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

AMBASSADOR JAMES DOBBINS

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is the 21st of July, 2003. This is an interview with James Dobbins, D-O-B-B-I-N-S. And this is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy.

You go by Jim, I take it, or James?

DOBBINS: Jim is fine.

Q: Well, really, to start off, could you tell me when and where you were born and we'll talk a little about the family?

DOBBINS: I was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1942.

Q: Can you tell me a little about on your father's side and then we'll go to your mother's side.

DOBBINS: Both Irish-American. My father's father was a fairly prosperous senior executive in a large New York-based corporation and lived in Brooklyn's Park Scope. My father went to Brooklyn Prep, FordhaHoly Cross College and then Fordham Law School and became a lawyer for the Veterans Administration after the Second World War and during the War he was in Army Intelligence. And my mother's family was a somewhat less prosperous, large Irish-American family, but of the same milieu basically.

Q: What was her maiden name?

DOBBINS: Bent.

Q: I take it from what you're saying it was a Catholic family. I mean ...

DOBBINS: Yes, both sides were Catholic.

Q: How Catholic was it?

DOBBINS: I think they werwell, they were quite Catholic but of a very tolerant sort. I mean, they weren't militantly Catholic. But they were devout Catholics.

Q: How big was your family?

DOBBINS: My mother had 11 brothers and sisters, so she came from a large family. My father's was smaller. He had two brothers and I had five brothers and sisters, of whom one died in infancy. And I have two brothers and two sisters who are still living.

Q: Well, you grew up as a small child in Brooklyn Heights was it?

DOBBINS: I spent the first few years during the Second World War living in Philadelphia, which was where my father was stationed with the Army counter-intelligence, actually. Then we moved back to Brooklyn where my father worked for the Veterans Administration and then he was transferred to the Veterans Administration's office in Manila and we spent five years from 1953 to 1958.

Q: So when you were 11. About 11 years old?

DOBBINS: Yes, about 11 to 16.

Q: Well, let's talk about the time that you were in the States, in elementary school and at home. What were your favorite things to do?

DOBBINS: Oh, that's hard to say. I mean, just the usual things children did in that time. We lived in a inner suburban neighborhood in Brooklyn. We walked to school and back. It was a parochial school and half the kids in our neighborhood went to the public school. They were Jewish. And the other half went to the Catholic school. They were Catholic. That was pretty much how the neighborhood was divided.

So it was stick ball, visits to Coney Island or a little further out to the bigger beaches out on the island on the weekend. It was a very pleasant, completely normal and unstressed childhood.

Q: Did you have interests, say, in reading or in other things?

DOBBINS: Those mostly developed after I left New York and went to the Philippines. I wouldn't say I was a great reader at 10. But by the time I was 12 or 13 I was.

Q: Well, you went to the Philippines and you were there from '53 to ...

DOBBINS: Fifty-eight.

Q: So this would have beeyou were just in high school by then, weren't you?

DOBBINS: I actually had two years of elementary, or what now might be called junior high, and then three years, and a little bit more, of high school.

Q: What were the Philippines like from your impression of them at the time?

DOBBINS: Well, this was very much the, sort of, early post-colonial era. The Americans were very popular. They liberated the Philippines and then they'd immediately given them their independence so the credibility was very high.

The standard of living for expatriates was very high. My father, I think, was a GS-10 (General Schedule 10) and we had a swimming pool, a tennis court and five servants and a chauffeur-driven car. And we would travel out and back. At that time, the government paid first-class for everybody who worked for the government. First-class travel. So we would travel out in a Pullman car three days across the country by train and then 21 days across the Pacific in a large, very comfortable ocean-liner with stops in Hawaii and Japan and Hong Kong. And that would be repeated every couple of years when we came back on home leave. So it was a very idyllic and pleasant experience which everybody in the family enjoyed.

Q: Well, as a kid, did you have much contact with Filipinos your age?

DOBBINS: Well, the first two years I went to a Filipino school. My parents wanted me in a Catholic school and the only American school there was non-denominational. It was the American School, which in effect was an international school although it was called the American School. For two years I went to De La Salle which was a school for middle and upper-class Filipinos, and Spanish. The old Spanish, I wouldn't say they were necessarily aristocracy, although they probably thought of themselves in those terms, were there. It was taught in English.

Then for the last three years I went to the American School, which was international and it had a few Filipinos, but relatively few. But it did have non-Americans.

Q: In those schools, you say you began to be a reader, what sort of things did you enjoy?

DOBBINS: Oh, I think the usual sorts of things, Tarzan, Edgar Rice Burroughs sort of series initially, spreading beyond that as one got a little older. Boys' adventure-type stuff as a rule.

Q: In high school did you get to go out in any extra-curricular activities, or anything like that?

DOBBINS: A little bit. I was on the swimming team. I think that was the only varsity sport I did. I was in the chess club. That was the other day a week I would stay after school and play.

Q: I realize you were in Manila. How much at home and at school did the outside world intrude other than, sort of ...

DOBBINS: Well, a reasonable amount, but in a rather pleasant way. I mean, my father had a number of Philippine associates in his work and so we would mix with them. Some mixed families, some Americans had married Philippine wives and had Philippine extended families. And some of those were our friends so we would go to their house. There were a lot of mixed parties, which my parents I would go to with as a child.

Occasionally people would invite us out to their homes outside the city. My parents would go with us and we'd go to Filipino homes outside the city and visit small towns. For a while, I was in a Boy Scouts Troop, mostly in an American one, but for a while I was part of a Philippine Boy Scouts Troop where I was the only American. We took some extended camping trips including a month in Baguio with a Philippine group.

So there was a reasonable amount of interchange. There were no security problems in the city, so even though I was only 13 or 14 and home was a long way from school, I would take public buses to home and back quite easily. My parents let me roam around the city. I would go into the city and go to the movies by myself. If I stayed after school, I would miss the school bus and just take a commercial bus home, which meant changing a couple of times. And so I felt pretty free to explore the city and there was never really any anxiety in those times about security.

Q: Did you get any feel for the embassy at that time?

DOBBINS: The Veterans Administration was kind of separate from the embassy because it was so large. It was actually the largest VA (Veterans Administration) office in the world, because all the Filipinos who had fought in the war were American Veterans. And so it was larger than the VA office in New York or Chicago. It was quite large, with 400 or 500 people I think, of which, say, 50 Americans.

So it was probably as large as the entire embassy. And it was, I guess, technically, part of the embassy in some way, but there really wasn't much contact. There was the 4th July party in the ambassador's residence that everybody was invited to and we would go there. But other than that, no, I mean, not really.

Q: How about things like the Cold War and all that, did that ...?

DOBBINS: Not much. I remember I'd gotten a small printing press as a toy and I got it around the day that Stalin died and so my first headline was that Stalin had died. So I remember Stalin dying and writing a newspaper account of it. And that was pretty much it. There was a low-level Communist guerilla insurgency in the hinterlands, the Hukbalahap, or Huks, as they were called, which would sometimes make traffic difficult between Manila and Clark Air Force Base, which was the nearest big PX (Post Exchange). It was about two or three hours from Manila. But they weren't targeting Americans and there really wasn't any threat directed at Americans. And there wasn't much anxiety in the period. The Philippines weren't a likely nuclear attack site, so we didn't have drills where we hid under our desks the way we had back in Brooklyn.

Q: Well, did you graduate from the high school there or...

DOBBINS: No, I came back in my senior year. I did a few months of senior year there and then I came back here and I went for a few months to Falls Church High School and then I completed the year at Wheaton High School, here in the suburbs of Washington where I graduated.

Q: You graduated, would it be, '59 or...

DOBBINS: Fifty-nine, yes.

Q: What were you thinking about doing at college?

DOBBINS: I had applied and been accepted to Georgetown's Foreign Service School. A woman who was a friend of, actually, my cousins who I was staying with in Staten Island between my junior and senior year said, "Well, what do you want to do?"

And I said, "Well, I don't know. I had a good time in the Philippines." And she said, "Well, you're living in Washington, why don't you go to Georgetown? They have a good Foreign Service school." And I said, "Well, that sounds like a good idea," and I applied because it was nearby and my parents would prefer me to go to a Catholic university if possible, although I don't think they would have objected if I'd insisted on going to a non-Catholic one. But it was nearby and my father had gone to Jesuit schools so they were comfortable with a Jesuit education and the idea of a Foreign Service career had some appeal. I didn't know much about it except that it had been very comfortable living in the Philippines and if I could find somebody who would pay me to do the same thing, it seemed like ...

Q: You'd have your swimming pool and tennis court wherever you went.

DOBBINS: Exactly. First-class ocean travel. So I went to the Foreign Service School. In my senior year of high school when I set that as a goal and when I was accepted to Georgetown that's what I did.

Q: Well, when you went into Georgetown, it'd be '59 I guess, what was the School of Foreign Service like in those days?

DOBBINS: Fairly small. I'm not sure what size it is today. It was fairly small. I would guess maybe 800 or 900 students in all. Probably 200 to 300 in the freshman class and then that would be winnowed down over time. It was more formal than today. I mean, we wore coats and ties to class. Life, if you lived on campus, was rather structured. You had to be in your dorm by a certain time. You had to show up for church if you were Catholic. There were non-Catholics and they weren't under a similar requirement. But Catholics, you had to go to church at least once a week, I seem to recall, maybe more often.

I never lived on campus. I either lived at home or in a fraternity house or, on occasion, in apartments in the area. So I was off campus. In the College you could not live off campus unless you lived at home, but you couldn't rent an apartment. The Foreign Service School was treated differently.

First of all, it was co-educational, which the College and the rest of the University were not. And secondly, for some reason, they thought that the students were more adult and it could be that they had attracted more, sort of, veterans from World War II and then Korea, and so it had an older student boda somewhat older student body. But in any case, they didn't subject them to the same limitations. At the time I don't think I necessarily saw the relevance of some of the things I was studying to what I'd ultimately be doing, but in retrospect I think that the course work was quite appropriate and I ended up using nearly all of it in my subsequent professional life.

Q: Was Father Healy much of a presence in those days?

DOBBINS: Not in the Foreign Service School. I think he was president of the university.

Q: Who was, sort of, the number one in the Foreign Services school at that time?

DOBBINS: Well, there was a Jesuit priest, Fadner, Father Fadner. I can't remember his first name. And he had different positions, but he was the senior Jesuit, and then there was a civilian non-Jesuit dean. Parr, I think, was the dean for a while. It was sort of a duumvirate of the two of them, friends. I can't remember what Father Fadner's title was, but he had another title.

Q: How well was the School of Foreign Service sort of plugged into the foreign policy establishment in those times? Were you able to draw on people in government? Did you feel a part of the system?

DOBBINS: At the time, there were no graduate students in the Foreign Service School. It was purely undergraduate. It since has gotten a masters and maybe even a PhD now. Some of the teachers either had prior experience or actually had other jobs, although those tended to be the teachers who taught at night. The school offered night courses and some people would take them, and the Business School, which was closely associated with the Foreign Service School, had a lot of people who would take the night courses. And the instructors at night were often people who had other jobs. I never took any night courses, and so I think nearly all of my professors were full-time academics. Whether they were consulted or had consultancy arrangements with the federal government I neither knew nor was particularly curious about.

Q: Well, this period of '59 to '63 wayou were catching the end of the Eisenhower administration and up through sort of the Kennedy administration.

DOBBINS: And Kennedy, of course, lived in the neighborhood and went to the same church we did, so that was very exciting.

Q: Did you find yourself engaged in the campaign?

DOBBINS: I didn't. I wasn't much interested in politics. I mean, there was a certain excitement from having Kennedy in the neighborhood, and people would say they'd seen him. We'd watch the debates in the fraternity house, sitting around in the evening. I can remember watching the debates. But there wasn't a strong sense of engagement on the part of the student body. I mean, there were Young Democrats and Young Republicans, and I'm sure some people got more engaged, but I can't recall that it was a period that the students were heavily into politics.

There were exceptions. The Cuban missile crisis occurred when I was there, and I still remember a certain degree of ominous concern that was sort of permeating the place for a few days. But the fact that one was in Washington, it meant that you could visit the Supreme Court or go to the Library of Congress. You had access to facilities, and professors would occasionallthe constitutional law class actually brought us all to sit through a Supreme Court session and that sort of thing. So you did have some things that you wouldn't have if you were physically located further apart, and I'm sure the academic staff profited from the proximity. But the students didn't normally feel they were intimately involved with the life of the federal government.

Q: Well, in the first place, were your classmates and others in the School of Foreign Service, were they pointed toward the State Department Foreign Service, or other places?

DOBBINS: Well, the State Department Foreign Service is rather difficult to get into, so 98 percent of them would have been disappointed if that's what they intended to do. I think three people in our graduating class passed the Foreign Service exam. Most of them were fraternity brothers of mine. There may have been others that I didn't know of that also passed the exam that year. Three did go in the Foreign Service, and stayed in and had more or less full careers. And that was probably out of a graduating class of 125, 150. So, at the most, half a dozen out of 125, say. No, I think most went into either business or law.

Q: Did you find yourself engaged in any particular area or type of studies while you were there?

DOBBINS: Well, as I recall, you didn't have a lot of choice. You could major in international relations, which I did, which meant you got the equivalent of a major in history and a major in political science and a minor in economics. You got enough courses there, and the way they managed to have so much is that you took very little modern languages. Two years was all that was required. No ancient languages, whereas in the college you would have had to take Latin or Greek for four years, only two years of philosophy versus four, which you would have had to take in the college, only two years of theology versus four, which you would have had to take in the college.

So you compensated that by getting more history and more political science and more economics, and that turned out to be quite a good balance. I think you had at least four years of history, at least four years of political science and nearly four years of economics.

Q: In this, was there a sort of geographic area, or economics ...

DOBBINS: Well, you got some. The first year, you had no electives. The second year, you might have one, and the third year, one, and the fourth year, two. So you didn't have a lot to choose from. You could choose whether you wanted Latin American history or ancient history or Asian history. These would be the sorts of choices you might have, in addition to whatever the standard history course was for that year.

Q: I imagine you got a good hunk of European history.

DOBBINS: Yes, European history would have been a required course.

Q: Was Bill Clinton there? Was he a presence?

DOBBINS: I'm not sure we overlapped. Either he was a freshman the year I was a senior, or he actually came a year after I left. I can't recall which. We were never really there together. We shared some of the same professors, but we were never really there together.

Q: There is one professor, a Jesuit I believe, who was in philosophy or something that everybody talked very much about. I can't remember.

DOBBINS: Well, that may have been Carroll Quigley who was a history professor. He was not a Jesuit. But he was a history professor, he was very dramatic, and had a lot of interesting ideas. Some of them were kind of wacko in retrospect, and I don't think he was taken all that seriously by his academic peers, but he was a great teacher, and his courses were very popular. They were required courses, freshmen survey courses, basically, and so he had 120 students in his class. He was mesmerizing in his presentation. He was sort of a warmed-over Toynbee, basically, with a few ideas of his own, but it was riveting stuff.

He also had a good reading list. He made you read the Iliad, Thucydides and that sort of thing. So it was an excellent course.

Q: As you were getting close to '63 and getting out, did you have any thought about whither or what you were going to do?

DOBBINS: Everything sort of fell into place very easily. This was during the period of the draft, and so one anticipated that one was likely to be called up. I applied and was accepted to Naval OCS (Officer Candidate School), and I also took the Foreign Service exam in the summer between my junior and senior year. Rather surprisingly, I passed it, and then passed the oral exam, even though they knew I wasn't going to be available for three and a half years because of the Navy commitment.

Q: Did you go througGeorgetown, I've heard, has these sort of seminars or something unofficial, getting ready for the oral exam. Did you have any of that?

DOBBINS: They didn't have that at the time, or if they did, I didn't know about it. I didn't really do any preparation geared to taking the oral exam.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions that were asked?

DOBBINS: One question was, well, you're the vice consul in Naples and you're called on a Saturday and told that an American who was passing through the area has deceased. What do you do about it? And then there were follow-on questions as to how do you handle different aspects of this particular consular crisis. It wasn't very profound.

Q: You just say, "Well, I take a shovel and head out."

DOBBINS: I said I'd call his next of kin and ask them what they wanted. I think it was designed to test, first of all, simply how you responded, in general, to questioning, and secondly, how much sort of common sense you might exhibit under these situations.

Q: Well, then, you had how many, four years in the Navy?

DOBBINS: Three and a half. Four months of OCS, and then three years of commissioned service.

Q: What branch of the Navy were you in?

DOBBINS: I was called a straight line officer, surface. I was on an aircraft carrier for three years.

Q: Which aircraft carrier? Different ones?

DOBBINS: No, it was the Bon Homme Richard.

Q: Was that a Forrestal class, or was that earlier?

DOBBINS: No, it was a reconverted Essex class. It was the Essex class with the angled deck.

Q: They had just moved to angled deck.

DOBBINS: No, well, they'd had angled decks for a while. In fact, I think they had probably had angled decks by the time the Korean War came, because you couldn't really operate jets of a straight line. They'd just keep crashing, wiping out all the planes in the front, because of the speeds they came in.

Q: What aspect of being a line officer were you doing then?

DOBBINS: I did different things. I went to Naval Justice School when I got out of OCS, which I had asked for, so for a while I was the assistant legal officer on the ship. I then moved to be the fire control officer, which doesn't have anything to do with fire. It's the radar that controls the ship's armaments. But most of the time was spent standing deck watches. I went through the hierarchy to become officer of the deck, and then one would stand those watches. Usually, probably something more than four hours a day. In other words, the cycle would come, you'd do four out of every 20 hours or so, you would be on the bridge, either as the junior officer of the deck, or when I became more senior, as the officer of the deck. You're essentially running the ship in the captain's absence.

Q: Well, where was the Bon Homme Richard. Was it part of the Sixth Fleet or the Fifth Fleet?

DOBBINS: It was home-ported at San Diego. We did two West Pac tours. The first was before the Vietnam War got started. It was a peacetime cruise. We were the first aircraft carrier to go into the Indian Ocean, for instance, and we spent about a month, went to Madagascar and Kenya, went off the Persian Gulf and the shah of Iran flew on board. We gave him an air show that he was sufficiently impressed with to buy American ever afterward. It was part of the effort to win the shah over. And then toward the end of the tour the Vietnam conflict began to heat up. We were actually in the Gulf of Tonkin, or just off the Gulf of Tonkin, when one of the Gulf of Tonkin incidents occurred. We could hear the incident over the combat information network.

Q: Was there any question at the time, by those of you listening in, and your colleagues, about what actually happened?

DOBBINS: Oh, yes. It was clear from what we heard that there was confusion as to whether somebody had been fired on, and who had been fired on. There were two Tonkin Gulf incidents. There was no doubt US ships had been fired on in one of the two, I think the first one. We actually refueled that ship. I think it was the Turner Joy.

Q: It was the Turner Joy.

DOBBINS: And it had a large shell hole in its bow, so there was no doubt that it had been hit. I remember taking pictures as it was alongside, being refueled. But the second incident was much more confused.

Q: Was your ship involved in strikes, or not?

DOBBINS: We were. It was around this time they were conducting the secret air war over Laos. Our planes would go off on what were called, euphemistically, armed reconnaissance strikes, but they always came back without their armaments. We then did a second tour, which was at the height of the war. There we would spend 30 days on the line, during which we were launching strikes every day, and then we'd go in for three or four days of leave in the Philippines or Hong Kong or Japan, and we would go back on the line for 30 days. And so, there, the combat operations were continuous.

Q: What was the feeling you were getting about our involvement at that time?

DOBBINS: Well, first of all, this was before the protests had become very large scale in the United States. There certainly wasn't much debate among the officers on my ship. There were occasional discussions, but not much. I'd say there probably were a few people who had more access to classified information as to where the strikes were going, why they were going, what the situation in the country was, and I remember one argumennot argument, but a discussiowith one of the younger air intelligence officers, who was arguing that the situation in Vietnam was more tenuous and difficult than most of us realized. But this wasn't something that was discussed a lot among the junior officers. We focused more on where we were going to spend our next liberty.

Q: Was there much of a gap between the aviators and the ship officers? The brown shirt with the black shoes?

DOBBINS: It was almost complete. For one thing, the aviators didn't stay with the ship when it went back to the United States. They would go off and live at an airbase. Their relationship with the ship tended to be temporary, for the six months of deployment. They had their own social network that was quite separate from the ship's officers. There were a few aviators who mixed with ship's officers and became friendly with them. We had a few friends of that sort who we would see socially, but that was rare, and more often, there was very little connection between them, and very different sort of lives. Of course, they were the ones taking the risk.

Q: Yes, absolutely. How about integration and all? Black Americans on the ship, was there a problem there?

DOBBINS: Well, not that I'm aware of. There were some race riots in the United States during the time I was in the Navy. I think Detroit occurred during this period, but there weren't any visible racial tensions, not of extraordinary nature. As a legal officer, I would have to sort through sort of fistfights and drunken brawls. Sailors would be brought back, and there may have been some racial overtones on one or two of them, but it wasn't a particularly prominent feature. I think there may have been one or two black officers, which would have been quite unusual, but I don't remember any difficulties arising.

Blacks were largely congregated in certain ratings. These were black and Filipino mess. There were one or two whites, but that would have been very unusual. No, it wasn't something that was a preoccupation. Whether the blacks felt they were discriminated against, I can't say, but if so, they weren't voicing it at the time.

Q: I mean, was the Foreign Service thing sort of sitting there waiting for you?

DOBBINS: Yes. After a couple of years the Navy had said, "We'll transfer you to Hawaii," which was desirable, "if you'll extend for another year." They wanted to transfer me to the signals intelligence work in Hawaii, although they wouldn't tell me what it was that they wanted me to do. It was classified, but that's what it was. I already knew I had been accepted into the Foreign Service, and so I declined.

Q: Were you able to do any sampling of what the Foreign Service did in this period of time?

DOBBINS: Not really.

Q: Did you have any idea of what it did?

DOBBINS: In a general way. After all I'd been four years in the Foreign Service School. I understood how an embassy was structured. Some people did consular work, some people did administrative work, some did political work and some people did economic work. During this periol was quite content to wait. I was enjoying what I was doing, and wasn't necessarily impatient.

Q: Were you married at this time?

DOBBINS: No.

Q: One of the things about the Foreign Service, when one went in, if from the Navy, it was basically a naval structure. I think the Foreign Service in '46 was copied after the Navy.

DOBBINS: I didn't know that.

Q: It was the naval officer, executive officer, DCM (deputy chief of mission) and the departments, this type of thing.

DOBBINS: Well, that may be. That may explain why it seemed so comfortable and natural. There were naval officers in the Foreign Service when I came in. The one who was in charge of placing junior officers was apparently a naval officer, which is probably why I ended up in Paris rather than Vietnam.

Q: Well, you were discharged in what?

DOBBINS: Sixty-seven.

Q: Sixty-seven. Had the protests started by that time or not?

DOBBINS: Yes, but they hadn't become as virulent as they did toward the end of the '60s and the early '70s.

Q: Well, you came in '67. I assume you took the regular A-100 course?

DOBBINS: Right.

Q: How did you find that?

DOBBINS: It was good. We had quite a good head in a guy named Alex Davit. He was pedagogically quite talented, and made a good impression, a strong impression, on people who went through the course in that period. Ours was the biggest class they had had to that point. It was quite a large class.

Of course, the Foreign Service intake was a good deal younger then it is now. I was one of the older, more experienced, and I was only 23 I thinor 24, probably, because I had actually graduated when I was 21 by a week. So I had just turned 24 when I went in. But most people either were directly out of undergraduate school or had done a couple of years in the Peace Corps.

Q: Did any people in your class stick out in your mind?

DOBBINS: Of course, there's one or two that are still in the Foreign Service. Dick Miles who was ambassador of Bulgaria and went somewhere else. There's one other, Bob Tines, who was actually my roommate. He became a consular officer and is either in Japan or Hong Kong at the moment. He was drafted after he was in the Foreign Service, so he had to leave the Foreign Service, do two years and come back again. Virtually everyone else has left, but it was a big class, 50-some people.

Q: At that time, were you looking towards any particular area?

DOBBINS: Do you mean geographically? No, not really. If I was thinking of anything, it was Asia, where I had been and where I thought I'd like to go back. When they interviewed me originally and asked where I'd like to go, I may have said, Asia, but I don't think I made a strong case for anywhere in particular. They ended up sending me to Paris, which was very nice. And I think they did that because I was a veteran. So they sent other people to Vietnam and sent me to Paris, for which I'm very grateful.

After my tour in Paris, I did ask to go into Japanese language training. I did that for a week or so. Or not even for a weel think for one day. And then they decided that I'd married a non-American, and they had a policy that your wife had to have become a citizen before you went abroad. That usually took some time, and they were reluctant about sending me to Japan so quickly, because the Japanese language training was mostly in Japan. So they said, "You should take a stateside assignment so that your wife can become naturalized." So I eventually ended up going back to Europe and spending most of my career in Europe as a result.

After I had served in Europe a couple of times, I decided it probably made sense to stay in the area I had become knowledgeable about.

Q: How did your class feel about Vietnam? Were they dragged kicking and screaming?

[End Side]

DOBBINS: There was a bit of a bait and switch, although I don't think it was intentional. We were told, at the beginning of the class, that they weren't sending anybody to Vietnam. No first-tour officers were going to go to Vietnam. So everybody didn't debate it, because it didn't appear to be a problem. Then when handed out the assignments at the end, they said, "Oh, by the way, the policy the changed." So they ended up sending, like, 12 people from our class to Vietnam. Some of them had actually, when asked at the interview, "Would you go to Vietnam?" said yes, because their understanding was that they would thereby show how willing they were, but it would be at no cost since they had been told they weren't sending any first-tour officers.

I would guess that some of the people who got this as their first assignment were not pleased with it. Certainly there were a lot of envious looks when they said I was going to Paris. There was sort of a little ceremony at the end of the A-100 course and they went through the names and gave you your diploma and your assignment at the same time. But again, Vietnam hadn't become as controversial within the Foreign Service as it subsequently did.

Q: Well, you were in Paris from when to when?

DOBBINS: I was in Paris from '67 to '69.

Q: What were you doing in Paris?

DOBBINS: I had the ideal junior officer tour. I started in the consular section and showed so little aptitude that they got rid of me after two months. I don't think it actually was a lack of aptitude, but I clearly was exhibiting a lack of strong interest, and so they weren't that unhappy to move me on. Then I became the aide, the staff assistant or special assistant, to the ambassador to the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) for six months, Philip Trezise, who subsequently became assistant secretary for economic affairs.

That was very interesting, a completely different world, economics, economic policy and I got to see how a small multilateral mission was run and do a lot of interesting things, a good deal of writing, mostly reporting on meetings and keeping the administrative wheels running in this mission.

When the Vietnam peace talks came to Paris, I was moved to become, initially, the assistant secretary of delegation, and then the secretary of delegation, of the Vietnam peace talks. Originally, someone from the Diplomat's Executive Secretariat was brought out to run the equivalent of the Executive Secretariat of this delegation. A series of what was then called SS officers were brought out for the first few weeks. Then they decided I'd been there long enough and they turned that over to me. So, for almost a year, I ran the secretariat for the Vietnam peace talks.

Q: I want to go back for a minute. In the OECD ...

DOBBINS: Well, let me just finish on the tour. And then the last rotational assignment was in the political section of the embassy, working for Sargent Shriver. My brief was youth and youth affairs, which he was quite interested in. It was when the youth were about to overthrow the Fifth Republic. So as a first tour, it was really fun.

Q: Well, let's talk a little about the OECD. Did you get any feel? This is in a way the precursor of the European Union, or not?

DOBBINS: It was the offshoot of the Marshall Plan. The OEEC (Organization for European Economic Cooperation), split to become the EC (European Community) and the OECD.

Q: Did you get any feel for the relationships between the various powers and how the United States fit into this?

DOBBINS: A little bit. By then, the OECD had been expanded. Japan was a member, so it wasn't just a U.S.-European club, but it was largely U.S. and European. The issues tended to be rather arcane, and the European Union, or the European Community at the time, certainly wasn't acting as a bloc on the issues that the OECD was focusing on. The EC, of course, was the trade bloc, but the OECD really didn't do trade issues. It did other types of issues.

Q: De Gaulle was in power at that time?

DOBBINS: Right, and he had just thrown NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) out and the U.S. NATO headquarters was in the process of closing down. The U.S. base on the outskirts of Paris that we used to have a PX in was also closing when I was there. It was a difficult time.

Q: On the OECD thing, were there problems with the French at that point?

DOBBINS: Well, not in the OECD, that I'm aware of. There were certainly problems in our broader relationship with the French. I spent a week on the French desk prior to going to Paris. It was the week that Charles de Gaulle was in Quebec, declaring a free Quebec.

Q: Viva Quebec libre! (Long live free Quebec!).

DOBBINS: Exactly. And I was briefed on our policy toward France, which was, in the words of LBJ (Lyndon Baines Johnson), who had passed this policy onto the State Department, "We ain't getting into a pissing contest with Charles de Gaulle." So it was restraint and not rising to the bait of de Gaulle's provocations. And, of course, problems with the French were also apparent when I was dealing with the Vietnam issues, but in the OECD, nothing that I'm aware of.

Q: Then from the OECD you moved to the youth officer?

DOBBINS: No, I moved to the Vietnam peace talks.

Q: Vietnam peace talks. Were these the Harriman talks?

DOBBINS: Harriman was number one, Vance was number two, and Phil Habib was the senior Foreign Service officer. And Negroponte and Holbrooke were the other two junior officers.

Q: When you got into this world, how did you find that we were working? Did we think that things were going to work out here or something?

DOBBINS: Well, things obviously weren't working out by the time the peace talks took place. It was a very difficult time. I didn't have a lot of insight coming to the job, and so I found it a real eye opener and very exciting because it really seemed the most important thing in the world. Two thousand journalists had arrived with Harriman. Walter Cronkite would be standing outside the door, as we'd leave a meeting, asking for some comment, along with the anchors with all of the other networks.

So it was a very dramatic time. The delegation was very high-powered. As I mentioned, the junior officers, in addition to myself, were Dick Holbrooke and John Negroponte. Bob Oakley was in the political section of the embassy, handling these matters, as was John Gunther Dean. Phil Habib was my boss, he and Negroponte. Clearly, there were huge tensions in terms of the evolution of policy in Washington, big debates about how to proceed. The whole negotiations were handled with utmost secrecy. Everything was top secret, and then there were compartments within compartments, so that we conducted secret negotiations that were secret from most of the delegation and from most of the people who were seeing the regular traffic.

We had ostensible meetings with the Vietnamese where we traded talking points for hours on end, and then we'd have secret meetings with them in some other location, which were somewhat more substantive. And most of the people in Washington would be reading one set of traffic and unaware that a completely separate negotiation for compartmentalized distribution was taking place.

Q: Well, what were you doing?

DOBBINS: I was running the administration of the delegation, basically, making sure that people's briefing books were up to date, that they had the right papers, that incoming message traffic was being distributed, that outgoing traffic was dispatched - any outgoing message had to be approved by me before it would go to the message center. I was doing the sorts of things for Harriman and Vance that the executive secretary of the State Department does for the secretary of state and the other principals, on a much smaller scale, obviously.

Q: Did you have any contact with Harriman or Vance?

DOBBINS: Yes, we'd meet every morning. Vance did a staff meeting every morning. Harriman would not normally do the staff meeting, so I'd see Vance every day. I'd see Habib four or five times a day, and I'd see Harriman two or three times a week, probably.

Q: How did you find Habib?

DOBBINS: Oh, he was great. Very charismatic, very congenial, warm, tough, but in an affectionate way.

Q: Did you sit in on any of the meetings?

DOBBINS: Yes, as I said, we had regular meetings with the North Vietnamese like two or three days a week, and they would take place. My station was often in the adjoining room, as I would be in a room next to the room where they were meeting, so that if incoming messages could come in, I could decide whether to bring them in to Harriman or let them wait. If they had something they needed to get back to Washington, I would then get it back to Washington. I could take phone calls. So I was in and out of the room they were meeting in all the time.

I remember when one of the times I had to go in to bring Harriman a note saying that Bobby Kennedy had been assassinated. And then six weeks later, same room, same time of day I had to bring him in a note saying Martin Luther King had been assassinated. And you could see him each time sort of stunned. He was sitting there talking to Le Duc Tho or whoever the Vietnamese interlocutor was at the time and getting these dreadful bulletins from home.

Q: Were you getting any feel from the people who were doing this, bringing back how they felt about how things were going and how dealing with the North Vietnamese was going?

DOBBINS: Well, I certainly knew how dealing with the North Vietnamese was going, because I was privy to both formal and informal negotiations. Sure, there was lots of talk about the negotiations, and some insights into the Washington policy debates, which people on the delegation, were certainly protagonists in.

Q: Well, this period you were doing it was from when to when?

DOBBINS: When the negotiations started in '68, I can't remember the month, and my involvement lasted about 10 months. So it was probably all of '68, and of course it was at the same time that the French Fifth Republic was teetering, so it was a very interesting time, with huge riots in the street, a shutdown of the economy. I was young enough so I could pose as a student and in the evenings go over to the Sorbonne or the Odeon and listen to the speeches and stand behind the barricades and watch the riots.

Q: Was the feeling that the riots were going to topple the republic?

DOBBINS: It came very close. De Gaulle briefly fled the country.

Q: But it went to the Rhineland to talk to his troops, didn't he?

DOBBINS: He left the country to make sure that the army was behind him, and then he came back.

It was strange because there really were no casualties. The riots were very much a set piece, rather folkloric events during which the students would build barricades and the police would rush them and try to overcome them with sticks and batons and shields, rather than bringing up a bulldozer. I think the only person that was killed was a student who was running from the police, jumped in a canal and drowned. So, in a sense, one wondered what the fuss was about, but the seriousness of it was that the student riots, which as I said, were very folkloric in nature, eventually stimulated a Communist led general strike, which was a much more serious threat to the regime, because it was fairly rigorously followed.

Q: Did that have any effect on the Paris peace talks?

DOBBINS: Not much. It began to have an effect on life when gasoline gave out. It became more difficult to get around, but I don't believe it had any effect on the substance of the talks.

Q: By the time you left there, had anything happened?

DOBBINS: Yes, we negotiated a bombing halt. There was a bombing halt that was tied to certain concessions on the part of the North Vietnamese of a rather minor sort, and the main point was an expansion of the negotiations to include the South Vietnamese and the Viet Cong. So a two-way negotiation became a four-way negotiation. And then we rather foolishly engaged in a yearlong discussion of what the table would look like. But yes, when I was there we did have an agreement. The agreement was to halt the bombing, expand the negotiations. There were some other elements to it. Then I went to the political section in the embassy, and there was a rather prolonged hiatus in the Vietnam Peace Talks during which there weren't any talks, but the delegation stayed there.

Q: You were also there when all hell broke loose in the United States. I think of the political conventions of '68.

DOBBINS: Yes, the general feeling was that the world was teetering on the brink of something, with both Kennedys, and then Martin Luther King being assassinated, with large-scale riots, protests, and similarly the same thing happening throughout Europe. I mean, it wasn't only in France, although France is where the '68 events were taken the furthest.

Q: When you moved to the political section, you had what, youth affairs?

DOBBINS: Yes.

Q: That must have been sort of the hot spot, wasn't it?

DOBBINS: It was very interesting, and, of course, Shriver was a fascinating and charismatic figure, Kennedy's brother-in-law, so he had a lot of aura, and he was quite interested in youth affairs, so it gave me a certain access, an entrï¿½e. Bob Oakley actually was my direct supervisor and was designed to sort of keep me out of trouble and doing something useful. But Shriver was interested and I would have a certain amount of contact with him as well.

Q: Would you be talking to people like Danny the Red and all? Did we have contact?

DOBBINS: Well, by the time I moved to the political section, the May '68 events had been pretty much over, so Danny the Red was probably either in jail or in exile. To some degree, it was talking to people like that. To some degree, it was talking to more conservative youth who wanted more contacts with the United States, working with French-American youth groups. To some degree it was just promoting to a youth audience certain embassy events. We haa whole group of the astronauts came. The NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) guy programmed the astronauts, and so Shriver said, "We'll have Dobbins do a youth event." So my goal was do a youth event at which the astronauts would meet a selection of youth. That was my piece of the astronauts' thing, was a youth event for them. There were similar events.

Some of this was just publicity. Shriver generated publicity, but it was certainly fun and interesting and different. How significant it was in the grander scheme of thingwhatever effects youth had had in '68 in France they never replicated themselves in the sense that youth never again became influential, per se. So I doubt the American embassy ever had a youth officer again who had so much access and was doing this job full time. But it was an interesting thing to be doing at the time.

Q: Well, the youth officer program started in the early '60s. I think Bobby Kennedy got that going. I remember I was in Yugoslavia at the time, and we were supposed to pick out the future leaders. Well, the future leaders looked like Marshal Tito. You just get older and the youths would sort of cycle through. Did you get any feel for how events in the United States were being portrayed at that time, particularly to the youth of France?

DOBBINS: I suppose so, in the sense that it was the same way that they were being portrayed to us. I don't know that the French press was any more sensationalist. I would say, first of all, that given what was happening in France, the United States seemed relatively tame in comparison in terms of the protests. And the youth movement in the United States, the French didn't think they had anything to learn from America in that regard. The United States was certainly more violent than France, but there was a general sort of sense of fin de rï¿½gime, the world unraveling.

Q: Well, did you find when you were doing this, was the embassy at all divided between de Gaullists and anti-Gaullists?

DOBBINS: I don't think there were any Gaullists in the embassy. During '68, I was in the Vietnam peace talks, and it was only in '69 that I was in the embassy. So I wasn't sort of in the middle of the debate on whether de Gaulle could last, or would he go under? There certainly was embassy reporting, and there undoubtedly was discussion within the political section of how to portray the depth of this crisis. Dick Walters was the defense attachï¿½, for instance, at the time, and I think he was the one that found out that de Gaulle had left the country and gone to talk to the generals in Germany. So I think the embassy was doing some fairly sensitive reporting about how deep the crisis was and how likely it was to have any lasting impact. But I wasn't part of the political section at the time.

By the time I was in the political section, I don't recall arguments about our policy toward France. Our policy in France wasn't really very controversial. It was a rather restrained policy, given what de Gaulle had done. The effort was to try to maintain a relationship that was as civil and cooperative as possible, given the basic obstacles that had been placed in the path. I don't recall that there was a great controversy.

Q: It wasn't people saying, "Well, it will be a better world if we get rid of de Gaulle. He's anti-American and all this."

DOBBINS: Well, I don't think anyone had any practical way of getting rid of de Gaulle. I would guess that there probably would have been a feeling that we would do better under another leadership, and of course de Gaulle did resign shortly thereafter, and things did get better very gradually, although never completely.

Q: Did you have much dealing with the French officials?

DOBBINS: Very little. The only job in which I would have dealt with French officials was the last point in the political section, and there I didn't have a brief that would bring me over to the Foreign Ministry and bring me into contact. There were a few occasions, but not much. Occasionally I would accompany the political counselor, for instance, to the meetings he would have with more senior officials.

Q: Sargent Shriver, you were assisting him at one point.

DOBBINS: In this capacity.

Q: How did you find him?

DOBBINS: Well, he was a very sort of exciting, glamorous figure. He was certainly pleasant, hyperactive, a bit focused on his own persona and publicity, a big attractive family. He was an exciting and glamorous boss, and I wouldn't say he was warm, but he was certainly approachable and always very pleasant.

Q: Well, then, you applied for Japanese training at the end of this time?

DOBBINS: Right. I came back and applied and was accepted and was going into Japanese language training, and then I had met my wife during the time I was in Paris.

Q: She was French?

DOBBINS: She was actually Norwegian, but she was living in Paris. So we had gotten back, I was getting married. I didn't marry when I was in Paris, but we met and then we were married, I guess, three or four months after I came back. So when they found out I was getting married, they changed the assignment and said, "Well, we'll find you another assignment." It worked out fine, because they put me on the Policy Planning Staff.

Q: This is Policy Planning from when to when?

DOBBINS: Well, it would have been '69 to '71. Bill Cargo was the head and Art Hartman was the deputy.

Q: This is the new regime.

DOBBINS: Planning and Coordination Staff, it was briefly called, and it was when Henry Kissinger was in the White House driving everybody in the State Department crazy.

Q: Policy Planning has always been sort of amorphous, whatever the secretary wants it to be. What did it mean at this point?

DOBBINS: The staff was enlarged considerably, and it was given some specific responsibilities. In particular, it was supposed to be responsible for keeping Henry Kissinger under control, which it turned out to be incapable of doing, but it was put in charge of interagency work. And so the staff was doubled from about 10 officers to 20 some, 22 officers. It was put in charge of the interagency process, and Henry Kissinger had thifor the first couple of years of the administration, had a plethora of studies. So a Policy Planning Staff, or Planning and Coordination Staff, officer would be put on each of these studies, along with whatever bureau was doing it, and the bureau would take a lead in doing the work. But someone on the policy staff was responsible for following it and integrating it with all the other work that was being done. And then the head of the Policy Planning Staff, Bill Cargo, would be the person, along with the counselor of the department, a guy named Pederson. They would be the representatives at the meeting below the NSC (National Security Council) that Henry Kissinger would chair.

He was unhappy with that and gradually secured a higher level of State Department representation, but that was the State Department's effort to keep him and his staff under control, was to create this staff in the State Department that would deal with the NSC, in effect. So that was part of it. In addition the staff did speechwriting and other things of that sort, occasionallthe traditional sorts of things. But its main focus was keeping track of what was going on interagency, and again, for a junior officer, it was a great way of learning how the department ran. I was on the seventh floor, and had access to a lot of what was going on.

Q: Well, I've heard that a lot of these, when the Nixon administration came in, under the auspices of Henry Kissinger, called for a whole series of reports, and it's been said that these reports were designed to keep the State Department busy while Kissinger ...

DOBBINS: And I expect that's partly what we were doing, was just being kept busy. So we were fairly busy, and how much of this ever had any impact, I don't know.

Q: Well, while you were doing that, was there the feeling that the State Department's got a problem with Kissinger?

DOBBINS: Yes, although it became more apparent over time, because this was the beginning. The State Department I think only gradually and slowly perceived that the power was draining and increasingly being transferred to the White House.

Q: Well, did you get any feel for the role of William Rogers?

DOBBINS: A bit. I don't think I met him more than once or twice, and I didn't really have a sense for the interaction at that level. You didn't have the sort of system where principals meet, as they do now, three or four times a week among themselves, and where the principal becomes a main protagonist in the interagency structure himself. This tended to be delegated and the principal would talk to the president or talk to foreigners, but wouldn't often engage in himself representing the department and hammering out interagency positions. So the secretary was a somewhat more distant figure in that sense.

Q: Did you get any feel for relations with the Pentagon?

DOBBINS: A bit, although the relations really were more with the White House. I guess the one issue, of course, which was preeminent at the time and which I didn't have a lot of access to, because it tended to be compartmentalized, continued to be the Vietnam War. There were a whole other series of interagency processes and studies and things going on that were focused on the war, and I was only peripherally aware of those. The Pentagon relationship was, as far as I know, largely un-contentious in other areas. And it may have been un-contentious on Vietnam, too, because the Pentagon, after McNamara left, Clark Clifford came in, and then even Mel Laird, they weren't strong proponents of the war themselves.

Q: Were you getting any feedback from your friends, or people that you knew who had served in Vietnam about how things were going there?

DOBBINS: Some. Vietnam became very controversial at this point within the Foreign Service. We had something called the Open Forum Panel at the time, which has since become a kind of speakers' bureau, but at the time was supposed to be a source of informal advice from mid and junior levels to the secretary. It was supposed to be something that alloweit sort of predated the dissent channel and was supposed to be a way of the secretary getting ideas or input from other than the formal bureaucracy. I was basically in charge of staffing that and keeping it out of trouble, which wasn't easy, because at the time the whole issue had become rather divisive. And so this panel became wrapped up in some of that debate.

I remember, for instance, we had Tony Lake, who was then in the Foreign Service, come over and talk to us. He was still on the NSC staff, but he was about to resign over Vietnam policy, and David Aaron, who also left. I don't think he left in protest, but he actually became chairman of the Open Forum Panel briefly.

So there was a good deal of debate. There were some protests in very mild and inoffensive language that went forward from young officers, many of whom were friends of mine, either through that channel or similar channels. It was a time where protest was a less refined art than it is today, and I can't recall other than Tony Lake anybody quitting in principle. But there certainly was a lot of unhappiness.

Q: Well, were you there in '70?

DOBBINS: Yes.

Q: Well, I was just thinking, wasn't it around '70, in the spring of '70, when we sent troops into Cambodia? A bunch of risky junior officers signed a petition and got Nixon mad as Hell?

DOBBINS: I don't remember Nixon getting mad, but he may have, but yes.

Q: ... he at one point said, "Fire those people," which he tended to do, particularly in the evening. I think Kissinger learned how to handle Nixon.

DOBBINS: Yes, I don't recall anyone being fired, but I remember Alexis Johnson, who was the undersecretary, calling some people in and lecturing them about discipline and the needs of the service.

Q: Did you feel that there were really bubblinwas there ferment within the State Department?

DOBBINS: Well, there was ferment within the city. I lived in the Governor Shepherd, which was a building directly across the street from the State Department. And looking from my top floor, you could see crowds of students and tear gas and police lines. On the weekends, we'd go walk around the White House, which would be completely surrounded by buses that were parked end to end so that they, in effect, formed a barrier around the whole White House complex. The March on the Pentagon occurred during this period.

So there were regular protests and tear gas would float over the city, and then everybody would adjourn to restaurants in Georgetown and have a few drinks and tell their war, or anti war stories. I remember seeing friends who had come into town for the protests. We rather enjoyed the sense of it being, once again, in these turbulent times, right in the heart of it. That affected the State Department in mild ways. Some people protestenot many, but some, and there was certainly a reasonably active debate, particularly among the more junior officers about the war, its morality, its wisdom, those kinds of things.

Q: How did your Norwegian bride react, getting involved in this scene?

DOBBINS: Well, because she had been in Paris as well, she was interested. It was interesting and exciting, even somewhat amusing. I can't say either of us felt passionate one way or the other about the issues involved.

Q: Well, then, you left the Policy Planning?

DOBBINS: I left in '71. I went to Strasbourg.

Q: Today is the 25th of August 2003.

Jim, let's start in 1971. You're off to Strasbourg. And you were there from when to when?

DOBBINS: Seventy-one to '73.

Q: Okay, can you tell me about what our setup was in Strasbourg at the time?

DOBBINS: Well, it was a two-officer consulate, or consul general, of which I was the junior officer. And it did a certain volume, modest volume, of consular worno immigration visas, but non-immigrant visas, passport services for a small American community. It did a small volume of commercial work, and its principle reason for being, I think, was the presence of the Council of Europe organization that had been eclipsed by the European Community by that time, but still had some purpose and value. And its headquarters was in Strasbourg. It had a secretariat of 500 or 600 people, and periodic meetings of the Parliamentary Assembly, and we were an observer. We weren't a member of the Council, but we were an observer and had access and could report on their activities.

Q: Well, let's first talk about Strasbourg, per se, and then we'll go into the international, European thing. How French was Strasbourg, and how German was Strasbourg? It's sort of a hybrid.

DOBBINS: Well, it wasn't very German, but it was Alsatian, which is to say that the French, who were very consciously and proudly French, spoke a German dialect in addition to French, at home, often, and could obviously understand German, although Alsatian had deviated somewhat from German with a lot of French words in it. And at that time, the German economy was stronger than the French economy, and so at that time, several thousanlike, maybe 20,00Alsatians would cross the border every day to work in Germany.

Q: Well, now, when you arrived, they were three years away from the events of the spring of '68, when the student revolt and all sorts of things were happening in France. How much involved was Strasbourg and the people there we were observing in French politics?

DOBBINS: Well, Strasbourg was involved in French politics. French politics had largely calmed down since then. Pompidou had replaced de Gaulle and there wasn't much residue of '68 in terms of popular unrest. We did a certain volume of political reporting, but there wasn't much going on in French politics. Of note at the time, Gaullists were quite clearly in charge, weren't under threat. The Vietnam War was continuing and there was some anti-Vietnam sentiment and there were occasional very small demonstrations.

One night, we lived in an apartment above the consulate and about 2:00 in the morning, rocks began coming through our bedroom window, and below were four or five, probably by that time, given the time perhaps, alcoholically charged students throwing rocks in a Vietnam protest. Another time, a couple of them burst into the consulate and tried to tear down the flag, and the consul general and I, both of whom were bigger than these students, of whom there were only a couple, went out and tossed them out the gate before they could do any real harm. That was pretty innocent.

There was one, we never did find what the cause was, and it probably wasn't a protest. I was in my dining room, which had French doors overlooking a terrace, and a bullet came through the doors. It was a .22, and it was spent, so it actually went into the wall and then bounced on the floor. It was a spent .22 that had come, probably missed me by a foot or something. If it had hit me in the eye it might have done some serious damage. If it had hit me somewhere else, it might not have, because, as I said, it didn't even penetrate the wood very far. And they never find out whether it wathe police said, "Well, it was probably just someone hunting," but that seemed implausible, but not impossible, I guess. I never did find out what the source of it was.

We had a loud party the night before, and I always wondered if it was someone in the adjoining apartment building was expressing his unhappiness with it. But there were a few rather small incidents of that sort, but otherwise it was a very tranquil, quiet time.

Q: Well, did you feel any constraints, or were you making a point of going to the university there? The campus?

DOBBINS: Well, I don't recall going to the university. I did join some sort of young businessmen's groupbut they were very business oriented. After a couple of meetings, there really wasn't much point. It was very local, the sorts of things that the Shriners or the Elks would be concerned with here. But there wasn't any real hostility to the United States, except in these rather small groups. But, I say, the most they could generate for an anti-Vietnam rally was four or five people, so this was not a mass movement like what we were seeing in the '60s. And in any case, Alsace as a whole was a more socially conservative area than elsewhere in France.

Q: Who was consul general when you were there?

DOBBINS: For the first, I guess, two or three months, I was on my own. I arrived the day the consul general, whom I was supposed to serve under, was leaving. He had just been fired, though it wasn't explained quite in those terms, by the ambassador, who was rather irascible, unpredictable, and ultimately, it turned out, alcoholic.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

DOBBINS: Watson was his name. I think it was Thomas Watson. He was the son of the famous Thomas Watson.

Q: He had another brother who went to the Soviet Union.

DOBBINS: Yes, I think that's right. So he was an ambassador to France, and he finally left the post after the press got a hold of allegations that he had been making indecent proposals to an airline stewardess on some plane. There were a few occasions when he had been quite verbally abusive to Embassy stafI don't mean sexually harassinbut just verbally abusive to his staff in Paris. He came to visit us in Strasbourg and was very pleasant, and took us out to dinner and was quite a good host.

DOBBINS: He did take exception to the Council General, a fellow named George Andrews, who had only been there about six months. I never really got the story. Apparently, it was something as trivial as the ambassador asked Andrews to do something and Andrews turned to his deputy, the vice consul, and asked the vice consul to do it. And the ambassador was apparently unhappy that, having asked the consul general to do it, the consul general didn't do it, rather than turning to his vice consul and asking him to do it. It was a fairly simple task, like go find a copy of X, or something. I don't know whether this was really the source of the difficulty. Whatever it was, the ambassador had come for a visit, been displeased and directed that this individual should be transferred out of his jurisdiction.

So poor Mr. Andrews was abruptly sent off somewhere else. I think he ended up going somewhere where he was happy enough, although he didn't stay much longer in the Foreign Service. But it was too bad, because his father had been a consul general in Strasbourg. He may have even been born in Strasbourg. So this was a sort of a coming home, and he only spent six months. The day I arrived, he informed me, that he was leaving and I would be acting consul general.

Then, for a long time, they didn't name a replacement, and in fact the ambassador's original inclination was to not get a replacement and just allow the post to be run at a more junior level. Eventually, they did assign somebody who was a younger officer, younger than George Andrews, a fellow named Ron Woods. He and I became close friends and worked together several other times over the next couple of decades. So he arrived about three months after I'd been there and took over.

As I said, he was a fairly junior officer himself. In fact, he couldn't technically be a consul general for the first year or two, because he didn't have the rank for consul general. I think at that time I was an FSO seven and I think he was a five. You couldn't be a consul general until you got to be a four.

Q: Well, let's talk about what was the organization, the European organization, what was its title now, again?

DOBBINS: The Council of Europe.

Q: The Council of Europe. What was the staff of sort of Europe at that time? I'm talking about as a body.

DOBBINS: Well, the European Community was continuing to slowly coalesce. The Council of Europe had been overshadowed, but it was continuing. It had a somewhat broader organization because it included the European neutrals who didn't belong to the European Community. There was still no real effort at political union within the EC, or even common foreign policy, but certainly in the economic and commercial areas, it was continuing to coalesce and do important things. It was, of course, the height of the Cold War and Europe was very divided.

Q: Well, were we monitoring the Council of Europe principals? Were they unhappy or in a snit about what was happening in Brussels?

DOBBINS: The Council of Europe tended to focus on broader, non-commercial, non-economic aspects of the European union. So, for instance, it was the Council of Europe rather than the European Community that would standardize road signs throughout Europe, so they all looked the same. And there were other forms of standardization that the Council of Europe worked on.

It would do studies in social health and, particularly, juridical areas. It would try to set European standards for human rights abuses. It had its own court. I can't remember what it was called, but it was basically a human rights court where people could bring suits if they felt their rights were being abused by their own government. So we would file a report. Some of this was relevant to the United States in a general way.

We sent these reports by air gram, which ensured that virtually nobody read them at the other end. I suspect that these were largely filed and forgotten. I would be surprised if more than one or two people read most of them, and I think it was principally useful for me, just to become adept at the process of going and listening to a full day's debate in the Parliamentary Assembly and then reducing that to a coherent three paragraphs. So as a tradecraft exercise, it was quite valuable, but the actual utility of the work I would think would have been extremely low.

Q: What was your impression of the personnel and spirit of the Council of Europe?

DOBBINS: I thought they were quite professional and approachable. They recognized that they were in something of a backwater in terms of where the real action was, but it was a typical sort of international organization. It had people from 18 countries working together, living a pleasant, quiet life in a small but comfortable European city.

Q: I've seen shots on TV of doings there later on, but it seemed to me, when I see people in full dress kit of tails and all opening doors for the delegates as they go in and all ...I sort of wondered and said, "Oh my God, I can imagine what almost the overhead would be for an organization like this. A lot of perks and ..."

DOBBINS: The European Parliament, which is the Parliament of the European Community, also met in Strasbourg, and its staff, in a typical European Community arrangement, actually were housed in Luxemburg, where of course all the other institutions were in Brussels. But they used the same facilitthat is, the same building, and chambers, and probably therefore used the same ushers and things like that.

Q: How did you deal with our embassy to the European Community?

DOBBINS: We had almost no dealings. The European Parliament, we didn't report on that. If they were sufficiently interested, somebody would come from Brussels and we would obviously facilitate their visit if they wanted us to.

Q: I'm not quite sure of my timing, but were the seeds, or was it more developed, what became known as the Helsinki Accords, because it would fit more into here since this was broader representation than just the ...

DOBBINS: Well, the CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) was begun around that time. And it culminated only in the signature of the Helsinki Final Act in, I guess it was '76.

Q: Ford signed it, so I think ...

DOBBINS: The process had begun. The negotiations were underway. We didn't have anything to do with it there. I wrote a policy paper for the State Department. The European Bureau was inviting policy papers, so I had the temerity, because I guess I came from the Policy Planning Staff, of writing a long paper, which posited rather prematurely the idea that Europe was coming together and that the U.S. had some advantages in a more self-confident and unified Europe. I advised doing things like assisting the French nuclear weapons program, which the department got very nervous about. I only found out later they were nervous about, because it was actually being actively debated, and they felt it was a very sensitive subject. So they liked the paper, but refused to publish it. But it led to somebody in personnel who had something to do with it suggesting me for my next job.

But the CSCE, per se, no, there were really no activities there. Some of the Council of Europe human rights kind of stuff was reflected in the CSCE negotiations, but it wasn't being managed out of there.

Q: Did you find that your consular folks had a certain window on, say, the non-Europeawell, I mean the European, but the people who were not part of the European Community. I guess we were talking about Sweden and ...

DOBBINS: Well, the Council of Europe, its principal reason for existing separately from the European Community was that it did have a broader membership, which included the neutrals.

Q: Well, did you find that you were tasked, the post was tasked, with looking at the neutrals and how they were observing the European development or not?

DOBBINS: The post really wasn't tasked with anything. We were just doing the reporting to justify our existence. There was no technical interest in any of this, because it had no immediate operational impact on what Washington was doing.

Q: Just capture the spirit of the time, only somebody looking at this from the future or something, what was the spirit, sort of the feeling that you and your colleagues had about European unity? A good thing, or we were concerned they were building up a rival that was going to give us a problem?

DOBBINS: Well, and there's always been a tension. So I think the paper I wrote actually sort of reflected that I tried to argue, already, a more pro-Europeanist approach, as I recall. I wouldn't sathis wasn't a time when the Europeans were particularly challenging us, and if there were any concerns, it was with the Brandt government in Germany, and where they were taking their ostpolitik line made Washington nervous. So it was less a concern about European reunification than managing German ...

Q: Were you picking up any reflections from just your acquaintances or your contacts and all about the Soviet Union at that time?

DOBBINS: Well, not in Strasbourg. The politics there were very parochial, and the Council of Europe had no real East-West relations dimension. It was all within Western societies and looking at Western societies. So the Cold War and the East-West competition really weren't part of our professional life at that point, other than the background of what we were doing.

Q: As soon as you have an international organization, one thinks of the KGB (Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti, Committee for State Security) and the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) getting in there and recruiting. One thinks, of course, of particularly Switzerland, where I think every other person was on the payroll of one or the other.

DOBBINS: I don't think either were interested in the Council of Europe. I certainly never detected anything.

Q: Well, then, after this, it sounds like almost an idyllic ...

DOBBINS: It was very pleasant.

Q: And also you were learning the trade.

DOBBINS: Yes, and it was learning how a multilateral organization went. I learned political reporting. I learned management. Basically, the consul generaor he was the consul, and for a while we were both consuls, but he was the head of the consulate general, the principal officer, basically left the management of the post to me. And the locals were all long-term, highly experienced, so I did nothing but sign documents they put in front of me. I probably spent, at the most doing 25% of my time consular and administrative and commercial work. The rest of the time, I could travel in the district and make calls, see people and report on things that interested me.

Q: Anti-Americanism, was that not an Alsatian trait or something?

DOBBINS: No, not at all. Quite the contrary. They were very, very positive.

Q: Well then, in '73, whither?

DOBBINS: I was asked, partially because I had written this paper, and the fellow who had been the desk officer who had to review it then went off to personnel and became, I guess, my counselor. He was within the office that handled my grade, asked if I would be interested in interviewing to be a speechwriter and special assistant to the U.S. representative to the United Nations, who had just been named, a guy named John Scali. And Scali was visiting Geneva and I agreed and drove down to Geneva and met Scali, who was a little skeptical, I think because he had just hired a couple of people for the same job. He wasn't much of an organization person, but was about to give a speech, which he wasn't satisfied with, so he said, "Okay, you take all this stuff and see if you can do a better job."

So I, of course, knew nothing. It was a speech to the Economic and Social Council, so I took all of this material and spent the night reorganizing it in a more coherent and better draftehe liked the result and said, "Okay." So based on that, I was transferred. That did mean curtailing the tour in Strasbourg. I curtailed that and went to New York.

Q: You were there at the UN from '73 to ...

DOBBINS: Seventy-five. Two years.

Q: Could you talk just a bit about John Scali, because he had an interesting background.

DOBBINS: He was a newsman, and he was an ABC reporter. He was the ABC State Department diplomatic correspondent. And he had played a role in the Cuban Missile Crisis as a go-between, which became very famous. He had joined the White House staff under Nixon in the Public Affairs Office in the White House and played a role in the media management of Nixon's famous trip to China, and apparently for that, and other services, he was named ambassador to the United Nations by Nixon. At that time, Watergate had begun, but it hadn't yet taken its toll. So you still had people like Chuck Colson and Haldeman and Ehrlichman and all in the White House. Scali was a buddy of these guys and would be calling them two to three times a day to just chat, ask how things were going and sort of back channel. Kissinger was also still at the White House. In order to get whatever instructions he was getting from the State Department he didn't like changed, he would be on the telephone to the White House all the time.

So he was an interesting man. Very insecure in odd ways. One would have thought that somebody who had come from journalism would be at ease in public speaking. But he was not at ease at all. He could not speak extemporaneously at all, so he needed even relatively casual statements written out, and he would deliver them very powerfully if they were well written, but he would read them word for word. It was clear that his on-air presence, he had carefully written every word and then went on. Because, of course, the ambassador to the UN gives many speeches, keeping him prepared was a lot of work.

Q: I would imagine that there would be a session or something and the press would be waiting for the ambassador to come up, almost practically on a daily basis.

DOBBINS: Some of it was that sort of thing, but it was also actually having to go speak in the Security Council. Even if it wasn't public, he'd still need written remarks for most things, speaking in the General Assembly, speaking to the United Nations Association group, that sort of things. There were two or three small sets of remarks every week and usually one or two large ones.

Q: Well, you were basically speechwriting the whole time?

DOBBINS: I was a special assistant. Speechwriting was probably the most single demanding component of it, but basically I screened his traffic. I decided what he'd see, what he didn't need to see. I'd make sure that he was getting what he needed; act as an interface with members of the staff. Over time, because I was accessible and there and knowledgeable, I accumulated more duties.

Q: Well, did you get caught, or were you working within this very peculiar thing between William Rogers, our secretary of state and Henry Kissinger, who was much closer to Nixon? This policy tug-of-war?

DOBBINS: Scali consciously manipulated that to his advantage as long as it lasted. But, when Kissinger became secretary of state, then Scali's ability to play both sides disappeared and he was under a much tighter leash than he had been, and was much less of an independent player and much more somebody who simply had to take instructions. I don't think he ever had a particularly good relationship with Kissinger. He never developed a relationship with Ford. Ford actually came to visit our mission once and gave a talk, and Scali really didn't take the occasion tthis was when he was still vice president, and at that point it wasn't inevitable he would become president. Scali was courteous, but I don't think he went out of his way to ingratiate himself with the person who turned out to be the next president. And, as a result, after Nixon left, Scali was very shortly thereafter replaced.

Q: What were some of the issues that you were observing going on that the United States was dealing with?

DOBBINS: Well, it was a very active time. We had, in addition to Watergate going on, and that was something you not only read about in the newspapers, but I usually would spend a lot of time in Scali's office listening to him talk to people like Colson or Ehrlichman or Kissinger about what was going on that day in the unfolding crisis. So there was a certain inside quality to it. Scali, I don't think, was involved in any way, so they weren't telling him anything secret. But it clearly had an impact.

The other thing, the two major events were the '73 war in the Middle East. ...

Q: This is the October War, Yom Kippur War.

DOBBINS: Which was ultimately settled in the Security Council in very difficult negotiations that were worked out, in which a settlement was worked out in the Security Council. And then the Turkish invasion of Cyprus.

Q: That was in July of '74.

DOBBINS: So those were both really major events. Then there was the "new world economic order," an assault by the third world on the established economic system, which didn't go anywhere and ultimately just further impoverished the countries. It was a time when the third world and the nonaligned had become much more demanding and much more willing to use their voting strength in the UN to discomfit the United States, the industrialized world.

Q: Well, for one thing, first, the Watergate thing. For those of us who were overseas, one of the hardesmost countries wondered, "What the hell was this all about?" Because to the normal political type in almost any other country, Watergate seemed to be pretty much that's the way you run things and all. And, all of a sudden, why were we getting so upset about this?

Were you in contact with other delegations, and was there a sense of puzzlement of what was going on?

DOBBINS: When I was in Strasbourg, there was a certain amount. In New York, of course, they had access to the same media we did. My job was mostly, in any case, not with other delegations but coordination within the mission. So I can't say I recall any Watergate-related discussions with other delegations at the time.

Q: What about the October '73 Arab-Israeli war? What role was Scali doing in there?

DOBBINS: Well, as I say, the Security Council was centrally involved from the beginning, and it was in the Security Council and in the negotiations over the Security Council language that the war was concluded and the terms of the ceasefire were agreed. So he was very heavily involved. Now, some of the negotiation was being done by Kissinger directly with the principals, but then it was being fed back into Security Council forum. So he was heavily involved in negotiating with the Russians and others.

Q: Did you get any feel fol realize, you were maybe the fly on the wall or what have yobut the role of some of the principals in this, particularly the Soviets or the Egyptians, the Israelis?

DOBBINS: Well, some. I don't remember anything that stands out, particularly. I mean, I think most of it's been in the history books since then. I attended some of the Security Council sections. Generally, it would be somebody else who would go to the smaller meetings with individual delegations.

Q: How about the press? This was, I guess, your first real encounter with the press by helping the speeches and all. What was your impression?

DOBBINS: Well, my first encounter with the press would have been with the Vietnam peace talks, which was heavily covered, much more heavily than anything else thereafter. We did a lot of presswork. Scali would give press conferences, and, of course, he was an experienced journalist, although, as I said, rather less self confident in that regard than I would have expected. It was useful, learning to understand how the press worked and how to deal with them. And the speechwriting was very valuable for later assignments.

Q: The speechwriting, did you have to clear this with the State Department?

DOBBINS: Not normally, no. I would try to get, not always successfully, whatever the officer with the substantive responsibility for the topic to do the first draft, which I would then rewrite to make it morwhat's the word I'm looking for? better written, and more speech-like. And then we would go back and forth with him. I would circulate a couple of drafts to the substantive people in the mission with responsibility, and to Scali. Scali was not easy to please, and he would give very vague, or nonexistent, guidance on a speech, and when he got it, not surprisingly, he wouldn't find it was what he wanted. So we often had to do a lot of redrafting. We didn't normally have to clear his stuff with Washington.

Q: Did you get any feel for the influence on our mission of the Israeli/Jewish political apparatus in the United States?

DOBBINS: Oh, sure. Kissinger got into his shuttle diplomacy, and it was occasionally making an effort to put some pressure on Israel. Then we would often become, because the Jewish community was so heavily concentrated in New York, it would be our mission that would be picketed, because we were easier than the State Department to get to. And sometimes it was the UN that would be picketed.

The biggest day was when Yasser Arafat came to the UN in I guess '75, maybe '74. I can't remember. He'd never been before, and of course he at that time was a much less respectable figure than he is today, since this was still when they were hijacking aircraft and sitting them in the desert in Lebanon. So he came to visit, he came to the General Assembly, which Kissinger had agreed to, and there were huge demonstrations, as well as the New York Police Department had to go through extreme security measures. They closed down the Long Island Expressway at rush hour, both coming in and going out, which as you can imagine didn't make Yasser Arafat any more popular in New York.

There were a lot of demonstrations, and it was obvious that Kissinger and Nixon would occasionally have to back down. But they would have to back down on their efforts to pressure the Israelis toward concessions when the heat got too high.

Q: Well, what was the background of Arafat coming to the UN?

DOBBINS: This was a time when the nonaligned movement was acting in great solidarity and the U.S. was constantly being outvoted by, like, 100 to one or 100 to three. The only countries we could count on were Portugal and Israel, Portugal because of its unpopular colonial wars, which we were the only country defending them. So there were lots of votes which where 100 to three. The General Assembly invited him to speak.

Q: Did you get involved in the resolution that seemed to come up every year, Zionism is racism?

DOBBINS: I don't know if those resolutions were circulating at that time. They may have been. We would have certainly gotten involved. We got involved in a lot of campaigns. We were involved in the campaigns over Chinese membership, for instance, until we changed our policy after Kissinger's trip. What was the other? There were a number of sort of ongoing issues, which were re-fought every year.

Q: One was Puerto Rico, I think, wasn't it?

DOBBINS: That was a lower-level one, kind of an annoyance.

Q: You were there, I guess, during the time when the mainland China was entering the UN?

DOBBINS: Yes, and that was interesting, watching. They of course came. They were extremely cautious, noncommittal and very diplomatic. They clearly came in determined to show that they could behave responsibly, and so they tended to abstain a lot.

Q: Were you there when they arrived?

DOBBINS: Yes.

Q: Was there some concern, almost our entire UN policy was based on keeping the Red Chinese out, and in they came? Were you worried that they were going to start throwing bombs around?

DOBBINS: We were surprised by the degree to which they turned out to be a non-disruptive presence.

Q: They continue to be.

DOBBINS: Yes.

Q: Well, what about this North-South business, which is a simple way of putting the economically developed countries versus the poorer countries? This was a big campaign, as you were saying, at that time.

DOBBINS: Well, it sort of reached its peak at this point, and it was a masterful stroke by OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) and the Algerians. This was just after the oil embargo, and the price of oil had gone up tenfold, which of course was far more disruptive and destructive to the third world than it was to the industrialized world, because we could after all afford to pay the higher prices, whereas they could not.

But under Algerian leadership, the OPEC countries succeeded in persuading the third world that the OPEC's price gouging, supply-manipulating strategy was a good thing, because it was a precursor for all of them getting better prices for their raw materials. So there was a high degree of solidarity and a major push to improve the terms of trade to the benefit of the supplier countries, raw material supplier countries. There was a big general assembly devoted exclusively to the purpose, probably in '74. And the underlying documents for it, which I was probably one of the few people who read, made it clear that the third world had never had better terms of trade, that the terms of trade, oil aside, were at a historical high.

Nevertheless, the rhetoric was all very hostile to the West and to free trade. It didn't amount to anything, except to simply disrupt and make unusable the various international forums for debating these issues for a decade. And, sure enough, it was a historic high. When this campaign was mounted, the terms of trade in terms of the producers of raw material were more favorable in '73 than they have ever been since, or had been previously. And so this decade, new world economic order debate in the end produced absolutely nothing, and disguised a continued deterioration of the terms of trade of the third world.

Q: Any other issues that you were observing at this time?

DOBBINS: Those are pretty much the main things that were preoccupying us at the UN. There was the whole debate about the UN, and whether or not it served U.S. interests. Scali, to his credit, was a strong supporter of the United Nations, of internationalism; felt that the UN played an important role that the United States had to support. The fact that we were constantly being outvoted 100 to three and the strong Jewish community dislike of the UN as the result of Israel's being constantly under pressure, and a variety of other factors, led to the UN becoming rather unpopular in American public opinion, Yasser Arafat's visit being one example.

As a result, Scali was replaced by somebody who came in with a much more hostile attitude toward the UN.

Q: Who was that?

DOBBINS: Moynihan. He made his mark and became a senator of New York largely because he bashed the UN throughout his assignment.

Q: Were you there when Moynihan came in?

DOBBINS: No, I left. I had been scheduled to leave in any case before Scali got fired. I left to go to Washington in the summer in mid '75, and Moynihan got there a month or two later, so we never overlapped.

Q: For your career, did you feel that you were becoming sort of an internationalist with the Strasbourg and this?

DOBBINS: You mean multilateralist?

Q: Multilateralist.

DOBBINS: No, I didn't think of it in those terms, but the UN in particular was very instructive and turned out to be very valuable in understanding how these institutions worked. I did get a distinct sense that multilateral diplomacy in some ways was more satisfying than bilateral, because bilateral you tended to be an observer and very seldom would actually achieve anything. That is, there weren't that many things that were achieved at the bilateral level, whereas in multilateral diplomacy, there was a scorecard. There were votes. You either won or you lost. There were constant things in which you had specific objectives. You mounted a campaign, you either achieved it or you didn't achieve it. If you achieved it, you got a great sense of accomplishment.

In multilateral diplomacy, you had a bottom line that you could calculate. It wasn't money, but it was specific objectives that either were achieved or weren't achieved in finite, given periods of time. In bilateral diplomacy, that was largely lacking. Bilateral diplomacy is largely a maintenance process.

Q: Well, how about these 100 to three votes in the UN? Would it be almost a matter of saying, let the kids play and let's let it go? How did people within our mission gin up to the ...

DOBBINS: Well, I suppose it was somewhat dispiriting, particularly for the people who were working in the areas where this was occurring. These were General Assembly votes. The General Assembly's powers are relatively limited, and so in the end its principal damage was damage it did to the United Nations' reputation in the United States and continued support for it.

Q: But did this affect the officers?

DOBBINS: To some degree.

Q: To some degree.

DOBBINS: I think by and large, the main problem in New York was just the difficulties of living there on a Foreign Service salary. I will say that Scali did get for us, got through Congress, legislation, which allowed us to have our rent paid.

Q: How did our officers survive before getting that?

DOBBINS: They would tend to be people who had New York roots. Some had their own money. Some had family reason to be there. It was difficult to recruit to New York. Some were couples without children, or not school-age children. And some of them commuted long distances. It was a variety of factors, but there was no doubt that recruiting to New York was more difficult than Paris or London or other attractive cities, because you didn't get allowances, until Scali got us a housing allowance, and that helped.

Q: Well, then, in '75, whither?

DOBBINS: I became a special assistant to Hal Sonnenfeldt, who was the counselor of the department, and who was known as Kissinger's Kissinger. Like Kissinger, he had left Germany, like Kissinger, as a Jewish refugee from Germany. I think Kissinger left Germany in his early teens, whereas Hal left Germany when he was, like, seven. So he didn't speak English with an accent, but he still spoke German. He had come to the State Department and worked in INR (Bureau of Intelligence and Research), actually. I don't think he ever served abroad, although he eventually was brought into the Foreign Service and was, by the time I worked for him, a career minister in the Foreign Service.

Q: I've interviewed him. He never ...

DOBBINS: He never served abroad. He had worked for Kissinger on the NSC staff, where he had been the senior director for Europe, and then he'd come over to the department. He'd actually been scheduled, and I think he was nominated to be, undersecretary of the treasury. Then, for some reason, he ran into some political problem on that nomination, and so he came to the State Department as counselor. His remit was to oversee all East-West, European and political-military issues, which is a pretty great remit. It's maybe half of what Kissinger cared about. He essentially split the world with the undersecretary for political affairs. He did the third world, and Sonnenfeldt did the first and second worlds, which was probably the bigger of the two, in terms of real importance. Sisco was the undersecretary.

He had a very small staff on whom he relied very heavily and gave us a lot of leeway in doing the job. So it was only a year, and it was very difficult.

Q: This would be '75 to '76.

DOBBINS: Kissinger was, in the beginning, both the secretary of state and national security adviser, and we had both White House and State Department stationary, and we would write our memos on one or the other, depending on which bureaucracy we thought we wanted to send it through. Kissinger lost the second position about halfway through my tenure there and was just secretary of state. But it was a fascinating job. Sonnenfeldt was extremely difficult to work for, but was very influential, and so for a junior officer, it gave me a lot of influence, as well as unique insights.

Q: Well, how would you characterize Sonnenfeldt's being difficult to work for.

DOBBINS: I think, mainly, he was under a great deal of pressure. Kissinger was, of course, really a monster and was very abusive to his staff. Kissinger, he was self obsessed, spent little or no time concerning morale or feelings of his staff, tended to be abrupt, demanding, unreasonably so. And Hal, instead of absorbing that, tended to just pass it along. If he came back from a tough meeting with Kissinger, he would be in a grouchy mood and simply pass along this tension, rather than absorbing himself.

So I've known him for a long time, and we've become good friends since then, and in a different situation, where he's not under this sort of pressure, he's not personally unpleasant. I think Kissinger's always unpleasant, unless he's making an effort because he thinks you're important and therefore he has to be pleasant to you. But I don't think Hal's naturally that way, but I think he didn't have the ability to absorb that and not pass it on to his staff. He really only had a staff of three. It eventually became four, but three people, who divided up his world.

One of us did arms control, one did the Soviet Union and the other did everything else, which is basically Western Europe and East-West negotiations other than arms control, and that was me. I was in charge of that, and basically the European Bureau didn't do anything without us telling them it was okay. So it was rather heady.

Q: Who were the other ...

[End Side]

Q: You were saying you replaced ...

DOBBINS: I replaced Bob Blackwell, who had the job for the first year that Sonnenfeldt was at the State Department. He then went to London, where I then replaced him again a few years later. Bill Shinn was the guy who did the Soviet Union, who has died since, and he was replaced by a guy named Bill Montgomery. The fellow who did arms control was John Kelly, who started about the same time I did, and then after a year, or less than a year, he was replaced by Leon Fuerth, who of course was Gore's national security adviser in the Clinton administration.

Q: You had sort of the European international?

DOBBINS: I did everything to do with Europe except arms control.

Q: Well, what about, again, coming back to the CSCE negotiations?

DOBBINS: I went with Hal to the signing in Helsinki with President Ford. Our office oversaw that negotiation.

Q: I think this is a very interesting period in American foreign policy. The Helsinki accords turned out to be a very important focal point for, essentially, what happened in Eastern Europe and all of this. It gave them a focus. At the time, my understanding is that Kissinger had denigrated this. I talked to Vest, who was involved with this, and others. When you were looking at this, at your time, which would be '75, '76, did we have any idea of the real impact of what this was going to be?

DOBBINS: I don't think so. First of all, I think Kissinger saw it as a surrogate for the peace treaty we had long denied the Soviet Union, a peace treaty on Germany, and felt that our willingness to negotiate and then sign it was a concession to them to begin with. He didn't really value the human rights element to it; saw that, if anything, as a device for stringing out the negotiation until he got what he wanted. I can't quite even recall what it was we thought we wanted from the negotiation at this stage, but it wasn't tougher human rights language, which was largely a desiderata of the West Europeans, who felt more strongly about the value of this.

Our focus was more on the security component. And CSCE was linked to other things: East-West arms control.

Q: Confidence building I think they were ...

DOBBINS: There were other things. Confidence-building measures is part of CSCE, but there were other things that weren't even part of CSCE that were linked in Kissinger's mind. He had an elaborate construct of East-West desiderata and negotiations he was conducting, of which this was one component, which he was finally persuaded to bring to a conclusion, but always without much enthusiasm. It was very much a part of his overall dï¿½tente policies.

So when we got to Helsinki, and Hal had to smuggle me there, because Kissinger didn't allow his staff to have staff. The thought that one of his assistants might have an assistant was offensive to him, although it eventually eased up. But for the first few trips I went with Sonnenfeldt, I had to fly commercially from place to place and somehow try to catch up with the secretary and his party. I remember, in Helsinki, I saw Sonnenfeldt walking down the street next to Kissinger, and Sonnenfeldt was carrying a briefcase, and I wondered why he was carrying a briefcase, because I was carrying his briefcase. I was walking toward them. As I walked toward them, Sonnenfeldt, who was a step or so behind Kissinger, waved me off, sort of, "Don't come to talk to me." Because he clearly didn't want me to come up and have to introduce me to the secretary.

Then I saw, as I got closer, that he was carrying Kissinger's briefcase. My entire career flashed in front of me, and I thought that if I was highly successful in 20 years, I could graduate from carrying the counselor secretary's briefcase to carrying the secretary's briefcase.

It was on this trip that Sonnenfeldt said, "Well, help Peter Rodman write the president's speech tomorrow." The president was giving his speech. And I said, "Rodman won't let me help." Peter Rodman was the secretary's speechwriter. And I said, "Rodman's not going to let me help him write the speech. He'll want to write it himself." He said, "Well, go help him."

So, sure enough, Rodman of course declined any assistance, but I did get a copy of the speech, which I brought to Sonnenfeldt first thing in the morning, and I said, "This is really terrible. It's all pro-dï¿½tente, has no human rights component to it, nothing about holding them to standards, nothing critical of their current human rights practices, and will go down extremely poorly domestically and even with the audience here."

So Sonnenfeldt took the speech and went off and rewrote it with Ford's counselor Hartmann, I think his name was, who was a former journalist who had come into the Ford White House and had a very influential position with Ford. Sonnenfeldt and Hartmann rewrote and toughened the speech up, and Ford's speech was a pretty good speech, and has played pretty well historically since then, as a result.

Q: Did you get any repercussions from the Kissinger side?

DOBBINS: No, I'm sure that Kissinger knew that Sonnenfeldt was doing this. I think Rodman was reflecting what he thought Kissinger would want. I don't know whether Kissinger recognized it had to be changed, or whether he was reluctant, but in any case, Hartmann and the White House staff recognized they had to take a tougher line, and they did.

Q: The counselor of the state department is sort of an open job that can mean anything from policy planning to being the person who receives delegations, to almost anything. You were saying in a way that you all were acting sort of as a European Bureau, practically. I mean, was this a problem?

DOBBINS: I wouldn't say we were acting as the European Bureau. We were acting as the undersecretary for political affairs for Europe, the Soviet Union and political-military issues. The undersecretary for political affairs was acting as the undersecretary for political affairs for the third world. That's as a practical matter how it worked out.

Hal was very sensitive and unhappy with his relatively junior status among the seventh floor. He had a smaller office. He eventually moved to a much larger suite. He clearly wasn't given the same as the Undersecretaries. For instance, the undersecretary for political affairs had his own automobile. Hal had to use the motor pool. So he was unhappy, particularly since he'd taken this job after having been nominated to be undersecretary of the treasury. But as a practical matter, he was probably at least as powerful, probably more powerful, than the undersecretary for political affairs, because his were the issues that counted and the issues that the secretary largely cared about.

Q: When I interviewed Sonnenfeldt, he kept returning to the term Sonnenfeldt doctrine, which annoyed the hell out of him, because he felt that it didn't ...

DOBBINS: It was unfair to him.

Q: And it didn't represent his view at all. Could you explain how you viewed that at the time?

DOBBINS: Well, I was intimately involved in it. Sonnenfeldt and I and Kissinger went to London for a European chiefs of mission conference, Arthur Hartman was the assistant secretary and had called. Kissinger came and he spoke, and he had left. The conference was like a day, or even a day and a half, and Kissinger had left, but Sonnenfeldt was there, along with Hartman, who was chairing the meeting in the secretary's absence. They had gotten onto the topic of East-West relations, and Sonnenfeldt made an intervention. He spoke about how unfortunate it was that whereas the United States had achieved a consensual and natural relationship with Western Europe, in which the United States' leadership was accepted and welcomed and they built a relationship which was natural and comfortable for all concerned, that unfortunately the Soviet Union had never been able to build a comparably natural relationship with Eastern Europe. And that the East-West relationship would be better and less tense and less difficult if the Soviet Union were to be able to achieve a more natural relationship with its Eastern European partners. That was sort of his thesis.

But he didn't use the word natural, which was what then led to the problems. This is an important point; because it was the ambiguity of the word he used that got him in trouble. Instead he used the word organic. In other words, he said it was regrettable that the Soviet Union had not achieved an organic relationship with the nations of Eastern Europe. And of course the word organic can have two meaningnatural, which is what Sonnenfeldt meant, or unitary, which is what his critics claimed he meant. Warren Zimmerman was the note taker. He was working in EUR (European and Eurasian Affairs) and he was the note taker for this session. He drew up a telegram reporting ior even an air gram, in those days, but an air gram or a telegraand he sent it up to me to clear, because EUR had to send everything to us to clear, without exception. They couldn't send out any instructions on any subject. But clearly, this one he wanted to clear in any case, because Sonnenfeldt was the principal speaker.

So I went in to Hal and I said, "They've sent off this telegram. They've got you speaking. You ought to look at this carefully. I think it accurately reflects what you said. I think what you said is important, but it's also potentially sensitive. It could be embarrassing, so look this over carefully and make sure you want to send it." And he looked it over and signed it and sent it.

Now, in retrospect, it then got leaked. Some recipient of it gave it to Evans and Novak, who then blew it out of proportion.

Q: Anyway.

DOBBINS: They then wrote an article about this: Sonnenfeldt, Kissinger, intimate calls for an organic relationship between the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. They may have even called it the Sonnenfeldt doctrine, or then somebody else then called it the Sonnenfeldt doctrine. It became sort of lore. Now, I always regret not having made the telegram EXDIS, that is greatly restricting its distribution. It went out as an unrestricted telegram, so it went out pretty broadly, because it was on a very general subject matter, so I'm sure thousands of copies were distributed.

I probably should have made it a more restricted distribution. Having recognized it was something that could get him in trouble, I should have done that, but I didn't. I did draw it to his attention. He never blamed me for this. He never raised this with me at all, critically, because I had flagged to him this particular passage and said, "You need to think carefully whether you want to send this." And he thought, and he sent it.

But the problem was that he used a word that could either be interpreted benignly, as a more natural or consensual relationship, or could be interpreted un-benignly, as our advocating that the Soviet Union should achieve more control over Eastern Europe, that our object was to consolidate the Soviet Union's power in Eastern Europe as a way of controlling the East-West conflict, which is not, I think, what he meant. But what he did mean, and even this is somewhat controversial, is that it's too bad that the Soviet Union, unlike the United States, was not able to achieve a relationship with its partners in Eastern Europe in which they perceived their own interests as being served.

Q: Well, while you were dealing with this, were you forming any feelings about the Soviet Union and how we should be dealing with this?

DOBBINS: I wasn't directly responsible for the arms control part of it, which was the most substantial aspect of our relationship with the Soviet Union. I became familiar with the process and brought into it to some extent, and became a proponent of nuclear arms control as a way of dealing with dangers inherent in the East-West relationship.

Q: Well, it seems like the arms control was almost giving up. I mean, there wasn't much reduction on the nuclear side. It was just trying to set limits.

DOBBINS: Of course, Kissinger ultimately failed in hiwe had the SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) I treaty, and then he wanted to negotiate the SALT II treaty, and he was unable to do so. That's how he lost the job in the White House, in fact. I mean, Schlesinger put his foot down and Schlesinger lost his job, but Kissinger lost his national security adviser job, and he was unable to table a proposal, which would have had lower restrictions than did the SALT I agreement.

But it was always conceived of as a process, and my view at the time was that since it was clear that nuclear weapons had, and the way that they were being deployed and used by the two sides, carried with it the possibility of essentially destroying civilization. Even if the prospect of a conflict at any particular moment was low, still mathematically, over time, the conflict with the possibility of something going wrong at some point was higher than one would want to be comfortable with, that you needed some device to deal with this, and if anybody had a better device than arms control, I'd be interested in hearing it. But in the absence of any better one, it did seem to me to be a moral imperative to at least be trying to reduce and circumscribe the use and proliferation of these weapons.

Q: Did you have any feel for the influence of President Ford?

DOBBINS: I thought he was a very good president, and it was the best-run national security system I experienced, at least until the second Clinton administration, which was also pretty professional. Actually, the first Bush administration was pretty professional. But the Ford administration, partially because it was, in effect, the end of the second term of the Nixon administration, without Nixon, was a very professionally run national security system. Scowcroft did a good job in the White House, the process was straightforward and reliable, and Ford made the decisions he had to make. I thought it was a very well-run system, and I thought he was an excellent president.

Q: Looking at Europe, what about Germany at the time? Germany, although it was a loyal ally and all, there was always the concern that somehow or another, with this aussenpolitik in some way it could go for unity of all of Germany at the price of neutrality, which was sort of take the guts out of NATO. Was this a concern?

DOBBINS: Well, it had been a concern with Brandt's Ostpolitik, but Kissinger actually had, for his own purposes, seized dï¿½tente as a central focus of his own policies. I remember, during the campaign where Helmut Kohl was the conservative candidate, and I can't remember, either Brandt or Schmidt, probably Schmidt was the SPD (Social Democratic Party) candidate, Sonnenfeldt and I went to Bonn, and he met with Kohl. I didn't join the meeting.

But the purpose of the meeting was, essentially, to tell Kohl that the U.S. supported dï¿½tente policies, and to caution him about being too critical from the conservative side against the SPD's policies in this regard, to the extent they coincided with Washington's, which they largely did. Because, by then, the Four Power accords on Berlin, which Egon Barr had been instrumental in negotiating, was complex of things that led to the Helsinki summit. So, by then, Kissinger had invested in the process sufficiently so that he was cautiously waiving Helmut Kohl off from being too critical and too anti-dï¿½tente.

Q: What about France? France was continuing to be sort of the burr under our foreign policy saddle. During this time, where did France fit in?

DOBBINS: Well, relations with France had improved considerably, because Giscard d'Estaing had replaced Pompidou and thus the Gaullists were out of office. Giscard was more of a centrist. We had begun both the secret quadripartite talks with the French, the Germans and the British, and more public talks in a slightly larger forum involving the Italians and eventually also the Canadians, which became the economic summits. And Sonnenfeldt and I were instrumental in establishing both of those forums. They both began with informal discussions between Giscard, Schmidt and Kissinger. So both forums were set up and both continue to this day to be sort of a steering group for U.S.-European relations. Relations with France were considerably improved under Giscard.

Q: Now, as counselor of the state department, did Sonnenfeldt have much contact with various embassies, or were they taken care of by geographic bureaus?

DOBBINS: For anything serious, they would deal with Sonnenfeldt, and if he was too busy, they'd deal with me. And they'd only deal with the regional bureau for routine members. For instance, if Kissinger was going on a trip to Europe, I would get on the phone with the local ambassadors and say, "Kissinger wants to be in Paris on so-and-so, could you check?" We would manage to completely cut out both our local embassies and the European Bureau until the trip was set, in which case we would then tell the European Bureau that we were going on a seven-day trip, here's the itinerary.

Q: I would think, again, these secretarial trips were rather imperial.

DOBBINS: Well, no more than they've become. In terms of the number of staff he traveled with there were fewer than today. It was nice to travel with Kissinger because he stayed in first-class hotels, which none of his successors had quite had the courage to do. We always stayed at Claridges when we were in London. We always stayed at the Crillon when we were in Paris. I'm afraid that all of his successors have gone to not quite the same quality hotels. But his plane was no bigger than anyone else's, and he carried lots of press, because he got a lot of press coverage. They were exciting trips to go on, because of the media attention.

But the embassies in town, I mean, the major ones, the three or four major ones, dealt either with Sonnenfeldt, or, in his absence, sometimes with me. And I would deal with the ambassadors pretty regularly.

Q: What about the media? Was it one of these things where you would have to be very careful not to attract attention? In other words, make sure Kissinger got the full light of the media?

DOBBINS: Yes, Sonnenfeldt wasn't a media personality. His one exposure to the media turned out to be rather unfortunate. After the Sonnenfeldt doctrine came out, he suddenly stopped getting White House invitations and became a non-person in Washington. It was right in the middle of the presidential campaign. Then Gerry Ford had misspoken and claimed Poland was a free country. So the combination of the Sonnenfeldt doctrine and proclaiming the liberation of Poland, it became a hot-button issue.

Q: I mean, in my interview, it was very obvious that this Sonnenfeldt doctrine really rankles, still does. This is Washington, I guess. I'm looking at the time. It's probably a good place to stop.

Q: Well, in '76, where did you go?

DOBBINS: I went to the European Bureau and became the officer in charge of French affairs.

Q: All right, well, this should be a very interesting time. So you were in the European Bureau from '76 to ...

DOBBINS: Seventy-eight.

Q: Seventy-eight. Examining the French-American relationship is fascinating.

Q: Well, today is the 17th of September 2003. We have now reached 1976, where you were in charge of French affairs in the European Bureau until '78.

Now, in the first place, let's look at the wiring diagram. Who was the head of European Affairs at that time?

DOBBINS: Art Hartman.

Q: He had not been ambassador to France at this point.

DOBBINS: No.

Q: Who did you report to?

DOBBINS: In the European Bureau? The office director was Robert Barber, and the deputy office director was Ed Roll.

Q: Well, now, what was the status in 1976 of American-French relations?

DOBBINS: Well, as usual, we were periodically irritated by some French assertion of independence. I think at the time the major issues tended to be nuclear proliferation, and I think there were some monetary issues, but nuclear proliferation was the one I recall being an irritant.

Q: Well, looking at it, was it a discussion among Office of the European Bureau, others? Had you become almost a focal point? Were people trying to puzzle out this French-American relationship? I mean, why was it always such a testy one?

DOBBINS: It was an interesting job, because there always were issues with the French, unlike most other countries of a bilateral nature, and thus there was a market for somebody who could explain how to effectively manage the relationship to get whatever it was that we were looking for at the time. So it did give somebody who could pretend to have the key to getting the French to do what one wanted entrï¿½e at a more senior level than might otherwise be the case.

Q: Well, what did you feel you brought to this?

DOBBINS: Based on two assignments in France, but also, the year I had been working with Sonnenfeldt and Kissinger, an understanding of how European politics and European diplomacy worked.

Q: Well, '76, who was the president of France at that time?

DOBBINS: There was an election, and there was a serious threat that the Socialists, allied with the Communists, would win, which made everybody very nervous, because this was a period in which Euro-Communism was the State Department's main European preoccupation. So we spent a lot of time considering how we should deal with Mitterrand, who was then running on this coalition ticket with the Communists, and deciding whether we should receive him in Washington, for instance, or not.

A lot of the European Bureau was strongly opposed to receiving him, some on the seventh floor, including probably the secretary of state, but certainly his main adviser there, Peter Tarnoff, who was executive secretary of the department, were pushing in the other direction. So there was a good deal of tussling back and forth, which we ultimately prevailed in.

Q: The issue was that Mitterrand was a candidate for, but not the ...

DOBBINS: He was a candidate for president.

Q: So the idea would be that if we received him, we would ...

DOBBINS: We would effectively be endorsing the idea that Communists could enter the French government, which of course they did, five or six years later. But by then, the concerns were a lot lower. The nature of Communism had changed, of Western European Communism.

Q: How did we view this Euro-Communism?

DOBBINS: We were very suspicious of it.

Q: In what way?

DOBBINS: We thought it would threaten the basic willingness of the countries concerned to cooperate within NATO, to adopt common positions on East-West issues, to confront the Soviet Union.

Q: Well, we had just gone through sort of the trauma of Portugal. From your perspective, did you look upon Portugal as being a positive omen? In other words, sort of the Socialists could eventually chew up the Communists, or not?

DOBBINS: I think some of us did. Henry Kissinger tended to take a cataclysmic view of it, and it was only with difficulty that Sonnenfeldt , and Carlucci, who was the ambassador there, persuaded him that if we gave the Socialists some room to maneuver that they would in fact ultimately prevail, as they did.

Q: Well, was this used as an argument on your part when you were running the French desk?

DOBBINS: At that stage, I was of the view that Mitterrand was by no means certain to win, that our receiving him could modestly improve his chances, that we could do without having a Socialist-Communist government, that one would be damaging to our interests and that we shouldn't therefore receive him or legitimize the process, but that if he did come to power, we would have to learn to live with it and work with, at least, the Socialist elements of the government. And we did some contingency planning on that basis. We had a meeting in the White House, and I did some papers on the subject.

Q: Who in the National Security Council was handling the French affairs, European Affairs?

DOBBINS: Bob Hunter was the senior director.

Q: He later went to NATO, didn't he?

DOBBINS: In the Clinton administration.

Q: What were your relations with the French Embassy?

DOBBINS: They were pretty good. I knew the ambassador, which was unusual for a desk officer. I had handled the quadripartite talks, which were very informal, confidential discussions among the main three European powers. And the French ambassador had been the French political director, so we had known each other, and I continued to perform that function for Hartman, who succeeded Sonnenfeldt as the American principal in these talks. I continued to be the note taker, which was unusual because I was on the French desk officer, but because I had done it from the seventh floor, I continued in it.

So I worked on those issues directly for the assistant secretary, and I was known to have access directly to the assistant secretary. I didn't see a lot of the French ambassador, but I did see him occasionally and I saw other members of the French Embassy.

Q: Well, I was wondering, the French government at the highest level and the American government at the highest level, have a tendency to get into kind of spitting contests over things. We're going through a big one right now. But this has been going on going back forever. Did you find that you, at the desk, and with the French Embassy, were trying to work to do what diplomats do and smooth things out and trying to keep things from getting out of hand?

DOBBINS: Yes. I think this wasn't a period of great tension in the U.S.-French relationship, and after Giscard took over from Pompidou, the relationship became a good deal warmer. There were some difficulties, but by and large, it wasn't one of the more difficult periods of the relationship.

Q: Speaking of relationships, you were there during the election of '76. Did that cause any tensions within European Bureau? Were there concerns that the Carter administration might be going in the wrong direction?

DOBBINS: There were some tensions. Euro-Communism, how seriously we should take it. Not a major problem.

Q: You were mentioning nuclear proliferation as an issue.

DOBBINS: Yes, the French were selling nuclear technology to Brazil, as I recall, and we were concerned about the Brazilians having nuclear weapons, as they appeared to be flirting with.

Q: Did we get anywhere with that?

DOBBINS: Eventually.

Q: How does someone get somewhere with this?

DOBBINS: I don't remember any particular denouement, and I don't know to what extent we were successful with the French, as opposed to the Brazilians, but eventually the Brazilians did fairly definitively give up their ambitions.

Q: Yes, I think the Argentineans were on the other side of the equation. It was a major concern to us, to have two nuclear powers down there with no particular reason to use them or anything else, but you've got unstable governments. Did the French have a different view of the Soviet Union than we did, say, under Kissinger?

DOBBINS: Not markedly. The Germans had taken a softer line.

Q: This is during the time of ostpolitik. When Carter came in, at your level, did you see any change?

DOBBINS: They had a much less experienced team and there were strong tensions between the NSC and State, which became more evident over time. And Carter brought in a young, inexperienced team of people. I remember going to a meeting at the White House to prepare for some trip he was going on, and I was by far the oldest person in the room, and I considered myself a young man at that point.

Then I went to another meeting to meet with two assistants to the president, again, to prepare for Carter's first trip, and I was explaining to them hohe was going to an economic summiand how these things worked, because I helped set them up under Sonnenfeldt, and had assisted George Shultz, who was the sherpa for the first of them. So I was explaining to them, and these two young, very senior people in the White House, all they wanted to talk to was what time on the tennis court that the president had personally awarded them.

He had been in office a couple of weeks, and he had finally made a major decision as to how to allocate time on the White House tennis court among his chief lieutenants, a task that most chief executives would have delegated considerably down the chain.

Q: Way down the line.

DOBBINS: But which the president had made personally, and there was a definite status involved in whether you got a prime time or were delegated to something morso that was both alarming and amusing. The NSC made an effort to get more heavily into European affairs. For instance, they insisted on sending somebody to participate in these quadripartite discussions, which made the State Department unhappy, to share this channel with the NSC, so we had to work with them. But, we weren't at the eye of the storm as it affected the Vance-Brzezinski relationship.

Q: Whom did Carter name as our ambassador?

DOBBINS: To France, he named Arthur Hartman.

Q: So, in a way, this continued a strong relationship between the bureau and France?

DOBBINS: Right, and I knew Hartman, saw him when I went to Paris, which, again, was somewhat unusual for the desk officer. And then Vest became assistant secretary.

Q: So it was quite a strong team, then?

DOBBINS: Yes, it was a good team. I saw a lot of Vest and traveled with him frequently.

Q: What sort of travel were you doing?

DOBBINS: Well, we did these quadripartite talks, which occurred ...

Q: The quadripartite talks were on what issue?

DOBBINS: On everything. They were the inner steering group for the alliance, so mostly East-West issues, but they basically discussed anything that was of common interest to the four.

Q: Well, Carter came in with the idea that one can almost literally do business with the Soviet Union. He put in Arthur Watson I think in there as a businessman. The idea was a new look. In the quadripartite group, did you sense disquiet about sort of the Carter approach?

DOBBINS: Well, there were issues on which the Europeans were unhappy. They didn't like his proposal for a consortium to control conventional arms transfers, for instance. That initiative consequently never really got off the ground. There was unease about aspects of his arms control agenda, which became more prominent as that agenda advanced, ultimately focused on the whole issue of shorter-range missiles. It led to, ultimately, the two-track decision to deploy a new generation of missiles, which the Carter administration really didn't want to do, but felt compelled to do to make the Europeans feel secure.

That sort of what I was doing when I got to London, which was my next assignment. There were lots of issues that needed to be worked out, and by and large they were worked out. It was not a time of tremendous tension. The real European concerns with the Carter administration were the idea that followed defeat in Vietnam; there were elements of the Carter administration, like Andy Young at the UN, who were saying that the United States would never engage itself again in that kind of commitment. So there was anxiety as to the durability of the American commitment to Europe and its robustness and willingness to be tough when it had to be. And this became a source of anxiety in Europe, particularly among more conservative circles.

Q: Well, the French, do you recall sort of what the French intellectuals, that class of people, were saying about Carter? Because he must have been a rather exotic bird for them to deal with.

DOBBINS: They were rather dismissive of him, the same way they later became with, say, Reagan, or the latest Bush. Later the French intellectuals in the '90s became much more conservative. There was a shift and the United States became popular with at least some conservatives. There was a reaction to the more traditional French left wing, and you were beginning to see little signs of that in the late '70s. They were the beginning of times that you might have the wider range of views on issues, which became more prominent over the next 10 or 15 years, as a more conservative strain of French intellectual thought emerged.

Q: I realize you were at the desk level, but did you see, was there a group within Congress or the congressional staff that sort of reacted against the French, or not?

DOBBINS: A little bit. As I said, this was not a period in which U.S.-French relationships were particularly bad. Giscard made an effort to get along with the United Statenot on every issue. He was not a Gaullist and didn't feel bound by certain Gaullist attitudes.

Q: Were there any problems with conflicts over African policy? The French have their spheres of influence.

DOBBINS: I think by and large we were quite content with the French to manage their part of Africa. There wasn't as much cooperation as there might be in areas where our interests coincided because of sort of mutual suspicion, but I don't recall any real tension.

Q: Well, was there in a way a sense of relief within, say, the State Department, particularly in European Affairs, that Vietnam, having been kicked out of there and all, was kind of behind us, and then we didn't have to deal with that all the time?

DOBBINS: I can't speak for everyone. I think there was a concern about American credibility and weight as the result of what was clearly a sharp defeat.

Q: Yes, I was in Korea at the time, and obviously the Koreans had a great deal of interest in how much we would stick to our commitments. There was a lot of nervousness there at the time.

DOBBINS: Right, so I think our main preoccupation was reassuring people that this wasn't going to portend ...

Q: What was your view, your collective view from the European Bureau, of Brzezinski?

DOBBINS: I didn't know him well at the time. I still don't know him well, but I know him better now. He became the opponent in the sort of interagency battles, although, again, this tended to become more prominent after I moved to London. I guess I was about a year during the Carter administration in Washington. That was the first year, and tension develops more progressively over time.

Q: Well, then, you went to London in, what, '78?

DOBBINS: Yes.

Q: And you were in London from '78 to ...

DOBBINS: Eighty-one. Three years.

Q: What were you doing?

DOBBINS: I was the political-military officer.

Q: Was it an assignment you looked after, or how did it come about?

DOBBINS: I had replaced Bob Blackwell in Sonnenfeldt's office. I'm not sure how he had come across my name, but somebody had recommended it to him, had called and asked would I be interested. So he and I had maintained an acquaintance thereafter, and he went to London from Sonnenfeldt's office. Then, when he was due to leave London, he went to Israel, so he was vacating this position, and he called me and said would I be interested. I said, "Sure, it's a great job."

He had set up an interview with the DCM, who I had met, but ...

Q: Who was the DCM?

DOBBINS: Ed Streator, who had a mandate from Kingman Brewster essentially to clear out the entire embassy staff and replace it with better people. He was recruiting what he wanted to be a star-studded cast, because Brewster wanted to be surrounded by sharp and inquiring minds. He interviewed me and hired me.

Q: On this, what was your impression of the ambassador's impression of the embassy, Kingman Brewster, who came from Yale, wasn't it?

DOBBINS: Yes.

Q: His impression of the embassy when he took over.

DOBBINS: I think he felt there were too many time servers. London was such an attractive post that you tended to get a lot of senior officers filling billets that really didn't require that degree of seniority. The political counselor, for instance, was a very senior officer who had been the head of senior officer personnel and then used that position to send himself off to be political counselor in London, a job for he wasn't terribly well qualified. He was okay. Brewster wanted younger, more inquiring minds, so he got rid of that guy and a number of others. He actually made one of the most junior officers in the section the head of it, a fellow who was the assistant Labor reporting officer.

Q: Who was that?

DOBBINS: Jack Binns. He made him the head of the section. And then he made the next-most junior officer in the section, who was the African reporting officer, the deputy political counselothat was Ray Seitz. And he brought in a number of other fast-track people. The result was that when he finished putting the section together, every single person in that political section became ambassador. In fact, every one of them became an ambassador before I did. Even the guy who was not a Foreign Service officer, but came from OSD (Office of the Secretary of Defense) and was the OSD representative in the section, he became an ambassador.

Q: Now, before you went out, you must have been hearing rumblings within the personnel process and within the department about this.

DOBBINS: Not much. It was really more in the embassy at that stage. It wasn't that many people he got rid of. The only section he really cared about was the political section, to some extent, the economic section. He got good people and he was really an ideal political ambassador. He was well-connected, willing to use his influence, worked hard, and didn't interfere with the professionals. I mean, he didn't care what you wrote as long as you wrote it well. He didn't care whether he agreed with it or not.

I remember once, he and I were waiting for some dignitary at the airport, and he said, "Well, Jim, what did Washington think about the cable you sent last month?" I said, "Well, they didn't agree with it." He said, "Well, I didn't agree with it either, but I thought it was very well written." He would send his own cables, first person, and then the embassies would send cables in the third person. It didn't bother him at all if they were totally in disagreement.

The embassy would come in one day with a cable saying "We think the correct approach to this is X," and he'd send his own personal cable the next day advising "Y," and it would be exactly different. And it didn't bother him at all. He figured if it was first person, they'd know it was him, and it was third person, they'd know it was his professional staff. And it didn't bother him that Embassy London was sending conflicting advice. Washington would just have to sort it out.

He was a good friend of the secretary of state, stayed with him whenever he went to Washington. If you brought him a problem and said, "I think the department's making a mistake here," he would say, "Get me Cy Vance on the phone." While you sat and waited, the secretary of state would come on the phone and he'd say, "One of my officers here has pointed out that we're really on the wrong track on this issue, Cy." So it was very satisfying. He was a lot of fun.

His other thing, which he did very well, was every week or two he would bring in some really senior dignitary who was traveling through London and have them talk to a selection of the senior staff. It was the senior staff plus the junior staff who he thought were interesting. So, you'd meet George Will one week, or Senator Tower the next week, various people transiting. We met some interesting people.

Q: It sounds like a fascinating period. On the political-military side, what were the issues that you were dealing with?

DOBBINS: There were two main issues. One was Britain wrestling with the decision as to whether or not to replace the Polaris missile, which was wearing out, with a new generation of American nuclear-armed missiles. They eventually did buy the Trident, and this was potentially very controversial with the Labor Party. So it was a delicate negotiation, very closely held.

The second was the equally sensitive issue of whether or not the United States should deploy a new generation of cruise missiles and intermediate-range ballistic missiles in Europe, which eventually led to a decision to do so, and then years of controversy over that decision. But the whole nature of that decision and linkage to an arms control proposal was all being negotiated while I was there. So those were the two issues that were principally there.

Q: Well, let's talk about the Polaris/Trident thing. First place, could you use the Trident in the Polaris mounting?

DOBBINS: No, you had to buy a whole new generation of submarines. The British built their own submarines, but they would have to build them new. It was a very expensive decision.

Q: The government, while you were there was?

DOBBINS: It changed. It was Callaghan, and then he gave way to Thatcher.

Q: On the Trident/Polaris missile controversy, I would assume that the British military wanted it, or did they?

DOBBINS: I assume they did. At least elements of them did. Clearly, it would skew the budget in that direction. The conservative leadership of the Labor Party, the ones who actually had responsibilities for defense, wanted it as well, but had to keep that from the rest of their party, which made it very sensitive.

Q: Well, the British were going through a difficult time when they were essentially selling off their fleet, if I recall.

DOBBINS: Well, the economy wasn't in good shape.

Q: The economy wasn't in good shape, and at least one of the carriers, Ark Royal or something, they were going to decommission and then all of a sudden they finally needed it for the Falklands operation.

DOBBINS: They didn't have it for the Falklands. I think it was gone by then. They didn't have any fixed-wing, or they didn't have any ...

Q: It was a Harrier-type thing.

DOBBINS: Those they had, and they had to rely on those. The Falklands would have been much easier if they had the Ark Royal.

Q: Well, in the political-military side, what were you dealing with from sort of our military side?

DOBBINS: Well, mostly the Political-Military and European Bureaus in the State Department, some from DOD (Department of Defense). Reg Bartholomew, who was the assistant secretary, David Gompert, who here at Rand now, was the deputy assistant secretary in PM (Political-Military). I guess they didn't have assistant secretary titles at the time. And then Vest was the secretary. I was the person who handled their schedules when they came to London, so I saw them quite regularly.

Q: Well, what was the British setup in dealing witdid they have political-military people, too?

DOBBINS: They had an office in the FCO (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), which they called the Defense Department, which was essentially a political-military affairs office, which I dealt with the planning staff. I was basically in charge of not just political-military, but European issues, so I dealt with the planning staff, the European elements of the Foreign Office, the political-military, and I had a lot of dealings with the Ministry of Defense.

Q: Well, were you here when the Soviets introduced the SS-20?

DOBBINS: Well, that was what gave the whole impetus to what eventually became the two-track decision.

Q: How did the act of deploying the SS-20 hit us?

DOBBINS: The Carter administration was initially inclined to downplay it, because they were heavily focused on getting a strategic arms control treaty, because this was not aimed at us, and because it did replace other older systems. They argued it didn't measurably change the threat to Europe, which would be obliterated in any case. I think it could be obliterated twice, so why worry about it? The Europeans didn't take such a relaxed attitude and agitated, initially, for the Carter administration to include it as an objective in the SALT talks. When the Carter administration, in the end, refused to do that, the Europeans then argued that the United States needed to deploy a counterweight, and then use that as a basis for a new negotiation, which is what eventually happened.

Q: Well, how did the British view this, from your perspective?

DOBBINS: Pretty much as I've suggested. There was a feeling that it was a challenge. It threatened, in the terminology at the time, to decouple Europe from the American nuclear guarantee, and therefore needed to be responded to through some combination of military response and arms control.

Q: What were we recommending for London?

DOBBINS: We were basically recommending the policy that was ultimately accepted.

Q: In other words, this had to be included, or that we should respond.

DOBBINS: Well, that we needed to both meet the Russian deployment with a counter-deployment, and needed at the same time to make an offer to restrict these weapons in a future arms control agreement.

Q: Did the subject of the neutron bomb come up while you were there, or had that been before?

DOBBINS: I'm trying to remember whether I was still in Washington. It did come up. I think it came up when I was in London as opposed to while I was back in Washington.

Q: This was sort of people dealing with Carter, is a little bit nervous-making, that he went all out, particularly pushed the Germans, Helmut Schmidt.

DOBBINS: Yes, it had more of an effect in Germany than in the UK.

Q: I was wondering whether one question is resolved, because he went very hard on "let's put it out there," and then all of a sudden changed his mind overnight.

DOBBINS: Right, and after the bureaucracy had worked pretty hard to implement the original decision and brought everybody onboard. He did reverse it, to everybody's surprise. I think it had more reverberations in Germany than in the UK, but it certainly was an episode that led to a good deal of criticism, particularly on the conservative side of the spectrum.

Q: How did you find the British military? Were you dealing with them at all?

DOBBINS: Only occasionally. I spoke at the military academies fairly regularly. At their staff colleges, I was a regular speaker, so I met them in that framework, but by and large, I was dealing with civilians in the Ministry of Defense.

Q: What were you speaking on?

DOBBINS: U.S. foreign policy. I basically filled a slot in their lecture series, so I would go explain what the Carter administration's policies were and try to reassure them that they weren't as bad as they looked.

Q: When the Carter administration came onboard, they had made some promises. I mentioned my time in Korea. They were going to withdraw the 2nd Division, which they eventually did not do. It's still there. But there were some of these. It was sort of a reaction against commitment in Vietnam, and sent a fairly young group of people. They took a while to train them.

DOBBINS: Right.

Q: Did we see pretty much eye to eye with the British on what constituted the Soviet threat, or lack of threat?

DOBBINS: I think it obviously depended on who was in power. We first had the Callaghan administration, and there was the Thatcher, so that changed somewhat. I'd tell you that the Callaghan administration would have been closer to Vance's view, and Thatcher's closer to Brzezinski's view.

Q: Vance's view.

DOBBINS: In terms of the U.S. debate. But issues tended to focus more on details than on broad pictures. Nobody questioned that the Soviet Union presented a threat, and that there needed to be some kind of combination of deterrence, defense and dï¿½tente. So the issue tended to be on the nuances of those.

Q: Well, you were in London in the fall of '79, which was a rather cataclysmic time, when you have the dual thing of the Iranian revolution and our embassy being taken hostage, and also shortly thereafter the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

First, on the Iranian thing, did that involve you at all?

DOBBINS: I don't remember anything. The Afghan thing did.

Q: I was thinking the Afghan thing. It's been one of those things where I'm sure later on you probably talked to some of the people who were involved in this, but at that time, how did we see the decision of the Soviets to go into Afghanistan?

DOBBINS: I think it came as a complete surprise, and it obviously completely undermined the whole sort of rationale for the dï¿½tente policies. Arms control, and the US-Soviet relationship tended to come pretty much to a halt. The U.S. introduced a series of sanctions and punitive steps, which tended to make the Europeans uncomfortable, and so a lot of U.S.-European issues arose, regarding how exactly to respond to this.

Q: Well, these quadrilateral talks, did that change things at all?

DOBBINS: How do you mean?

Q: Of course, because you weren't dealing with that at the time, but the British, were the British reluctant to take measures, did you find, or more reluctant?

DOBBINS: They weren't our biggest problems in Europe. It tended to be more the Germans, and probably French, that resisted economic sanctions, for instance. I don't quite recall what the British position was.

Q: How about the Falklands thing?

DOBBINS: Well, I was in Washington.

Q: You were in Washington, right. Did the Soviet move into Afghanistan, did you sense a change in the British attitude toward sort of the Soviet threat or not, or there might be a new age of aggression?

DOBBINS: There had been an ongoing debate between conservatives, who tended to think of the Soviet Union as having global ambitions and endlessly opportunistic and aggressive intentions and the sort of liberal view that the Soviet Union was largely a status quo of power that could be worked with. Particularly, in Europe, the status quo argument rang true, but when you looked at their activities in Africa, Afghanistan and some other places, the more aggressive and opportunistic explanations tended to ring true. So the question was, the Europeans naturally tended to look at Soviet behavior in Europe as the most important factor, whereas the United States took a more global view, and therefore was less inclined to accept the benign explanation.

Q: Did the advent of the Thatcher administration cause any change?

DOBBINS: Oh, sure.

Q: From your perspective, I mean.

DOBBINS: To some degree. New faces. The main problem, and one that I did have to work on, was that it looked like the Thatcher administration would come in very critical of the Carter administration on the SALT talks, which would damage the prospects for ratification, if they came out against it. I, with Brewster's cooperation and support, mounted a campaign to persuade the Thatcherites that it wasn't that bad. They eventually subsided and didn't make an issue of it, although they never were enthusiastic, they decided not to make an issue of it or publicly criticize the negotiation, which was then coming to a conclusion. It went to the Congress, and as I recall, it never did get ratified.

Q: Did you deal at all with Parliament?

DOBBINS: Yes, in fact, one of my jobs for the first year or so was following the Liberal Party. So I did spend some time in Parliament and with parliamentarians. I also worked on the political-military front with parliamentarians interested in those affairs, so I would take parliamentarians to lunch occasionally and get to know ones, sort of the junior spokespersons for defense or security or European affairs, and met a number of them. Robin Cook, who became the foreign minister, is someone who at that time was a junior Labor guy who I used to take to lunch.

Q: Were you seeing a change, I can't recall where the Labor Party was these days.

DOBBINS: They were tearing themselves apart.

Q: There was this extreme left wing. I always think of these guys getting down to one of the beach resorts and holding hands and singing "Internationale" or something like that. This is with Michael Foot.

DOBBINS: Yes, I met a lot of those people. There was a major debate in the Labor Party, particularly on defense and security affairs, with the conservatives, who had been pro-alliance and had followed the tradition of Ernest Bevin, were under attack. Although they retained control of those policies, really through my time there, there as a strong more left-wing segment which ultimately tossed them out. In fact, many of them left the party and joined the new party that David Owen created. Then that party collapsed and most of them faded into anonymity. But there were a number of people I knew on both sides of that debate. Cook was among the more radical, for instance. He lost his position as junior defense spokesperson because he was too radical.

Q: When you say radical, what were they after?

DOBBINS: They would have been more arms control, less defense, less skeptical of the Soviet Union, more disarmament, and of course ultimately they did oppose the two-track decision on the deployment of cruise missiles.

Q: We talked about the French intellectuals. How about the British chattering class. Did they play much of a role? These are the commentators.

DOBBINS: Yes, Britain had a fairly lively strategic debate. It really had more than the other European capitals. It had the International Institute for Strategic Studies and the Chatham House, which was the Council on Foreign Relations equivalent, the Royal United Services Institute, which was sort of a military strategy institute. A lot of thinkers came through. So it was a very lively strategic debate, with lots of interesting people to meet and active commentary in the papers.

Q: Well, intellectually, it sounds like you ought to have a lot of fun.

DOBBINS: Yes, it was a great time. It was a wonderful place.

Q: Margaret Thatcher, how was she viewed when she first came onboard?

DOBBINS: By?

Q: By the embassy.

DOBBINS: Well, of course, at the time, you had a Democratic government in Washington that was rather apprehensive about what they would encounter, but in the end there weren't any real difficulties in the relationship.

Q: Well, any other issue that you were dealing with the British?

DOBBINS: I think those were pretty much it. Africa, I mean, the whole Rhodesia issue was a major issue, which I didn't do, but Ray Seitz did that. But those negotiations, which David Owen was head of, were pretty active.

Q: How about Cuba? Did that come across your radar at all?

DOBBINS: I don't really recall anything going on with Cuba at the time.

Q: Then you left in '81, and whither?

DOBBINS: I went back to the department and spent about six or eight months as an office director under Richard Burt, who was the head of the Political-Military Bureau, and then he moved to the European Bureau. I moved with him as deputy assistant secretary.

Q: In the European Bureau. And you were there from '81 to...

DOBBINS: Eighty-five.

Q: How was Richard Burt? When you worked for him, how did you find him to be?

DOBBINS: We became very good friends. I had known him in London. He wasn't living in London, but he had lived in London and came back from time to time with the New York Times. He was a good friend of Bob Blackwell, and I knew him through that.

He was extremely smart, very young. I think he was still in his 30s when he took oveearly 30when he took over the Political-Military Bureau. He was somewhat arrogant, although not normally unpleasantly. In his dealings with people, he could be brusque and abrupt and impatient. Had good relations with Haig, and then eventually with Shultz, who replaced Haig. Very ambitious, but also very sensible and pragmatic, and interested in listening and getting things right. So he was very satisfying to work for.

Q: Coming back to Washington, this is early Reagan administration by this time. Did you sense a change between that and what you'd felt during the Carter administration?

DOBBINS: Yes, the early Reagan administration was really frightening. You had lunatics, or close to lunatics, running a lot of the policy. The NSC staff had been filled with ideologues and the first two or three directors. Allen, Clark, McFarlane, Poindexter, half of them got indicted, went to jail, or were under serious threat of indictment.

Q: There was Judge ...

DOBBINS: Clark didn't have that trouble. Clark was completely inexperienced, but was close with the president and a fairly sensible person. It got better over time, but it was people like Baker and Deaver who were on the domestic side of the White House that kept the foreign policy side out of trouble. And Rick Burt established lines to them, particularly to Deaver, and was able to get things done around some of the more ideological parts of the White House, on occasion.

Q: Did you find, particularly in these early years, I won't call it a conspiracy, but a method of almost sort of saying, "Oh my God, let's get around these guys"?

DOBBINS: What do you mean?

Q: In other words, would sort of directives or something come out of the National Security Council and you'd take a look, and talking about you and others, and say, "You know, this is crazy, let's do something. Let's not follow this."

DOBBINS: Well, they didn't tend to issue directives. The problem was how they ran the process. It was a weird time. There were lots of strange things going on, crazy ideas that were being booted about. Some of them, Al Haig himself was responsible for. I don't think people realize how sort of dangerous transitions are, when you bring in new teams, often inexperienced, with a lot of new ideas.

Q: Well, it's a time, I've talked to people particularly who served in Berlin, and how concerned they would be. For example, when the Kennedy administration came in, they were talking about, well, maybe we can do a deal or something like this, and they were afraid that we might give away the store in Berlin. This is true of other administrations. It's like yanking the 2nd Division out of Korea, which is very dangerous. So how did you find Haig? He had been head of ...

DOBBINS: Rick was working on some non-European things for Haig. Cuba, Haig had a fixation about Cuba, because he thought the Cubans had been responsible for the attempt to assassinate him, and was looking at a lot of schemes, some of them fairly harebrained, to address getting rid of Castro or solving other aspects of that relationship. On Europe and European things, Haig was pretty solid and knew a lot about it. He'd served in NATO, and he knew what the Europeans needed and wanted, so on those issues, he was fine. The few times I dealt with him, I didn't have any difficulty. He was rather a very intense person and he could sometimes get quite excited, and it was clear he had poor relations with most of the White House staff, which of course eventually brought about his demise.

Q: All right. Today is the 22nd of October 2003. Jim, you were with the Pol-Mil Bureau, '81 to '85.

DOBBINS: Well, mostly the European Bureau. Rick Burt had been made Director of Political-Military Affairs, and he asked me to come back to be one of his office directors in an office that was basically in charge of European security issues. But then, after we were there, I can't remember, but like eight months or so later, Haig moved him from PM to EUR and had him nominated to be assistant secretary for European affairs, and he asked me to come to be the deputy assistant secretary in the European Bureau, again, responsible for Western Europe and political-military issues more broadly for the bureau. So it was, I think, less than a year in total in the Political-Military Bureau itself.

Q: Well, this is when you were with the Political-Military Bureau the first year, was there still a fallout from the neutron bomb fiasco of Carter pressing for it and then pulling back?

DOBBINS: Well, to some degree. The centerpiece of the U.S.-European relationship tended to be the issue of medium-range missiles and how to respond to the SS-20 and whether to do this through a combination of arms control and mission deployments. The Reagan administration, after some internal debate, essentially picked up where the Carter administration had left off on that policy reaffirmed its intention to deploy a new generation of medium-range ballistic and cruise missiles in Europe and simultaneously pursued an arms control negotiation with the Soviet Union. There was a lot of debate about what the content of that arms control negotiation should be, and there was a lot of debate more generally about arms control as a concept.

The Republicans felt very critical about the concept, uneasy about the whole process, ambivalent about the whole process. So the whole arms control agenda became very controversial and difficult to manage within the administration. In some ways, the European centerpiece of it was the least controversial as to whether or not we should be doing it at all, but the most important and difficult to manage because of the necessity of maintaining an alliance consensus and securing the agreement of the basing countries to move forward with the actual deployment of these missiles.

Q: Well, I would think when President Reagan took office, and bringing Alexander Haig, who had been NATO commander, would have brought in somebody who knew the territory, and this would have been his turf. Did you feel this, or did he have ...

DOBBINS: Well, of course, Haig didn't last too long. I guess he lasted about a year. He certainly understood the European issues and the Europeans pretty well. He was not getting along well with the rest of the administration, with the White House in particular. So while he understood the European issues well and was supportive and helpful on them, he wasn't necessarily winning all of the interagency battles on the subject, and ultimately he lost his position.

Q: Well, what was your sort of position? How did you see things going? I mean, starting from the Political-Military and then moving over to the European Bureau. Almost since the first time since the Berlin Wall, Europe was really under great pressure, I mean, military pressure, with this SS-20.

DOBBINS: Some people interpreted it in that respect. Other people took a more cavalier attitude toward it in Europe, but by and large, the Europeans took the threat seriously, and there was a fairly broad consensus about the need to respond through a combination of new deployments and arms control. There was a strong debate throughout these years in Europe, which we had to participate in and steer. So it was a fairly intense policy and public affairs management process throughout this period.

Q: Well, where did the various countries in NATO, significant countries, initially fit. The SS-20 was introduced when?

DOBBINS: The first of them were probably deployed, I guess, in the late '70s, and the program had been underway earlier than that. So it was debated in the late '70s, and I can't remember when the first one was actually deployed, late '70s, early '80s, but of course it had been tested and the general dimensions of the program were known. The core of the constituency were focused on the basing countries, that is, the countries that had agreed to accept new American missiles on their territory, and those consisted of five countries: Belgium, Netherlands, Italy, Germany and the UK. This became the kind of core constituency and steering group within the broader alliance for management of the issue.

Q: Did this pretty well occupy your time while you were there?

DOBBINS: I was responsible for all political, military and arms control issues, so I also did the START negotiationchemical weapons negotiations, biological weapons negotiations, lots of different issues. But the European negotiation was the area for which the European Bureau had the lead, as opposed to simply being a player within a broader interagency process, and so this was the area where I was most heavily focused and traveled regularly to Europe and conducted international meetings, as well as managed the process in Washington.

Q: How were, say, the Germans seeing this issue initially?

DOBBINS: There were debates of varying intensity in all of the countries, and there were certainly those who felt the Western reaction was unnecessary or exaggerated. There were peace movements and antinuclear movements, but I think the dominant view in all of the countries was supportive. Some were under more pressure than others. The Germans were under considerable pressure throughout this period and had to continuously justify the prospective deployments and were particularly supportive of a very active arms control element to the program.

Q: Well, now, what was the German role in arms control?

DOBBINS: Well, none of the countries had a direct role, because they were bilateral negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union, but we created an alliance consultative form, called the Special Consultative Group, which Rick, or in his absence, I chaired, which met, as the negotiations became more intense, every month. We'd meet, at one point, every two weeks. Then, within that, there was a smaller, less formal group of the actual basing countries. So there were fairly intense consultations, and the chief negotiator, Paul Nitze, would travel to Germany fairly regularly for well-photographed briefings and consultations, to give the Germans a sense that they were being carefully consulted.

Q: Did we feel that the Socialists were a little more shaky on this than say the CDU (Christian Democratic Union)?

DOBBINS: They were in opposition for most of this period. The Schmidt government had originally gone along with the general trend in policy, but they'd lost office in, I think, around 1980, and so they were in opposition. And the Socialists were opposed to the deployments. They weren't just shaky. They were opposed.

Q: Were we concerned that this might mean that the Soviets would come with a proposal saying, "We'll take this off the thing if you, Germany, withdraw from NATO?"

DOBBINS: No, I think there were concerns that the Soviets would be sufficiently skillful to come forward with proposals which we couldn't accept, but which our allies would find attractive. And that that would undermine support for the basing, and if the basing didn't go forwarand essentially if any one of these countries withdrew, the others would have a hard time going forward. If the basing didn't go forward, then the Soviets would have won without having to make any concessions, so it was a tricky business, because you had a hard-line constituency in Washington which wanted nothing but a complete Soviet capitulation, which they ultimately got, and a soft-line constituency in Europe that would have been satisfied with more limited sorts of concessions.

Q: Well, were we able to play the Afghan card, showing the Soviets were not benign?

DOBBINS: To some degree, but Afghanistan was a long way away from Europe. I think the European view, which is not completely unreasonable, was that the Soviets were a status quo power in Europe. They might not be a status quo power in other parts of the world, but that that was essentially an American problem. Insofar as Europe was concerned, the Soviets pretty clearly favored stability and continuation of the geopolitical status quo rather than any radical revision of it.

Q: Was there a change when Haig left and Shultz came in?

DOBBINS: Haig was a very intense and somewhat erratic leader. Shultz was steadier and carried more influence in the White House. It was a calmer and steadier management style in the department, and he, Shultz, liked to use the department the way it was designed to be used. He didn't bring in a coterie of experts or an inner circle. He used the department as it had been designed to be used, so he was in many ways an ideal secretary of state from the standpoint of the Foreign Service: influential and reasonably accessible, and drew heavily on the Foreign Service for his advice.

Q: How close were we to the British during this time?

DOBBINS: We worked pretty closely with the British, but I think we were working equally closely with the Germans, and with the other basing countries, to differing degrees. The British didn't have a necessarily distinctly different type of relationship with us than, say, the Germans did.

Q: Well, were you noticing, almost every administration, particularly when you have administrations coming in from quite different parts of the political spectrum, like the Carter and the Reagan administratiodid you find that as time went on the Reagan people, particularly in the White House and all, were beginning to understand the complexities and what one could and could not do within the European context for dealing with the Soviet threat?

DOBBINS: The Reagan administration came in, filled a lot of jobs, particularly in the White House, with fairly radical ideologues who made up in enthusiasm for what they lacked in experience or common sense. Some of these were weeded out over time, the less responsible. Others were held under fairly strict check by the adults in the White House, particularly Jim Baker as chief of staff, and Deaver, who was deputy chief of staff, who thought that some of this was rather adventurous and would get the president in trouble, and who sat on some of the more excitable members of the staff.

So the situation improved somewhat, and policymaking became somewhat more sensible and centrist as the administration progressed. On the other hand, when Deaver and Baker left the White House in the second administration, then the more ideological and less grounded elements, of whom Ollie North would be the paradigm, were again in the ascendancy and they weren't under sort of adult supervision. This led to the Iran-Contra series of scandals and indictments.

All of the national security advisers, until you got to Carlucci and Colin Powell, ran into difficulties of one sort or another. Poindexter was actually indicted. Bud McFarlane tried to commit suicide. Richard Allen, the first of them, left shortly under something of a cloud. Judge Clark was an intelligent but extremely uniformed individual. So you had a series of troubled White House foreign policy coordination staff problems. The system was, as a result, quite erratic and saved from more serious difficulties by people like Baker and Deaver and Shultz.

Q: So much of this is still with military matters in the Pentagon, and it's never been a secret at all that Caspar Weinberger and George Shultz are not the best of friends. Did this play itself out in your work or not?

DOBBINS: That relationship reached its depths only after Rick and I had gone to Bonn, where he was ambassador, I was deputy chief of mission, but it was already pretty bad while we were still in Washington through '85, and the relationship with the Pentagon was difficult. Richard Perle was the assistant secretary. He and Rick got on well at a personal level, but were at odds on almost all policy matters, but at least they were civil and pleasant to each other, even if they didn't agree on much substantively.

But the Weinberger-Shultz relationship lacked even an element of civility and was difficult. The only person I remember talking to in the Pentagon who actually was both civil and cooperative was Colin Powell, who was Weinberger's military assistant and was, on the few times I dealt with him, very responsive and courteous and pleasant to deal with. But that was the exception. It was a difficult relationship across the board, and it got worse after Richard Perle left, because the people who were left behind were even less cooperative.

Q: So this just wasn't at the top?

DOBBINS: It filtered down, yes.

Q: In sort of the perception of the people who were filtering, who were second level, what were they seeing, the State Department giving away the store, being too wimpy, or not militant enough, or how did we ...

DOBBINS: I would guess that they felt that the State Department was too ready to accommodate allied sensitivities and concerns and too ready to make concessions to the Soviet Union in the pursuit of what they tended to believe were superficial or even counterproductive arms control agreements.

Q: Did you get any feel for the position of Soviet negotiators and people you were dealing with, where they were coming from?

DOBBINS: To some degree. I tended to deal more with the allies than with the Soviets directly, but clearly they had their own debates at home and had to contend with a somewhat similar range of views within their own governments on the process.

Q: What about the French? Where were they in all of this?

DOBBINS: They largely opted out. They weren't part of the basing process. Ultimately, Mitterrand endorsed the need for these missiles, and that was very helpful to the Germans and allowed NATO to present a solid front on the diplomatic side. But other than that sort of gesture of support that Mitterrand did finally make at the end, the French really at that point were not playing a role in NATO's military or political-military deliberations. France was not part of the Special Consultative Group. It wasn't one of the basing countries. It basically had opted out of this debate.

Q: What about Italy? When the chips are down, Italy usually does the right thing, but their government never seems to be very strong. How did you find it at that time?

DOBBINS: The Italians were going through their usual series of government crises, as I recall, so they were less active. On the other hand, there was less domestic opposition, as well. The Italian public was less focused on East-West issues and the Italian government was under less pressure on the issue than the German government was.

Q: Did we feel that the movement, during particularly the '70s, of Euro-Communism was kind of a spent force by this time?

DOBBINS: Not entirely. The Communists were in the French government, but I think people were a bit less concerned by it than they had been earlier, both because the polls were showing diminished support for the Communists in the countries where they still retained some significant rolin Francand because contrary to fears, the Communists had not exercised much influence on the international and security policy areas. On French policy, for instance, it didn't get noticeably worse as a result of having Communists in the government. So I think the feeling was that they were diminishing as a threat, and partially because their electoral support was diminishing, and partially because their policies had become less pro-Soviet, and if not pro-American and pro-NATO, at least less hostile.

Q: Did the Scandinavian countries play much of a role?

DOBBINS: No.

Q: But I suppose Belgium and the Netherlands were ...

DOBBINS: They were pretty critical. The Belgians weren't much of a problem, but it was a major issue in the Netherlands, and they had a rather complicated domestic political scene, and so everybody became quite expert on Dutch politics for a couple of years in an effort to help them manage this problem.

Q: Now what was your role regarding negotiations that were going on? I mean, we had people working in Geneva or Vienna?

DOBBINS: I was part of the process of drafting instructions and backstopping negotiations, but my role was basically in handling the allies, making sure that they remained supportive and making sure that the negotiating positions adequately reflected what the allies wanted us to be doing.

Q: When you say the allies, were we having to deal with each one separately, or was there such a thing as an allied consensus?

DOBBINS: Well, there was a broad consensus. There were countries like Greece that sort of opted out of the consensus but didn't actively block it. They just took a footnote, said they disagreed, but didn't block the consensus. You worked with individual allies and then you worked with them in small groups, like the five basing countries, and then you worked with them in larger groups, like the Special Consultative Group. So as is always the case, there are concentric circles that you have to work in order to get the broad consensus in the end.

Q: What about Congress?

DOBBINS: Congress really wasn't a problem. This was not all that controversial in Congress, so there wasn't any difficulty getting funding for the program. It wasn't threatened. Congress was comfortable with the policy and wasn't challenging it.

Q: Was there the basic feeling that if we initiate this program, there's a good chance we're not going to have to go through with it, because the Soviets will see that it worked...

DOBBINS: Well, we did go through with it. We actually did deploy the missiles. We eventually were able to take them out, but that was only after Gorbachev's and his glasnost revolution. I don't think anybody anticipated that the Soviets would agree to our negotiating position, at the time we made it.

Q: Chernenko.

DOBBINS: People were even skeptical about Gorbachev's bona fides. So I think the expectation was on the contrary, that we would have to deploy these missiles, and that if we got an arms control agreement, it would probably be only a partial one. In the end, we got everything we asked for, but that I think surprised everyone.

Q: But during your time there, '81 to '85, I mean, essentially you were occupied in setting up the response to the SS-20s.

DOBBINS: That was the dominant issue of the early '80s.

Q: What were the other issues that you found yourself getting into?

DOBBINS: Well, when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, responding to that. Then martial law in Poland, I can't remember whether that followed Afghanistan or preceded it.

Q: Well, Afghanistan was December '79.

DOBBINS: Martial law in Poland was '82, something like that? You had the pipeline crisis when Reagan threatened to try to block construction of a gas pipeline from the Soviet Union to Western Europe. The Western Europeans weren't prepared to agree. There was a crisis when the Soviet Union shot down the Korean airliner. That was another crisis in which the United States wanted to embark on a much heavier sanctions regime than the Western Europeans were comfortable with. So there were a series of crises derived about how to handle relations with the Soviet Union that we needed to manage in this period as well.

Q: What was your view from where you sat about the pipeline issue? This was a natural gas pipeline going to Europe.

DOBBINS: I thought that the Reagan administration's effort to do this unilaterally was clearly, A) not going to work, B) created a great deal of hostility and unhappiness, and so both Rick and I worked basically to get the decision undone and find a basis for the administration to back down, which we did.

Q: How'd you do that?

DOBBINS: We posed some desiderata that we wanted the Western Europeans to agree to and got them to agree to it. There were some less significant steps they took to constrain Soviet trade in some area. We decided that was adequate.

Q: Were there any other sort of areas that you had to focus on?

DOBBINS: No, I think those are it.

Q: How about those two happy nations that get along so well together, Greece and Turkey? How did that go over in your time?

DOBBINS: I wasn't directly handling the Cyprus issue, which was the focus of what crisis management we were doing in that region. I think the relationship was rocking along. There were intermittent efforts to try to advance a resolution of that issue, but they never came to anything.

Q: Did the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, I think in '82, cause any problems European-wise?

DOBBINS: Not that I recall. It wasn't a major issue in the U.S.-European relationship.

Q: You spent quite a bit of time with Richard Burt?

DOBBINS: He was my boss for the whole Reagan administration, for eight years.

Q: How did you find him?

DOBBINS: I enjoyed working for him. He was difficult at times: intense, ambitious, quite young, very smart, quite self confident, but intent on doing a good job, doing a professional job, carrying policy through successfully, some mildly conservative ideological bent, but not strongly so, pragmatic and recognized that if he was going to actually succeed in molding policies, and if these policies were going to be successful ones, that he had to take advice. So he surrounded himself with very competent professionals and ran a very disciplined and successful set of operations, both in the European Bureau and then in the American Embassy in Germany.

Q: Who was his mentor or sponsor?

DOBBINS: Al Haig, and he was worried that when Haig was fired that he wouldn't last, because he had been nominated but not yet confirmed, but Shultz stuck with him. The confirmation was somewhat difficult. Jesse Helms had issues with Rick. But eventually it was overcome and he got confirmed.

Q: Did you find yourself in the role that often happens when you have someone who is, say, ambitious and driving and very smart and all that, of kind of going behind and un-ruffling feathers and that sort of thing?

DOBBINS: Perhaps a little bit, but I was also young and ambitious, and I probably ruffled as many feathers as he did. So if anybody was cleaning up after us, it was somebody else.

Q: Did you find this ever got you into problems? In other words, at a certain point, you can get people feeling that you're moving in on their turf or challenging them and sometimes it comes back to haunt you?

DOBBINS: To some degree. Both Rick and I and some of the otherBob Blackwell was his principal deputy for a whilgot a reputation as being excessively sharp elbowed and aggressive. There were probably people who retained that impression long after it had ceased to have too much reality. There were people a decade later who would tell me that continued to be my reputation. So, sure, I think you eventually pay for all your sins in that regard, but Rick was smart enough and effective enough so that there was also a grudging respect, even by people who felt he had been somewhat unnecessarily competitive. There were times when we were just competitive for the sake of competing and wanted to show that we could do better than some other bureau that was doing a perfectly adequate job. We should have just sat back and let them do it instead of showing them how smart we were. That undoubtedly made our job more difficult, in some respects.

But I think that that was compensated for by people recognizing that Rick did deliver. When problems were turned over to him, they got solved, and that he was unusually talented and competent, and what was then called the two-track decisions, the missile negotiations and the missile deployments, performance in that area rested principally on his shoulders, and this was carried through to completion successfully. The missiles were deployed, the negotiations were maintained, and the centerpiece of both U.S.-European relations, and in many ways, the centerpiece of the administration's foreign policy at the time was carried through to a successful conclusion, largely as the result of our efforts. So I think people were, sometimes grudgingly, prepared to acknowledge that this was a job well done.

Q: Well, I mean, it's a professional organization and success is acknowledged. What about deployment? Was there a country or a time when it was really crucial, somebody made a decision and that allowed the other things to fall into place?

DOBBINS: They were all very interdependent. Each of the countries made clear that it wasn't doing it unless everyone else moved forward in lockstep, so there was an elaborate sequencing and a recognition that these really were dominoes, that you couldn't afford to see any of them tumble. In the end, I think the first missiles, they may have gone into the UK, but the first missiles on the continent went into Belgium, and then I believe the Netherlands came shortly thereafter. So there was an elaborate choreography that kept everyone in lockstep.

Q: Were you finding with the Europeans there was a good, solid core of people who knew the trade, knew what the issues were, and you could all kind of work together as colleagues?

DOBBINS: Sure. When you work an issue like this over an extended period of time, you develop a set of interlocutors in whom you have confidence, with whom you share confidences, and there was a core group of people who worked this issue whom we got to know quite well, and we'd see every couple of weeks on one side or the other.

Q: Well, then, you went to Germany in '85?

DOBBINS: Right.

Q: And you were there from when to when?

DOBBINS: Eighty-five to '89.

Q: Where stood things in '85 when you were in Germany at that time?

DOBBINS: Helmet Kohl had been governing for I think about three to four years at that time, of what eventually was a 14-year period of government. Genscher was the foreign minister, from a different party, rather powerful, different ideological persuasion from Kohl. The coalition was not under any pressure or any real danger. The SPD was down in the polls. There was no real prospect of Kohl's losing power. The U.S.-German relationship was continuing to evolve. There were still lots of residues of the postwar relationship, including U.S. responsibilities in Berlin and other legacies of an earlier era. The American ambassador was still by far the most important non-German figure in Germany, and maybe the third or fourth most important figure including Germans, in terms of press, media attention and perceived influence, whether or not that was fully deserved. Big embassy, maybe the biggest in the world if you counted the constituent postI think six or seven constituent posts, including the mission in West Berlin, which was bigger than all but, say, 10 or 15 embassies around the world itself and was under the ambassador in Bonn. So it was a big management job, as well as a pivotal policy post.

Q: Over the years, by being as big as it is, at one point in the '50s, I think, a third of the Foreign Service was actually in Germany. My first post was in Frankfurt from '55 to '58. Was there a good, solid core of experts on Germany at the embassy?

DOBBINS: There was a fairly healthy corps of German experts. In fact, there was some resentment that neither Rick nor I were drawn from that cadre. But, yes, we had substantial German language capability in our political and economic sections, and quite competent people to rely on in that regard. Most of the principle officers in the other posts spoke German well. There was a cadre, a considerable depth of expertise.

Q: I was talking to, and the name escapes me, he later was ambassador to East Germany.

DOBBINS: I don't remember the name. Ambassador to Turkey, as well, right?

Q: Yes, he was ambassador to Turkey, too. He said something about when Burt came in, he cleaned out the German expertise and that left most of the German experts in the mission in Berlin. I'd just like you to comment on that.

DOBBINS: I think the only job in which Burt put someone who wasn't a German expert where there had traditionally been one was mine. I didn't speak German when I got there, although I did by the time I left. Other than that, he may have replaced one German expert with another. The community was sufficiently ingrown so that people would say, that somebody else who might be a native speaker of Germany, but he'd only served in Austria, so he didn't count. I think our political counselor was Olaf Glovel, whose wife was German, who spoke perfect German, but who had I think not served in West Germany before, and so therefore wasn't considered part of the club, although he was eminently qualified.

Then one person, at least, two people left who were there, both voluntarily at their own accord. One sort of left in a huff because he couldn't get along with Olaf. I never quite understood why. It wasn't that they had been working together. It was a feeling that this person had expected to be promoted and wasn't, or something, but sort of left, sort of saying, "I just don't feel comfortable here." Another left because he got a better job offer. But they were replaced by other people who spoke German and were competent to do the job.

I think that it was a sufficiently sort of ingrown community, so that it took itself more seriously than need be. I think it's sort of symptomatic of a group of people who had more leisure time and less to worry about than maybe they shouldn't have.

Q: So it was a thing where the experts are considered, what is it, the son of a bitches from out of town.

DOBBINS: I think also they had had a series of fairly low-key ambassadors, political appointees like Arthur Burns, who was very prestigious but also very low energy and senior career people like Marty Hillenbrand and all, who were very traditionalist in their orientation, and suddenly they got an ambassador who was still in his 30s, when he got there, who was young, telegenic, ambitious, imaginative, and willing to try new things, shake things up, but be much more activist, or much more obtrusively present in the German media, and who was prepared to make a much higher level of demands on the embassy staff to do things that were not traditional and some of them were uncomfortable doing.

Q: Well, what about the relationship with Berlin, because, in a way, I have never served there but it seems that over the years we developed sort of a priesthood and a dogma about Berlin, what you can and can't do. There's always been this sort of separation between Bonn and Berlin. This must have been a problem.

DOBBINS: Well, first of all, of course there were two Berlins, and there was an embassy in one and a mission in the other. The mission was a separate diplomatic mission. The chief of mission in Berlin was the American ambassador in Bonn, but the mission in Berlin was not a constituent post in Bonn. It was a separate diplomatic mission, and then the ambassador's deputy there was the minister. It was even more complicated because, in fact, the ambassador's deputy was the commandant in Berlin and then his deputy was the American minister. So, theoretically, the American minister's chain of command went through the commandant to the ambassador. That was more nominal than real.

The mission in Berlin liked to think of itself as independent. On the other hand, the rating officer for the Minister in Berlin was the DCM in Bonn, which meant that in sort of the Foreign Service hierarchy of who rates whose performance, it was a fairly clear subordination, although one that the Minister there was never entirely comfortable with and tried to evade whenever possible. But Rick and the embassy in Bonn had established fairly effective management controls, including over the budget. Berlin had a budget that was derived from the German occupation budget, so it had a very generous budget, extraordinarily generous, but Bonn had taken over administering that budget and controlling its expenditures, which was another source of unhappiness. There was a gradual regularization of the situation and a gradual subordination of Berlin to the embassy in Bonn, which Berlin was never comfortable with and which was never complete, but which was always a source of minor tension.

There is a certain preserved-in-amber quality to all of the arrangements associated with Berlin, derived from its rather unnatural status as this Western enclave in the middle of East Germany, under nominal allied sovereignty, with ties to West Germany, operating in many respects as state in the West German Federation, but with West German sovereignty quite limited. These arrangements, because they were so arcane and artificial, needed to be preserved with some care. One couldn't be too cavalier about them, because the security and the stability tended to rest on these arcane arrangements, going back to the late 1940s.

It was a kind of last outpost of empire. I remember either the Ambassador or I could get a plane to fly to Berlin on two-hours' notice. The U.S. Air Force, no question, no bills. Ambassador and DCM want to fly to Berlin, any time. You could also get a train. You needed a little more time, because there was only one, but if you asked for it and booked it, you could actually have your own private train, which would take you to Berlin. It wasn't a very efficient way to go. I only did it once because I thought my children would enjoy driving on their own train, and it was a rather extraordinary legacy of the postwar era, that we still maintained a private train, mostly used by our military, but available to the ambassador and DCM to whisk them off to Berlin, as if it was still 1948.

Q: What was the situation vis-ï¿½-vis the Soviets in '85 to '89, as regards Germany. Was the missile crisis still out there at the beginning?

DOBBINS: It was, largely. The first deployments occurred, I think, in '84, or early '85, in any case, before I got to Germany. I think they hadn't put any missiles into Germany at that stage, but they had begun to deploy them in several other countries, and Germany was next on the list. Once the missiles started being deployed, the issue became less prominent, among other things, because it was something of a fait accompli.

There were still demonstrations, but the large-scale demonstrations were largely over in Germany. They were earlier, in '83, '84. One of the Pershing missiles, the Pershing I, rather than the Pershing II, actually exploded when I was there. Fortunately, nothing happened to the warhead, but the missile exploded, which caused a good deal of nervousness, which we had to tamp down, as one could imagine. And there were lots of little contretemps of that sort, but by and large, the issue was quiescent.

Relations with the Soviet Union, of course, once Gorbachev got into power were steadily improving. There was a lot of debate how meaningful this was, how sincere he was, the longevity of the process, but by and large it was a period of improvement. The East and West Germans were negotiating various sort of dï¿½tente, ostpolitik-type things all of the time. Our contacts with the Soviets were minimal. There were a couple of spy exchanges where Rick went to the Glenica Bridge to pick up Nathan Sharansky, for instance. We conducted these negotiations. We did a couple of spy swap negotiations. Again, reminiscent of an earlier age.

Q: Well, I would think that dealing with the German government at this time, foreign embassy, would have been a little bit peculiar in that you had Helmut Kohl, who was a great power and was going to be a power for some time, but you had Genscher, who was the foreign minister, who was a power and continued to be a power unto himself. Was there air between Genscher and Kohl? Did you find yourself having to check with one to make sure you weren't getting just the Genscher side, but you had to get the Kohl side on?

DOBBINS: We of course tried to play one against the other to our advantage and had some limited success in that regard. Kohl was more conservative, more in tune with Washington's preferences, although not entirely, but he tended to be more responsive on issues than Genscher would be. Genscher was more interested in ostpolitik and dï¿½tente and negotiating improvements in East-West relations. He gave voice to a softer version of German policy, but was influential and under the German system had a good deal of autonomy and ability to pursue policies without much interference from the chancellor. We worked closely with the chancellor's national security adviser, Horst Teltschik. But Teltschik had limited influence when Genscher felt strongly in an opposite direction. Sometimes, we'd get caught between the two and it would become uncomfortable to us, never to a severe degree, but there were occasions when Genscher was clearly unhappy with our effort to maneuver him out of some position he had taken. But, by and large, the Germans accepted Washington's preeminence within the alliance, their dependence on the alliance and the United States for their security. They wanted to work closely with us, and by and large it was very pleasant. Both Rick and I had extraordinary access within the German government. So, basically, quite rewarding, quite professional in our relationship. We had a lot of friends there, and probably closer friends than any other post, partially because we were there so long. The German officials tended to be very professional and very accessible.

Q: Did you find that there was sort of the Reagan card? I would think Kohl and Reagan would have gotten along well. Was there any duplication of the Thatcher-Reagan?

DOBBINS: Not really. First of all, Kohl didn't speak English and never really made any effort to learn it. He and Reagan were very different personalities, and Kohl, while he was a conservative in the German spectrum, was far to the left of Reagan on issues like East-West relations and relations with the Soviet Union. So, no, they weren't soul mates the way that Thatcher and Reagan were. Kohl wasn't leading a conservative revolution in Germany. Even on social policies, the Germans had their social market economy, and Kohl was not challenging that.

Q: Did the close relationship between Thatcher and Reagan, the British and the Americans, did that bother the Germans at all?

DOBBINS: No, I don't think so, because the relationship between Germany and Washington was quite close, in some ways, more so, because there were just more issues on which Germany and the United States, because we had so many troops there and so many issues that tended to involve them. The real relationship was, I think, equally intimate, if perhaps less ...

Q: Personalized?

DOBBINS: Well, at the level of president and prime minister, you didn't have the same soul mate qualities, and there was probably an even greater degree of mutual confidence between the British and Americans, simply because of a commonality of language and history, but the relationship with the Germans was quite close, and I don't think there was any perception on their part that they were second-class allies.

Q: Were the French playing any games that you noticed with the Germans, using the Germans to further French causes that we didn't want to see furthered or that sort of thing?

DOBBINS: Not much. The French mostly in this period were noit really wasn't until the '90s until the French began to interest themselves more seriously in NATO, military and security issues. They largely opted out of the issues that were at the heart of the German-American relationship. Now, they had their views on dï¿½tente and that sort of thing, and there were difficulties negotiating the communiquï¿½s over this or that sentence, but no, the whole idea that the European Community should somehow have a defense identity had not taken hold, and the French had simply opted out of large amounts of the trans-Atlantic relationship, but they weren't being particularly helpful. They were just pursuing their own policies.

Q: This is a time before we made the big drawdown, which was I guess in 1990 or so, but what about our troops there? Having a lot of young men running around with armored cars and all this, this can cause problems.

DOBBINS: Not much. They had been there a long time and they were well accepted by the population. Their maneuvers had to be carefully controlled and there would usually be guys with bags of money that would run around behind the tanks and pay the farmers if they crashed through their gates. So that was not really very controversial. The only area of their activity that became controversial was low-level flying, which tended to annoy people, particularly when the airplanes crashed, but even when they didn't. "You have to do it on Sunday, why do you have to do it during naptime? Couldn't you stop from 12 to 3:00 so you don't wake people up?" That kind of thing, so we got in the middle of a lot of these status of forces-type issues, but they were quite limited. By and large, the Germans were quite happy to have the Americans there. They made a contribution to the economy. They were accepted socially as non-obtrusive. They kept to themselves, largely, and to the extent they mixed in the local societies, they were quite welcome to do so. There were really no tensions, even during the missile crisis and all. There were no real tensions.

Now, there was a terrorist threat that was fairly active, and it was directed in part against Americans and in part against German officials. There were several American soldiers who were killed in terrorisRed Army Faction was the German equivalent of the Bader-Meinhof Gang. There were terrorist threats to the embassy and terrorist attacks on the embassy. The German political director, who I knew pretty well, was assassinated. Bombs went off in Berlin. Soldiers were killed in West Germany as well, so a major preoccupation was security and counter-indigenous German terrorism. There was some Middle Easterners in the bombing. There was a Libyan bombing, and the Pan Am 103 bombing. That bomb was put on in Germany.

Terrorism was a major issue for us, and the Germans occasionally would respond less vigorously than we would hope to some of these incidents. That led to basically short-lived tensions in the relationship. Managing the troop presence was certainly a focus of our attention, and I had committees and spent a lot of time with the U.S. Army and others there. But by and large, it was a positive aspect of the relationship, not a negative.

Q: You had all these posts, consular posts. How did you find them, their value?

DOBBINS: Well, yes, we had them. I think there was some value. It's a federal country, the local politicians felt it important that there be a presence. It maintained relationships with these people, it performed consular services for a large community of Americans, including the American military and dependents. It provided some commercial access to the region. In terms of the U.S.-German relationship at the national level, other than the mission in Berlin, the contribution was fairly negligible. Frankfurt was a regional post. There were people there, it was convenient because of the airport, and there were people there who had relatively little to do with Germany and were conducting rather specialized operations all over Europe from there. All the pay and leave records for everybody in Europe, the regional finance center for the State Department, I think, if I remember correctly, was in Frankfurt. And there were other kinds of regional support operations from there. But the consulates were not major players in terms of the German-American relationship or the core of the embassy's responsibilities. But still, it was a much larger establishment of constituent posts than any other country in the world had, and managing them was an important part of my job.

Q: At one time, we blanketed the place, this is right after the war, with the Amerikahï¿½user, America houses, telling about America, essentially libraries and cultural centers, but it certainly made the Germans well aware of the United States. By this time, I assume there wasn't much.

DOBBINS: It was diminishing. I think we still had them in Berlin and Munich, maybe one or two others. They were slowly being integrated with the consulates and scaled back, and the personnel were scaled back, but we still had fairly significant USIA (United States Information Agency) presence in Germany, including outside Berlin. So, again, it was still larger than in most other countries, but diminishing over time.

Q: Was there any concern that we were beginning to neglect Germany, as opposed to ...

DOBBINS: Well, there was periodic hand wringing about the new generation doesn't know America as well as the old generation, and the people who were grateful to America and remember soldiers distributing chocolates are leaving and they're being replaced by people who can just remember protest marches and that. I tended to dismiss those as somewhat exaggerated. The opinion polls didn't show that great a divergence in opinion between the older and younger generations, and it showed that the younger generations tended to become more conservative as they got older anyway on these issues, among others. Support for the United States remained strong. Numbers of Germans visiting the United States was higher than ever. Numbers of Germans going to school in the United States was high. With the soldiers there, of course the number of Americans who had an experience with Germany was also very high. So at that stage, there weren't any real alarm signals, although it was a subject for occasional speeches and conferences.

Q: When did you leave in '89?

DOBBINS: Probably summer.

Q: What were the readings on what was happening in East Germany before you left?

DOBBINS: Rick was replaced by Vernon Walters. Rick left in maybe March or April. He became our strategic arms negotiator in Geneva. I stayed until the summer and was Vernon Walters' deputy for his first maybe three or four months. Interestingly enough, when he had been named ambassador, was asked in some interview what he thought of German reunification, and he said, "I think it's possible in the next 10 years." Rick and I looked at this and thought this guy had lost his senses. Everybody just laughed at the naï¿½ve and unrealistic assessment this was.

In the context of early 1989, it seemed pretty naï¿½ve. He didn't repeat it for a while. But clearly, while I don't think German reunification was in the air as a realistic short-term prospect, I remember Rick and I urging on George Bush's first visit there he at least allude to American support for reunification, not because it was going to happen any time soon, but it was an important element of the German overall political consensus and one that we ought to continue to foster for reasons having nothing to do with whether it would ever occur, but in terms of positioning ourselves within the German political debate. We were disappointed when Bush steered away from any mention of it and took a more cautious line and didn't actually endorse it. I think he visited in April of '89, on his first international trip as president. So I think German reunification had become a little more current in the debate, but only a little bit more at that stage, and nobody was thinking that it was something that was on the agenda for the next few years.

Q: As things were moving while you were there in the Soviet Union and sort of the whole Gorbachev impact, glasnost and perestroika, the view from Bonn, what was it? Had we seen this as really going to make a difference?

DOBBINS: Rick and I obviously were reacting largely to the sort of same newspaper reports everyone else was as to what was going on in the Soviet Union. We weren't directly involved in the discussions. I don't think we were particularly prescient about how far this would go, or how fundamental it was. There was a good deal of debate as to whether Gorbachev really meant what he said, and if he meant what he said, was he going to be able to deliver on it?

The German focus, of course, was more on their relations with East Germany and the prospects for further amelioration of that relationshinot directed toward unification, but just toward more easy access and improved conditions for people in East Germany. My own view was that at some point that would lead to a destabilizing of the East German system, and the West German politicians and bureaucrats essentially didn't want to accept that intellectually, because if they accepted it, they would have to accept that there were inherent limits on how far the East Germans could reasonably be prepared to go in these kinds of arrangements.

Q: Were there in Germany at the time the equivalent to the British chattering class, the French intellectuals, a group of people who had more influence through the media or publicity or something, but sort of outside the regular government system?

DOBBINS: Well, to some degree, although the dialog tended to be conducted between the government and the opposition as opposed to a large class of influential academics. There were some. There were some media and some academics and think tanks, but smaller than the American or British. The debate tended to circulate around old issues on arms control and dï¿½tente rather than sort of more fundamental issues like collapse of the Soviet Union or German reunification or liberation of Eastern Europe. It tended to be focused on the nuances and details of maintaining or maybe slightly ameliorating the existing situation. I don't think anyone was suggesting that the existing situation in which they'd lived for 40-some years was going to change rapidly, so the focus on Gorbachev was really to what degree could we expect incremental changes of significance in the existing relationship. And nobody really was suggesting that something more tectonic was about to take place.

Q: You lefwere there any other issues in Bonn that you might want to ...

DOBBINS: No, I think that's ...

Q: Well, we always have a chance to look at this. You can fill in. Where'd you go in '89? Well put it at the end here.

DOBBINS: I went back to become principal deputy assistant secretary in the European Bureau.Q: Who was the head of the European Bureau at that time?

DOBBINS: Ray Seitz.

Q: What was your particular piece of the action?

DOBBINS: Well, the way we organized it, I did everything. I mean, I did all the management of personnel for the bureau as a whole, oversaw the work of the other deputy assistant secretaries. I think the area that came directly under me, because of my immediate prior experience, and because it soon became the most important issue in the bureau was Germany.

Q: When did you arrive in the bureau?

DOBBINS: In the summer of '89. I don't recall quite what month, but midsummer, I recall.

Q: How long were you there? From '89 to ...

DOBBINS: Two years, so '89 to '91.

Q: Probably the most significant years in the development of Europe for a long time.

DOBBINS: It was an amazing time, and it was a good place to be. I knew I was in a good place the day the wall came down. It was a Saturday and I was in the office, and my secretary stuck her head in my office and she said, "Jim." I said, "Yes." She said, "President Bush is on the telephone for you." I said, "What?" She said, "Yes, it's the White House. They have the president for you." So I knew I was in the right place at the right time. He never called again, but just once was more than most people get.

Q: Well, let's pick it up, summer of '89, when you arrived there. Was there anything on horizon that you were going to see, because we're not talking just about Germany. We're talking about Czechoslovakia and Poland, that whole complex dealing with the Soviet Union. Were people saying, "Let's get ready, big things are happening"?

DOBBINS: I don't know that anybody foresaw the full scale of things that were likely to happen. But in preparation for the new job, I traveled in the late spring and early summer to Moscow, Prague and Warsaw to get a feel for what was going on there, and familiarized myself with those issues. At that time EUR was responsible for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as well as Western Europe. Then, shortly after I arrived, I began working on a memo to Secretary Baker on German reunification, which didn't say it was imminent, but said that it had become a more practical than purely academic issue, and we needed to refine our approach to it.

Q: Well, German unification was, in a way, a good news/bad news type thing, in that it might unify, but there was the possibility that it might neutralize Germany.

DOBBINS: I think that unlike the British and French tended to see the glass as more half empty than half full, we regarded this as an opportunity. There were obviously potential dangers if it was mishandled. If it was mishandled, it could have a lot of negative consequences. It could lead to a Germany that was detached from its relationships with Western Europe and the United States. It could lead to a reversal in the reform process in the Soviet Union. It could lead to violence in the region and a reversal of the trend toward more autonomy of the countries of Eastern Europe. So there were lots of potential problems, but I think we also saw it as a major opportunity and treated it as such.

Q: Did we find ourselvel won't say at oddbut with a different perspective than in particular the French and the British?

DOBBINS: Oh, yes. The French and the British initially sort of had their heads firmly in the ground and were inclined to try to resist what turned out to be the tide of history, where as we basically allied ourselves pretty clearly with Helmut Kohl and with a vision of moving ahead with a rapid, unconditional unification on the understanding that the unified Germany would retain its relationships with Western Europe and the United States.

Q: Well, in the fall of '89, when you had particularly sort of the crises and East Germans fleeing to Czechoslovakia. How were we handling this initially? I mean, what were we seeing, what was this meaning?

DOBBINS: Well, I'm not sure we fully understood the dynamics and the way this would work out. Our embassy in East Berlin, for instance, tended to underestimate the degree of ferment and change and the potential for really rapid change. Of course, there were the incidents of the people who were occupying our embassies, or weren't occupying them, were taking refuge in our embassies. Our historic experience with this is when they did that, they sometimes stayed 20 or 30 years and it became an ongoing, difficult issue. So I remember, the Secretary was having lunch with several of his closest aides and he called me up and said, "What should we do about these 20 or 30 East Germans that were sitting in the lobby of our embassy in East Berlin and refusing to leave unless we took them to get access to go to West Germany.

Baker wanted to do something helpful. I was arguing that to an extent, if we help this group, we'd have another group the next day, and what we'd end up with is months and maybe even years of these people camping in our embassy, unable to leave.

Q: This is with the memory of the Pentecostals and Cardinal Mindszenty and all of that.

DOBBINS: Exactly. Baker was more, "I'll call Shevardnadze on this," and I counseled him against calling Shevardnadze and getting himself so heavily engaged on the problem, and suggested we simply have our ambassador continue to try to urge them to leave and get the East German government to allow them to return to their homes. I think it was Baker's instinct always to look for thif you've got a situation, how can you turn it to your advantage. And I think he was, on that point, maybe more prescient than I was.

I remember that in preparation for President Bush's visit to Malta, where he had his first summit with Gorbachev, I went over to brief him. I was the State Department briefer. There was a CIA briefer, John McLaughlin, who is currently the deputy director of the CIA and who was at that time the head of the European division of the analytical division of the agency. We hadn't concerted our briefings, but both of us told him that German unification was a much more real and immediate prospect than anybody had imagined. Both of us thought our views on this matter were very daring and both of us were surprised and pleased that the other one had come to the same conclusion, as I recall, because it wasn't at all the common wisdom in Washington at the time.

Q: This was about when?

DOBBINS: This must have been August, maybe?

Q: Well, this is very early.

DOBBINS: August or September.

Q: Because people were still laughing when you said, "In the near future, Germany might be reunited."

DOBBINS: Exactly, so I think that the State Department and the European Bureau of the State Department were really quite advanced in appreciating how the situation was moving. The book that Zelikow and Rice wrote, both of them were in the NSC at the time they wrote a book on German reunification, which gave considerable credit to the State Department for its prescience on the issue.

Q: What were you getting from your German colleagues at, say, the German Embassy, or the West German Embassy?

DOBBINS: Well, I don't know that we had much contact here with the German Embassy at that stage, although we had our normal social contacts. We were having a lot of contacts with the German government, with Kohl and his senior advisers and Genscher and his advisers. So we were in close touch with the Germans on the issue, but they were as surprised as anybody by these developments.

Q: Where was Genscher early on?

DOBBINS: Well, Genscher tended to be cautious because he'd invested a lot in ostpolitik and in the relationship with the East German regime. So his initial inclination was not to push things, because he didn't want to damage that relationship. And he also placed great importance on maintaining a relationship with the Soviet Union. But once the wall came down, the situation broke, he also became quite active and in general a constructive force for negotiating the outcome.

Q: Well, in events leading up to the fall of the wall, did you see, was the Hungarian sort of opening its borders and all seen as almost yanking the keystone out of the Iron Curtain?

DOBBINS: Well, that's of course how it developed. I don't know that we predicted that that would be the particular straw that would break the back.

Q: Well, were we looking at Hungary?

DOBBINS: How do you mean by looking at Hungary? Bush visited all these countries.

Q: And I was wondering whether Hungary was considered in that ...

DOBBINS: In that fall, when he visited the countries in, I can't remember, September, October?

Q: Were we seeing Hungary as having new, fresh aspect and things?

DOBBINS: Well, things were happening in all of them, in Hungary, in Czechoslovakia and Poland, all in different ways. Poland was in some ways the most startling, of course, because the Solidarity had actually, as I recall, entered the government at that point, although Jaruzelski remained the President. So you had a rather startling change there. In Hungary, the change was more gradual. The Communists were still in charge, but they were reform Communists, and I can't quite recall what development went on in Czechoslovakia, but it was changing too.

Q: Poland, though, was really the biggest country in the area, and did we see Poland sort of no longer being really a part of the Warsaw Pact?

DOBBINS: Well, we saw all of them as having gained considerably more autonomy, and in Poland, the democratic opposition had formed the government. We at that point were not advocating that they leave the Warsaw Pact. It was pretty clear that within the Warsaw Pact they were for the first time exercising some influence, and as a whole, it was a moderating influence on the Russians.

Q: Well, were we looking? At that time, what were you getting from our reports in the Soviet Union? Was there the possibility, were we looking at maybe the Soviets might intervene in massive form or not, a la Czechoslovakia.

DOBBINS: I don't think it was ever possible to entirely discount that possibility, but no, we weren't getting warning signals of that sort. There was always the possibility that Gorbachev would be overthrown and more conservative forces would take over, which of course did happen briefly. But at that stage, no, we weren't getting reports either that Gorbachev was in danger or there was any imminent likelihood that his policies would be reversed.

Q: When you arrived in the European Bureau, what was sort of the impression in the European Bureau about Gorbachev.

DOBBINS: I think we were inclined to take him on his word, to see his reforms as genuine and his intentions as sincere. It wasn't clear to us where it would lead, how far he was able to effectuate the reforms that he had in mind, but I think we tended to see him as genuine in his intentions and somebody who should be taken at their word.

Q: What about Baker? As these things were developing, before the wall, would Baker get together some people from the European Bureau to sort of mold what was happening, I mean, take a look and see what might be in it for us?

DOBBINS: No, that really wasn't the way he worked. First of all, he wasn't a sort of a theoretician. He was a very practical person who wanted to work on specific tasks. He was a dealmaker who wanted to know what the deal was he was supposed to be negotiating in a given moment, and if there wasn't a deal to be had, he felt it probably wasn't worth his time, and he'd let someone else handle it. When those events had reached the point where a deal was in the making, he would be happy to step in and negotiate it, and he was extremely good at that. I think that to the degree he engaged in that broad speculation, it was really with his own small circle of advisers, who were quite good, and whom he met with regularly.

Q: Well, was there anybody in his small circle of advisers who was sort of the designated person to look at the bloc in relationship with Germany and all that?

DOBBINS: There were two. Dennis Ross did the Soviet Union for him, and also headed the Policy Planning Staff, and Bob Zoellick quickly established Europe as his special domain. There was some jockeying between him at the Undersecretary for Political Affairs and Zoellick, who at the time was I think the counselor and subsequently became the undersecretary for economic affairs, but Zoellick was closer to Baker and won most of those jostling contests. So Zoellick emerged as the principal deputy to Baker on European issues.

Q: Did Zoellick sit down? How did he interface with you all?.

DOBBINS: Most taskings would come through him. He'd ask for papers on subjects, and the papers would go to Baker. We wrote think pieces to Baker on this subject. I wrote a long one on German reunification, which went to him at the time. Then, as events began to accelerate, we would send Baker memos, which would lay out broad strategy, and he would react. You'd get marginalia back, "Yes, I agree with this. Good thought." And Zoellick and I and Seitz would talk quite frequently.

Q: I'd love to get just more feel for the process.

DOBBINS: There was bureaucratic tension and unhappiness with Ross's easier access, and a feeling that we were sending things he was seeing; he was sending things we weren't seeing. So we always felt we weren't fully informed of what was going on within this inner circle, and that was a source of frustration throughout the department. Because our issue was so central and because our advice had proved so reliable, we were given a reasonable amount of access, probably more than most other bureaus. I think my boss was more unhappy with this than I was, not that I was terribly happy with it, but it served the Secretary reasonably well. The policy was certainly a success, and it's hard to quarrel with success.

Q: Absolutely not. Well, now, just to get a feel for the process, if you'd be tasked with a paper or something, would you sit down with Seitz and maybe someone from up in the German desk and sit and talk about the thing before writing it, or would you just sort of sit down and write it?

DOBBINS: It would vary. Ninety-nine percent of the time I would try to get somebody else to write it. I would task it to the office that was responsible for it, and the offices that were working this issue would primarily be the NATO, regional political-military office, to much a lesser degree, the regional economic office, and then the Central European Office would be fairly heavily engaged. The Soviet office would also be engaged. Sandy Vershbow was the director of the Soviet office.

Sometimes, I would not be satisfied with what I got from below and rewrite it myself. It didn't happen very often. Sometimes, I would simply edit it and send it back to be redone. There were a few memos that I wrote myself, but normally either Ray and I would get the tasking or would ourselves decide we wanted to send a self-initiated memo, and then we would task it to the relevant office. Usually, I would call the office director, have him come up, and I'd tell him what we wanted and when we wanted it, and then they'd produce it, we'd edit it and send it.

Q: How did the NSC fit in at this time, this time leading up to the fall?

DOBBINS: They were very active, because, of course, Bush was very engaged, I mean, the fact that he called me the day the wall went down. He was very much a foreign policy expert himself, and they had a very highly competent staff. Bob Blackwell was the head of the European directorate. Condi Rice was one of his assistants. She did the Soviet Union. Phillip Zelikow did Western Europe. There were one or two others, but they were the main people we interacted with, and we worked closely with them on all of these issues. We would share our memos and it was a very closely-knit operation, and Bob also maintained his links, particularly with the seventh floor. He preferred to deal with the seventh floor, if he could, and did, with Zoellick in particular.

Q: At that time, was it European Union or was it the European Community.

DOBBINS: It was the European Community.

Q: So you weren't seeing that as a real unity at that point, as something to deal with, as contrasted to dealing with France, Germany, United Kingdom.

DOBBINS: They hadn't progressed far toward creating a common foreign policy at that stage, so it wasn't dealt with as a unit in that regard. It was certainly an important part of the landscape of Europe and the potential architecture of a post-Cold War era. So it was one of the main elements of the vision that Baker put forward in the major speech he did a little after the wall came down did foresee an expanded role for the European Community. And that was very positively received in Europe, and gave an impetus to the intra-European dialog, which led to the Maastricht Treaty.

Q: Rome?

DOBBINS: In other words, the basic deal, which accommodated the French and the British, among others, to German unification was that Germany would remain even more embedded in the European Community, and that therefore a unified Germany would be less of a threat. So, sort of the pillars of the enterprise were that Germany would remain in NATO and that the European Community would be strengthened.

Q: Well, the wall sort of came down not by great decree from above, but I think it was, if I recall, the guards were kind of told, "Well, let them go through," and things just sort of happened, as they so often do. Basically, people took over.

DOBBINS: The guards were told to cease barring transit, and at that point they decided if they were going to stop doing that, they might as well stop doing anything. Then the citizens just came and danced on top of the wall, then began dismantling it.

Q: At the State Department, were you seeing this as really the beginning of the end of the way we saw things?

DOBBINS: We definitely saw it as the beginning of the end of a divided Germany. I don't think at that stage we appreciated that it would be the end of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union.

Q: Was it instinct on the part of the president, the secretary of state, or was it other people, the very fact that we didn't have George Bush jumping up and down on top of the wall, which I think maybe some other politically minded presidents would have loved to do? It was done with real taste and restraint and diplomatic sanity. Where did that come from?

DOBBINS: I think it was very consistent with George Bush's both personalitnot a particularly demonstrative persoand basic sort of conservatism of a moderate sort in terms of the relationship. He recognized the need not to humiliate or make this more difficult for Gorbachev, and was a basically cautious person. It wasn't that the State Department had to restrain the White House by any means. I think that was a common view about how to deal with this.

Q: What was Kohl doing, and Genscher? Were they checking to see where we were, or were they going ahead?

DOBBINS: Kohl had the bit in his teeth and was definitely pushing the process. Genscher tended to be more cautious, but Kohl made a fundamental decision, made a big speech, proposed immediate monetary unity, which was very appealing to the East German people and turned out to be very expensive to the West Germans, but was a very skillful tactic to deploy to begin the process of unification in a way that would be very difficult to pull back from. He pushed the process very clearly. I can't say that Kohl checked with Washington before he made each of these initiatives. We had good contacts with his staff, and with him, and he knew what Washington thought and he knew what he could get away, and he went at some times to the limits of what he could get away with.

After he had made this speech, and after the wall came down, he came and spent a weekend with Bush at Camp David and went over and agreed on our fundamental bottom line which was that we supported a unified Germany as long as it remained with NATO, and he agreed with that. Genscher was actually more ambivalent about that than Kohl was, but Kohl gave an unequivocal undertaking to that effect, and that eased minds in Washington, and Washington was quite supportive of it.

Q: Allowing West Germany and East Germany to unite and still keeping it within NATO was a tremendous blow to the Soviets, really. This is the same way if Germany had turned neutral on us, it would have sort of almost destroyed NATO within Europe. How was this accomplished?

DOBBINS: It was accomplished through a long process of discussions and negotiations. We created the two-plus-four process as a forum in which the ultimate agreement could be ratified. There were diplomatic contacts with neighboring states, with the Soviet Union, with the East Germans. It took place relatively rapidly, but through a very complex, multifaceted process. The posture we took on consideration was just to say that Germany should be reunited and then Germany should decide. In other words, it wasn't that we were insisting that as part of the negotiation, Germany should undertake to remain in NATO, because we were confident that a united Germany would want to remain in NATO, because a united Germany would essentially be a larger West Germany.

So we simply took the posture that in the arrangements for Germany's unification, Germany shouldn't be constrained as to its international orientation. And it was hard to argue with that position, since we were saying "Leave it to the Germans," and that's essentially how it was arranged. There were some in the two-plus-four negotiations and the resulting documents; Germany did give some undertakings of a fairly limited sort.

Q: Well, one thing, NATO troops would not be based in East Germany, I thin, and other things like this.

DOBBINS: That sort of thing.

Q: Of course, there wasn't really the need to.

DOBBINS: Right.

Q: As this happened and Kohl's process to redeem the mark at one to one I guess with the Ostmark. It takes one back, I think it was '48 when they had the currency reform, which was at that time, people forget now, but really a benchmark ...

DOBBINS: It's what split the country.

Q: ... in Germany, establishing the mark at a solid value. Was there concern that making this one for one thing could bankrupt Germany?

DOBBINS: Not outside Germany. I mean that wasn't our problem.

Q: Well, in a way, though, the German economy is important.

DOBBINS: Well, probably, maybe people in the Treasury recognized that this would lead to low growth in Germany and therefore have a ripple effect on Europe and the United States, which it ultimately did, but no, I don't think it was of central concern.

Q: At the State Department, were you finding, maybe coming through the economic bureau, but companies saying, "Let us get there and start doing investing?"

DOBBINS: Not initially. Things were too confused. But eventually there was interest in this.

Q: Was there any feel at the time about the East German economy as being not what it had been portrayed, in other words, a very weak economy and one that really was almost a basket case.

DOBBINS: The East German economy always compared favorably to the rest of Eastern Europe, but clearly all of Eastern Europe, and East Germany had been falling further and further behind. Clearly, the Soviet economies' productiveness had been vastly overestimated by the CIA and successive administrations, and probably East Germany's as well.

Q: Well, in the aftermath, where did your focus come after sort of the concept of the United Germany and the surrounding countries, having been essentially cut loose from the Soviet Union. Did that cause a realignment in thinking, the bureaucracy?

DOBBINS: We tried to put in place a new Euro-Atlantic architecture, contrasted with trans-Atlantic, which tended to be West Europe and the United States. Euro-Atlantic was designed to encompass Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, so the CSCE became OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) and took on a more formal cast. We created a parliamentary assembly for OSCE that brought together Russian parliamentarianor Soviet parliamentarianand others, and tried to create more East-West lines of communication and formal institutions, as well as embedding Germany even more deeply in Western institutions like the European Community.

But, of course, as soon as Germany was unified, another debate occurred about what was the place of the former Eastern European countries? Did they join the EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries as sort of permanent neutrals, which I have to say I favored, though that was not the outcome that was ultimately chosen, and it's certainly not the one they wanted? Did they stay linked to the Soviet Union in some more benign and voluntary arrangement, or did they apply to and join the European Community and NATO, which is ultimately what happened?

That issue really wasn't resolved in this timeframe. It was the next issue that had to be addressed after German reunification, and it was debated for a couple of years, and only really resolved when the Clinton administration decided to expand NATO in '93 and '94. And then, of course, the Soviet Union was collapsing and we were mostly spectators to that.

Q: Did you get involved, those in the European Bureau, in the events in Romania?

DOBBINS: No, not really. You mean Ceausescu's overthrow?

Q: Yes.

DOBBINS: We were spectators. We didn't have any influence.

Q: How about as you were going through this process for the next time, did you run across people like myself and thousands of others in the government had grown up in the Cold War? I mean, we were Cold Warriors. The Soviet Union was the enemy, and that was the focus. I mean, all of a sudden, really, the axis had shifted. The world had changed completely. Did you run across the problem of sort of Cold Warriors saying, "Maybe it is," but still playing the Cold War game?

DOBBINS: Certainly, people were much more cautious and I'd say that Bush and Baker established relationships with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze and others that were reform elements in the Soviet Union that persuaded them that these people were genuine, or sincere, and could be trusted. There was always the question as to how long they would remain in control, and I think that there wasn't a high degree of confidence that their course was irreversible. When, for instance, the coup took place and Gorbachev was put under arrest, there were a couple of meetings, one with the president and cabinet members that I attended. Baker was on vacation and so it was myself and Larry Eagleburger who attended. And the mood was, well, "Gorbachev was great but it's over, and we're going to have to get along with these people, so let's not do anything to rock the boat."

It wasn't, "This is unacceptable. We're not going to allow it to stand. We have to support Yeltsin. We have to come out strongly." So there were ritual statements deploring the coup, but there wasn't a major effort to somehow place ourselves in opposition to the new regime. There was a feeling that they would consolidate their power and it would be returned to sort of business as usual pre-Gorbachev.

I didn't say anything at the meeting itself. On the way back, I told Eagleburger that there was no certainty that the coup was going to succeed because they just didn't seem to have the stomach for it. They weren't shooting people. They weren't behaving with the rigor that would have indicated that they were prepared to risk everything and, as a result, it wasn't at all clear that the effort would succeed, which of course in the end it didn't. But the President and his advisors took a rather conservative, rather cautious approach.

At a second meeting, which was at the deputies level, I suggested that one possibility would be to have Bush call Yeltsin, who was then in the White House, leading the resistance, and I got the feeling that people thought that was a rather startlingly daring idea, were sort of off-put by it. In fact, Bush did call Yeltsin, but he didn't call him for another three days, as I recall, at a later date when it was pretty clear which way the tide had turned. So it wasn't as much of a gesture as it would have been if it had come a couple of days earlier, when it was more uncertain which way things were going. And yet, he could have called Yeltsin and it would have made a big impression.

So there was a definite caution and I would say that people tended to see the conservative elements within the Soviet system as being stronger and more implacable than they in fact turned out to be.

Q: Did you find during this transition period that you were experiencing that State and CIA were together, somewhat apart?

DOBBINS: State and the CIA analytical division were together. I can't remember who was the CIA director before Gates. The analytical people in the agency and we tended to have quite a similar view.

Q: What about the rest of Europe? I mean, were we spending a lot of time going around consulting with various capitals to either bring them on board or find out what they were thinking?

DOBBINS: The main forum for managing this was the quadripartite talks of the British, the French and ourselves. There were lots of consultations in NATO, and there were lots of consultations bilaterally with these countries. George Bush made a big trip to Europe and went to a number of the East European countries. So it was a very intense process of diplomacy.

Q: During the two-plus-four talks, what about France and England? What were they doing?

DOBBINS: Well, they were dragging their feet, mostly, but ultimately came along.

Q: Sort of going back a bit, but it was in the fall, wasn't it, the Malta thing?

DOBBINS: Yes.

Q: That was sort of a hairy thing, if I recall. It was supposed to be done at sea and Gorbachev was no sailor. He was all of a sudden having ...

DOBBINS: Well, it was done in port, but it was done in a ship in port, and apparently there was a big storm.

Q: Bush at least is a sailor. How did that go? Did you get involved in that?

DOBBINS: Well, as I said, I briefed the president for it. I didn't actually go on the trip. I think it went very well. They established a relationship there and laid a basis for everything that followed.

Q: Was there any concern about the closeness of Baker and Shevardnadze, who was a very charming person and kind of our guy? Was there a feeling that he might be over-charming us or not?

DOBBINS: I don't think so. I think Shevardnadze was regarded afirst of all, Baker tended to have most of his meetings alone or with nobody but Ross in the room, so one got only fairly incomplete reports as to what was being said. But I think Shevardnadze spoke candidly about the situation he and Gorbachev faced, and what was going to be necessary for them to be able to work with us, and I think they established a relationship of trust with each other, and Shevardnadze clearly was able to deliver on his undertakings.

Q: How well do you think you were served, at the time, by our embassy in the Soviet Union during this period?

DOBBINS: I don't think we had any complaints about it. Baker tended to do his diplomacy directly. I remember, I went to the Soviet Union with Baker and we were going to a meeting with Gorbachev, and the people who went to the Kremlin were myself, our ambassador, Jack Matlock, Dennis Ross and Baker. But the only people who got into the meeting were Ross and Baker with Gorbachev and one adviser, and Matlock and I spent the three hours sitting in the anteroom, which I think was probably more difficult for Matlock than for me, since he was the ambassador to the Soviet Union. I think this was the recurrent pattern, which must have been quite frustrating. But I don't think it was because the secretary didn't trust Matlock. This was the way he always did things when he could, was to restrict it very closely, and the feeling that you could have more intimate conversations in that way. And by limiting his own team, he helped Gorbachev limit his.

So I don't know that anybody felt the embassy's reporting was inaccurate, but the ambassador sort of wasn't regarded as a key player, and Baker preferred to do the diplomacy directly, by telephone if he couldn't do it ...

Q: Well, the bureau's relation with Ross, was it a bit troubled or not?

DOBBINS: Well, bureaucratically strained, I would say. I got along well with him personally.

Q: But it's just not all the information got out?

DOBBINS: Right. I mean he had a privileged position, which was uncomfortable from the European Bureau's standpoint since we were theoretically in charge of these things.

Q: This happens all the time.

DOBBINS: Yes, it's not unparalleled. I mean, Baker had a particular approach and the problem was probably more acute then than under some secretaries, but no, it's not unparalleled.

Q: Well, did you feel the hand of Margaret Tutwiler there, because one had the feeling she was, particularly on sort of public posture of Baker and all that, was very controlling.

DOBBINS: She was, and she was definitely part of this small inner circle and sort of ran his immediate office and looked after his public persona as well. She was very tough, very direct, but I got along well with Margaret and we became reasonably good friends.

Q: Well, you were there also when the Gulf War started.

DOBBINS: Yes.

Q: Until it finished, actually. When it immediately happened, from the perspective of Europe, what were some of the issues and how did this develop?

DOBBINS: Well, I got called in at, I think, 6:00 in the evening to come back to the office because Iraq had just attacked Kuwait, and we spent the entire night in the videoconference room at the State Department with Treasury, White House, Defense on this. Through the night, we made numerous decisions, blocking Iraqi accounts, for instance. My part of the process was, of course, coordinating with the European governments, including in particular the British government, and helping put together the coalition that eventually was deployed in Kuwait.

Bob Kimmitt emerged as the key figure below the secretary, and took over responsibility for coordinating all the elements of the department, but the European Bureau was quite heavily engaged in various aspects of it, and I traveled with the secretary on occasion as he conducted the diplomacy, getting toward the war.

Q: Was it sort of early hours and all? Was this sort of considered sort of a fait accompli and how do you deal with the aftermath of this?

DOBBINS: No, I don't think there was ever a feeling that this was a fait accompli. I think the intention from the beginning was to eject Saddam from Kuwait. I don't think there was ever a feeling that we would have to accommodate ourselves to this.

Q: What were the initial European reactions?

DOBBINS: Pretty much the same as ours, I think. There really weren't any differences. This was not really a trans-Atlantic point of difference.

Q: Were the French sort of on the same wavelength as we were?

DOBBINS: Yes. When you actually got to the point of launching the war, there were probably nuances of difference as to what kind of diplomacy you ought to engage in at the point, but not really. The French sent substantial forces to Kuwait and engaged in it. The diplomacy tended to be focused more on, for instance, should the Russians be invited to participate, which they were. They decided not to, but Baker did ask them. Non-European countries, practical steps to freeze assets, apply sort of comprehensive sanctions, so there were thousands of things to do and talk about, but it never became a source of trans-Atlantic tension.

Q: How were we doing during this initial time after the invasion? I guess it was still the Soviet Union, wasn't it, at that time? Primakov was going around and by some was not seen as a very friendly type by some vis-ï¿½-vis the United States. How were we viewing that?

DOBBINS: We didn't regard the Soviet Union as exactly an ally at that stage, but we also didn't regard it as a major source of difficulty. The Soviet Union was not at the center of our Gulf War diplomacy. It was rather peripheral, and yes, you had to deal with unwelcome Soviet initiatives, but they were brushed aside without too much trouble.

Q: So this was a period of considerable unanimity from our principal allies.

DOBBINS: Yes, and the Germans gave us money instead of troops and that exercise, sort of rattle the tin cup exercise, was rather successful as well.

Q: Were there during this '89 to '91 period any other issues you were dealing with, or minor issues?

DOBBINS: You mean other than the collapse of the Soviet Union and the liberation of Eastern Europe, the unification of Germany ...

Q: Other than that, Mrs. Lincoln, how was the play, sort of.

DOBBINS: No, I think that's pretty much what we were focused on. It was a very productive and fast-moving era.

Q: Well, in a way, you must have felt a bit like the copy of Dean Acheson's book, Present at the Creation. By the time you left there, was it sort of a feeling of almost elation?

DOBBINS: Oh, yes, we were definitely on a high. I guess the one issue that we were dealing with and which was the fly in the ointment was that Yugoslavia was collapsing and a civil war was beginning to take place, and Baker clearly was very reluctant to deal with this. I persuaded him to go to Belgrade just as things were collapsing, and I'm not sure he ever really forgave me for it, because he got a lot of very bad publicity.

Q: That was when he said, "I don't think we have a dog in that fight."

DOBBINS: He said that later, but it was that experience, I think, that may have persuaded him, because we spent a day meeting all of the eventual protagonists, Milosevic, Tudjman, Izetbegovic, I mean, we met them all seriatim and we tried to persuade the ones intent on leaving the federation not to leave, and unsuccessfully. The Bosnians said, "We don't want to leave, but we'll have to if the others do." Tudjman said, "Well, I'm prepared to stay as long as the Slovenes don't pull out," and the Slovenes said, "Hey, we've got a get-out-of-jail card. Nothing's going to happen to us and we don't care what happens to the rest of them." And they did leave, and that sort of precipitated the process. Whereas I would have preferred a situation in which we didn't recognize the Slovenes and continued to pretend as if Yugoslavia existed, in which case there probably wouldn't have been the outbreak of violence, the political pressures were too great. The Austrians, and then the Germans, moved precipitously, and Baker just wasn't willing to take any risks.

This was controversial within the Republican Party. Bob Dole was a strong proponent of Croatia and independence.

Q: Bob Dole's role was quite interesting. Didn't he have a staff member or something?

DOBBINS: Mira something. Mira Baratta I think was her name, who was, I think, Croatian, and so he became quite a strong proponent of the Croatian and Slovene and eventually Bosnian independence. So we backed away from that situation as it unraveled and encouraged the Europeans to take the lead, and I did a lot of traveling in Europe and worked with the Europeans, and we hoped that their interventions would somehow prove effective, but they didn't.

Q: One of the major thing was Genscher's initiative of recognizing rather prematurely Croatia. Had we had any warning of that?

DOBBINS: We had a warning. He said something along those lines, and I was in a meeting with Baker and I think Eagleburger, and Zoellick and Ross were there, and we were discussing this situation, and I said that this was a very dangerous step, that if you recognize Croatia, you turn civil war into an international war, and we would ultimately find ourselves unable to avoid involvement. And Baker said, "Oh, you're exaggerating. I don't think it's going to bad." I said, "I don't think I'm exaggerating." And he said, all right, well, why don't you call the German political director and tell him we think this is a bad idea."

I said, "Well, I can do that, but I think it would be more effective if you called Genscher and told him it was a bad idea." And he said, "No, you call the German political director." So I called the German political director and said that we definitely think this is a bad idea. That Germany is the one country in Europe that because of its history is going to refuse to become engaged in this conflict. All the rest of us are ultimately going to have to. It's irresponsible that you, the one country that in the end won't engage to defend Croatia to precipitate a situation that the rest of us may have to. And he said, "Oh, no, no, no, you're exaggerating," and sort of brushed it off, and that was it. Baker was unwilling to put his own authority behind it, because he knew it would become controversial at home.

Q: Well, did you have a feeling that Genscher was sort of doing this on his own? I've talked to people who talked to German officials and embassy officials in Belgrade who said that they were caught by surprise.

DOBBINS: Well, I think there was some political pressure in Germany. There was sympathy for the Croatian and Slovenian cases, and there were some ex-Yugoslav minorities in Germany who exercised influence, and there was a general sympathy with the idea that we argued in favor of German self-determination to unify, how can we argue against Croatian self-determination? I don't know whether this was just purely a response to domestic pressures, or whether there was some deeper calculation on the part of Genscher. The defense when they were criticized was that it was a response to domestic pressures.

Q: Well, also, about that time, shortly thereafter, the Pope weighed in, too, which couldn't have been a worse signal to the Serbs, having served for five years in Belgrade during the '60s, the Pope and the Catholics in Croatia and the Germans and what they did. History really lives in that country and for the Serbs, this sounded like a ganging up of the old World War II forces on them.

DOBBINS: Again, the secretary met with the cardinal who was the Pope's foreign minister, and we tried to dissuade him from taking a line on this, but they had their own sort of domestic politics involved. The Croatians were Catholics and therefore carried more weight with Rome than the Orthodox Serbs. I think the Austrians were the most to blame, because they were the ones who first recognized the Slovenes and legitimized their so-called conflict. There was a wide impression that the Yugoslavs and Serbs had attacked the Slovenes. In fact, it was quite the reverse.

It was the Slovenes who had attacked the various Yugoslav elements within their own territory. So it unraveled and the situation became unmanageable, but we didn't really face up to it for another four years.

Q: Well, in a way, was there sort of the feeling, in your bureau or elsewhere, that at least here is a problem that we can pass over to the Europeans? I mean, the Balkans are always a mess, and with the Europeans, I'm talking about the French, the British, the Germans, saying, "Let us handle this."

DOBBINS: Yes, the Europeans wanted to show that they had committed themselves to having a common foreign policy, and as the Luxembourg foreign minister said, "This is Europe's hour," and we were more than happy to hold their cape while they tried to take care of the problem, but they proved incapable of it and they didn't get much help from Washington.

Q: How had this developed by the time you left? Where was it?

DOBBINS: It was unraveling. There was the beginning of violence in the areas that the Serbs claimed in Croatia. The Bosnians were feeling constrained to declare independence, even though they knew that the consequence would be a civil war in Bosnia. The one person when we were in Belgrade with Baker before it started, who fully agreed with our efforts to persuade the Croatians and the Slovenes not to declare secession was Izetbegovic, who said, "If they do it, then Bosnia will become a battlefield."

I don't think the fighting had started in Bosnia yet. I don't think Bosnia had declared its independence at that stage, but it was moving in that direction, and there had been the beginnings of fighting in Croatia.

Q: What was your assessment of Tudjman and Milosevic?

DOBBINS: The meetings we had with them didn't lead to any assessment at variance of what I've read, Milosevic was regarded as an opportunist, could be charming, but as a rather hard-headed opportunist and apparatchik, and Tudjman as a nationalist with crypto-fascist leanings.

Q: In '91, what happened?

DOBBINS: In '91, I went as ambassador to the European Community.

Q: Today is the 5th of December 2003. Jim, you were at the EC from '91 to when?

DOBBINS: Ninety-three, a little under two years.

Q: Well, now, what was the status of the European Community at that time? It's now the European Union. It's gone through several changes, but how was it at that time?

DOBBINS: The Treaty of Maastricht had been signed before I arrived, which was the treaty that changed, among other things, the name from the European Community to the European Union. Its biggest single element was the creation of a single currency. The treaty had to be ratified before it came into effect, and that took most of the time I was there, and one country had a referendum, Denmark, and it turned against it, which would have blocked the whole treaty and the common currency. So they had to get over that, and the Danes had to have a second referendum after a certain period. So there was a lot of uncertainty about whether they were going to be able to sustain the commitments they'd taken, which they did in the end. So that was the major focus, was getting the Maastricht Treaty ratified and getting the common currency process begun, and they were also dealing with the Balkans.

The Europeans claimed this was their hour. They were going to show that they were capable of taking on a challenge, which unfortunately they were not able to do, but the Balkans were collapsing at this time, and collapsing into war. So the major issue within Europe and between the United States and Europe in the security arena was Yugoslavia. It was also, of course, when the Soviet Union collapsed. By the time I got there, Russia had replaced the Soviet Union, so the whole issue of what to do with not only the older states of Eastern Europe, but the new states of the former Soviet Union, where did they fit in our Euro-Atlantic architecture? Were they candidate members for NATO or the European Union, or were they to form a separate bloc of their own? How was Russia to be thought of? The intellectual debate of the era was what the European and Atlantic architecture should look like in light of this fundamental change.

Q: Was there a U.S. policy towards this? When you went out there, did they say, "Jim, go out and put this together or something, or were we just sort of on the sidelines?

DOBBINS: Our policy on the Balkans was that we supported the idea that the Europeans should take the lead and that we would play a supporting but subordinate role, so we were quite happy to avoid responsibility for having to intervene or play a leading role on the Balkans. We had a policy of assisting the democratic transformation of these former Soviet bloc states, but we didn't have a policy on whether or not they should become a part of NATO or the European Union. We were groping our way toward a policy ourselves.

Q: As you went out there, did you sort of have your own sort of personal view of what you wanted to see?

DOBBINS: Yes, I did, and I gave some speeches and talked about it. It wasn't entirely compatible with where we eventually ended up. On the Balkans, I supported the administration's view, and the early Clinton administration view, that this was essentially a European problem that they should be able to cope with themselves. That turned out to be incorrect. That is, they didn't cope with it themselves, partially, because we never really let them. That is, we kept telling them they were in charge, but whenever they did something we didn't like, we undercut it rather than support it. Whenever they came up with a solution, instead of saying, "Well, we don't think this is ideal, but if it's what you want to do, we'll support it," instead we would undermine it because we, for one reason or another, thought it was inadequate. So the Vance-Owen plan, which was finally forward, ensured that it didn't get the traction it needed to get implemented.

Q: What was the problem?

DOBBINS: As I recall, the basic problem was we didn't think it fair enough to the Muslims, that it went too far in rewarding aggression and ethnic cleansing, and it was too likely to end in a fragmented state. But I think there was also a certain "not invented here" element to it. The U.S. policy was lift and strike, which was to lift the arms embargo and threaten to use air power against the Serbs, which the Europeans wouldn't go for, among other things, because they had large peacekeeping forces in on the ground. We wouldn't put any forces in on the ground, and so we had this rather unpleasant debate across the Atlantic for a couple of years.

Q: The Europeans had, as you mentioned, quite a few troops on the ground, but they seemed to have their hands tied behind their backs. They either didn't have enough troops in the right place, or they seemed unwilling to confront what amounted to almost a bully on the part of the Serbs.

DOBBINS: They weren't prepared to engage in a peace enforcement mission without American participation. They were prepared to do the traditional kind of peacekeeping, separating combatants who are prepared to be separated and oversee humanitarian relief, but they weren't prepared to muscle one party or the other without active American participation, and the United States wasn't prepared to participate.

Q: Did you find yourself in an awkward position of trying to work on this policy?

DOBBINS: No, the Balkans was only marginally a responsibility of my mission. It was more of the mission to NATO and my colleague in NATO.

Q: Who was your colleague in NATO?

DOBBINS: It was Will Taft, and then in the Clinton Administration, Bob Hunter, who is now here at Rand.

Q: Did you see the European Union, or at that time the European Community, as all a good thing, or as you got close to it did you see it as maybe this is going to be a threat to American power or economics and all?

DOBBINS: I thought that there were certainly areas in which we were competitors, but those areas tended to be one where healthy competition was beneficial to both sides. And there were many areas of mutual dependency. I thought the European unification was as much a product of American as European policy, and it was as much an accomplishment for the United States as it was for the Europeans who had put it together, and that we continued to have a strong interest in encouraging and facilitating this development.

Q: Going right back to Acheson and George Ball and all, you had the Europeanists in our diplomatic establishment, power establishment, who had been strong for this. This is really cornerstone of our postwar policy, to keep the Germans and French from fighting each other, essentially. But did you see a different group developing, not the Europeanist but the ones who were not wild about the development of the European Community within our policy community.

DOBBINS: I think there was always a clear primacy given to the NATO relationship, which after all we belonged to, rather than the European Union. There was certainly a considerable skepticism about the European Community getting more involved in security policy. I think people were not particularly concerned about its efforts to create a common foreign policy, as long as security policy was put to the side and handled through NATO. But the idea that when it became a common foreign and security policy it began to raise questions.

But the Bush administration was quite pro-European, all of the major figures. The president, the national security adviser was pro-European. Jim Baker didn't have strong views one-way or the other. He was just a pragmatist and the Europeans were important for a variety of reasons, and we cooperated with them quite effectively through the German unification and the end of the Cold War. So the relationships became quite close and quite positive.

The Clinton administration, I think, was also strongly multilateralist, internationalist. I think there was some danger in the early Clinton administration that they would put more emphasis on the United Nations than on, say, NATO and the trans-Atlantic relationship. But that view foundered after the disasters in Somalia and the early problems in Haiti, and the Administration abandoned that and went to a more pragmatic realpolitik (politics of reality) view.

So in both the Clinton and Bush administrations, Europe was pretty central to our approach. Now, it became a little less central as we began to focus on issues like Somalia or Haiti, where Europe was not central. But once the Balkans in the latter half of the '90s again became the major focus of our overseas interventions, the Europeans again became our principal partners. The Clinton administration in about its second or third year, I guess, made a decision to favor NATO expansion and put its effort behind that, which also linked them very closely to Europe and made European policy and European objectives a centerpiece of the administration's overall foreign policy.

I had had some doubts about whether expanding NATO or the European Union made sense, because I thought it was going to be extremely difficult to maintain the effectiveness of either organization if you greatly expanded its membership. I also thought it was likely to antagonize Russia, and I thought Russia was the only serious security problem in the region, and that as long as you had a good relationship with Russia, you didn't really need an expanded alliance. Expanded alliance only made sense if you were anticipating Russian hostility.

I later came to change this view after my experience in the Balkans and the recognition that the expansion of NATO had really nothing to do with defending these countries from external aggressors and everything to do with defending them from themselves. That is, providing a framework in which they could adopt responsible political and economic reforms and achieve cooperative relationships with their neighbors.

Q: Well, in a way, this was one of the underpinnings of NATO, was, say, to keep the French and Germans from looking over their shoulder at the other and saying, "Well, they've got a few more tanks than we have." Get that nonsense out of the way.

DOBBINS: I would have preferred, at the time, trying to replicate the kind of Marshall Plan aid by providing a large package of aid for all of the former Warsaw Pact on the condition that they agreed among themselves how to spend it, which would have tended to compel them to cooperate more closely with Russia in defining priorities for the region. Whereas the Clinton administration was responsive to the desires of the countries of Eastern Europe not to associate themselves with Russia, rather it gave a different emphasis to the policy, and the emphasis did to some degree pull the East Europeans closer to the West and create a gulf with the Russians. But the Clinton administration managed to attenuate that difficulty fairly successfully as a result of its policies toward Russia.

Q: Well, as ambassador to the EC, how did you operate? It's quite a different job in Brussels than being the ambassador, say, to Belgium, per se, or something like that. Was it sort of a joint collegial group, or did you have to touch base with everybody, or how did you work?

DOBBINS: We had three American ambassadors in town, the ambassador to Belgium, the ambassador to NATO. There really wasn't much overlap with the ambassador to Belgium. We had cordial personal relations and social relations, but we didn't do much business with each other. The embassy to Belgium did do the administrative work for all three missions, so there were some questions of motor pools and that sort of thing that would come up. There was a substantive overlap with the mission to NATO as the Europeans became more engaged in security policy. At that stage, it wasn't as great as it became subsequently, but there was a certain requirement for occasional coordination on issues.

For instance, when Secretary Christopher came on one of his failed missions to sell America policy toward the Balkans, the lift and strike mission, he spent the morning with my clients at the European Union, and then he spent the afternoon at NATO, making the same pitch. There was certainly an overlap between what I was doing and what the bilateral U.S. embassies in all of that that point, I can't remember whether it was 12 or 15 countriein the European Union did. So there was a collaboration with them.

The job did involve travel to member countries and aspirant member countries for consultations. The focus of the work was mostly economic, because that was the area where the European Community and the Commission's powers were most fully developed. So the areas on which I spent most of my time tended to be trade. We were in the midst of the Uruguay round. Agriculture was a major bone of contention. There were ongoing negotiations, which I participated in, on agricultural trade. There were periodic summits of the president and the president of the European Union. I think once a year at that time President Bush came or we went to Washington once a year for summit meetings, and then there were semiannual meetings, which Secretary Baker came to, and they too tended to focus on agriculture.

Q: With agriculture, you're up against particularly the German-French bloc that is out to preserve its agriculture, which for the most part it's almosthey talk about small farms, but it really isn't small farms. But it's very much part of the German and French soul and all. Could we get anywhere with that?

DOBBINS: We did reach an agreement while I was there on agriculture, which became the basis for a successful conclusion of the Uruguay round. It somewhat limited transfer payments to farmers, support payments, and it pushed them into a more transparent fashion, and particularly into a fashion that didn't artificially increase production, so that it reduced the surpluses which then had to be dumped on the international market, somewhat.

It was very complicated, because we have our own agricultural subsidies, which we wanted to protect, and the Europeans, each country had very different interests. So there was a lot of tension on the European side, among the European players, and even within the commission, between Delors, who was the president of the commission and the commissioner for agriculture, a guy named McSharry and the commissioner for trade, who was in charge of the overall commission trade policy, but had limited influence over its agriculture elements. There was a lot of tension in the U.S. government between USTR (United States Trade Representative) who was in overall charge, and the secretary of agriculture, who was playing a similar role within the U.S.

Both of them tended to resist any involvement by me or my mission, except when they got in trouble. So when things were going okay, they made their best efforts to keep us uninformed and not allow us to participate, and then when they'd come up against some disaster and the negotiations would appear nearing collapse, they would then ask for assistance.

Q: Well, what would you do? Was there a group within the European community of diplomats, technocrats, or whatever you want to call them, that you can get together with and go, "Okay, we've got a problem here. How do we solve this?"

DOBBINS: Yes, I don't know that you got them together. You'd have to see them seriatim for the most part, but I worked pretty closely with the British ambassador, somewhat less with the German ambassador, but the British ambassador tended to be helpful, as did his staff. I could see Delors or any of the commissioners or their senior staff and when things began to get difficult, I would go see the individual commissioners seriatim until I saw a way through whatever the difficulty was. And usually we could overcome the difficulty with some effort, back some people down by creating some countervailing pressures.

I worked with Delors' chief of staff, who is now the EU commissioner for trade, Pascal Lamy. He was at the time Delors' chief of staff. So we played, I think broadly, a helpful role in moving the negotiations forward, although there were times when both USTR and Agriculture didn't like it, and I can remember the secretary of agriculture screaming at me on the phone once because, in his view, of imagined transgression on my part, so it wasn't always easy.

Q: Did you find the French and the German representatives particularly hard to deal with?

DOBBINS: I didn't deal much with the French representative. I'm trying to remember who it was, but the answer was no, not at a personal level.

Q: I was thinking more of a policy level.

DOBBINS: It would depend on the issue. The French official who was in charge of their trade policy in the Quai d'Orsay (French Foreign Office) and I became friends. He was quite engaging. He was de Gaulle's son in law, and he was quite an engaging fellow whom I became friendly with. So, no, I think I got along quite well with all of the people I had to deal with there.

Q: Did you find the British somewhat off to one side within the organization?

DOBBINS: Well, on some issues, like common currency, they were, because I think they weren't planning on joining it. But on others they weren't. Certainly on the trade and agricultural issues, they were as much a player as anyone.

Q: How about on the common currency? How did you, from your perspective, view was this going to happen or not? This is the European ...

DOBBINS: I thought it was going to happen and I kept predicting that they would overcome the various difficulties that they had. There wasn't a clear U.S. policy on it. I went and called at the Treasury before I went out there, and I met with the secretary of the treasury and he had all of his senior staff. The deputy secretary was there, the undersecretary, the assistant secretary, they were all there, and they were all eyeing me somewhat suspiciously. And I said, "Well, what's our attitude toward the prospect of a common European currency," and I was really stunned when the secretary of the treasury looked to his colleagues and said, "Well, we really haven't discussed that. Interesting question." And he said, "I meet with the G-7 (Group of Seven) ministers all the time, my European colleagues, none of them have ever talked about it either."

Then I also called on Greenspan and asked him ...

Q: He was the head of the Federal Reserve at that time, wasn't he?

DOBBINS: Yes. And asked him the same question and got a completely different answer. He said, "Yes, of course, I meet with the G-7 central bank governors, and we talk about this all the time, and I think on balance it's probably a good thing for us." So there certainly wasn't a concerted view on the subject. I had my own view and nobody really interfered with me.

The United States had, as part of the process of German unification, given a major impulse to the next stage of European unification, which included a common currency. We didn't specifically advocate a common currency, but we did advocate that one of the responses to the concerns about a unified Germany would be to link it even more closely with a unified Europe. So we were to certain degree a father of the Maastricht Treaty.

Q: I was interviewing Janice Day just recently, who was economic counselor in Paris.

DOBBINS: Has she retired?

Q: She's just retired. And she was saying that she founthis was a little later on, I think in the mid '90that our representatives in Europe were saying, "This is a done deal, it's going to happen," but back in Washington, for the most part, our people in Treasury and other places were talking to the British, who were much more skeptical, and they were reading the Financial Times and all. So they were quite dubious, and there was a certain split between sort of our people in Europe and our people back in Washington, because of sort of the common language, which was something was getting lost.

DOBBINS: Right.

Q: How did we look upon Germany and its unification growing pains and all that?

DOBBINS: Benignly, I think. We recognized this was a difficult problem and expensive. We were sympathetic, made some efforts to interest American firms in investments in the East and get the Germans to facilitate that, but I don't think much ever came of that. But we were benignly sympathetic and helpful on the margins.

Q: Well, with the Danes giving this problem with the referendum, what did this mean? Every member of the community had to vote to approve the Maastricht Treaty?

DOBBINS: They had to ratify it, and they had to follow their own national procedures for ratification. Some states chose to hold a referendum, some didn't, but the way the treaty was written, it did have to be ratified by all of them to come into effect.

Q: Did you find yourself leaning on the Danes or doing anything?

DOBBINS: Well, I didn't have much influence with the Danes. I remember talking to the Danish foreign minister and others, but I didn't go give speeches in their local campaigns. The United States positioned itself as being supportive of European unification without advocating any particular detail of it, and I think the positive American attitude was probably helpful in a country like Denmark, where American views would have had some influence. If they had been hostile, it might have had a different result.

Q: Where was Sweden in this, and Norway?

DOBBINS: Sweden hadn't joined at that stage, but was moving toward membership at that point, Sweden and Finland were, both. And I visited Sweden, and I knew the prime minister and I went there and had lunch with him and chatted, though we mostly chatted about Russia, not about the EU membership. But Sweden was moving toward EU membership.

Q: Turkey, what was happening about Turkey?

DOBBINS: Not much at that time. From the EU standpoint, I can't recall getting involved in Turkey. I had been involved when I was in the European Bureau with Turkey, and we had come close to getting a Cyprus settlement. I had accompanied President Bush to both Ankara and Athens in an effort to wrap that up, which in the end failed. But Turkey was not at that stage an active issue in the EC. It wasn't on the list of countries that were likely to get in anytime soon.

Q: I mean, first place, could you explain the relationship betweewhat is ithe Parliament of Europe in Strasbourg and the European Community, at that time, in Brussels? How did these two, how did they work?

DOBBINS: Well, there were two parliaments in Strasbourg. There was the Council of Europe, which had a parliament, and then there was the European Parliament, which was the institution of the European Community. They both met in the same building. The Council of Europe was a bigger organization, which had, like 21 countries, whereas the European Union at that time had, I can't remember, either 12 or 15. It may have been 12 at the time.

The European Community also had a court system. They had the European Court that adjudicated European law. It had the commission, which was the executive arm, and it had a parliament. The parliament had only limited powers, powers which have since been increased, but at the time were fairly limited, and therefore we didn't pay much attention to it. It was marginal from the standpoint of U.S. interests. There were American congressional exchanges with it occasionally, nothing very substantial. Two or three American congressmen would come once a year for a day or so of discussions, and I would go down and join them, usually, for that.

The parliament would occasionally ask me to meet with them. I'd meet with a committee and they'd want to hear about American policy on a given subject, and so I remember meeting with their Foreign Affairs Committee on one or two things, and sometimes individual parliamentarians. I spent a lot of time with business groups that were interested in promoting trans-Atlantic relationships, and sometimes parliamentarians would participate in that, so I knew some of the parliamentarians very well. But we didn't spend any time lobbying the parliament. It didn't have any power, so it wasn't something that we tried to actively influence.

Q: Well, were we observing and looking at a growing net of European regulations, many of them economic or legal, which would impact on us on us or trade?

DOBBINS: Well, there were a lot, and that's why there were a number of American law firms that had offices in Brussels, and American business was quite interested in the European Union. I would see would American CEOs that would be coming through Brussels and we'd have lunch or dinner and talk about the European Union. That was a fairly regular event.

By and large, American business was positive. In other words, the regulations that were being imposed were standardizing. For the most part, they weren't imposing regulations on things that were unregulated. They were imposing regulations on things that were regulated 12 different ways. So from a standpoint of American business, for the most part, this facilitated trade with Europe, because it meant that you could in many areas meet a single standard rather than having to meet 12 different standards with your product.

The antitrust element, or what they call competition policy element, was growing stronger, and that was raising some problems for American firms, but at that stage at least it hadn't gotten to the point where it was challenging mergers and acquisitions of American firms other than in Europe, whereas now it's taking a more global view. So, American business and economic interests were quite interested in what was going on, but they weren't hostile, for the most part.

Q: Had the movement againsI'm trying to think of what the term is.

DOBBINS: Biotechnology?

Q: Yes, biotechnology and foods and all has become quite a major problem in the United States.

DOBBINS: It was just starting.

Q: Were we seeing this as a problem then?

DOBBINS: Yes, I mean, we were making representations. At that stage, it was less of a problem, because the industry was smaller, but it was already an issue between us.

Q: Did you see it as a means of sticking it to the United States and helping competition, or was this a real feeling within the people in this movement?

DOBBINS: Well, it represented European conservatism, which was a factor in most areas, social and cultural conservatism, and a cautious approach to technology that was distinct from the United States. The issue was just getting running and there weren't large lobby groups in Europe on the subject, but it was clear that the Europeans were going to approach this with a different set of preconceptions.

Q: On the subject of first Eastern Europe, and then we'll talk about Russia at that time, how did we view majoPoland and Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romanihow did we view that at the time you were there? Did we see this group really sort of coming in and being a major player?

DOBBINS: No. I'm not sure we do even today think of them as major players. During the time I was there, we were still uncertain of where they would fit in a new architecture. We had certainly set up arrangements in what was then called CSCE and began to have relations or consultation with NATO, but we hadn't made the basic decision, and neither had the Europeans, that we would support ultimate membership in Western organizations for these states. That was still being debated and really wasn't settled by the Clinton administration until after I left this job.

Q: Well, did they have the equivalent to lobbyists coming in and watching?

DOBBINS: Yes, again they certainly had ambassadors, and Russia had an ambassador to the European Community who I met with. He was a former prime minister of Russia, and the East Europeans in general were pressing very strongly for full membership in these organizations, and making their pitch to any forum they could get to listen to them.

Q: Well, looking at the former Soviet Union, one can't help but looking at Ukraine as beinthis is a big place with a lot of rich potential and all that, and it has real potential. How did we view it at the time?

DOBBINS: Well, I was somewhat skeptical that Ukraine was really a viable nation that would long-remain separated from Russia, given the fact that it had almost never existed as such. But the administration made a decision. The Clinton administration surely, and somewhat less definitely, the first Bush administration, that we had a national interest in Ukraine's territorial integrity and independence and we were prepared to provide it assistance and support. One of the initial issues was to de-nuclearize it as quickly as possible, and that was a major focus and quite successful focus of policy.

Q: Did you notice any change when the Bush administration left and the Clinton administration came in? I must say, in my interviews, one comes away with Bush I, certainly not Bush II, but Bush I was probably one of the most well honed administrations regarding foreign policy that we've ever had.

DOBBINS: The Ford administration was very good, too.

Q: But did you get any feel for sort of an uncertain hand on the foreign relations tiller? When the Clinton administration came in, this was not an administration that had been focused on foreign policy. It was the economy.

DOBBINS: Yes, and I think that the aspect that I saw directly in my job in Brussels was the Balkans. Clearly, the Christopher's effort on the lift and strike mission, where he went around Europe selling a policy he himself didn't much believe in and then went back and reported failure showed a considerable lack of certainty and deftness.

Other than Yugoslavia, the Clinton administration's early focus tended to be elsewhere, and a lot of the questions were sort of, "What are they ultimately going to do?" I think the Europeans were pleased in the areas that I was working on that the Clinton administration did stress continuity in its trade and economic policies. They picked up the Uruguay round where the Bush administration had left it, concluded the negotiations fairly rapidly and had also of course gone ahead and gotten NAFTA (North American Free Trade Alliance) ratified, which the Bush administration had negotiated but hadn't been able to ratify.

So on the trade and economic policy side, there was continuity and competence. On the security policy side, there was a lot more uncertainty. You had a new team of people who had mostly been pretty junior when they were last in power. It had been 12 years at that stage since the Democrats had been in power, so most of the people in the senior positions either had no experience or had experience at quite junior levels of government, and they made a number of serious mistakes in the first year or so from which it took them a while to recover.

Q: What type of mistakes?

DOBBINS: Well, I mentioned the Yugoslav policy. The others, of course, were on Somalia, which I got dragged into as a result of after I left Brussels, and Haiti. I mean, allowing gays in the military to become your first issue as you come out of an election showed a very unprofessional sense of prioritization and discipline within the Clinton White House. We had the same problems with the early Carter presidency, with the early Reagan presidency. Transitions are much more dangerous than the American people recognize. We're lucky we don't have more disasters when these people come in, if it's been a long time since that party was in power, you have a very amateurish group with strong preconceptions that don't accord well with reality.

Q: Did Japan enter? Japan was sort of the other 500-pound gorilla in the economy field. Where was that at that time, from the European Union point of view?

DOBBINS: Japan, like the United States, had an embassy. They had a quite senior ambassador, whom I saw quite regularly, and he and I were the sort of two major non-members who counted most, particularly on the trade issues, and I would try to concert with my Japanese colleague on trade issues when our interests were compatible. And we certainly met fairly regularly and traded insights as to what was going on.

Q: How about China?

DOBBINS: I don't think China had an ambassador to the European Union. They hadn't really emerged from their isolation at that point. This was before they were trying to get into the WTO (World Trade Organization), so I don't think I ever came across anybody from China in my Brussels period.

Q: How did you view Russia from the vantage point of Brussels?

DOBBINS: I met a couple of times, had lunch with the Russian ambassador, who had been Yeltsin's first prime minister.

Q: What was his name?

DOBBINS: I have no idea, but he was an old apparatchik. He sort of looked like Khrushchev, sort of overweight, red in the face, couldn't speak English. He tried to be very nice, and he was certainly ingratiating and pleasant, and definitely wanted to try to achieve a good relationship with the United States. We didn't have a lot to talk about. They were just sorting out their own problems. They weren't sure what their relations with the European Community were going to be. He rather liked the views I was putting forward in my speeches, and he came to a conference I hosted about how Russia ought to relate to former members of the Warsaw Pact, because I was arguing against expanding NATO and the European Union at that point. So we had a pleasant relationship to the extent you can with somebody who doesn't speak your language, and he wasn't a sophisticated diplomat. He was a Russian politician.

Q: Well, then, by the time you left in '93, how far had the European Union come along in that two-year period?

DOBBINS: I think by then Denmark may have had a second referendum and ratified the treaty, and so it was clear that that was going to go forward. They were floundering in the Balkans and continued to flounder for another couple of years. But we successfully concluded the Uruguay round and relations were generally good, except for the Balkans, which was a big exception.

Q: Well, with the Balkans, were you getting recriminations from your European colleagues of why don't you do more, and all of that?

DOBBINS: Well, there were a lot of recriminations. They tended to get worse after I left, but there certainly were a lot of mutual recriminations.

Q: Was the trend more intra-EC? Because, in a way, they had said, "This is our problem, we'll take care of it," but then, as you were saying, we kind of tended to undercut them.

DOBBINS: Yes, we undercut them and failed to support them consistently, and they failed to measure up to the problem for a variety of institutional, as well as political, reasons. There were undoubtedly tensions within the EC on the issue as well, but the most important tensions were the trans-Atlantic tensions.

Q: Did you see the possibility of a real united Europe with a common foreign policy and all of that, or was this going to be more of a federation without a very strong head to it?

DOBBINS: Well, I'd say yes to both. I mean, I thought that Europe would continue to unite. I thought it was a process without a fixed end. It wasn't going to end up in any finite time in the United States or Europe, but the process would continue and it would gradually consolidate. I thought that was quite likely, and I thought that was something worth supporting. I tended to, in my public speeches, push the Europeans in that direction and urge them to move faster than they were moving, and challenge them in that regard. But I thought that the process had very substantial momentum and broad support among elites throughout Europe, as I still do.

Q: Did you see the British, though, sort of standing off to one side and all at this point?

DOBBINS: Well, on the foreign and security, yes, and the currency area. There was a debate within the British government on the issue, an active debate. It was a conservative government at the time. There was an active debate within the British government, and the British were often spoilers on some issues, but they were quite active on others, so it would vary from issue to issue. They weren't categorically against all forms of further integration, but they tended to be somewhat more skeptical and to approach it issue by issue.

Q: Was there any particular fallout? This is after the Gulf War in the 1990s with Iraq over Kuwait. Was there any fallout from that or were there any developments within Europe?

DOBBINS: No, not that I recall. The Gulf War was considered a quite successful exercise in U.S.-European collaboration. People were quite satisfied. No, I don't recall any difficulties. There was minor complaining that we seemed to get all of the contracts out of the Kuwaiti reconstruction, but no, it wasn't a problem.

Q: When you left in '93, what?

DOBBINS: Well, when I initially came back, they didn't initially have a job for me. I was replaced because the administration decided they wanted to find a place for Stuart Eizenstadt, who had been a senior White House adviser in the Carter administration and whom they were looking for a place more suitable to his talents. So I was moved out earlier than a normal Foreign Service rotation, and initially there wasn't anything offered, and, in fact, the director general of the Foreign Service asked whether I'd considered retiring.

Q: How old were you at that point?

DOBBINS: Well, I guess this was '93, so I was 52.

Q: That's not very ...

DOBBINS: And there really wasn't much on offer at that stage. European Bureau said that they were going to support time for ambassador to Turkey, but when I found out that Mark Grossman, who was the executive secretary of the department and quite close to Christopher was also interested in going to Turkey, I knew that that wasn't going to happen. I went to Rand. I was asked to go to the Defense Department as the deputy assistant secretary of defense, but then that place was such an administrative mess that it never came to fruition. I came to Rand, to the Washington office of Rand, where I, at the invitation of the president of Rand, became a senior fellow. I was seconded from the State Department, I hadn't left State, and I guess I spent like three or four months there in what I had anticipated what would be a year or two.

I got called on once to do a project for Christopher on the State budget and how to improve its presentation and the prospects of congressional support for increases, and I spent a couple of weeks doing that and made the presentation to Christopher, but that was a very brief project. Then, about two days after the Blackhawk down incident ...

Q: This is in Somalia ...

DOBBINS: Where the helicopter went down and 18 Rangers were killed and an American soldier's body was dragged through the streets, and the policy cratered and the administration decided it was going to withdraw our forces. I got a call from Peter Tarnoff, who was the undersecretary for political affairs, saying that they needed to put somebody in charge of Somalia policy in order to ensure that we made a graceful exit ...

[End Side]

Q: Yes.

DOBBINS: The decision was we'd stay six more months and then leave, so they needed somebody to take over the oversight of the Somalia operation and try to extricate us with as much grace as possible, leaving behind a force without us that would cover our retreat and make it look less abject. So I went back to the department and became the special Somalia coordinator, which turned out to be the first of a succession of such jobs, and I did that for, I guess, six or eight months, essentially until we pulled out.

Q: Well, this would be in, what, '94 about?

DOBBINS: Ninety-three, I think. It would have been late '93 to early '94, probably.

Q: When you got there, sort of what was the word? This was not your field of expertise at all. What were you getting from Africa and also from the military about this?

DOBBINS: Well, the military was relieved to have someone in charge at State, so they were perfectly happy, and certainly the Pentagon felt that the main reason that the policy had cratered was that State hadn't held up its end of the policy, and in consequence the military had gotten overextended and asked to do too many things. The assistant secretary for African Affairs was perfectly happy to transfer this responsibility to someone else, because it wasn't something he felt comfortable doing, wasn't something he was temperamentally suited for, and he was a gentleman and a very pleasant person. So he was more than happy to have somebody else who would take this off of his shoulders.

I think the rest of the bureau resented it and felt, "Why is this guy coming in? He doesn't know anything about the region. Why is he suddenly being parachuted in, and where does he fit?" We more or less got over this, and there was sort of uncertainty about exactly who I worked for and what the arrangements were. But we worked our way through all that, and we were broadly successful in achieving what had been set out for us to do, which is get the troops out, create enough of a peace process among the various warlords so it looked like we were making some progress and recruit a coalition that was prepared to stay for a year or two after we left, and I basically did that.

Q: Well, did you get any feel toward the feeling toward Jonathan Howe?

DOBBINS: Sure. I had known Howe quite well. Howe came from the State Department, you'll recall, and he was director of political-military affairs for two years, before he became deputy national security adviser. Well, there were a lot of people who were inclined to blame the problem on Howe, and he certainly contributed to it, but the problem was mainly made in Washington. It was a series of decisions and non-decisions by the new Clinton team that wasn't paying attention that made decisions without adequate forethought. So I think that the blame, mostly in my judgment, was Christopher, Lake, Aspin, and the president as much as it was Jonathan Howe or Boutros Ghali.

The administration was happy to blame it on the United Nations and successfully passed off a lot of the blame on the United Nations, but the problems were really ones of our own making, including a screwed-up command situation in Somalia itself, which was the responsibility of the Pentagon and the military, including, I would guess, Colin Powell, who left only a short time before the disaster, but who must have had some role in setting up what turned out to be a flawed command structure.

Q: How were your relations with the Department of Defense on this?

DOBBINS: Pretty good. As I said, the Department of Defense was delighted that there was somebody they could turn to on the State side, because previously the responsibility had been dispersed and so there was a single person to call.

Q: Well, did you feel you had been handed a poison apple in a way? I mean, "Here's a mess. Let's give it to Dobbins and see what he does with it," or something.

DOBBINS: Well, in a sense. One of the differences I learned from another colleague who left the government to go into industry, when you go into industry, you want soluble problems, because your pay and your bonuses and your recognition are going to depend on your having brought concrete results. In the government, it's insoluble problems you want, because the more important the problem is and the more difficult it is, the more amount of staff, money, time and access to senior officials you'll get. So one of the most senior positions in the administration the last 50 years has been whoever's in charge of the Middle East peace process, right? He's not going to solve it. It's never been solved. It's not going to be solved, but it's still a prestigious position.

Similarly, for my career, who was in charge of fighting the Cold War? The assistant secretary for European affairs, because it included Russia and NATO, was a key official, not because he was going to win the Cold War, but because he was in charge of managing an insoluble problem. So, in that sense, getting tapped to do things like Somalia or Haiti or Bosnia or Kosovo would have been a dead loser if you were in private industry where you had a bottom line to show at the end of the year, but in government service, it meant that you had access to the top, that you were running a major issue that people cared about. So it wasn't as unrewarding as it might have first appeared.

Q: How did you find the relationship between sort of the State people in Somalia and the Pentagon people? Who was our top diplomat at the time?

DOBBINS: Well, we fired the first one. Part of the change when I was brought in was to get rid of the ambassador; he was thought to have shared responsibility for the problem. Gosende, I think was his name. So he left and a guy named Dick Bogosian, who I had worked with in Paris on my first assignment, knew pretty well and liked, he was a wonderful person, and who had been an Africanist, was sent to be our ambassador there, which was a very difficult and dangerous job.

He and I cooperated very closely. We talked every day. He was my principal implementer on the ground, and his relations with the military were very good.

Q: Did we see any possibility at that time of getting anywhere with the Somalis, or were they so fragmented?

DOBBINS: We very significantly reinforced our military strength there in an effort to stabilize the situation, and there was a brief hope that we could use that enforced strength to expand our control over the situation, but when we tried to do that, the senior levels of the administration, including in particular Christopher, said, "Absolutely not. No risks. Just stay in the foxholes, don't get out. Six months, we're leaving." So despite the fact that we now had the firepower and the increased presence that would have allowed us to assert more control in Mogadishu and tamp down some of the worst chaos, we chose not to do it.

We did promote a fairly active negotiating effort among the warlords. We actually flew Aideed to one of the meetings, which created great controversy, just the fact that we facilitated his going somewhere on a U.S. military plane after what he had done was a source of some anxiety back here. And I went out there and met with all of the Somalis. I met with them in neighboring Kenya rather than Mogadishu itself. It was virtually impossible to see people in Mogadishu. We made a little bit of progress. We actually got them all together. There were some discussions, but in the end they didn't amount to anything. And once we were out, we pretty much lost interest.

Q: Somalia, pulling out, I recall somebody saying that when we were trying to put pressure on the Serbs later on, they kept throwing the figure 18 at us, saying, "You can't take losses and you're going to pull out, so we don't have to worry about you really committing yourselves."

DOBBINS: I think a lot of people probably thought that. I don't know that many of them talked to us about it to our face, but there was certainly a lot of uncertainty about that, and the administration did a lot to substantiate that, by putting so much emphasis on force protection and avoiding casualties. On the other hand, we also demonstrated that, properly applied, we could exercise a lot of leverage even without suffering any casualties. After all, we won the war in Kosovo and concluded the war in Bosnia without suffering any casualties in both cases.

Q: It must have been a rather nervous time for you and others when we were pulling our troops out. It's always hard to get out of a place under hostile fire, or did it go pretty well?

DOBBINS: There wasn't any physical risk or any substantial physical risk. The day before our troops left, Shalikashvili and I flew out to say goodbye to the assembled allies who were staying and holding the beach while we left, who were mostly Pakistanis and Indians and other third world countries, because none of our European allies would stay. But, Somalis weren't about to do anything that might reverse our decision to leave, and so there was no active effort to hinder our departure.

Q: Well, we I guess were the main power there. How did we keep the Pakistanis and Indians and others to keep their troops there. Did we have deals or something?

DOBBINS: I was sent around on a presidential mission, given a delegation and an airplane, and went to Pakistan and India and Morocco and Italy and one or two other countries, in an effort to persuade them to stay. They had their own reasons for staying. The Indians and the Pakistanis both liked to put their troops out on peacekeeping missions, because it was a good way of training them at somebody else's expense, so they had that incentive. The Egyptians, I went to Cairo. Other countries had national interests in Somalia that they felt worth pursuing. Others simply had felt stronger about the United Nations than we did and were inclined to support it, so for a variety of reasons, the countries were prepared to stay, and we gave them not firm commitments, but a general understanding that if things got bad, we would help extricate them, which we ultimately did. So, each country that stayed had reasons of its own to do it, and it was a fairly substantial force that stayed.

Q: Where did you go, or what were you doing after this sort of taking this particular chestnut out of the fire?

DOBBINS: First of all, when it came to the end, they had nothing for me to do, which was somewhat annoying. Then, we had an arrangement where I was supposed to become the department's special peacekeeping coordinator, which I would sort of play the role I played with Somalia, but with respect to all of the peacekeeping operations around the world, a position which created great neuralgia in the International Organizations Bureau that was supposed to be doing that, but wasn't.

We created the position and it existed for a few weeks, and then the administration decided that they would get serious about Haiti and threaten an invasion if it couldn't be politically resolved, and I was asked whether I would like to become a sort of point person for that policy. When I said yes, we dropped the special peacekeeping and I just moved on to Haiti, which I then did for two years.

Q: All right, so we'll move to Haiti. This will be what?

DOBBINS: Well, this would be '94 to '96.

Q: Jim, again, you were doing this, what was the title regarding Haiti?

DOBBINS: Well, it changed, because initially they brought in a fellow named Bill Gray, who had been a former congressman.

Q: Yes, head of the Black Caucus, from Philadelphia, I believe.

DOBBINS: Right, and he had retired from Congress a few years earlier but remained an important leader within the black community, and he was brought in al can't remember what his title was, but something like presidential adviser, special presidential adviser, or something like that, on Haiti, in order to give it some political visibility. And also because the administration itself was so beleaguered as the result of its mistakes over both Haiti and Somalia and had lost a lot of credibility as a result, and I think felt they needed some new faces and some effort to restore their credibility. Also, of course, this was responsive to the base of support for a more robust policy on Haiti, which was the Black Caucus in Congress, all of whom were Democrats.

So I was assigned as his deputy, so I think my title was something like deputy special adviser for Haiti, or something like that. I was the senior professional on that team, and it was actually a somewhat difficult situation, because both the NSC, both Sandy Berger and Tony Lake in the NSC and Strobe Talbott in the State Department, who were managing this effectively regarded me as their personal subordinate for managing it. And they regarded Bill Gray as not a figurehead, because he was too significant for that, but as somebody who needed to be managed and kept on task, and it was sort of my task to do that. Whereas Gray regarded me as his deputy, not theirs, and so I was rather constantly being pulled in two directions, because his views were often different from those of the senior elements of the administration. So it was a difficult period, which lasted really until a few weeks after we had invaded Haiti. I guess when Gray stepped down in that capacity formally when Aristide returned, which was about a month after the actual invasion.

Q: How did one deal, your attitude, Gray's attitude and all, dealing with various political conundrums of we were allowing, essentially, Cuban people to come into the United States if they got in ...

DOBBINS: At that point, we were allowing them in if they got out. Now we're only allowing them in if they get in. That is, if we catch them at sea now, we do return them to Cuba.

Q: But there is, one can almost say gross discrimination for Haitians, because at that time the Haitians had a ...

DOBBINS: Well, at that time, the human rights situation in Haiti was a good deal worse than it was in Cuba. Yes, it was gross discrimination, and this was the core of the black caucus argument and pressures. Randall Robinson's hunger crusade, which is what really turned the policy around.

Q: It doesn't ring a bell.

DOBBINS: Well, prior to my appointment, there had been a coup, President Aristide fled the country, and he'd continued to be recognized. The U.S. and the rest of the OAS (Organization of American States) and international community continued to accord him legitimacy. He eventually located in Washington as part of a government in exile. Nobody recognized what we called the de facto regime. Political and eventually economic sanctions had been applied by the United Nations. Most of that had occurred before the Clinton administration came into office. There had been an effort to negotiate an arrangement by which Aristide would return, but there would be safeguards for the factions that had ejected him, his powers would be somewhat limited, and an international peacekeeping force, which would consist of essentially trainers rather than a more robust force, would come in to begin trying to professionalize the Haitian army, which had staged a coup.

That effort foundered just three or four days after the Blackhawk down incident. The ship that contained these UN mandated military trainers, or at least the American componenthey weren't to be all Americans, but several hundred of them were to be Americanpulled into the harbor in Port-au-Prince and a small unruly crowd that had been generated by one of the local sort of extreme party leaders, who turned out to be a CIA agent, it was later learned, turned out a sort of small, unruly crowd on the pier. And the Clinton administration, terrified of yet another incident, actually turned the ship around and sailed out of the harbor, despite the fact that our deputy chief of mission, a slight woman, was standing on the pier, waiting for them to come ashore and was herself braving this hostile crowd without any support. These 700 U.S. soldiers sailed around and left, and this sort of retreat under fire was another extreme humiliation.

Shortly thereafter, Randall Robinson who was a black writer, leader, activist here in Washington, went on a hunger strike, saying he wasn't going to eat unless the administration changed its policy on returning Haitians asylum seekers without examining their claims to asylum, simply returning them to Haiti, making of course the comparison to the Cuban thing. He continued and got a good deal of publicity for this, for a couple of weeks, and it eventually became the catalyst that led Clinton to change the policy. It was the change in policy which led to Bill Gray's appointment, and a day or two later, my appointment.

The policy changed in two respects. One was the statement that implied that if we were not able to resolve the impasse over Haiti's political future diplomatically in a way that led to the return of Aristide, we were prepared to use force in that regard. The second was that we would not return Haitians, boat people, in effect, people who were intercepted at sea, we would not return them to Haiti until we had at least examined their claim for asylum. So that was the policy, the announcement that was more or less coincident with my appointment, and those were the policies that I was supposed to coordinate the implementation of.

Q: Could you describe our perception of the situation in Haiti, the government and that type of situation?

DOBBINS: There was a good deal of misinformation, among other things, because this was a period during which there was a considerable gap between what the administration policymakers wanted, and what the intelligence community, particularly the CIA, thought was wise. This was the period during which the CIA director at the time had reportedly poor relations with the administration, and the information, the CIA had fairly extensive assets and contacts, but they tended to be with only one spectrum of the society there, that is, those who had been in control for a while, the military in particular. So the reporting did tend to be skewed, and the embassy reporting was a little less skewed.

Q: And when you arrived on the scene, you were aware, this was general knowledge.

DOBBINS: No, I don't know that it was general knowledge, but it was pretty evident in the debates in the situation room that the intelligence community tended to paint. As things moved toward the possibility of an intervention, I think they tended to predict a greater degree of resistance and a more effective capacity of the regime there to mount some sort of prolonged resistance than in fact proved to be the case.

The intelligence community was also very skeptical of Aristide. They had apparently briefed before I got there the Congress that he was not only mentally unbalanced, but also dependent on drugs, was a drug abuser as well as mentally unstable. Now, I think to some degree in retrospect, their cautions on Aristide have proved justified, but clearly the idea that he was mentally unbalanced drug addict was not substantiated by his subsequent behavior. Some of the other cautions about his attitudes and likely behavior in power were better substantiated. In any case, there was a pretty big gulf in the administration between those who thought he had been democratically elected, had shown poor judgment, but basically had the right instincts and with the right amount of guidance and support could be channeled constructively and those who felt that he was incorrigible. So there were pretty strong divisions on that score.

I don't know that the Pentagon had a view on Aristide. They simply didn't want to get engaged on this and were strongly resistant until a couple of months before the intervention. Then they did come around, but for the first few months of these debates, they were strongly opposed to any use of force, or even any involvement in the peacekeeping activity. So that was an uphill battle. There were a lot of debates within the administration, and the knowledge was somewhat limited simply by the fact that this was a country that the United States had largely ignored for 200 years.

Q: Well, first place, with the CIA, you mentioned that the person who demonstrated, got his 700 followers to demonstrate against our landing of troops.

DOBBINS: It was the FRAPH (Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti).

Q: Well, the CIA, the guy who was on the payroll, was this not a CIA action, but just sort of a rogue action?

DOBBINS: I'm not sure. There were a lot of subsequent press articles about his status with the CIA, and I'm really basing my comment on what was in the press. There are different types of agents, whether he was somebody whom they were paying to do what they wanted him to do, or somebody who was simply providing them information and doing what he wanted to do. I don't think there was any suggestion that he had mounted this demonstration at the CIA's behest, but there was a feeling that if he was and had been somebody who had been working with the CIA for an extended period of time, and the press reports suggested that was the case, that the agency ought to at least had a reasonable prospect of having known that he was doing this. And having some sense of what its dimensions were, how threatening it was, what was likely to happen if the troops came ashore, rather than having this occur as a complete surprise. At best, it demonstrated a lack of coordination within the U.S. organization.

Q: Did you take the measure personally?

DOBBINS: Constant. Constant was that guy's name.

Q: The guy who organized the ...

DOBBINS: And the head of the FRAPH, Toto Constant. He became a folk figure at the time, because then he fled to the United States, and then the Haitians wanted him back to try him for crimes against humanity, and we eventually kept him here under bizarre circumstances, largely because we didn't think they would be able to give him a decent trial. So I think he is still living with his mother somewhere in Brooklya weird case. Anyway, Haiti was among the interventions I've dealt with, the one in which the U.S. administration was most disorganized and at odds with itself.

Q: Well, did you have a chance to take the personal measure of Aristide?

DOBBINS: To some degree, but Aristide was at this point pretty much on his best behavior and Bill Gray made an effort to sort of put aside all of the previous differences and try to establish a new relationship based on trust, and it worked for that period, because Aristide had every interest in accommodating us, provided we weren't trying to negotiate away his prerogatives when he returned to Haiti, which is where he would have resisted. So Aristide was on his best behavior, and Aristide could be quite charming and engaging, and he certainly gave the lie to the idea that he was a drug-crazed lunatic. He was quite coherent.

Q: Drug-crazed is the wrong thing, but throwing this in sounds a bit like you have a policy difference, what you try to do is denigrate the person. On the part of the CIA, it sounds a little ...

DOBBINS: Well, there were certainly those who felt that that was what was happening. There was certainly a deeply felt gulf here that made the interagency process extremely difficult, and there were a lot of leaks. The most damaging was the leak in which I think it was the New York Times that actually reported an intercepted phone conversation in which Aristide was quoted, verbatim, from a phone conversation on the basis of intercepted communications.

Q: This is the NSA, National Security Administration.

DOBBINS: I'm not sure who it was, since in fact he was in Washington at the time. Assuming that the intercept was in fact accurate, who intercepted it, I don't know, but it leaked. It had been briefed to the Intelligence Committee. It leaked. It wasn't clear where it had leaked from. The reporter was a reporter that covered the CIA and the Intelligence Committee, and I think that the general suspicion was that the leak probably had occurred from the Intelligence Committee. I don't think that was ever formally acknowledged, but this was the implication of things when they said, "We've got to tighten up our procedures." There was a feeling that they needed to pay more attention to that.

I mean the leak about him being a drug-dependent psychotic was also a leak of a classified CIA briefing which had been given to the intelligence community and which subsequently leaked to the press. So all this stuff was swirling around in the press.

Q: Here in many ways was our Haitian policy under Clinton, by the time you'd got there, designed almost more than anything else to mollify the Black Caucus?

DOBBINS: No, there were other elements. After all, it had been the Bush administration, which had imposed economic sanctions and secured OAS and UN resolutions calling for Aristide's return. I think that there was a feeling that there was an issue of principle here of some consequence. By this time, you had achieved democratic transitions in every country in Latin America except Cuba. Every president in Latin America, except Fidel Castro, had been freely elected, and so this was a reversal in a trend that was regarded as very positive, and there was bipartisan support for the concept that one should be willing to make an effort to preserve a democratic hemisphere.

There was that element, and then in the Clinton administration there was an element of what was caricatured by its critics as foreign policy is social work, that here you had an impoverished and repressed society only an overnight raft ride from our shores that needed more attention and that deserved a better future. So there were a variety of factors, and then there was the problem of refugees and that led to a lot of political pressures from Florida, for instance, to do something about the problem. So there were a variety of factors, but there's no doubt that, just as other ethnic communities in this country have influenced policy, whether it's the Polish community pushing for Poland's entry into NATO, or the Armenian community pushing us to engage on the behalf of Armenia. This is a fairly common phenomenon, so that the Haitian American community and the Black Caucus did take up the issue, in part because of the contrast to the way we were handling Cuban refugees.

The sad thing was that, unfortunately, at that point, there were no black Republicans in Congress, not one. Every member of Congress who was black was Democratic, and at that point, the Republican Party wasn't polling significantly among black constituencies across the country, and wasn't really trying to. Some of this has changed. As a result, all of the constituency was only exercising its weight in one party, and what the result was, whereas all of these interventions were controversial, they weren't partisan. That is, the controversy tended to split both parties. Even Iraq, more recently, splits the Democrats who think the war in Iraq was a good idea. There are Democrats who think it's a bad idea. And there are Republicans who think it's a bad idea and there are Republicans who think it's a good idea. Certainly that was true of the Balkans as well. There were significant Republican voices supporting the Clinton interventions, including, for instance, Bob Dole. But in the case of Haiti, there were no Republican voices who were arguing for intervention.

The support was exclusively Democratic, and so the issue became not only controversial but partisanly controversial in a way that none of the others were or subsequently became.

Q: Well, then, here you are. What were you doing? What was your organization doing?

DOBBINS: Well, first we had to create an organization, but that wasn't too big. We recruited a dozen or so people to manage the process. There were several streams. One, as it turned out to be, in many ways, the most time consuming, was dealing with the altered refugee policy, which had not been well thought out, and which quickly became almost unmanageable. The policy had been previously when Haitians were intercepted at sea by the Coast Guard, they were simply returned to Haiti without any review as to the validity of their claims to be political asylees.

The Clinton administration said that henceforth they would review those claims before returning them. The problem is that in order to review the claims, you need to interview the person and you need to make some judgment as to whether the individual is likely to suffer persecution of some sort if he returns to the country, or is he, alternatively, simply an economic refugee. He's fleeing because he's starving to death, not because he's going to get shot by the local constabulary when he gets back. And if he's just starving to death, then you can return him, in effect. Of course, there were programs to feed people in Haiti that were underway, so you could salve your conscience in that regard.

So you needed a process in which an interviewer who was qualified, which meant somebody from INS (Immigration and Naturalization Services) who had the appropriate training, could interview these people, which you could do on Coast Guard cutters if the numbers were limited. But pretty soon the numbers overwhelmed us, because as soon as the Haitians found out that there was a chance of getting in the United States, the number of boat people magnified tremendously. From a few dozen every day, it magnified to thousands and then tens of thousands every day that were taking anything that would float, getting into the water, getting out. They didn't have to try to get to the United States. They just had to get out far enough to get picked up a Coast Guard cutter, and then they were in the system, and then they had a chance of persuading whoever interviewed them.

So the change in policy greatly expanded the number of asylum seekers, so you needed a place to put them while you reviewed their cases pending their return. There was a lot of debate about where to put them. One thought was that we'd hire a few big ocean liners that would sort of cruise around and the cutters would bring them to the ocean liner and they'd be processed on the ocean liner and then returned. And we actually did go out and hire a couple of ocean liners, although I'm not sure any were actually used for it. This was a pretty crackpot scheme, actually. But then we decided we'd put them in Guantanamo. The military didn't like that, kept saying it wasn't possible, and then when they admitted it was possible, they'd say, "Okay, we're going to take 5,000," and then when we got 5,000 there, they'd say, "Well, we can't have any more," and we'd say, "You have to," and then they'd go up to 10,000. It eventually got up to about 40,000, if I recall.

This was all complicated because there was a simultaneous outflow of Cubans and there was a change in our Cuba policy about this time, so we ended up having a lot of Cubans detained in Guantanamo in more or less the same timeframe, and of course the two had to be kept separate. So Guantanamo was clearly filling up.

Then we had a policy where we were running around to other Caribbean nations to ask them to set up refugee processing centers, and one of my tasks was to fly down to meet with the president of Panama and persuade him, which I did briefly, to accept this. A lot of time was spent going around to Jamaica and Panama and Trinidad and other places that no one had ever heard of in the Caribbean and offering them huge sums of money to accept essentially a concentration camp for Haitians on their soil. We actually started building some of these camps, although I don't think we ever put anybody in any of them. There was this mounting pressure, because the immigration policy that the administration had announced was ultimately unsustainable.

Q: Were you there at the time when the policy was developed?

DOBBINS: No, it was announced coincident with Gray's and my appointment.

Q: Was anybody saying, "Hey, this is really going to trigger something?"

DOBBINS: Yes, all the professionals were saying, "Boy, you've got to watch what you're doing."

Q: Well, then, how did this particular part play out?

DOBBINS: Well, it was one of the factors that forced the intervention. As long as you were prepared to return people that were intercepted at sea to Haiti, you wouldn't have many people who were leaving, and as long as you didn't have many people who were leaving, you didn't have a refugee crisis. You had a human rights crisis in Haiti, because up to 1,500 people a year were being killed in politically connected violence, according to NGOs (nongovernmental organizations). So you had a human rights situation in Haiti, but you didn't have a refugee problem.

Once you began to acknowledge the human rights situation, once you began to acknowledge it, you then had a refugee policy. Once you had a refugee policy, you then had mounting pressure for an intervention to correct the human rights situation so that you could then begin returning people again, and that was the dynamic that ultimately led to the intervention. So one strain of what we were doing was running around with our hair on fire, dealing with this mounting refugee crisis, and the administration was very concerned that they had another fiasco on their hands, after the gays in the military...

Their credibility was pretty strained, and then another reversal, another admission that this policy was unsustainable would have been very difficult.

Q: Who were some of the principal players at the top of the Clinton administration in this?

DOBBINS: Lake, Berger and Talbott, and John Deutch in the Pentagon.

Q: Did you have the feeling that you really weren't getting good direction from above? Were you putting out fires?

DOBBINS: Well, I was getting good direction from Lake and Berger and Talbott in the sense that we were in daily or hourly contact, and there were lots of meetings. There were usually one or two meetings in the situation room every day. What was unclear until the end was whether the president was in fact prepared to launch an intervention. I have talked about one strand of what we were doing. The other strand was to create mounting pressures on the regime with a view to securing their agreement to Aristide's return, in other words, we vastly increased economic sanctions, we put a lot of pressure on the Dominicans and closed their border. We talked about putting some kind of military observer force along the Dominican border. That's something the Pentagon hated and effectively stonewalled.

Q: Why was the Dominican border important?

DOBBINS: Because it's Haiti's only border.

Q: Yes, but I mean were people fleeing across it?

DOBBINS: No, it was because if you have economic sanctions, you've got to close the border. The main thing that was being smuggled across was gasoline in five-gallon cans. We were forbidding travel by leaving Haitians, we were trying to secure international support for tougher sanctions, more comprehensive sanctions, so that was one strain. The second strain was trying to create an international consensus on a possible intervention, a legal basis for it, and trying to create a coalition that would actually mount the intervention. It would be largely U.S., but we wanted at least some international cover and appearance of participation, so we were recruiting tiny Caribbean islands whose armies consisted of 100 men to lend us five of them so we could put their flag on top of the operation. And we eventually did create what we called the Caribbean Community Battalion, which turned out to be a large company, composed of units from a dozen different little Caribbean countries. It was militarily ineffective in the extreme, but it had considerable symbolic value. We were doing all of these things simultaneously.

Q: What was the role of our embassy in Port-au-Prince?

DOBBINS: First of all, it was administering fairly substantial humanitarian assistance programs: food, human rights watch, those kinds of things. It was reporting on the situation. Aristide still had some elements of his government that were still there. He had a prime minister who was still there, who was not in office, but who also was not under arrest, and so we were maintaining relations with the opposition and performing a number of other functions.

Q: I mean, were they part of the consultation process, these meetings?

DOBBINS: I was in contact with our ambassador pretty much daily.

Q: What was our reading of the people in power, this military group?

DOBBINS: Well, how do you mean our reading of them?

Q: I mean the personalities. Who was calling the shots?

DOBBINS: There were three leading personalities, Cedras, Biamby and Francois. Cedras, called himself president. Biamby was the chief of staff of the army. Cedras had been the commander of the army and took over the government. Biamby retained control of the army, and Francois was the chief of police. They were all military officers.

Francois was corrupt, engaged in drug trafficking and thought to be the most venal of the three. Then there were sort of minor players who we thought might be suborned or might be prepared to mount a counter-coup. There was a lot of, in the end, quite ineffectual talk about that kind of activity.

Q: Were there plans afoot for a military intervention? Had the Clinton administration realized that this had to be actively considered?

DOBBINS: That was part of the policy announcement that proceeded my and Bill Gray's appointment, was a presidential determination that he was prepared to threaten the use of force, if necessary, to secure restoration of democracy. There was always a considerable uncertainty as to under what conditions he might actually authorize it. It was clearly going to be very unpopular domestically here. It might be unpopular internationally. It might be resisted in Haiti, some people thought, and therefore we were never quite certain how sure we could be of this ultimately becoming possible until, in the end, the president did agree to do it.

But, yes, there was an assumption that ultimately an intervention was probably going to be necessary, and there were those of us who thought that the sooner the better, that the human rights situation and the humanitarian situation in the country was continuing to deteriorate, in large measure, because of the sanctions that we had applied, and that for humanitarian, if no other reasons, doing this sooner rather than later made sense. Additionally, the refugee policy we put in place was not sustainable over an extended period of time. We simply couldn't warehouse another 30 or 40 thousand Haitians every week. There was nowhere to put them, so that was another form of pressure.

So there was planning, and there was planning on an international basis. The UN had already authorized a peacekeeping force for Haiti, and the original thought was that we would beef up that force. Using its name obviously required further UN authorization, but within the framework of the existing authorizations, use that peacekeeping force. We went up and met with Boutros Ghali, and his staff's view was, "You're not talking about a peacekeeping operation, you're talking about an invasion. A UN blue-helmeted peacekeeping force is not suitable for that. What you need to do is get a UN Security Council authorization inviting you to invade, and then you can turn it over to this UN peacekeeping force at a subsequent phase, when you've established security."

We were initially somewhat skeptical that we could get a Security Council authorization of that sort, given all the traditional resistance to interference in domestic affairs, particularly within Latin America. But in the end, we did succeed. The secretary general assisted in that effort and the fact that Aristide could make a formal request to the Security Council, which he ultimately was persuaded to do, also in the end gave us what was called an all necessary means resolution, which authorized the intervention.

Q: Well, why was it Aristide had to be convinced of this?

DOBBINS: Well, he didn't want to go back simply as the puppet of the United States. He wanted to make sure that when he got back, he would in fact ultimately have a free hand in governing the country, so he was somewhat leery on those grounds, I think.

Q: You mentioned the human rights situation, the economics situation, and particularly with sanctions, that's on its own. But what else was happening politically? You said there were something like 1,500 killings a year?

DOBBINS: Well, Haiti had long been misgoverned and was continuing to be misgoverned by a combination of the army and the mulatto elites that had traditionally run the country. The coup regime wasn't very competent and it didn't have much legitimacy, even within the country. There was resistance, not violent resistance, but political resistance on the part of Aristide and his supporters, and Aristide had wide support in the population as a whole, and as a result there was continuous violence that was creating casualties. There were some really clearly targeted assassinations of prominent Aristide supporters. Other of the violence was less clearly targeted as opposed to sort of more indiscriminate efforts by the security establishment to maintain control in a society in which they lacked legitimacy and support in the population.

Q: Well, now, where did Gray fit in on this? You say that you had conflicted supervision, you might say.

DOBBINS: Well, Gray first threw himself into it, and we spent a lot of time flying around the Caribbean, both recruiting allies but also looking for places to stuff Haitian refugees while we processed them, and he became very engaged on that. He liked flying around as a presidential envoy. He also, as I said, established a relationship with Aristide. It then began to get very complicated. The refugee crisis was mounting, and we were barely keeping our head above water in terms of our capacity to cope with it. The political situation was getting complicated. The whole issue was becoming much more controversial in the country.

At some point, Gray decided that he was overexposed, that the administration, by making him the point person and always having him give the press conference, was transferring a lot of the responsibility for this policy to him, while at the same time not giving him a free hand in deciding what the policy was. And he chose to step back and become less visible and less engaged, and he did. The last six weeks or so before the actual intervention, he wasn't inactive, but he was much less active.

Q: Well, what's sort of the timeline between when you and Gray came onboard and when the invasion came?

DOBBINS: I think it was three or four months.

Q: Was there sort of a sub-theme going on of talking to the 82nd Airborne of the Army or something on what to do?

DOBBINS: Well, there were plans. Once we determined that this was going to be a U.S.-led coalition rather than a UN force, and once the Pentagon became persuaded that the President was quite likely ultimately to tell them to do this, they began seriously planning for it. Then there were discussions between State and Defense and the NSC about what the conditions might be. The Defense Department wanted a clear answer from the State Department as to whether this was going to be an opposed landing or not, whether they needed to anticipate that there would be resistance, or whether in the end their entry would be brokered.

The State Department's answer was, "You won't know until you get there. You won't know until you step off the helicopter whether you're going to have to shoot your way into town, or whether there's going to be somebody there inviting you to lunch." They said, "Well, we can't do that. You need to tell us one or the other, because if we anticipate resistance, then we're going to shoot whoever comes to invite us to lunch." I said, "Fine, but then you're going to drive into town shooting bank guards and crossing guards, because there's no way we can tell you." As events indicated, ultimately an arrangement was made only after the 82nd Airborne got on the airplane and was halfway there that we got a brokered agreement, which allowed a peaceful entry.

What the Pentagon eventually did, although they didn't tell us at the time, was accede to this logic, however reluctantly, and they had two plans with two different forces. They sent down two different divisions, one that was going to force its way in, the other of which was going to go in voluntarily, and they had two plans, plan A and plan B, one of which involved shooting everybody as you arrived, and the other of which involved arriving and going to lunch. In the end, they were able to put into effect the second of those plans and it worked reasonably well.

Q: Was there a tipping point, where your task force or group was saying, "It's got to be an invasion," or was this taken out of your hands?

DOBBINS: I think that there was a growing recognition that it was going to have to be an invasion. There was always some uncertainty because the president was, and remained throughout his term of office, reluctant to do these things unless he felt he really had to, and needed to be persuaded there weren't any alternatives. But it mounted pretty steadily in that direction, and as the prerequisites fell into place: we got a Security Council resolution that authorized it. We got a coalition that was sufficiently broad to legitimize it. The Pentagon had a plan that it was capable of executing and the regime there remained obdurate, and Aristide was being reasonably compliant and playing his role, and the refugee crisis began to mount, eventually the pieces came together and the president authorized the use of force.

Q: Well, how did former President Jimmy Carter fit into this thing?

DOBBINS: That came at the last minute, and I wasn't involved in it. It surprised me as much as anybody. It was partly the president's desire to avoid the use of force if it could be, his sort of casting around. There had been a long discussion as to whether someone ought to go and give an ultimatum, and then who was that person? Should they send Bill Gray down there? I think there was some reluctance to do that. Who else would be the appropriate person to go down and say, "Okay, the time has come. Either you agree to the American-led peacekeeping forces coming in, or they're going to come in over your objection."

In the end, it was determined to ask Carter and Colin Powell and Sam Nunn. I think that that decision was largely made at the White House, but I was not part of the decision process, and it came very much at the last moment.

Q: Did you feel that this might muck things up or not?

DOBBINS: Aristide was very concerned, because he felt they might bargain away his prerogatives, and he was quite paranoid about it. I think those of us who had been working on this for a long time were somewhat miffed that we had been cut out of this and it was now pretty much taken out of our hands. And there was some concern that Carter would exceed his brief and make a deal that we couldn't back away from, one, which would complicate the process of mounting the intervention, but in the end it worked out pretty well.

Q: Well, I just vaguely recall some of the report, but it seems like Carter actually found that he was being preempted when he was talking to the Haitian leadership. I mean, he was told the 82nd Airborne was on its way, or something.

DOBBINS: He knew what the timetable was. He might have wanted more time, and at that point, the president wasn't prepared to give him more time and wanted to make sure that he and his team were out of town before the paratroopers arrived.

Q: How did things evolve?

DOBBINS: Well, it went better than Somalia, but it was a more benign situation. It was always likely to go better than Somalia. There were still big gaps in our ability to plan and execute these types of missions, and these are partially dealt with in the book we published here on these nation-building missions. The military had insisted that it wasn't going to get involved in policing, and the State Department kept telling them that they were going to have to, because once they got there, there wasn't going to be any alternative. The existing Haitian institutions were ineffective, corrupt, discredited, and to the extent they did policing, they did it in an abusive fashion, which we couldn't tolerate once we were in charge.

The military responded, "Well, fine, if the State Department thinks its important that somebody do policing, then the State Department ought to find some people to do it, but we're definitely not doing it." So we spent a few weeks before the intervention rushing around Latin America, mostly, and recruiting dribs and drabs of police, including American police, and we got the former head of the New York police force, Ray Kelly, to head this effort. We eventually did deploy 1,000 U.S. and other national police as part of the intervention force, but these didn't arrive in the beginning and weren't likely to arrive in the beginning. The military were taking the position that they weren't doing policing, and then the first day, as they were getting off the ship in the middle of Port-au-Prince Harbor, a friendly crowd arrived to watch the disembarkation. The Haitian police, who were actually military, arrived to disperse the crowd and did so in their usual fashion, by knocking them over the head or shooting them, and they did that in front of CNN, and that was broadcast back here, with U.S. soldiers just sort of looking on while the human rights abuses were seen. That immediately caused the White House to tell the military to drop its objections and get some military police down there.

Fortunately, the commander of the military police elements within the Army knew he was going to be needed, even though the Army and Shalikashvili were saying they weren't, and he had units alerted and ready to go, although he had told them they weren't going to be necessary. The next day, they flew down and the U.S. military, at least in the interval before the State Department mobilized civilian police, could get there, took over responsibility for overseeing the Haitian police. So that was one small crisis. Special Forces units were dispersed throughout the countryside and did a good job of establishing security out there.

There was another incident the first week or so, the first few days, where some Haitians in one of the other cities in Haiti, in Cap-Haitien, a bunch of Haitian police looked cross-eyed at some Marines, who shot them dead, killing six or seven of them, and that pretty much ended any thought of resistance on the part of other Haitians. In retrospect, it wasn't ever clear whether they intended to do any harm. They were just looking threatening, and that was enough for the Marines.

Those were really the only early incidents, and otherwise security was established pretty comprehensively, but there were lots of other problems. We had a good plan to establish a new police force. We vetted that with Aristide beforehand. We had the assets and the people. We opened a police academy. We began recruiting. Pretty soon we were pumping out several hundred new recruits in a fairly comprehensive training program, and eventually we trained about 5,000 of them over a two-year period. That was quite a successful program. We did nothing comparable to reform the judicial or penal systems, and so the police eventually became immured in a basically corrupt system and the reforms had only limited long-term effect, but it was at least a relatively successful short program.

There was a big dispute about what we would be doing with the military. Our intention had initially been to reform and retrain the Haitian military. Aristide preferred to disband it, and we eventually went along with that, and it was disbanded completely and never replaced, so Haiti doesn't have a military. It just has a police force. Then the spokesperson for the former regime, a woman, was assassinated just three or four days before President Clinton was due to go down on a visit. That created a great furor, particularly back here on the part of the Republican opponents, who saw this as the kind of political violence that they had been criticized for condoning in Latin America for so long, and now they could criticize the Clinton administration for condoning it.

The Clinton administration responded by getting Aristide to request the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) investigate it, which they did, but Aristide and his people tended to stonewall that investigation, leading the FBI to conclude that there may have been some complicity on the part of Aristide and his people in the murder in the first place, which there may well have been. Not perhaps of Aristide personally, but some of his people, so that poisoned relations pretty thoroughly and made the whole issue much more controversial here.

We eventually succeeded in holding elections on schedule, both elections for a new parliament, and then eventually elections for a new president. The opposition decried them as unfair. Some didn't run. Some ran and then disclaimed them as having been unfair. I think most neutral observers felt that they were poorly run, but fair as things go, but again, the Republicans here decried the results and the opposition there refused to accept them, so that became extremely controversial.

Aristide was initially attracted to the idea that his five-year term should not count the three years he had spent in exile, and there was some logic to that, but we wouldn't accept it, largely because of what we knew would be the reaction from the Republican right here. The Republicans had secured control of the Congress four or five weeks after the intervention, so they were on a much stronger position. We, along with elements of his own party, required Aristide to step down, five years after he had originally entered office, even though he had three years of exile. And his response was to run a candidate who would take orders and do nothing for five years until he could run again.

Aristide originally had espoused a fairly progressive economic reform program involving privatization of a lot of corrupt and incompetent parastatal companies, but once he got back, he backed away from these reform programs, because he felt they would give too much leeway for foreign capital and international investment, which he was opposed to, and sided with the vested interests that saw some advantage in the status quo with respect to these parastatals, the power company, the port. And, consequently, most of the economic reforms that the World Bank was prepared to fund were not funded. Our own aid program was fairly limited after the first year, largely again out of concern that we couldn't get more through the Congress.

We left within the timeframe we said we would leave, which was two years, by which time the situation was peaceful, they'd had elections, but most of the underlying reforms that would have made this of long-term value had not been put in place. The situation then gradually began to deteriorate, until in 2004, the U.S. had to intervene once again.

Q: Well, you were there for almost two years dealing with this?

DOBBINS: I was dealing with it. I was based in Washington, not in Port-au-Prince.

Q: After the intervention, did this revert to sort of a State Department Bureau of Latin American Affairs issue?

DOBBINS: No. I wasn't in the Bureau of Latin American Affairs, although I drew on it, and all of my staff was on the Bureau of Latin American Affairs. I was attached formally to the secretary's office, as I recall, and as a practical matter worked for Strobe Talbott, who took a continuing interest. It was a broad interagency effort. Richard Clark and Richard Clark was in the NSand I co-chaired the interagency committee that was in charge of managing the policy there. There was an interagency group that we co-chaired that ran this. Defense and CIA and AID (Agency for International Development) and Commerce and Justice all played important roles. It was a broad, multi-agency effort for that two-year period.

Q: Well, with this Republican resurgence in Congress, did you find yourself up having to explain it, making testimony, problems all the time?

DOBBINS: The congressional part of it was very difficult, because the Republicans were very critical of the policies. They saw vulnerability for the administration. They wanted to link this back to Central America and, as evidence, mounted that there may have been some official complicity in some of the political violence there. They were eager to renew the claims that there were death squads and that the Clinton administration was condoning this kind of activity, so that the congressional relationship was difficult, the hearings were almost always quite hostile.

Q: Did you feel that there were elements within the Republican Party that had ties to particular interests in Haiti, or was just sort of generic "Let's get at the Clinton administration"?

DOBBINS: I think that the conservative elements in Haiti had had long-term relationships in the United States. I never had any sense that there were any inappropriate ties of a sort, or strong economic ties. Haiti wasn't rich enough to have economic links that were meaningful and that would have an effect in U.S. politics. There were certainly ties in terms of where people got their information. Not all of the conservative business elites, mulattoes, wealthier people in Haiti, were malign by any means. There were people who were opposed to Aristide because they thought he was a left-wing extremist with megalomaniac tendencies and a naï¿½ve view of the economy that were opposed to him, that were genuine democrats and would like to see substantial reform, but just didn't believe that Aristide was likely to promote it, which in retrospect is probably a correct assessment.

It's not that the Republicans were necessarily allied with the worst elements in Haitian society, but the manner in which the debate had evolved forced the Democrats and the administration having to rally around Aristide as a symbol of a restored democracy and to exaggerate his virtues and their own successes. And the Republicans on the other side had to exaggerate the failures, the weaknesses, the deficiencies in the electoral system, the degree of political violence, which while not negligible was also not significant in terms of the Haitian political evolution and recent history.

You had such a polarized debate that there was no middle ground here, and there was no middle ground there. The polarization in each society fed the polarization in the other, and there was no really sensible discussion here about what were our options for dealing with an impoverished country 100 miles from our shore with a corrupt and incompetent government. There was no real dialog there about how to move forward and avoid the extremes that they were being presented.

Q: When the invasion came, we had this tremendous refugee problem. Was that resolved?

DOBBINS: Sure. As soon as we determined that we could send people back without having to examine their asylum status, it went away. That's not to say there aren't lots of people in Haiti that would like to be refugees, but they know if they get in a boat the Coast Guard will pick them up and return them. It won't ask them why they left, it won't ask them whether they had a justifiable fear of persecution, it will just send them back.

Q: Was there any political development or political pressure that was coming from the Haitian community in Florida.

DOBBINS: Some, but the Haitian community in Florida, unlike, say, the Cuban American community, has not been as effectively organized, it's not as wealthy, it hasn't been here as long, and so it's not as influential.

Q: Well, then, were there any other developments during this time that you were dealing with Haitian affairs?

DOBBINS: After the initial mistakes of not having been prepared to do policing, the programmatic elements worked fairly smoothly, we met all our deadlines. The intervention was, broadly speaking, successful against our own criteria, and was perceived as such, and the Clinton administration felt that on balance it was a success that they could point to. But its long-term effects have been disappointing, and in retrospect it's pretty clear that we can't expect to introduce meaningful reforms in a society as corrupt as the Haitian in a two-year span. And we should have pushed more forcefully for more significant reforms when we had the momentum and the influence to do so, and then we should have been willing to stick around long enough to ensure that they kept in train.

Q: Were you concerned that you were tainted by being involved in this policy? As a Foreign Service officer, you're given a job and you do it, but did you get too high a profile in this?

DOBBINS: Yes. Certainly, there was a price to be paid. A lot of people said, "You're really willing to take this on? Have you really thought carefully? This is a real quagmire." And, unfortunately, Latin America as a whole has had that reputation. You had the same phenomenon in the '80s when Foreign Service officers were serving a Republican administration in Central America and many of them were tarred and targeted, and some never subsequently confirmed affirmable as a result of their connection with controversial policies that the Democrats have been opposed to.

I had always served before in areas where there was a broad bipartisan consensus: East-West relations, arms control, and trans-Atlantic relations. There were controversies, but they weren't partisan controversies. Some Republicans supported dï¿½tente. Some Republicans opposed dï¿½tente. Some Republicans supported arms control, some Republicans opposed arms control, and similarly for Democrats, so that you had a spectrum, sometimes between conservatives and moderates, but not between Republicans and Democrats.

With Latin America, it tended to be straight party line, and had been for decades, which made it a much more dangerous area for a Foreign Service officer to become engaged in. It tended to make, I think, many of the career officers that served in the region rather cautious and somewhat colorless in terms of their demeanor, behavior and willingness to go out on a limb in support of a policy, even if it was a policy they happened to believe in. But, be that as it may, certainly the controversies, which were raised at the time, continued to have an effect on my career. That said, it was a fascinating experience and an ability to make a meaningful difference on a significant issue, and I'm not sure I would have in retrospect chosen to do it differently, or chosen not to have done it, but there definitely was a cost.

Q: Well, this is probably a good place to stop. You left that job when?

DOBBINS: I moved from there to the NSC in, as I recall, somewhere probably in the spring or summer of '96.

Q: So, Jim, 1996, how did you get the NSC job?

DOBBINS: Well, it was sort of strange, because of course I'd never served in Latin America. In fact, other than a couple of trips to Tijuana, I'd never actually been there, and I'd never been to Tijuana in daylight, so it didn't really qualify me. I guess the thought was that if I could do Haiti, I could do the rest of the hemisphere, although Haiti is about as dissimilar from the rest of the hemisphere as it's possible to be.

[End Side]

Q: So you were the Latin American person on the NSC from '96 to '98?

DOBBINS: Right.

Q: How was the NSC constituted at that time, and where did it sort of fit in in policy matters?

DOBBINS: Well, it was quite influential and it became more influential in the second term. In fact, I think it was probably the most influential NSC we've had, at least since Kissinger was in the NSC. Tony Lake was the national security adviser when I started there, and Sandy Berger was his deputy, and then in the second term, Tony left, was nominated to be director of the CIA, although he withdrew from that, and Berger became the head. So I guess I had six months to a year under Lake and then two, two-and-a-half years under Berger. It was organized kind of along the lines of the State Department. You had regional and functional offices. My office was the Office of Western Hemisphere Affairs, and I hait variefour or five officers working for me at any one time, and then there were others: Europe, Asia, Africa. And then there were the functional: congressional, speechwriting, legal affairs, and economics. It was organized both regionally and functionally, very similar to the State Department. Tended to parallel it, not exactly, but more or less.

Q: First, how did Tony Lake operate?

DOBBINS: Well, Tony, he was a little more relaxed than Berger. He actually went home in the evening. I don't think there was anything sort of particularly unusual about his mode of operation. Berger was a more intense person and more of a workaholic than Tony. They seemed to work quite well together, and I think Berger had closer links with the political sides of the White House, since had been on the campaign, and so he approached the job both from substantive and political aspects, where Lake was more of a foreign policy professional without any aspirations to become involved in domestic politics. But under both of them, it was a very well run operation. I think both of them took care of their staff, tried to make it a happy and rewarding place to work and treated their staffs well, with respect, and were quite accessible.

The NSC by that time was fully electronic, much more so than the State Department even today. Every desk had a computer, which had all of your intelligence. It had codeword material that was available electronically. There was no paper at all, and you could e-mail directly to Berger or Lake, as well as to each other, so there was a much more rapid communication than, say, in the State Department, which is more layered. When you had something hot and important, you would get answers back in a few minutes.

Q: This brings up a question. Asking about those that were on the NSC, were you aware that you had to treat e-mails with caution, in that offhand remarks or something like this might at some point be subpoenaed for God knows what reason, but whether you liked it or not, you were building, there was a record out there that people might be using, frankly, against you for political motives?

DOBBINS: Well, I was certainly aware of it, since all of my papers in the State Department had already been delivered from my job on Haiti. They had asked for every paper that had come in or out for the period, so I was quite aware of this sort of ex post facto examination of what everyone had committed in writing.

Yes, I think people were, and there were occasional reminders. Sometimes people would say jokingly things that might not have appeared to their advantage in the history books, and people would quietly say, "You really ought to watch that." There would be occasional reminders that you had to avoid committing some kinds of things to e-mails, but I didn't find it a big barrier. I mean, if you thought about it, you could get across your message in an appropriate way without saying things that you would later regret. There was a significant element of the NSC that did nothing but review documents that had been requested by the Congress, so there was an industry for one investigation after another. We were endlessly requested to search our files for anything that mentioned X, and at least one or two of them, several of them, involved my office directly. It was a regular feature, and on occasion used up a lot of time.

Q: We're talking about sort of the political atmosphere at the time, because this is a time when you had a Clinton White House and a very hostile, I think it's the right term ...

DOBBINS: Well, I was there for the whole Monica Lewinsky affair and impeachment.

Q: The impeachment, but it was basically a very hostile Republican Congress which was out for blood in a way.

DOBBINS: Right.

Q: This was not a cooperative time. Did you feel that?

DOBBINS: Well, sure, because they were out for mine, among others. But, of course, they were after the president and Mrs. Clinton even more so. I mean, at the White House, everybody was very conscious, because this was all occurring against the background of the impeachment crisis, which affected a lot of the things we did: how we programmed the president, where he could go, what he could say, constant attention to the intersection between domestic and international politics. To some degree, it played to our, and particularly my, benefit, because the president for about a year and a half couldn't travel freely in the United States, and so the only way he could show he was being president was travel internationally, and one of the areas that was from a domestic American standpoint most rewarding to travel in was Latin America, because of the growing importance of the Latin American vote.

Whereas most senior directors in the White House would spend years importuning the domestic side of the White House for just one visit to their region, or just one state visit to Washington by one of the regional leaders, I was actually the recipient of calls from the domestic side saying, "Couldn't we have somebody from Latin America to a state dinner? Do you have anybody to suggest."? Or, "The president's thinking of making another trip to Latin America for a week. Let's work on an itinerary." During the three years I was there, not counting trips to Mexico, of which there were several, there were two big, major Latin American trips, weeklong extravaganzas which were very successful. Then there were also fairly frequent summits with the Mexicans. The domestic difficulties probably, if anything, made these a welcome diversion, and so I probably had more exposure and more contact with the president as a result.

Q: I want to come back to that, but first, what was the problem, to capture the spirit of the times, why couldn't the president travel around?

DOBBINS: Well, because the only question's he'd get from the press were about his sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky and his various legal difficulties. They wouldn't have asked anything else. Whatever event he was going to, whatever ribbon cutting or event, it would be nothing but questions on the impeachment issue.

Q: Did you catch anything of the spirit of this thing? At a certain point, it's something one can titter and all that, but after a point, this wasn't exactly a very earth-shaking matter.

DOBBINS: Well, what was interesting was the degree to which there was a very broad loyalty and support for the president in the White House, and the White House is a pretty big place, several thousand people. Whereas in the Watergate era, there were constant disaffections, during the Clinton period, there were no defections at all. Despite the fact that the president had clearly lied to his staff as well as to the American people, nobody left, nobody protested, nobody leaked, nobody walked out in disgust. The staff was very loyal, and there was a lot of sympathy for the president and affection for him, because although he had a temper he was, by and large, quite a good boss.

Q: Did you get a feel for how the president used the NSC?

DOBBINS: I saw the president fairly regularly and traveled with him. This was very much a staff-driven White House. The president relied on staff very heavily, tended to by and large do what they recommended, almost never made decisions without at least having subjected them to staff review and debate when there were differences among the staff. He was himself a policy wonk who liked to meet with experts and talk to them. It was the bane of his personal staff that whenever he got into a meeting with people like me, he'd want to stay longer than they wanted him to, and they were constantly having to tear him away from fascinating discussion about Latin American currency reform or global warming to get him to his next political event, because that's what he liked to talk about. And he liked to talk to smart people and trade ideas and listen, so he was very intellectually engaged.

He drew heavily, and he read carefully and, interestingly, he also would turn to what we would call substance when political life became difficult. I'll give you two examples, which I thought were remarkable. Normally, I would get maybe once a month a paper from the president. I'd send him something; something would come back with his handwriting on it, saying, "Why don't we do this?" Or, "I'm not sure I agree with this, give me more information," that sort of thing, marginalia. The rate was usually every three or four weeks something would come back like that. The only occasions in which I got back multiple notes from the president on the same day, and there were two such occasions in which I got three or four of these back on the same day, one was the weekend immediately after the Monica Lewinsky story broke and sort of broke. And on that Monday, I got three notes from the president, so he clearly, as all of this was going on, what he'd do is go to his inbox and read old papers that had been sitting there for six weeks.

Then the second was I got back on the Monday that he testified. Remember, he had to testify before the Grand Jury. You would have thought that before this crucial event he would have spent the weekend agonizing about what to say. But he spent the weekend looking at old papers about Latin America and reading the NIE (national intelligence estimate) on Mexico or something and writing something on page six, saying, "Give me more information on this." So clearly this was a refuge from some of the difficulties of political life, was to delve in a little more deeply than he otherwise would into the details of what the NSC did.

He was a graduate of Georgetown's Foreign Service School; I guess he arrived there the year I left. He was a very rewarding president to work for in that sense, that you got a good deal of feedback. He knew your issues. He'd get very impatient if you tried to brief him on the same thing twice. He already got it the first time, thank you. Or when you briefed him, you were just telling him what was already in the briefing paper, he'd say, "Look, I already read the briefing paper." So it was by and large quite intellectually satisfying.

Q: While we're on the subject, the trips, what particularly substantive trips did he take when you were there?

DOBBINS: Let's see. I mean, they kind of blend together in my mind. We went to Argentina, and we went to Chile. I think I missed the one where we went to Chile. I managed to get him into two regional summits, which were my idea, so we had a summit with all the Caribbean leaders on one of the islands. I can't remember which island, but on one of the islands, and all the Caribbean leaders for a daylong summit. On the same trip, we had a summit with the Central American leaders in Costa Rica. Then on that trip, he also went to Argentina and Brazil and Venezuela.

The second trip, which unfortunately I got sick the morning we were leaving and had to send one of my deputies to go on the trip. I probably got sick because of the tension of getting the trip organized, but that was another big trip, and I don't recall because I didn't go on it. It did include Chile and three others, so it was a weeklong trip. And, additionally, we met at least once a year, maybe even twice a year, with the president of Mexico, sometimes in Mexico and sometimes in Washington, so I think there were two trips to Mexico. I went on two trips to Mexico with the president. He also went to Haiti while I was there.

Q: How was the Mexican-American relationship with Clinton?

DOBBINS: It was very good at the personal level. He and Zedillo got along very well and Zedillo was a very impressive person, also a bit of a policy wonk, and so they had a lot in common. There were a lot of pressures, because the Republicans hadn't yet discovered that the Hispanic vote was important, and so there was a lot of Mexican bashing, concern over certification, whether they'd be certified as cooperative on drugs, a lot of bashing over immigration policy. It was a very politically charged and difficult relationship, and Clinton had to really fight quite hard to avoid Congress forcing a decertification of Mexico on a couple of occasions. But the relationship between the two administrations was good and I was sort of the principal link on our side, and then there was a fellow on the other side, and he and I sort of were the links in preparing for the presidents' meetings and in general keeping the relationship on track. I worked very closely with Jeff Davidow, who was the assistant secretary at State. And between the two of us, we spent a lot of time on the relationship and we did a lot of important things.

Q: At one point, actually for quite a period of time, people that I've talked to said that the Foreign Ministry of Mexico was sort of the repository of sort of the left-wing types who really didn't like the United States. It was sort of where you put these people, because foreign policy wasn't that important. Did you find that going when you were there, or not?

DOBBINS: Well, that had changed to a significant degree. The people in the Foreign Ministry I worked with, the foreign minister and the deputy who did this work, were not ideologues at all and were quite pragmatic. I think the ministry as a whole and their foreign service was sort of caught up in sort of third world nonaligned-type attitudes, and Mexico would on UN voting issues not be particularly supportive. But that really wasn't all that important. Whether you were going to lose by 87 or 88 to 15 on some of these votes didn't make too much difference, so we didn't waste a lot of time worrying about how Mexico was voting in the UN.

But on the issues of the U.S.-Mexican relationship, they clearly wanted to modernize and change the relationship, and so we had very little ideological difficulty and we worked quite effectively with the Foreign Ministry.

Q: How was Cuba playing out?

DOBBINS: Well, Cuba was very difficult, because the president and the secretary of state and Berger and Lake, while he was there, would all liked to have had an opening and a greater flow of people back and forth, and ideas. But there was just an absolutely hysterical resistance to it, which wasn't exclusively on the Republican side. There were Cuban American Democrats, as well, Menendez, for instance, from New Jersey, and Torricelli, also from New Jersey, who also pushed a hard anti-Castro, pro-sanctions regime. So we were stuck with a policy that clearly hadn't worked for 40 years and didn't show any sign that it ever would.

Indeed, because it was a Democratic administration with a Republican Congress, the Congress kept piling on additional restrictions, which the administration had to fight off, so there was the legislation, the Helms-Burton legislation, that had come after the Cubans had shot down some American aircraft, some American civil aircraft that had been over-flying Havana and dropping leaflets. After they were warned off several times, the Cubans eventually shot one or two of them down, and that led to great hysteria on the part of Congress, who imposed legislation which would have, in addition to imposing some probably fairly minor penalties on the Cubans would have ruptured our relationship with the West Europeans because it was extraterritorial in impact. And we had to spend a lot of time figuring out how to get around this. I finally read the legislation and figured a way to get around it, and we did get around it, and that led to even more outrage on the part of ...

Q: How did we get around it?

DOBBINS: The legislation was purported to have the intention of supporting the growth of democracy in Cuba, and it provided for presidential waivers in limited cases. I think our rationale was that the Europeans are prepared to help promote democracy by funding NGOs and doing other things, whereas if we take this action, which is sanctioning European companies, they will cease to do so, and therefore, by avoiding a rupture with Europe, we're supporting democracy in Cuba. Well, needless to say, the proponents of the legislation found this an entirely specious line of argument and went berserk, but that's what we did, and we avoided the problems with Europe and didn't impose the additional levels of sanctions.

The Europeans, as a result, did do additional things to support democratic reforms in Cuba. We had a negotiation with the Europeans in which we got them to do some additional things in exchange for having waived the application of these sanctions. We also took several steps to increase contacts with the Cuban people. We expanded the amount of remittances that Cuban Americans could sent to their families, we increased the amount of travel, places from which they could travel, number of times they could travel, conditions under which they could travel, Cuban Americans could travel back to see their families. We took a number of other small steps that increased contacts of that sort.

Q: Were there studies or thoughts about in the real world, not the political world, would it be better to open relations with Cuba as we had with Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, rather than these restrictions? Would it have made things better, or was this just too toxic a study to even undertake?

DOBBINS: Well, it wasn't something that required any study. It was obvious to almost anybody except a Cuban American or somebody who was accepting large donations from them for his political campaign that the policy of complete ostracization was having no effect whatsoever in terms of promoting change in Cuba, whereas policies that combined carrots with sticks and deployed greater contact had obviously had the desired effect over time in virtually every other society which we were in contact with. But there was a strong political lobby, and the fact was that the Cuban American community cared and no one else cared. It wasn't that other people didn't see that the policy wasn't particularly productive. It was simply it wasn't important enough to buck an important lobby that did care.

You had a lobby that cared deeply and was prepared to put its money where its mouth is, and then you had the rest of the political establishment didn't care enough to take them on. So there were small groups that were interested in a more flexible policy, and you would get input from them occasionally, but they weren't very effective and they weren't well organized. They weren't well funded. What was interesting and what has been developing over the last few years, and begun to have some impact, was the business community was beginning to lobby, because they saw business opportunities, particularly agricultural exports. These began to eat into the Republican base of support for the embargo, and the embargo has in fact been relaxed as it relates to agricultural exports, although only marginally, as the result of this pressure from the export community.

To be fair, Clinton would have liked a better relationship. There were occasional feelers, but nobody saw this as something worth paying a significant political price for. The main effort was to make sure that the relationship didn't get significantly worse, that we didn't have a situation in which large numbers of Cubans began getting on boats and going to the United States. And Castro could do that at any time, because it was Castro who prevented them from emigrating, with our agreement. We had an agreement that he would keep them at home and if he had ceased to enforce that, then we would have had real difficulties.

Q: Did you see any effort on the part of Castro to change the relationship, or was he pretty happy? In many ways, our policy was helping keep him in power, or was it?

DOBBINS: Occasionally. There were occasional small feelers, but by and large, he certainly wasn't prepared to make any large-scale gestures in that direction.

Q: On the political side, how did you view Senator Jesse Helms, the head of the Foreign Relations Committee at the time?

DOBBINS: He wasn't personally that involved in Latin America. He didn't do anything that was really outrageous. He was actually quite helpful in the Balkans when I took that. His instincts on the Balkans were basically the same as the administrations, and we didn't really have any issues of substance with him on the Balkans. On Latin America, he would have been pro-embargo, that sort of thing, but really the more vocal elements were actually in the House, not in the Senate, on Cuba. On certification in Mexico, I can't remember where he was, but he wasn't the main problem. Helms was not the principal problem on most of the issues I dealt with.

Q: It had been that his staff was very powerful, but sort of by this time had this changed?

DOBBINS: Well, certainly, his staffer for Latin America, who was now the assistant secretary for Latin America, was very critical on some points, and was a very hard liner on Cuba, and on Haiti and on other things. But as I say, it was other members of Congress that tended to take the lead on the issues that preoccupied us, so it was others. On Cuba, it was the Cuban American members of Congress. On Haiti, it was Dan Burton in the House. On the certification, it tended to be a different set of senators from Helms. Our problems were broader, and Helms didn't help ameliorate them in the way that a more internationalist-minded chairman of that committee might have done, but for the most part, he wasn't the principal instigator of the problems, either.

Q: Where was Dan Burton coming from? Was it personal, was it political? How did you see Dan Burton?

DOBBINS: Well, Dan Burton is a rather excitable, irascible, person. He had become the chairman of the Government Reform Committee, and thus one of the administration's principal persecutors.

Q: Well, let's do Haiti. During the time you were with the NSC, how was Haiti going?

DOBBINS: It was sort of slowly deteriorating. Aristide had been replaced by Rene Preval. Aristide wasn't going to allow Preval to take any initiatives, and so you had sort of a five-year period of stagnation, waiting for Aristide to return to power. Preval was reasonably accommodating within the limits that Aristide would set for him in terms of being responsive to U.S. pressures and desires, and so he did clean up his police force and his palace guard to some degree and got rid of some people who had been implicated in political violence and murders, and appointed responsible people to run the police force. But he wasn't prepared to push the economic reforms that he needed, and he wasn't prepared to make accommodations with the opposition that would have led to a more open electoral process. That wasn't entirely his fault. The opposition knew they were going to lose, and therefore they were pretty keen to find excuses not to have to run, and that's always the problem in Haiti. Whoever thinks he's going to lose declares the process is tainted and refuses to run. You almost never get sort of genuinely contested elections.

Nevertheless, Preval wasn't as accommodating as he might be in overcoming some of those difficulties, so you already had the process by which Haiti's democratic system began to erode from within, as one election after another was contested, low voter turnout, or was uncontested, to the point where today Aristide is the only elected official in the country, because all of the other institutions have run out of elected officials. Their terms of office have expired, so all the mayors and all the legislators no longer have a mandate, and they've been unable to organize elections, and that was already beginning to occur at this period. It sort of gradually wound down. I think that there were still UN troops there. I think the U.S. had left just about the time I got to the White House, but there were Canadian troops that had taken over, and they stayed for a year or so, and then they left, and then there weren't anything but a few American engineers, engineering troops, and some UN police. Then they left and people just became more and more disillusioned with Aristide.

Q: Central America, had it sort of had its day, or was it a problem or of interest?

DOBBINS: Well, it was of interest. It wasn't a problem. It was a success story. All of the countries had made a reasonable transition, there were democratically elected governments in all of them. We had good relations with all of them. The president went down there and had a summit meeting with the group of them. We were trying to get a free trade agreement with Central America. We began in that administration and this administration's continued to push it.

Of course, it was still a very poor area, but in contrast to the current situation, this was really a golden era in U.S. hemispheric relations. All of these counties had reasonably good economic growth rates, they all had democratic governments, and they all had very good relations with Washington. While I was in the White House, we negotiated a peace settlement between Peru and Ecuador, a recurrent sort of conflict, which had sparked, a conflict between the two. Argentina and Brazil were collaborating, Mercosur, was prospering and the U.S. was supportive of that development, and the president could sort of tour the hemisphere pretty triumphantly throughout this period. It was a very positive period in U.S. hemispheric relations.

Q: Venezuela, that didn't turn into a problem?

DOBBINS: It hadn't at that point. We visited Venezuela. It had a somewhat corrupt and rather overage government, tired in that sense, but there was a lot of oil investment. The relationship was fine; there were no real strains in the relationship. When I came to the White House, there were lots of problems with Colombia because we had decertified them and were ostracizing their leader because of his drug ties. But even there, during the time I was in the White House, the old leader went out, a new one, a democratically elected one that was acceptable came in. We had him to a state dinner in the White house and feted him, so it was a very positive period.

Q: Was the OAS, from your perspective, an effective organization?

DOBBINS: Moderately. It didn't have a lot of money or weight, but it was responsive. We used Gaviria. There was a coup in Paraguay, for instance, which we opposed. I got heavily involved in that just a week after I went to the White House and sort of took charge of organizing our response to that. We were able to turn that around in about 48 hours, get all of the coup plotters arrested. Gaviria flew into there the day of the coup and did all the right things as the secretary general. They were quite responsive and our relations with them were quite good.

Q: In Paraguay, how does one respond to a coup from the NSC?

DOBBINS: Well, the president of Paraguay called in the middle of the night. He took refuge in our embassy, and so the embassy got me on the line. They said, "I've got the president here. What do I do?" So I got Jeff Davidow on the line from State and we gave them some guidance for the night. We had had warnings that this was likely to occur. We got a hold of Gaviria, who was somewhere else in the hemisphere that night ...

Q: He was the head of the OAS.

DOBBINS: Yes, and so we called him at 10:00 at night and said, "Go to Paraguay first thing in the morning," which he agreed to do. We issued a statement rejecting the coup and calling on everybody else to reject it. Brazil and Argentina both told Paraguay that if they went ahead with this, they'd be out of Mercosur and ostracized. There was an OAS meeting first thing in the morning who again condemned the coup. There were broadcasts and the people in Paraguay came out in the street and opposed it, and that was enough to swing the balance, and by the end of the day, the coup plotters were all in custody and the army was back in the barracks.

Q: Well, as you say, it was sort of a golden period because we were paying attention to any sort of breach in the democratic situation in Latin America, which had changed really considerably.

DOBBINS: And we were much more sympathetic to the economic needs than this administration was, at least initially. When Brazil looked like it might be getting into trouble, we provided and had the IMF (International Monetary Fund) provide very substantial support; quite different from what this administration did when Argentina went into a similar situation. There was much more sympathy. Berger and I met with Rubin and Summers and debated it. Rubin and Summers took the British laissez faire view, but they listened carefully, and Rubin was a very thoughtful person and listened to the political arguments for doing something and eventually agreed. So it was more than just good feelings. We were putting our money where our mouth was on these occasions.

Q: What was the situation on Argentina during this period? Had it reached sort of the stage of almost economic collapse?

DOBBINS: No, it was at the other end of the spectrum. It was the height of prosperity. Menem was the president. He had embraced relations with Washington. He fixed the peso to the dollar, he pegged it to the dollar, and the Argentine economy was doing rather well, and Argentina was our closest ally in the hemisphere. In fact, we made them a major non-NATO ally, something, which drove the Chileans crazy, but was an indication of how close the relationship was. Menem was basically doing anything Clinton asked him to do, which was helpful.

Q: Was Canada part of your beat, or not?

DOBBINS: Not formally. When the second term began, I proposed that Canada be moved from EUR to ARA (Bureau of Inter-American Affairs) in the State Department. I did a note for Albright, and she eventually did that. We didn't follow in the White House, partially because Canada didn't have its own staff, so the European directors had said, "I'll give you Canada, but I won't give you any people," and I said, "I won't take Canada unless you give me a person."

Since there really wasn't one person doing nothing but Canada, it wasn't like the State Department where you could send the people as well as the function. So I could have had Canada, but I didn't want to take it without additional staff, so I didn't. I think it has been switched subsequently, and it did remain switched in the State Department, which was amusing, since of course while I was in charge of Latin America I had Canada switched, and then when I went back to the State Department, I was in charge of EUR and found I'd lost Canada, thanks to my own bureaucratic maneuvering.

Q: Well, I would have thought that at the time you would have found the Canadians themselves, although they like to play themselves as the hemispheric power or something, would feel much more comfortable in Europe. Latin America has almost a second-rate aura to it.

DOBBINS: You got different reactions. In the end, I don't think most Canadians cared or knew or were interested in how the State Department organized itself. I asked the Canadian foreign minister about this and he looked at me blankly and he said, "Well, do you mean we're not in the Western Hemisphere? Why not? Why would we be in Europe? Of course we should be in the Western Hemisphere." A few weeks later I raised the issue with the Canadian deputy foreign minister, who was a career fellow and who had been a friend of mine. He had been both their ambassador to NATO, and then he was their ambassador to the European Community, so I asked him, and he was horrified: "How could you do this to us?" So you had completely two wildly different reactions, and I think the Canadian foreign minister's reaction was the more typical for Canadians. The Canadian deputy foreign minister's would have been more typical for career diplomats.

But in the end, by this time, Canada had pulled all its troops out of NATO and withdrawn them from Europe. It had joined the OAS, which it hadn't been in. It only joined the OAS in the 1990s. It had become chair of the Free Trade of the Americas negotiations, and the only place where it had troops abroad were in Haiti. So the all of the focus of its foreign and security policy was hemispheric, as was a lot of its rhetoric. The rhetoric of the government had focused heavily on the hemisphere, so it made sense.

Q: Let me just.

[End Tape]

Q: This is tape seven, side one, with Jim Dobbins. Jim, NAFTA, North American Free Trade Agreement, how was that going? You'd been there, it was a done deal and all, but were we monitoring this closely, because there had been screams and yells about there would be a giant sucking noise towards the south. You must have been looking at it economically.

DOBBINS: Oh, there were endless studies on this. It was still being implemented. There were still elements of it that hadn't been implemented. In fact, there are still elements today, I think, that haven't been fully implemented, but it was going quite well. Actually, and all of the objective studies were very positive about its impact on both sides. The impact on the Mexican side had been obscured by the fact that Mexico went through a giant economic crisis right after NAFTA had been concluded. Something that took a 10 percent hit on their GDP, and a huge, prolonged recession, currency crisis, et cetera. So all of the statistics showed that as soon as NAFTA went into effect, Mexico's GDP was reduced by 10 percent, and it was only gradual that it came back up.

On the American side, there was really nothing but positive statistics in terms of the effect of it, although you wouldn't believe that, listening to the anti-trade and labor union lobby. But there were lots of specific issues. That was a very complex arrangement with a lot of cross-border issues built into it that needed a lot of attention. I would say 25 percent of all of my work had to do with Mexico.

Q: Looking at the whole thing, did you deal in drugs? In other words, was drugs an issue, or did somebody else handle drugs?

DOBBINS: Well, we had a functional and regional division on drugs, like everything else. There was someone else doing economics. There was someone else doing drugs, and I represented the regional and somebody else represented the functional interest in the NSC. But because the issue was so important in the bilateral relationship, by and large the bulk of the responsibility probably fell in my office rather than the office that was doing drugs on a global basis.

Q: Well, then, how was the situation while you were there, drug-wise?

DOBBINS: The Mexicans were trying to organize themselves to conduct a credible law enforcement campaign. It was difficult, given the depth of corruption within their government, and there was continued suspicion among our law enforcement agencies of even the most senior officials. The congressional scrutiny and the eagerness with which Congress would have fallen on any evidence of a failure on the Mexican part meant this was all subjected to intense scrutiny and became highly politicized.

In general, the Mexicans were trying to make a greater effort. We were trying to help them. We were trying to get over some of the divisions of the past, where Americans felt that U.S. agents had been murdered as a result of Mexican corruption. The Mexicans felt that Mexicans had been kidnapped and brought to the United States, which had happened, to stand trial. So there was a legacy of distrust, and this all tended to involve fairly senior people. I mean, the attorney general would call me occasionally on matters personally and the president had a drug czar whom I also had to work with.

Q: Barry McCaffrey was it?

DOBBINS: Barry McCaffrey, and my job was often making sure that his enthusiasm didn't extend to the point of getting our relationship in serious difficulty. Treasury was a big player on this because they had the Customs Service. A variety of law enforcement agencies that had to be somehow coordinated, it was a big job. I probably spent a quarter of my time on Mexico, and on Mexico, I probably spent half of my time on narcotics-related issues.

Q: Well, what about Colombia and Bolivia, two of the big producing areas?

DOBBINS: Well, Bolivia wasn't too much of a problem. The eradication campaign was going on there relatively successfully. A government took over that was pretty well committed to the campaign, but Colombia was very problematic, particularly during the era in which we decertified them because their president had drug connections. When Pastrana took over, the political situation improved, but he never really got a grip on the narco insurgency, and our policy was hampered because the Congress would allow assistance for counter-drug operations, but not for counterinsurgency operations in the rather mistaken view that you could distinguish the two. The result was that our supportive efforts were rather severely hamstrung.

Q: Was it difficult to sort of get the various enforcement agencies to understand that they couldn't ride rough shod over foreign countries and all?

DOBBINS: It was very difficult, particularly with respect to DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency). Customs occasionally was a problem, but I knew the director of customs quite well. It was Ray Kelly, who had been in charge of the police in Haiti, and who is now again a police commissioner in New York. He was a sensible guy who listened and was eager to get advice on the international aspects of the issues. The guy who headed DEA was an ex-New York state, I think, policeman, with no real sophistication or sympathy for the complexities of international relations or diplomacy, and a rather simplistic view of what his mission was and how he should related to the Mexican law enforcement, of which he was in general contemptuous, with some justice.

Then, each year, as you'd come up for certification, getting everyone in the administration to support whatever line the president had ultimately decided on, usually having decided on the basis of conflicting advice with different elements of the society was also something of a trial, particularly when Congress was eager to find differences among the elements within the administration. So this was a real problem. On narcotics, the FBI didn't play a big role. The FBI was problematic in other respects in terms of its behavior abroad, but in narcotics, they weren't a big player. The big players were Customs and DEA.

Q: Was there concern about the grower groups, particularly in Colombia, but elsewhere?

DOBBINS: Well, there was a good deal of concern. On the other hand, we were rather hamstrung by this artificial distinction that we would support the government of Colombia in its efforts to address drug traffickers, but not in its efforts to address politically motivated insurgency. There wasn't much we could do about it beyond what our counter-drug assistance did, and since the drug and political insurgencies were pretty closely linked by this stage, our assistance probably was of some utility on the counterinsurgency side, even though it was supposed not to be. Our policies were heavily circumscribed by both human rights limitations, which while perfectly legitimate, also limited the amounts of money, and assistance we could provide, and this distinction between counterinsurgency and counter-narcotics.

Q: How about our relations with Chile during this time?

DOBBINS: Pretty good, except they would get nervous when we became too friendly with Argentina, and that would get them upset, but otherwise, excellent. They were the poster boy, really, for Latin American reform, economic reform, anyway, and their politics, they were gradually shaking loose from the militarism and still at this period somewhat unhealthy power of their armed forces. But the armed forces were by and large on their best behavior, and there wasn't really any challenge to civilian leadership.

The Chileans wanted to buy a new generation from combat aircraft from us, and this led to a very difficult debate within the administration as to whether to overturn our policy, which I think went back to the Carter administration, of no sales to modern combat aircraft to Latin America on the grounds that they didn't need them. Eventually the State Department changed position and agreed with the Pentagon, as a result of which we did agree to sell them to Chile, and then Chile ran out of money. Originally, this was a big debate within the administration, and it was one of the few that I lost.

Q: How did you fall on it?

DOBBINS: I was against changing the policy, because whereas Chile was a perfectly friendly country, Argentina was the one who was extending itself for us. Chile wasn't doing anything for us. They were just growing economically, but they weren't extending themselves to the United States, and Argentina was in a number of different ways: sending police in significant numbers to Haiti, for instance, and to the Balkans, supporting us at the UN and doing a lot of other things. I didn't see any reason why we should reward Chile, which hadn't done anything for us. It wasn't hostile; it just wasn't extending itself for us, when the Argentines were very concerned, because the Argentines couldn't afford aircraft. I mean, we would have sold them aircraft, too, but they didn't have any money.

I felt that it made sense to just continue to the policy and too bad if Lockheed missed the sale, but the Pentagon felt otherwise and eventually State turned around and it sort of left me alone on it. I managed to put up resistance for a few months, but eventually got overruled. We then compensated by making the Argentines a major non-NATO ally, which is a provision found in legislation, which has no real significance. It doesn't give them access to anything they wouldn't have otherwise, but they were very proud and happy with this designation, which then drove the Chileans crazy and they threatened to cancel the whole purchase. That got Albright and Berger upset, but eventually the Chileans calmed down and got over it.

Q: How did you find, being on the NSC, your relationship with the Latin American embassies?

DOBBINS: Pretty good. They tried to get as much access as they could. The smaller countries, the foreign ministers would come see me. The bigger countries, they would try to see Berger. Brazil and Argentina, they'd try to see Berger. If it was Bolivia or Ecuador, I would be the highest person they'd see in the White House, the foreign ministers, that is. All the ambassadors saw me fairly regularly. I talked to the Mexican ambassador very frequently, for instance. But I also, in the case of Mexico, dealt directly with the Foreign Ministry and with the presidency, as opposed to going through either our or their embassy on some issues.

Q: How about your relationship with that other great power, the State Department?

DOBBINS: It was very good while Davidow was there, which was most of the time. I think he was there probably two years. He came after I did, so for about six months, there was no assistant secretary. Then he came, and he was there for a couple of years, and then he went off as ambassador to Mexico, and we were very close. We worked very closely together. The State Department regional bureaus are always a little unhappy when they have a powerful homologue on the NSC staff, but they're equally unhappy if they have a weak one, so I'm sure they occasionally felt I was arrogating too much power to myself, but on balance, they also saw that that was probably to their advantage. They got more of the president's time and attention for the region that was helpful to them.

Davidow was not particularly turf conscious. He came to my meetings when I called them. I came to his meetings when he called them. There was never a sense of, "No, I should be having this meeting, you shouldn't." The answer was, "If you want to have a meeting, you have a meeting. If I want to have a meeting, I have a meeting." I had my channels to Mexico, for instance, which I maintained and kept him informed, and he was perfectly happy if something was being handled in that channel and he was kept informed, so it worked very well. There were lots for both of us to do.

Q: Did you get any feel for the stewardship of Madeleine Albright as secretary of state during this time?

DOBBINS: Of course, I worked for her for the last two years directly when I went back to State. She was reasonably interested in Latin American affairs. I remember I was briefing her for her confirmation hearings. She immediately went on about how she wanted to liberalize our Cuba policy, and I advised her to keep that to herself until she was confirmed. It was a joke, because she, I'm sure, knew that as well as I did. She was quite involved on Cuba policy and had achieved a certain stature with the Cuban American community, despite her views on the efficacy of the policy, which she had largely kept to herself, because she had been tough on Castro after the shoot down of these aircraft.

I traveled with her. In one case, Davidow couldn't go, for some reason, and I ended up being her senior staff on a visit to Haiti. She and Berger worked very closely together. She was a little uneasy that he might come to dominate the relationship and that grated occasionally. But by and large, it was a collegial relationship. Whereas one of Colin Powell's aspirations was to leave the State Department a stronger organization after having run it for four years, she wanted to leave the world a different place. The health of the institution, per se, was I expect, a lower concern. She wasn't hostile to it the way that some secretaries of state have been, Henry Kissinger for instance, who was actively suspicious about the State Department and its bureaucracy. I don't think she had any hostility to it, but she hadn't become secretary of state in order to increase the staff or funding for the State Department. She'd become secretary of state because she wanted to do certain things. Her real focus was on the Balkans. But she threw herself into Latin American policy and was quite supportive and helpful on most issues.

Q: Well, speaking of issues, were there any issues that sort of encompassed the entire NSC, as opposed to you're doing your Latin America thing and all? Were there any times when you were all sort of gathered together, "What will we do about X?" Like the Balkans, or something of that nature.

DOBBINS: Well, every year or so, we would have a meeting where we would talk about the state of the world. Berger would have us spend a Saturday and spend six or seven hours in which everybody would participate, or all the senior directors would participate, and we had staff meetings three days a week, which were briefer affairs. They were half an hour or so, and obviously at staff meetings, everything came up, but by and large I didn't intervene on the Balkans in the staff meetings. I waited my turn and talked about Latin America.

But sure, there would be times. During the whole impeachment crisis, the issue of how you handled this, maintained the ship and stayed on course, was a constant factor in decision making. There were other cross-cutting issues, but other than the annual sessions where we all sat down and talked about the state of the world and what our priorities for the coming year should be, mostly you stayed in your lane. One of the nice things about the NSC was that because it was smaller, it was less competitive than the State Department. In the State Department, it's so fragmented, there are so many people with overlapping responsibilities, that you're endlessly wading through clearances and other people who are operating at cross purposes.

In the NSC, at least under Lake, and particularly under Berger, while lots of different people may have had some legitimate role, he made pretty clear on a given issue who was in charge, and he made it clear because that's the person he talked to, and everybody else he didn't talk to him about it. So if you were the one he called and he said, "Talk to so and so and so and so and get me such and such," then you called the senior directors and said, "Berger wants X by 5:00, give me your input," it was pretty clear you were in charge. By and large, that worked pretty well, and so I didn't spend a lot of time fighting with my peers. I had my lane, I knew what I was doing, I was clearly in charge of it. Berger was going to turn to me and would respond when I sent him something, and I would keep others informed and involved on it as was appropriate, and everybody accepted that. It worked very smoothly, and without a lot of the layers of bureaucracy that you encounter in the State Department.

Q: Did you see the role of Al Gore here as vice president?

DOBBINS: Yes, he was quite active on some issues. Environmental issues he would be very active on, so, for instance, one of the big issues was whether we were going to allow Mexican tuna fish into the country, because there was a question of whether dolphins were being caught, and so the Mexicans had to adopt certain standards. You had to get legislation changed, because the legislation had prevented Mexican tuna exports. Now we needed legislation, which would allow Mexican tuna to come back into the country. This was opposed by a number of environmental groups, despite the fact that the administration claimed that the Mexicans had met all of the hurdles, and Gore's office became involved in that issue.

Gore got involved on some of the Cuban issues. One meeting with the president we were asked about a very difficult issue on which everybody was divided, and he actually went around the room and asked each person for advice, and he asked everybody in the room for advice. So Berger was there, he got Berger's advice, and then he asked me for my advice. This was on the Helms-Burton legislation and whether it would exempt the Europeans from application. Stephanopoulos was arguing that that was going to be politically costly, and I think the vice president was at that meeting. I can't quite remember what position he took.

Normally, this would be done in a way that was more discrete. In other words, the president wouldn't have all of his advisers sit down with each of them present and ask differing opinions. He did on that occasion. So the vice president got involved on Cuba stuff. He had a big staff, and they would certainly take an interest. I would say that Latin America wasn't his main focus, and so they got more involved on some of the European stuff than they did on the Latin American stuff, but they would get involved from time to time, and they were taken seriously when they did express an interest.

Q: Well, the White House, of course ...

DOBBINS: The vice president for instance visited Haiti. I accompanied him on a trip to Haiti, although that was actually while I was still at State.

Q: Well, Gore was also sort of a policy wonk, wasn't he?

DOBBINS: Yes, and where I'd see the vice president most often was whenever the president had a meeting with a foreign leader, Gore would normally attend. He would normally show up for the pre-brief. Normally, Berger and I and then other White House staffers not from the NSC would brief the president, so there would be five or six people who would go into the president's office preparatory to a meeting. Normally, I was the one who would then give him a three-minute brief, and that's where you had to be careful not just to tell him what you told him in the briefing memo, but on the other hand, not to forget to tell him anything essential. Gore would often be at those sessions and he'd put in his two cents. I can remember on several occasions where I had to contradict him.

Q: There's always a sort of international affairs side to the White House, which is essentially the NSC, and then there's the political side. Did these two work together?

DOBBINS: Yes. Yes, for instance, our Cuba policy was so heavily domestic in orientation that I worked pretty closely with the domestic side. We usually talked about how to address a problem, and then got their advice on how to get it sold on the domestic side. There were the pure political people who would get involved. For instance, when the president went on trips, the political people would get involved on how they would use the trip to advance their causes, and so what issues should we be pushing. For instance, he was going to Chile. Chile has an interesting retirement system, which is one of these privately based systems where people put their money essentially into the stock market. One of the things was, "Should we take the president and show him this?" And, "No, no, we're not messing with Social Security. This will send a signal, so you can't do that."

There were lots of interests between the political, and at the White House, it wasn't just political. You had people who did politics. Then you had the people who did domestic policy, which of course was political, but like the NSC was a professional staff who were looking at domestic policy issues. Then you had the people who were just looking at politics, per se, and then you had the press people. Yes, we would work with all of them quite intimately, and particularly on trips. There would be endless meetings preparing for the trips in which all of these people would come together, but then when you had a politically charged issue like Cuba or something, the meetings would include people from the political side.

Q: Well, did you find the press, particularly during the Monica Lewinsky business, it almost stopped all questioning on anything else?

DOBBINS: That was one of the reasons that the president traveled internationally, because at least half of the questions would be on something else. If you traveled to Mexico, the Mexican press wouldn't ask you about Lewinski , so every other question would be on that, but at least half the questions would be on something else. As the thing heated up, we would sit with the president and go through a press briefing. We'd brief him for a press briefing, and they'd do it in two parts. They'd do it on the foreign policy part, and then the foreign policy would leave the room and the domestic people would go through what that day's questions were on Monica Lewinsky and how to handle them.

Q: Was there a sense of frustration about the whole political situation, particularly the Monica Lewinsky thing and all, that this was tying up other things?

DOBBINS: To some degree. On the other hand, as I've said, it also had the perverse benefit from our standpoint that it freed the president's time for foreign affairs. It actually probably meant that he could spend more time doing our issues because it made it so difficult to do anything on the domestic side. So I would say, at least in my sphere, I didn't have a feeling that there was something really important that if this wasn't distracting, we would be achieving it. That didn't occur. Certainly, the fact that you didn't control the Congress and the Congress was unbelievably hostile across most of the spectrum, particularly on Latin America, which tended to be more heavily politicized than, say, European affairs. There tended to be a more partisan division on most Latin American issues than on most European or Asian issues. So that was a frustration, but no, the Lewinsky affair didn't have an impact that I could determine on our policies toward my part of the world. They seemed to be getting quite high-level attention and going very well.

Q: Well, then, is there anything else we should cover in this NSC?

DOBBINS: I don't think so.

Q: Well, then, maybe next time we'll pick this up. In '99, what happened?

DOBBINS: Well, in '99, I went back to State and took over as the envoy to the Balkans just before the war in Kosovo started.

Q: Well, then, this should be quite interesting. We'll take it then.

Today is the 8th of March, 2004. Jim, you finished at the NSC and then what happened?

DOBBINS: Well, sometime in I think early '99 I was asked whether I would be willing to come back and succeed Bob Gelbard as the special adviser to the president and secretary for the Balkans. The reason for the move had to do with Kosovo. We were moving toward an intervention in Kosovo pretty briskly and, given my experience in previous such circumstances, they wanted me to take that on, and I got back there just as the closing weeks of the Rambouillet Conference and the beginning of the drums of war.

Q: Well, when you arrived, what was the title of the job?

DOBBINS: Was it special or senior? I think it was special adviser to the president and secretary of state for the Balkans.

Q: What were you getting from your time in the NSC and all as you moved over to this thing? What was the attitude towards Kosovo? Had Kosovo started to boil over?

DOBBINS: The situation there was deteriorating. There were more human rights violations, more violence. The Kosovars, after pursuing the possibility of peaceful change for a number of years had moved toward violent confrontation and a more radical wing of the independence movement had come to prominence, younger, more radical figures who formed the Kosovo Liberation Army, the KLA, and were beginning to attack Serb facilities and personnel, which led to more savage reprisals by the Serbs. There had been a number of efforts to stem this. Holbrooke and Wes Clark had made several trips to Belgrade to talk to Milosevic and given him various ultimatums. And there had been arrangements and agreements, including one that put a group of unarmed observers, a fairly large group of unarmed observers into the territory. But that wasn't having any real effect, and the violence was being stepped up. There was increasing pressure on both European and American governments to take a more robust attitude and really to stem the violence.

There had been a long debate in the U.S. government with Madeleine Albright and Wes Clark, among others, championing a more robust military option, where others, the Department of Defense, for instance, had been more reluctant to go in that direction. But that had been pretty much resolved by the time I took over the portfolio.

Q: You mean it was basically resolved by the facts on the ground.

DOBBINS: Well, partially by the facts on the ground, and partially the debate. The administration had conducted a debate and the president had made some decisions.

Q: Did you get involved with bringing other governments, European governments, into this?

DOBBINS: Oh, yes. I took it over from Mark Grossman. At that point Grossman was doing Kosovo and Gelbard was doing Bosnia, and I took both, starting with Kosovo because it was more urgent, and a few months later, Bosnia. So I took over all of the diplomacy. Obviously, the secretary of state did some of it and the deputy secretary of state did some of it, but for the most part I was the principal interface with the Europeans, with the UN, with NATO, with others.

Q: Well, how did these fall out initially? As I recall, by the time you took over, you had a real human tragedy forming, of a great number of Kosovars being either massacred, a good number being massacred in place, or being evicted.

DOBBINS: Well, that came a little later. At the point before our bombing campaign started, the numbers affected were relatively limited. There were a few thousand. There were a number of refugees, and there were probably several thousand internally displaced as well. But the large-scale genocide, ethnic cleansing on a massive scale, which forced more than half of the population out of their homes, and a third of the population out of Kosovo, altogether, began after the bombing campaign and as a response to the bombing campaign.

Q: As you, I imagine, took your trips sounding the other countries out, what was their response?

DOBBINS: Well, the NATO diplomacy was already fairly far advanced. We were in the concluding phases of the Rambouillet Conference, which was a conference that the French and the British were co-hosting, and the contact group, which included the Russians and the French, the British, the Italians, the Germans and ourselves and the European Union were sponsoring. This conference brought together the Kosovar leaders with the Serb delegation, headed by the president of Serbia at the time, Milutinovic, who was a lieutenant of Milosevic's, in an effort to try to broker an agreement which would allow NATO and NATO forces to go in and police a ceasefire on an agreed basis and begin to build some kind of political framework in which the long-term status can be negotiated.

In the end, the Serbs rejected this. The Albanians rejected it at first, which infuriated Albright, but eventually they said they could accept the proposals that were on the table. The Serbs opposed them, and it was on that basis that NATO began its bombing campaign.

Q: Was there hope that the Serbs would accept this?

DOBBINS: Some. There were some people who thought that the Serbs could be induced to accept this. I think Dick Holbrooke hoped so. I think probably Chris Hill, who was the U.S. principal negotiator at the conference probably hoped so, but I think most of the administration did not think they would, and therefore was looking for an arrangement in which the Albanians would accept it and the Serbs wouldn't, so there would be a clear sort of casus belli (cause for war), which was why it was very upsetting when the Albanians didn't accept it either. But, eventually, they were persuaded to accept it.

Q: Did you find much of a division within NATO on our approach to this?

DOBBINS: Only on the fringes. The Greeks were very opposed to the conflict and to the NATO policy, although they didn't actively interfere in the alliance's carrying through on it. Some of the newer members, who had just joined, the Czechs in particular, were also unenthusiastic, and the Italians were pretty weak. But the French, the British and the Germans were pretty strong, and with their support, we were able to keep the rest of the alliance on track.

Q: What was the motivation behind the Greeks?

DOBBINS: I think historic identification with the Serbs and there's a strong strain of anti-Americanism in Greek political life.

Q: Also, too, I imagine that the Albanians, being on their border ...

DOBBINS: Yes, anti-Albanian.

Q: Anti-Albanian, too. Well, what was your role during this initial phase? You were talking about your role in the various groups. What was the UN?

DOBBINS: Well, the UN didn't have any formal role at this stage. They became important at a later stage when we agreed to give them the leadership role on the civil side of the post-conflict arrangements and they essentially were asked to govern Kosovo for an indefinite period, so they became quite important at that stage. But at this stage, they weren't. The Russians were going to block any Security Council action, so we essentially went to war without going to the UN. So the UN was on the sidelines in the run-up to the war and through the war itself, although Kofi Annan was fairly sympathetic to the war and said things that indicated his sympathy, even though there wasn't a Security Council resolution.

Q: What was the Russian attitude, were they just opposed?

DOBBINS: They were apoplectic. They had been supportive to the idea of bringing some kind of resolution to the situation and reducing the violence, and prepared to participate diplomatically, but they were unprepared to sanction the use of force and reacted very strongly when NATO began bombing. The Russian Prime Minister Primakov, was actually on a plane on his way to Washington and he turned around and flew back to Moscow when the bombing started.

Q: Were there any lessons that you were picking up that we had learned from Bosnia that we'll be getting into this, things to be done, things to be avoided?

DOBBINS: The planning for the post-conflict phase went quite smoothly in the U.S. government because everybody had already done it by that time three different times, in Somalia, in Haiti and in Bosnia, so we all knew each other. We knew what each other's preferences were. We didn't have the same arguments all over again. I mean, issues that had been settled one way or another in previous arrangements remained settled, so we had a familiar pattern to apply to this situation.

We also corrected some of the mistakes that we'd made in Bosnia. For instance, in Bosnia, the U.S. had opposed a strong civil administrator had worked to and fragment responsibilities in those areas in a rather misguided view that the United States was somehow in competition with Europe for influence in Bosnia, and that NATO was in competition with the European Union. But in this case, there was a general agreement that that had been a mistake and complicated the international community's exercise of its responsibilities in Bosnia. So we got pretty easy agreement on the civil side that there should be a single individual or a single organization with overall responsibility, in partnership with NATO. And we ultimately agreed that that should be the UN. There was initially some thought that it might be OSCE, but eventually it was agreed that it would be the UN.

There were a lot of other things. For instance, putting in a robust, well armed, international police force was agreed based on both the positive Haiti model and the negative model of Bosnia, where they hadn't armed them or given them arrest authority and we had subsequently regretted that. So there were a number of aspects to it that drew on previous experience and made the whole thing go much more smoothly. The more difficult problem was managing the alliance through the bombing campaign, which initially didn't seem to be succeeding. Indeed, it seemed to be making the situation worse. That was a very difficult process.

Q: Well, before we get to that, were you running into the opposition of, well, maybe Republicans or maybe other groups in the United States about doing this? This was a difficult time. The Clinton administration was domestically under a hell of a lot of pressure. The president either had been impeached or was in the process thereof.

DOBBINS: This came after the impeachment crisis, so that was over by the time this started. That was over only a few weeks before, but it was over. But the administration was still operating on a fairly thin margin and the Republicans controlled the Congress. Clinton did not go to Congress for authority to do this, and there was controversy, but it didn't divide along party lines. That is to say, there were Republicans, including Bob Dole, who was very supportive of the policy and associated himself with it closely, and there were some other Republicans, and I would guess there were some Democrats who were critical of it. The partisanship tended to become more pronounced after the conflict was over.

[End Side]

Q: You were saying the burden sharing became a point ...

DOBBINS: Yes, burden sharing became the club that the Republicans would beat the Democrats with. They limited U.S. assistance, for instance, to only 16 percent of the total in an effort to limit the U.S. exposure. So it became a burden-sharing debate, but there really wasn't much criticism of the conflict itself. There was criticism when it looked like we weren't winning it, of course, but once we'd succeeded, that criticism died down.

Q: Were you in on sort of the planning for the war, and you and others, say, who were sort of Balkan hands who were trying to figure out how the Serbs would respond.

DOBBINS: I wasn't a Balkan hand at that stage, but yes, of course the planning was already far advanced when I came in. I guess I probably came in maybe six or eight weeks before the actual bombing started, so there had been a lot of planning already underway, and then I took over responsibility for it and carried it forward in cooperation with the NSC and the Defense Department, and I had a number of Balkan hands working for me. I mean, I had a number of people with a lot of experience in the region.

Q: Well, as the bombing started, it seemed to be the press and all was playing up our mistakes, the blowing up of a bus and things of this nature.

DOBBINS: Well, and the Chinese Embassy.

Q: Oh, the Chinese Embassy. Oh my God.

DOBBINS: Yes, so there were constant alarms and excursions and small fires to put out every day. I mean, it was a five-ring circus. There was the media campaign, there was the military campaign, and there was the diplomatic campaign. There was the humanitarian effort. There were just lots of things going on and trying to keep all these strands straight and trying to keep everybody moving in the same direction was pretty much what my job was.

Q: Were there useful contacts with the Serb authorities, or did they shut down when the war started?

DOBBINS: They pretty much shut down. There were some tentative efforts to get in touch with us at the end, but the events were moving so quickly. Milosevic had his diplomatic adviser trying to get in touch with me toward the end, but by then the events had moved very quickly. The initiative was with Ahtisaari and the Russian former prime minister, Chernomyrdin. Ahtisaari, who was representing the European Union, Chernomyrdin representing the Russians, representing Russia, presented an ultimatum to Milosevic, which he accepted and agreed to withdraw from Kosovo.

In the end, there were no direct U.S. contacts until that point, and at that point, the contacts became military contacts.

Q: As the bombing campaign progressed, was there a feeling that the bombing of the Serb troops in the field didn't seem to be doing much, but almost moved the thing to break down the Serb economy, hitting Belgrade, Novi Sad, Pec and other places like that?

DOBBINS: Well, there was a lot of uncertainty at the time as to what we were accomplishing in terms of attacking military targets, which had been our initial emphasis. What we know since suggested that indeed we were quite ineffective, that we had not been able to locate or do much damage to military targets, that they had effectively camouflaged themselves and that we weren't doing much damage on a military basis. We clearly were damaging infrastructure, and there was a major debate in the administration, which raged throughout the process, as to how quickly we should escalate and how broadly, and the degree to which we should begin to attack more clearly civil targets.

One of the big debates was whether we should destroy the electric grid, for instance, which we didn't do, but which we were under considerable pressure to do from some elements within the administration, particularly the vice president's office. There was a huge debate within the military structure between the U.S. Air Force on the one hand and General Clark and NATO on the other about the strictures that they were under. The Air Force wanted to escalate the campaign, particularly against Belgrade. The campaign against Belgrade was gradually escalated, but only gradually, and it was an important process of sort of consensus building in the alliance that was necessary before one went too quickly in that direction.

Q: Were sort of the diplomats and the military of various nations involved sitting there picking targets?

DOBBINS: Formally, the targets were picked by NATO, by the NATO military structure. By and large, since the U.S. was providing the dominant component of the air effort, particularly the dominant component of the bombing aspect of the air effort, it was largely a U.S. decision. The targets were reviewed with the president. The French insisted that they also have in effect a veto over particularly sensitive civil targets, and so those types of targets also had to be briefed to the French, and they had to get their agreement. There was a good deal of unhappiness about that, and it remains one of the reasons that the current administration was so loathe to involve NATO in Afghanistan was this residue of unhappiness on the part of some, including the Air Force, over the strictures that they were under in what was called war by committee.

In fact, the restraints were quite sensible ones, and if the Air Force had had its way, we would have lost the war, because there's no doubt if they had escalated at the speed and extent they wanted to, they would have lost public opinion and split the alliance and the bombing campaign would have at that stage petered out without having accomplished anything.

Q: Were you in the position of sort of working with the Air Force to keep them from going too far?

DOBBINS: No. The dialog there was between Clark and his Air Force subordinates. The debates in the situation room which I participated in were more generic debates about how quickly we should be expanding the bombing campaign and whether or not we should in particular be going after the electric grids or some other things that would disable the society for a fairly extensive period of time if we did it. There, the principal proponents of that sort of escalation were the vice president's office. Now, they were probably getting their information and recommendations from the Air Force, but it wasn't the Air Force itself that was represented in the meetings.

Q: Well, in a way, it was the Air Force versus the more political, including Clark, the more politically sensitive side of things?

DOBBINS: Yes. It was the typical sort of debate, strains that occur in joint operations, in particular the Air Force's feeling that if they're just left on their own, they can win the war by themselves, thank you. It's the same sort of debates that occurred during Vietnam. In this case, of course, it was complicated by the fact that lots of other governments were undergoing the same debates, and you had a multinational command structure superimposed on the American one, which had arguments even within itself.

Q: It sounds like the Serbian army had taken to heart the lessons it had learned during the short Bosnian bombing.

DOBBINS: I don't know to what extent. That bombing campaign was so short. It was less than a few days. Whether they had had any particular lessons learned from that, I don't know, but the Serbian army was fairly professional. Its equipment was somewhat out of date, but it was a fairly disciplined and professional force. It was fighting in terrain where cover was adequate. Because there was an emphasis on avoiding casualties, and indeed we didn't suffer a single casualty in the campaign, the aircraft were operating at a fairly high level so they could avoid Serbian air defenses. As a result, they were operating at that high a level, they couldn't see very much.

Q: As this was progressing, was there concern on our part about who the KLA, the Kosovo Liberation Army, its makeup, leadership and where it was going?

DOBBINS: Oh, there was a lot of concern, because there were a lot of allegations that they had been engaged in drug trafficking, that they were engaged in political violence against Albanian enemies as well as against Serbs, that they engaged in human rights violations, were politically extremist. As a result, we did deal with them, I dealt with them quite extensively, but we never really saw them as allies and we didn't provide them any military support and, as soon as the war was over, we disarmed them.

Q: What were your Kosovo contacts?

DOBBINS: Well, Thaci, who was the head of the KLA faction, the sort of political leader, and who was the self-styled prime minister of Kosovo at that point, Rugova, who was the leader of the more pacifist, nonviolent wing, and was a more widely respected figure, but also a rather indecisive one. Then there was leadership in the KLA that we saw and there were other political factions with whom we had contacts.

Q: When we went into this, did we have a feeling what we wanted to come out of the war?

DOBBINS: Yes, because we had the Rambouillet agreement, which set up a framework for a government in Kosovo, and a framework for NATO's involvement, and that sort of provided a starting place. Now, once it was clear that this wasn't going to be a negotiated solution, the war aims originally were bomb them for a few days and see if they'll sign this agreement. After the Serbs retaliated by engaging in a large campaign of ethnic cleansing, it was pretty clear, A, they weren't going to sign the agreement, and, B, we weren't going to confine ourselves to that objective even if they had. So the war aims became more extensive, but they were also limited by the fact that we felt that in the end we would need Russian agreement and a Security Council resolution and other things in order to conclude the war successfully. And so the war aims were evolved in a series of NATO and then EU statements, but they also evolved in the context of an ongoing negotiation, which we conducted in the framework of the G-8 (Group of Eight) about a settlement. It was that negotiation which I headed the U.S. delegation to that produced the Security Council resolution that formally ended the war.

Q: The G-8 at that time, were the Russians in that?

DOBBINS: It was actually the same as the contact group plus Canada. The Russians had walked out of the contact group in a huff when the war started, and so in order to save face and not have to go back to the same group they walked out of, we found another group that was virtually identical. So it had the U.S., UK, Germany, France, Italy, the European Union and Russia, and then the G-8 also has Canada, so that was the group that negotiated the framework for post-conflict Kosovo while the Russians and EU were negotiating with Milosevic about his withdrawal. Strobe Talbott was masterminding that negotiation, working with Ahtisaari and Chernomyrdin, while I was doing the G-8 negotiation.

Q: How did the G-8 work? I mean, were there divisions within this?

DOBBINS: Well, there were the Russians on one side and everyone else on the other, mostly, but there were differences among the Western partners. It was a complex negotiation, which we had to work out Western positions and then negotiate with the Russians, and sometimes the negotiations became quite complex. But, by and large, the Western side had a generally agreed set of aims and getting the Russians to accept them was the objective of the talks.

Q: Why were the Russians so essential?

DOBBINS: Well, the Russians were essential for two reasons. First of all, there was a general concern about the direction Russia might take in that timeframe and with NATO expanding, with Russia at that time going through severe economic turbulence. There was a concern that Russia might head off in a quite unhelpful, authoritarian, confrontational direction over the longer term. There was also a desire that the conflict be concluded in a way that secured full international legitimacy and would require a UN resolution. And, finally, it was felt that the Russians had some influence with Serbia, that Serbia as long as it felt it had continued Russia, and then Chinese, for that matter, support, would continue to defy NATO, but that if we could demonstrate to them that they had lost Russian support, that would be another factor in securing their acquiescence and NATO's objectives.

Q: Was there a moment or an action or something that sort of tipped the balance and brought the Serbian government, Milosevic, into agreement?

DOBBINS: Well, I think there were three factors that brought Milosevic into agreement, although we still don't know this, because we found no documents or other statements that give a clear-cut answer as to why he suddenly surrendered at that point. It rather surprised us that he did, but one assumes it was a combination of the bombing campaign, which was steadily expanding and beginning to attack targets that were more sensitive to the regime and to the populace. Secondly, the fact that the Russians did pull the plug, that they went with Ahtisaari and gave him an ultimatum and made clear that they were no longer prepared to support him. And, finally, the third factor was that there was a steadily growing debate in Washington and in NATO about moving onto a ground campaign, which was very controversial. The president had initially said he wasn't going to do this, but he was steadily moving toward a recognition that it might be necessary and there were active considerations underway of moving toward a ground campaign. The Pentagon was still resistant to it, but State was pushing hard for it, the White House was at least open to the possibility. The British were pushing for it. Milosevic presumably recognized that the next stage could be a ground assault and that that might not limit itself to Kosovo and that he might not survive such an effort.

Q: Was there floating around during this time the idea that maybe Kosovo might become part of a greater Albania, or something of that nature?

DOBBINS: No, there was a uniform agreement that was a bad idea. Even the Albanians rejected it.

Q: Why would that be a bad idea?

DOBBINS: Well, among other things, if you start redrawing borders in that region, it's not clear where you would stop. If Kosovo could become part of a greater Albania, why couldn't the Republic of Srpska become part of Serbia? Why couldn't the Croatian parts of Bosnia become a part of Croatia? Why wouldn't the Albanian-majority areas in Macedonian become a part of greater Albania? So there was a strong resistance to it, but the Kosovars themselves weren't interested, because Albania is much poorer than Kosovo.

Q: No, I was struck that when the Kosovars were leaving, they were leaving in cars and leaving behind nice-looking houses, which going back to my time in Belgrade, when I left in '67, just wasn't the case.

DOBBINS: Well, the Kosovars were still the poorest part of Serbia, and the poorest part of Yugoslavia, but they were a lot richer than Albania.

Q: During these negotiations and all, covering this, you'd been doing this thing before, had sort of the communications revolution hit? Cell phones, quick access, e-mail, all this, all the delegations were in much closer consultation with their people?

DOBBINS: Yes, this had accelerated. The first time I really saw the impact of the communications revolution had been earlier, when I went with Jim Baker to NATO just after the coup in the Soviet Union. I was the acting Assistant Secretary for Europe in it must have been '90, maybe, '91? The coup was underway in the Soviet Union and NATO was having an emergency meeting and Gorbachev was under arrest and Yeltsin was besieged in the White House, so Baker and I flew to Brussels and it was an interesting day. We were sitting in the NATO Council and Manfred Worner was the secretary general and he was chairing the meeting, and he had all the foreign ministers there and they were beginning to go around and make their sort of set piece opening talks, and all of a sudden, Manfred Worner got up and he said, "Excuse me, I have to take a telephone call," and left. And the meeting stopped and I guess it was 15 foreign ministers looked at each other, "What do you mean? The secretary general is stopping a meeting of 15 foreign ministers so he can take a phone call? What the hell is going on here?" So we looked at each other and we wondered, "What on earth? His wife called? She'd forgotten to pick something up?" What was going on?

So he came back in and he said, "I've just gotten a call from Boris Yeltsin and he's informed me that the coup is over, that Gorbachev has been released, that the coup leaders are in custody and that he, Yeltsin is in charge, and everything's fine," which I thought was interesting, because it showed that the first person Boris Yeltsin called when the coup was over was the secretary general of NATO. It was pretty extraordinary. Then we went on. So the meeting sort of ended. There were speeches, but clearly the meeting just celebrated this wonderful thing.

Then we went out and the Russian foreign minister, Russia was still part of the Soviet Union at the time, so the idea that Russia had a foreign minister was itself somewhat bizarre. The Russian foreign minister was in Brussels, so Baker and I met with the Russian foreign minister, which again was the first ever, and was strange. Then we went back to do press events and give press conferences.

Normally, the pattern was that the secretary general would give a press conference and then the next press conference would be the American secretary of state. So we're sitting in a holding room, watching Manfred Worner give his press conference, and Jim Baker's on the telephone, calling people around the world and particularly calling various democrats in Russia, people who had been closely associated with Gorbachev, leading the Russian glasnost, calling to congratulate them and ask what was going on and getting information. So Worner's off, and then, suddenly, George Bush is giving a press conference, so we are watching George Bush's press conference on the television, and you can see that the world leaders are queued up around the world trying to get on CNN to give a press conference, but everybody had to wait until somebody else was finished. Because if you gave your press conference at the same time someone else did, it wouldn't be covered live.

So we had to wait while George Bush gave a press conference, and a reporter said, "Have you talked to Jim Baker?" And George Bush said, "I've been trying to call him for an hour, but I can't get through," at which point, Baker, who was on the telephone watching this out of one eye, said, "Woops, I've got to get off the phone," and called the president. Then Baker was giving his press conference, so you could see the world leaders were queuing up to get on CNN, which was at that point the only 24-hour news station to give their press conferences and were calling each other as they waited to get on television. So there was this really worldwide network.

Now, by the time we got to Kosovo, which was nine years later, the cell phone had come into pervasive use, and so we would have daily phone calls. The secretary would have phone calls, sometimes individual, but with the Quint, which was the U.S., UK, French and Italians. She would usually call the five foreign ministers more or less every day, and half of them would be on a cell phone in their automobile somewhere, going from one place to the other, and the other would be in their office. Then I would call, have similar conversations, with the next level down, with the political directors of the five countries.

Then she would also have fairly regular phone calls with the Russian foreign minister, and then bilaterally with any number of foreign ministers. I would normally participate passively in all of those conversations. I would be put into the phone conversations sort of on mute so I could listen and follow up on whatever decisions were taken or suggestions were made. I remember I was in Bonn, because we were having one of these G-8 meetings and it was a free day. I was waiting to catch a plane back, so I borrowed a bicycle and was bicycling along the Rhine, but I had my cell phone, because she was of course busy. She was in Washington. So I was sitting on the cell phone, listening to these high-level discussions as I bicycled, a lovely sunny day and people out. I was bicycling around, listening to her talk to the Russian foreign minister, to the Quint foreign ministers, sort of participating in this high-level diplomacy while I was pleasantly bicycling on a sunny day along the Rhine. It was very bizarre. So the pace of diplomacy and the ability to be in contact with almost anyone, anytime, had very much picked up at that stage.

Q: As a practical measure, has this improved things, or what?

DOBBINS: It can. It helped us greatly in maintaining cohesion. I think we were very successful in containing not only cohesion in NATO, but between NATO and the European Union, and within the U.S. government. I mean, we were all over the world and talking to each other. I remember we were flying back to Washington just after the war and the Russians suddenly invaded Kosovo without being invited, and we'd arrived in Macedonia and we were meeting with Sir Michael Jackson, who was the British commander of the KFOR, the force that went into Kosovo and was just about to go in. He told us that the Russians had sent a battalion out of Bosnia that was rushing for destination at that point unknown, but probably for Kosovo, and what sort of confrontation. So just sitting there in this airport lounge, we got Sandy Berger on the phone in Washington and then we got Strobe Talbott on the phone, and he was on a plane having just left Moscow a half-hour before and having been told by the Russians that this wasn't going to happen.

We all talked to Michael Jackson from these different sites, and then Jackson went off and did his work and Strobe Talbott turned his plane around and went back to Moscow. We got on a plane and went to Washington and we got calls throughout the trip to Washington. I kept trying to sleep and I kept getting woke up, the Russians were coming, the Russians weren't coming, the Russians were already there. Strobe Talbott had flown back to Moscow, been again promised this wasn't going to happen. Again, it happened. The Russian foreign minister made a statement that they would leave, and then they didn't leave. This was all sort of as we were cruising across the Atlantic for 10 hours. It was pretty amazing.

Q: Well, then, did you get involved in the dispute, apparently, between Clark and Michael Jackson about what to do about the Soviet battalion?

DOBBINS: Well, on the periphery, when Jackson told us about it, he said, "I assume they're going to go and take the airport," and there was some discussion about whether we should resist, whether we should put troops in, and he said, "Well, we told the Serbs we weren't going to be there for three days. We were going to occupy Kosovo in stages, as they left, coming in as they left. This would be jumping ahead and going right into the midst of the Serb forces and it could lead to fighting through misunderstanding or because we weren't adhering to our part of the agreement." So I said I thought that I thought the problem with the Russians was one that should be solved diplomatically, not militarily. Whether Jackson even paid any attention to my remark or whether he came to his own conclusions quite separately, I don't know, but that is the tact he took and he eventually talked to them.

Q: At the time, and then in hindsight, what was the evaluation of why the Russians came up and there were assurances from Moscow it wasn't going to happen and it did, they came and grabbed an airfield. Nothing really came of it, but at one point it seemed like this was ...

DOBBINS: It was the Russian military who were deeply unhappy with the way the conflict had been ended, the manner in which their diplomacy had been sort of compelled to abandon the Serbs. They were feeling abused and unhappy and Yeltsin wasn't providing strong, consistent leadership. The leadership tended to be somewhat episodic, so it was clearly something that was done by the military. Whether they had gotten Yeltsin's permission or not it's not clear. It's pretty clear that the Foreign Ministry had no idea what they were doing. The Foreign Minister at least thought what he was saying was accurate when it said it.

Q: Well, was this a matter of really considerable concern, because here you had a Soviet Union that was falling apart and ...

DOBBINS: This was 10 years after.

Q: But here you had a military going its own way.

DOBBINS: Yes, there was concern. I think the administration did feel that this wasn't a precursor to nuclear war. This could be managed, and we essentially stifled this by getting all the neighboring states to deny the Russians over-flight rights so that the unit couldn't be supplied. After a few days of recognizing that they had to get their food from the British who were surrounding them, and that they really had no capacity to hold out indefinitely, an arrangement was negotiated and they largely went away. They went to a Soviet sector.

Albright and I and Bill Cohen had to fly to Helsinki and spend two days negotiating with Russian military and the foreign ministethe defense minister and the foreign minister were both theron what Russia's sector and arrangements and command arrangements would be in Kosovo, which was difficult, but eventually yielded a satisfactory agreement.

Q: Well, did you go into this negotiation with the idea that, in a way, you wanted to give the military a chance to back away. I mean, it must have been a tricky negotiation.

DOBBINS: Yes, I mean, there was a desire to let the Russians save face as long as what they were asking wasn't too inconsistent with NATO's retaining control of the military operation, including control of the Russian behavior.

Q: Did you see during the negotiation a split between the military and the Foreign Ministry?

DOBBINS: To some degree, but it was clear the military were in charge and the Foreign Ministry were just watching, trying to facilitate, but clearly the military was in charge at that point.

Q: Did you have concern about trying to rein General Clark in at that point?

DOBBINS: No, the Pentagon reined him in. They essentially backed Jackson, which as Clark in his book indicates, was incompatible with what they earlier told him, so he was somewhat the injured party in getting instructions from the Pentagon to go in one direction, and when Jackson balked, he called back and they agreed with Jackson, which left him out on a limb.

Q: After the Serbs gave in, what was your involvement?

DOBBINS: Well, I was in charge of setting, for the United States, of establishing the post-conflict arrangements, the peacekeeping operation and the UN governance, the diplomacy associated with it, getting the refugees back, disarming the KLA, making other arrangements to employ its members. There was a lot to do. It was at least as busy after the war, and I was responsible for the rest of the Balkans as well, for Bosnia, for Macedonia, for Albania, for Serbia. The focus for the next year became a massive campaign to unseat Milosevic, so I became very active with the Serb opposition, with neighboring states in terms of support for Serb opposition, creating a unified opposition, giving them electoral strategy, providing them material assistance and creating a unified front throughout the region in support of, essentially, regime change in Serbia.

Q: Before we go to that, what about the return of the refugees and all this? This must have presented a horrendous problem, didn't it?

DOBBINS: In some respects. The international community always tends to underestimate the speed at which these people will return home once the situation permits it. In this case, they didn't have far to go, because Kosovo was not that big. They were in camps on its periphery and both of them had transport, if not cars, tractors. So within a few days, despite efforts by UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and others to discourage them, they got on their tractors and went home. Of course, some of them suffered from the landmines that had been placed, but by and large, most of them got back very quickly and many of them found their homes damaged or totally destroyed, but they did get back quickly and began rebuilding their lives.

The problem wasn't getting them back. They did that on their own. The problem was ensuring that there was adequate food and shelter, and that was a fairly massive effort, which UNHCR headed and which was successful.

Q: Was there a substantial infrastructure for taking care of problems within the international community, food and shelter?

DOBBINS: Humanitarian assistance is probably the aspect of international intervention that is most adequately funded and organized, provided that adequate security is arranged. This is the aspect of nation-building that is least problematic and nearly always meets its basic goals, provided there is adequate security.

Q: What about the idea to keep Serbs in Kosovo? Once the Kosovars kind of won their point, we ended up trying to preserve small enclaves of Serbs. How did you feel about that?

DOBBINS: We probably didn't realize as much as we should have that as soon as the war was over, we would switch from protecting Albanians from Serbs to protecting Serbs from Albanians. We probably should have given some more forethought to it. I guess our feeling was that the Serbs would mostly flee. In fact, more than half of them stayed, which was a little surprising. They didn't necessarily stay in their own homes. Many of them congregated in certain areas, so you had these Serb enclaves, many of which were occupying Albanian homes, unfortunately, which exacerbated the difficulty, in several areas around the country. And they organized themselves to defend those areas, and so you had a rising source of conflict between the two communities. Of course, there were a number of reprisals taken by the Albanians as they came back, in response to the atrocities that the Serbs had committed. But the international community, and this was particularly strongly felt in Europe, felt that it was important to preserve the Serb rights in Kosovo, that we hadn't fought a war against ethnic cleansing only to see it take place on the other side, and that the test of the Kosovars' ability to govern themselves would be whether they were prepared to provide a framework in which the Serbs could also live.

So protecting these Serbs, the immediate media attention immediately after the war was over tended to focus on the degree to which NATO was providing adequate protection to the residual Serb population, and that became the news story, was how many Serbs were killed each day, what atrocities were taking place against the Serbs. The focus of NATO's activities there very quickly became directed toward the criminal and extremist elements that were threatening the Serb population.

Q: I mean, there had been the debate on having a diffuse or centralized authority, international authority or administrator or something. Who was the first administrator?

DOBBINS: Well, Sergio de Mello was briefly there, put in on an acting basis. He was the UN envoy, and he was immediately put in, a couple of days after the war over, until a permanent person could be named, and the person who was named was a Frenchman named Bernard Kouchner.

Q: Yes, he was a Doctors Without Borders.

DOBBINS: He founded Doctors Without Borders, and he was the French minister of health at the time. He resigned that position and went to Kosovo. He was a rather flamboyant, rather telegenic media-type person, but one with real humanitarian sentiments and strong views. His views tended to be closer to the American than the French on what to do about Kosovo, so he wanted to move quickly towards self-government and hold elections more quickly than the French government wanted. So, in general, we thought him quite good, although as an administrator, he was somewhat scattered in his ability to organize and concentrate. We had agreed, partially at my insistence, that the UN was the right organization, but partially because the Russians insisted that this be given to the UN to organize and run.

Q: How did that work out?

DOBBINS: It worked out pretty well. There were the complaints that they were slow in staffing it, that their personnel had arrived, only trickled in, that there was a long period during which NATO was fully deployed but the UN was only getting organized. This is normal in these situations because the military have surge capability and people on standby and civilians don't, and this was a major new task for the UN. But in the end, it certainly worked better than Bosnia. The other organizations, the OSCE and the EU, took subordinate positions within the structure, and that worked out fairly well.

Q: Were you concerned about Macedonia at the time?

DOBBINS: Well, not initially. It became more of a problem a year or so later when the Albanian minority there began to agitate and eventually took up arms with demands that split the country. There was a serious concern that Macedonia would fragment at the time, which would have had reverberating effects throughout the region, and quite serious ones. But at the time we weren't really concentrating on Macedonia. There were some people who argued that it was the central point of vulnerability in the Balkans, because historically it had been disputes over sovereignty over Macedonia that had been the source of conflict in both the First and Second Balkan Wars.

Q: What was the Greek role during this time?

DOBBINS: The Greeks had been generally unhelpful during the war, but Papandreou, who was a very sophisticated and sensible person managed to ensure that their political opposition wasn't manifested in a way that created irreconcilable problems for NATO. In the aftermath of the war, they on balance became helpful in Kosovo. They provided assistance and the problems that they had previously posed were largely reduced. And in Macedonia, other than on the issue of the name of the country, they were quite supportive. They had what to most people was an absolutely absurd position that Macedonia didn't have a right to call itself Macedonia, and they had been able to use their positions in NATO and the European Union and others to actually persuade countries not to use it. So "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" became the name that you had to call them, rather than just Macedonia or the Republic of Macedonia. But other than on that point, they were actually quite helpful in terms of dealing with the Macedonian problem.

Q: Of course, I mean, through Thessaloniki was the way to send supplies and all that, too, wasn't it?

DOBBINS: Yes.

Q: Did you have any problems there?

DOBBINS: No.

[End Tape]

Q: This is tape eight, side one, with Jim Dobbins. Yes.

DOBBINS: If we actually tried to invade Kosovo, then the Greek attitude undoubtedly would have become more of a problem.

Q: During the time when you had to deal with Bosnia, what was your reading of that?

DOBBINS: The politics were still very complex and there were still strong antipathies among the ethnic groups. The political mechanisms that had been created at Dayton were largely dysfunctional and the international community had to play a very assertive role in simply holding the country together and continuing to make progress on small things, but Bosnia was at that point quiescent in a military sense. Security was good. It was almost entirely a political problem, but it required considerable management.

Q: Were we putting pressure on the military, particularly I guess the French military, to do something about Mladic and Karadzic?

DOBBINS: We were putting pressure on our military to do something about it, unsuccessfully.

Q: I thought the French had the Republic of Srpska.

DOBBINS: No, that was mostly American.

Q: And our military, what was their ...

DOBBINS: Well, Mladic and Karadzic were mostly in Serbia. They weren't in Bosnia anyway. Karadzic at least came into Bosnia occasionally, and there was a thought that we might grab him when we did. There was also some effort to persuade the Montenegrins to cooperate in grabbing him, but basically our military took a very conservative approach to this and wanted to conduct operations only provided they had nearly perfect conditions: advance intelligence, many other factors. They insisted on a set of conditions for conducting an operation to grab one of these people that could never be met, and probably couldn't have been met. We did pick up a number of other war criminals during this period.

Q: Was there a feeling that we had not done the right thing in allowing this Republic of Srpska to exist and to have for some reason a sort of a separate entity?

DOBBINS: I think that was regarded as inevitable, given the limited commitment we were prepared to make to compelling some othethe only aspect of the Dayton agreement in that regard that was controversial was letting them keep the name Republic of Srpska, which gave the appearance of more autonomy and independence than people were comfortable with. But, other than the name, I don't think anybody was critical of the idea that Bosnia would be broken up into several, formerly two, and informally three, different components.

Q: Well, when you looked at the Balkans at that time, was the feeling that the basic population was getting on with the rest of life and there was less interest in this ethnic hatred?

DOBBINS: I think there was a feeling that NATO's strong positions in Bosnia and in Kosovo had stabilized the region, that in combination with a lot of international assistance you had the so-called "Stability Pact." Clinton went to Sarajevo for this big conference that established essentially it was a Balkan Marshall plan, a reconstruction program for the region as a whole. There was a major U.S. and European commitment to the region, which included ultimately a commitment to bring them both into the European Union and NATO. That allowed the other states of the region to begin to reorient their internal politics and their economic structures toward Western models. So there was a feeling that Bulgaria, Romania, Albania were all headed in the right direction. Then the success in displacing Milosevic in a largely peaceful revolution, and putting in a reform government, was a definite boost for the region and certainly the administration regarded that as an important accomplishment.

Q: What about during this whole Kosovo conflict, the role of Montenegro. There was talk about perhaps it going back to being a separate entity, which it had been before, back in the turn of the century. Was this of concern or of interest?

DOBBINS: Well, we had a very delicate role with respect to Montenegro. We had a relationship with the regime in Montenegro. During the war, we were careful not to do any bombing there, or almost no bombing there. There were a few military targets we bombed, but otherwise we didn't bomb. As soon as the war was over, we resumed our relationship, assigned Foreign Service officers who actually were physically living just across the border in Croatia, but visiting it on a daily basis. I went into Montenegro every month or two and met with the president and his advisers fairly regularly and we began providing assistance to Montenegro, economic assistance of different sorts.

At the same time, we were advising them against going independent, advising them to work with the opposition. They were helpful in supporting the opposition and opposing Milosevic, but Djukanovic, who was the president, wanted to lead them toward independence. We successfully blocked that and I had to be fairly tough with him.

Q: How did you block it?

DOBBINS: The Europeans felt even more strongly than we did that if Montenegro were to become independent, first of all, it would be a small, largely criminalized, non-self-sustaining state. Secondly, it would make it more difficult to keep Kosovo in a state of suspended animation, and it would further radicalize politics in Serbia, and, finally, it would also make it more difficult to hold Bosnia together. If Montenegro could be independent, why couldn't the Republic of Srpska? And you had the same concerns about Macedonia splitting apart, so there was a strong, particularly European, consensus against doing anything, which we generally agreed with.

Basically, we made clear that we would speak out against it, that both the Europeans and we would take a strong, public stance against independence, and opinion was split within Montenegro, which we knew. We'd conducted opinion polls and we were pretty confident that Djukanovic could not win a referendum if he held one, so the impact of strong American and European opposition to the move essentially made it impossible for him to go forward.

Q: After the bombing and the accords that allowed for Kosovo to be in its present form, what about our relations with Serbia? Was this going to be treated as a defeated power or how?

DOBBINS: Our original thought was that we would go back to our relationship with Serbia before Kosovo had become an issue, which was not a good relationship, but we had at least had discussions with them. We had diplomatic relations, and we were in communication with them. The initial thought was we would lift the sanctionnot the sanctions that had been posed by reason of the problems they were making in Bosnia, but the sanctions that related to Kosovo. We were beginning to move in that direction, and then we got a very different signal. I think Tony Blair was the first to realize that this was where we were going, and he called on the president and his staff called the White House. And Albright, who really had a visceral dislike of Milosevic, was easy to persuade that we had an opportunity to displace Milosevic and that we needed to avoid going back to business as usual. Keep all of the restrictions on that we had put on as a result of the war and make a concerted effort to overthrow him, using peaceful means, but a wide-ranging set of instrumentalities to build up the opposition, to provide it support, to use the media in all of the surrounding countries in broadcasting into the country, to keep on sanctions and even intensify them, to target the regime with further sanctions, denying them visas, in effect, denying them ability to leave the country and go anywhere. And so we had a concerted program for nearly a year, which did succeed ultimately in overthrowing Milosevic.

Q: Did we have problems with Congress or the press in doing this? I mean, was this ...

DOBBINS: No, Congress was quite supportive.

Q: This was not covert. This was overt.

DOBBINS: Well, if there were covert aspects, I wouldn't talk about them.

Q: All right.

DOBBINS: The fact that our objective was to support the democratic opposition and displace Milosevic was no secret and we had a number of overt programs that were designed to do that, and Congress was very supportive, including Jesse Helms.

Q: Did you have any problems with the Serb community in the United States when all this started?

DOBBINS: Not too much. During the war, there were some in the Serb community who protested. The Serb community didn't have a whole lot of influence in the United States. Somehow, the Croat community had more influence than the Serb community, and then after the war was over, by and large the Serb community became supportive of an effort to displace Milosevic. There was still some division in it, but there were some in the Serb American community that had contacts and were prepared to help, and we worked with them.

Q: We've been talking about the time you were dealing with the Balkans and we're talking about our support for the people who wanted to oust Milosevic. A couple of questions I'd like to ask about that, how it developed, and after all, we'd just bombed the hell out the country. It was to avoid too many casualties, but a development of a real hatred of the United States? So we'll talk about that a bit, and were there any other developments in the Balkans that you were having to deal with? You did that until when?

DOBBINS: I did it through the end of the administration and into the next administration. I became assistant secretary for Europe, but then that of course continued to include the Balkans.

Q: Okay, today is the 8th of April 2004. Jim, were we changing the dynamics of the American role in the Balkans and putting the Serbs very much on the anti-American side? Did you see that happening or not?

DOBBINS: Well, at this stage, no. I mean, we certainly had effectively sided against the Serbs earlier in the decade in dealing with Bosnia, and then in dealing with Kosovo. But in the aftermath of Kosovo, our effort was to side with the Serbs against their leadership, which we were successful in doing. So I think that whatever hostility we had created earlier began rather to slowly dissipate as a result of our clear engagement on behalf of those people who ultimately did become the government.

Q: How did we see this Serb government? Where were the Milosevic loyalists and where were the anti-Milosevic people?

DOBBINS: Well, the Milosevic loyalists were principally the criminal elements that he had introduced into his regime and whom were rewarded with various forms of corruption and the sort of nationalist extremists in his and other parties, like the Radical Party, and in the army. And the democrats represented all of the other party, some of whom were liberal, Western oriented, others of whom were more conservative and more nationalist, but still anti-Milosevic and basically democratic in their orientation. We were successful in mobilizing the students, which was quite important, and in a broad section of the intelligentsia.

Q: Were the Russians playing any role in this?

DOBBINS: They were playing a largely unhelpful role. They were supporting Milosevic and resisting efforts to put pressure on him. They weren't particularly influential, but to the extent they had influence, they were declining the opportunity to reverse their alliances and come out on top, and they did that until virtually the last moment.

Q: Was this mainly to sort of keep us from getting too much influence, or was this the traditional Slavic pan-Slavism?

DOBBINS: Well, it's a little hard to attribute much in the way of sort of rational calculation to the Russian policy at the time. Yeltsin was in charge, but only barely. The military were exercising a good deal of influence over policy. The Foreign Ministry was comparatively weak and so the issues were being looked at from a rather nationalist, conservative in Russian terms, approach, one that cast an eye on the domestic situation and on not wanting to appear to conciliatory to the United States, nor to abandon a traditional ally. So the calculations really weren't very rational. They really were driven politically and personally by the forces that were then dominating Russian policymaking.

Q: I can't remember exactly how we dealt with this last time, but what was the endgame with, say, Kosovo? We were trying to turn this over to the United Nations, the EU, or how were we seeing this?

DOBBINS: Well, we involved all of the relevant institutions in Kosovo. Basically, NATO was responsible for the military tasks in Kosovo. The UN was in overall charge in the civil tasks and the EU was in charge under UN auspices for Kosovo's economic reconstruction, and the OSCE was responsible for overseeing elections and other democratic reforms. So we mobilized all of the relevant institutions and gave them roles within an overall hierarchy.

Q: How did that work out? I mean, were there problems?

DOBBINS: It worked out better than the previous arrangements, because we were able to put them in a well-understood hierarchy, and we were able to devise a division of labor between NATO and the United Nations that made sense. And there were calculated overlaps in their capabilities in the security area, which tended to be the area where things fell between the stools in the way they had done in Bosnia. There were still difficulties. The civil elements of the mission deployed much more slowly than the military elements, which meant that NATO had to be responsible for policing, law and order issues, longer than it was comfortable in doing and would have liked to do because of the difficulties of deploying adequate civil assets, and that happens in all of these cases.

Q: The United Nations is always a tricky thing. The United Nations has sort of a mixed reputation in this type of operation. Do you think they kind of learned how to run something like this?

DOBBINS: This was the first time they'd actually had to run a whole country, in effect. They did have NATO doing the military task, which relieved them of that, but this was the first time when they were not only supporting an existing government, but actually providing for a government. So it was a larger role, but they got a good deal of assistance from other organizations and countries in doing it. I had developed confidence in the UN's ability to do this, based on having worked with them in Haiti, where it worked quite successfully. I think the UN, given the limited resources that are normally placed at its disposal, has a reasonably credible record. But one has to understand that they normally work with far fewer resources than, say, the U.S. does when it undertakes similar tasks, and therefore you have to sort of have a lower threshold for expectations.

Q: Were you there when Kouchner came in? Quite often, the French and the Americans are different, sort of off, not getting along the best. Did he represent a French view that gave us problems or not?

DOBBINS: He turned out to be a very pleasant surprise in that regard. His views were much closer to our own than his own government's, and I think on virtually all of the issues he saw things our way. He wasn't the best manager. He was a rather flamboyant, publicity-conscious figure, without a long attention span. But his instincts were quite sound. His policy judgment nearly always coincided with our own, and he was a fairly courageous individual with enough stature in Europe to get European buy-in and support. So I think we were, on balance, quite pleased with him, had a good working relationship with him, even recognizing his managerial deficits.

Q: Well, then, you left sort of the Balkan thing when? I realized you have it where you are.

DOBBINS: I gave up responsibility for it I guess around May or June of 2001, when I phased out of the European Bureau. I went from being special adviser to the president and secretary for the Balkans to assistant secretary for Europe a year earlier, early in 2000.

Q: What were some of the other issues that you were dealing with when you were dealing with European Affairs?

DOBBINS: The other main issue was the NATO-EU relationship as the EU moved toward the acquisition of some defense capabilities, and how they would relate to NATO. And that raised a host of issues between the two organizations, among some of the countries concerned like Turkey, who had some reservations about it and was using its position in NATO to block some arrangements that would have linked the two organizations more closely. So that was one set of issues.

The Balkans continued to be probably the single largest set of issues that I was dealing with throughout the period. Macedonia looked like it was going to blow up at one time and we had a new relationship to establish. We got the Serbs to disgorge Milosevic and send him to The Hague, so there were a lot of Balkan-related issues. I think those were the main issues that were active at the time.

Q: Did Albania play any particulawas it of any interest to us particularly?

DOBBINS: It was of considerable interest to us during the whole Kosovo crisis, because it was a base from which we would have ultimately probably invaded Kosovo, if we chose to invade Kosovo. We were mounting at least some of the operations in Kosovo out of Albania. It was a large refugee holding center. The Albanians had the capacity to further disrupt the region if they said or did the wrong thing, which by and large they didn't. It was also a source of criminality, smuggling, and other forms of disorder in the region. Albright and I visited Albania during this period.

Q: How about Greece? Was Greece helpful, non-helpful, because it has a mixed relationship with that area?

DOBBINS: The Greek public opinion was strongly opposed to the war in Kosovo and rather favorable to Milosevic, and the Greek foreign minister, Papandreou, was a rather sophisticated interlocutor, a very appealing fellow. He got on very well with Albright and I liked him and worked with him, and he rather skillfully worked his way around these conflicts in our relationship and actually did prove quite helpful, in a modest way on Kosovat least keeping Greece within the alliance consensus and also some modest things in terms of providing some refugee assistance and assistance to displaced persons in Kosovo.

In the effort to displace Milosevic, the Greeks actually played a useful role in facilitating contacts with some of the opposition leaders. So, despite a rather hostile public opinion, Papandreou actually was quite helpful in that phase.

Q: What about Turkey? During this time, I mean, here were fellow Muslims, although there wasn't really an ethnic tiwell, maybe there wabut fellow Muslims. Were we concerned about restraining the Turks or getting them to do something, or were they indifferent?

DOBBINS: Well, they weren't indifferent. On Kosovo, they were perfectly helpful and supportive. I wouldn't say they were leading, but they were certainly well within the alliance consensus. So there weren't any real issues, there weren't any problems that had a particularly Turkish cast to them. The problems with Turkey were of course the perennial issue of Cyprus, which we had dealt with and tried to move forward during this period and the arrangements between NATO and the EU. Turkey was opposed to the EU acquiring defense capabilities because they felt that ultimately it might be used against Turkey in some sort of Cyprus scenario or in some sort of conflict with Greece over the Aegean islands. So they were rather resistant to the idea that NATO and the EU should collaborate and used their ability to block NATO arrangements to that effect to frustrate a process for a long time, and I took the lead in the negotiations designed to remove this blockage, and negotiations involving the EU and NATO. We brought this almost to a conclusion. It was concluded somewhat later, but it was basically concluded on the basis of an agreement that I negotiated.

Q: What could be done to assure the Turks this wouldn't be used against them?

DOBBINS: The negotiation became rather arcane. There were some assurances that were provided by the EU in terms of the conditions. First of all, providing Turkey access to EU planning, participation in EU missions, certain assurances that Turkey would be kept informed and have an ability to participate, that there would be some transparency as the EU planned missions, statements which discouraged the notion that the EU was somehow going to play a military role in terms of the Greek-Turkish various issues under dispute. After a while, formula which are now too complex and arcane to remember were worked out on a number of these points and the Turks ultimately agreed.

Q: Well, NATO already was an existing thing for more than 50 years, doing very nicely, thank you, and then all of a sudden there was the thought of an EU force. What was the purpose of the EU force that would be different than NATO?

DOBBINS: I think the Europeans felt that there were circumstances in which NATO might not wish to involve itself, the Balkans in the early '90s being the best example, where the United States blocked any use of NATO troops in the Balkans from '91 to '95, leaving the Europeans to have to work through the United Nations and other less satisfactory mechanisms. So it was that experience, in part. It was a feeling that there were contingencies in Africa and elsewhere where the U.S. might not want to be involved and where NATO might not be the best vehicle. It was partially simply a desire to complete the European construction, to not leave out an obvious component of a fully competent, united Europe.

There was an argument that the Europeans would be more likely to spend money and make sacrifices if a European flag, rather than a trans-Atlantic flag, were put on their defense efforts. That logic proved spurious. I mean, that hasn't happened, but there were a variety of rationales for the desire. There were different national agendas involved. The French wanted to diminish U.S. influence and increase European influence and French influence throughout Europe. The Germans had a sort of a federalist vision of Europe, and the British were looking for a way of accentuating their own European-ness and compensating for their inability to join monetary union. So there were a variety of agendas that led to this.

Q: Looking at this, in many cases, the key to almost all military action in the last few decades has been the ability to transport and supply. The United States has that, and the Europeans haven't been able to make the expenditures to do this. Was this something they were considering?

DOBBINS: We kept emphasizing that they should spend more time worrying about capabilities and less time worrying about organizational wiring diagrams. The French and the British both have some capacity for expeditionary combat. They've both been mounting such operations with fair frequency, so it's not that the Europeans have no capacity, but it's certainly not as developed as is that of the United States. But, yes, there was a lot of emphasis in our rhetoric on the issue, sort of pushing them to spend more money and do more things, and their focus tended to be more on getting the structures right.

Q: Well, what about the bringing in of East European countries into the EU and into NATO? This was done during your time, what had been started, or was this ...

DOBBINS: The first expansion had occurred just before I took over the Balkan post, so Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic had joined NATO a couple of months before I assumed my responsibilities. We began in a rather preliminary fashion while I was still running the European Bureau to discuss the next enlargement, the one that has just occurred, but everybody recognized that this was going to have to wait until after the U.S. elections before the U.S. would be in a position to make any decisions. So we had some discussions, but they were rather preliminary.

Q: What were some of the thoughts within the EU in your own mind about adding these countries?

DOBBINS: Well, I think that in general we felt that the continued process of expansion was important for stabilizing these regions, particularly the Balkans, and it was the ultimate promise of membership in both NATO and the EU that kept these countries on a path towards democracy and market economic systems, so that one had to give reality to that promise by occasionally letting a few of them in. I think the bureau favored another round of expansion, and I tended to think that the logic would make it a fairly substantial one, but we didn't have to make a decision on that while I was there.

Q: I've been interviewing Keith Smith, and he was saying that when he was involved, first as chargï¿½ in Estonia and then later as ambassador to Lithuania that there was a lot of almost guerilla action with the people who used to deal with Soviet affairs, now Russia, about doing anything, because the idea was we don't want to provoke the Russians. Was there a conflict within the European Bureau about Russia's role in what we do in the West or where we grow, align, that sort of thing?

DOBBINS: Not at the time I was there, among other things, because Russia actually wasn't in the European Bureau at the time I was in charge of the bureau. It had been earlier and was later, but at this point it was done separately, but we hadn't reached the point at which we needed to consult them, because we didn't have to make any decisions on it. My view was that the Baltic nations were the most difficult of the choices, because, on the one hand, there were sort of geopolitical reasons for postponing it, largely as the result of possible Russian reaction. On the other hand, they were the only countries that had any real congressional support, and if you were going to have another round of enlargement, you had to have at least some participants in it that actually attracted congressional support.

So my conclusion was the Baltics were probably going to have to be included, and my second conclusion was, if you were going to do any one of them, it was probably better to do all three. I told my European colleagues that this was my personal judgment about where this was likely to go.

Q: When you say all three, you're talking about?

DOBBINS: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, but as I say, the discussions we were having at that point were preliminary. I didn't need any decisions, so I didn't need to engage anybody else in the discussion.

Q: Well, you had a secretary of state who came from Czechoslovakia and who certainly knew Eastern Europe. How did you find her working on European things when you were there?

DOBBINS: She was good to work for in most respects. She knew and liked Europe, spent a lot of time there, spent a lot of time on Europe. The Executive Secretariat in the department did a survey and they found that 54 percent of all memos written for the seventh floor, not just for the secretary, but for all the undersecretaries, were written in EUR. There were 20,000 people in the department, of whom EUR had 500. It meant that 500 people were doing 54 percent of the department's work. You wonder what the other 19,500 were doing. There's something of an exaggeration there, but 54 percent of every piece of paper written to any seventh floor principal came from EUR, and 65 percent of all secretary of state travel was to Europe, which meant that I traveled with the secretary of state 65 percent of the time that she went anywhere. And the president's travel was about 60 percent. Sixty percent of all presidential travel was to Europe, largely because of the prominence that the Balkans occupied in our policy at the time. Both the secretary and the White House were very Euro-centric during this period, and the European Bureau was definitely at the center of the policymaking process, generating a good deal more policy and a good deal more paper than all of the other bureaus put together.

Q: Did you feel the influence of the president on European policy?

DOBBINS: Sure. Albright, of course, was very knowledgeable about Europe and she spoke Russian, she spoke Polish, she spoke Czechthey're all kind of the same languagand French, pretty well. So when she would get on the phone or have meetings, she would conduct them in those languages, which was fine as long as it was French. It got a little frustrating when she started doing it in Russian. I don't know if we've ever had a secretary of state before who was capable of doing that, but that was impressive, the ease at which she could converse with the Russian foreign minister in his language and the French foreign minister in his language, so I was quite impressed.

Clinton I had seen more of when I was in the White House and I was certainly familiar with him and his style of governing. I saw less of him once I was back at State. I accompanied him when he visited Bosnia and Kosovo. I attended a couple of meetings with him during the Kosovo war, but by and large, he didn't attend NSC meetings. His meetings tended to be more informal, smaller numbers of people, and only after the principals had pretty thoroughly chewed over issues. But he was definitely engaged and interested and highly knowledgeable. During the Kosovo war, he did a reasonable amount of the sort of telephone diplomacy with top leaders, keeping the alliance together.

Q: Well, the question that everybody is asking right now, literally right now, is terrorism. It was reflected to you from European countries what we were doing, did that come up much?

DOBBINS: Well, it would depend on how you defined terrorism, but in terms of terrorism directed against either the United States or in Europe, not really, because there wasn't any.

Q: There was always the Basque thing.

DOBBINS: Yes, the Europeans had a terrorist problem, and we had a reasonably active dialog on terrorism conducted by the experts and there was cooperation, but it wasn't an issue that got up to the secretary of state or the president, or even the assistant secretary of state for Europe.

Q: How about Ireland, Northern Ireland?

DOBBINS: Peripherally. The White House had taken that over, largely because the State Department had opposed our getting involved at all, and the White House wanted to get involved, so they took that over and the NSC had made a small exception to their general rule of not getting involved in operational issues and working through State. On this, they were directly negotiating with the Irish and the British.

I secured enough transparency so that when the administration changed, we'd at least know what was going on and be able to pick up the pieces, but I didn't try to insert myself into what was then a very complex, nuanced dialog, in which we were playing a role largely because Bill Clinton had some personal contacts and was willing to exercise his personal influence and charm. Once that stopped at the end of the administration, the U.S. retained a watching brief, but we don't really have much influence over the situation.

Q: Were there any other issues that you were dealing with from the EUR perspective?

DOBBINS: Well, with that many countries, I'm sure there were a number, but those I think are the main ones.

Q: Did you get involved in the disarmament business with the Ukraine and all?

DOBBINS: No that was done by the office that handled newly independent states.

Q: What was the role of Strobe Talbott, your role with Strobe Talbott, during that time?

DOBBINS: He was deputy secretary of state during the time I was working on Europe. We had become pretty close, working on Haiti. He'd effectively been empowered by Secretary Christopher to oversee the Haiti policy for State, and I was sort of his chief lieutenant in that regard.

[End Side]

Q: You were saying you worked closely with Strobe Talbott on Haiti.

DOBBINS: Yes, and so we had become pretty good friends during that period. Then during the period when I was doing the Balkans and subsequently Europe, he was particularly focused on relations with Russia and the rest of the former Soviet Union. He wasn't terribly interested in the administrative and management sides of the deputy secretary of state position. He was much more interested in policy, tended to leave administrative issues to others, including the chief of staff of the department. That was Donnelly, originally, and then he was replaced by Elaine Shocas. He played some management roles, chaired the key committee for ambassadorship and that sort of thing, but that wasn't really where his heart was.

His heart was in policy, and particularly in forging a new relationship with Russia, and he certainly played the dominant role in that. For instance, in the Kosovo conflict, he became the principal negotiator with the Russians on resolving that conflict, and his negotiations with the Russians, which went in parallel with my negotiations with the G-8, proved decisive in bringing the conflict to a close. When I was running the European Bureau, I tended to get direction more often from Albright than from Talbott. Talbott would come to meetings or become a part of the decision process when he was interested in doing so, which tended to be whenever there was a Russian angle, which of course there was throughout the Kosovo period. But when there wasn't, like the future of EU-NATO relations, he tended to not try to play a role.

Q: In recent testimony before Congress, Armitage was making a point. They were asking, "What has your administration done?" This is the Bush II administration, from the State Department, he said, "One of the things we're working on is State Department had suffered from 12 years of neglect," which includes Bush I time and the Clinton years. I think this feeling is echoed by many people as far as funds go and all that, that top parts of the State Department were really interested in policy and they weren't minding the store and getting enough money. Did you feel this at all?

DOBBINS: I think there's some truth to it. On the other hand, I would argue that's probably what they should have been doing. I do think that Albright, at least, was primarily interested in not changing the State Department, but changing the world. Her measure of whether she was successful or not was not whether the State Department was a better-funded, smoothly oiled machine, but whether the Balkans were peaceful and Europe was moving toward a safer future. So those were here priorities, whereas I think Powell has a different set of priorities and is more of an organization man. If you're chief of staff of the army, you're not looking to fight a war; you're looking to strengthen the morale and competence of the Army. And if you leave a stronger Army when you left than when you got there, you think your primary responsibilities have been fulfilled. Well, that's not how most secretaries of state feel, and consequently under Powell's leadership there's been more emphasis on building the budget and strengthening morale and those kinds of issues.

I've never known the consensus in the State Department to be, "Boy, our morale is pretty good." It's the most chronic group of whiners and complainers I've ever been associated with.

Q: When I came in 1955, I used to read the paper about how bad the morale was and look in the mirror and say, "I don't feel that bad."

DOBBINS: We go through this forever. My view has always been that most people would prefer to be working for a powerful, influential secretary of state, even if he was an SOB, on the model of Henry Kissinger, than a nice, pleasant, attentive but un-influential secretary of state like, say, Cy Vance. Now, you can carry that to extremes. Kissinger didn't have to be as much of an SOB as it was, and it certainly would have been a happier place if he were less of an SOB. I always thought Jim Baker was kind of ideal. He didn't spend a lot of time on State Department morale, but he was a gentleman, he didn't scream at people. If he didn't respect them, he simply didn't talk to them, but he didn't humiliate them, and he was obviously extremely powerful and influential and effective.

I thought Albright was quite influential and effective on the things that she really cared about, which fortunately turned out to be the things I was working on, so we had a pretty good relationship. She's told me since she's left is the one thing she does regret is having left with such a sour relationship with the Foreign Service, and she said she wished she had approached some of those institutional issues differently, I think. So I think she recognizes that there were some lost opportunities there on the institutional side. But I think you can spend too much time on that and not enough on what the secretary of state's real job is, which is not running the State Department, it's running the world.

Q: Well, you left EUR when, 2001?

DOBBINS: Yes, I think something like June 2001.

Q: How did leading up to the transition between the Clinton and Bush administration, how did you view that, and how did that work?

DOBBINS: The transition in the State Department worked very smoothly, because Colin Powell was appointed early on and of course he was a very organized person. He brought knowledgeable people with him to facilitate the transition. He had a lot of contact with the old team, was very open, and got briefed at length. I briefed him a couple of times at some length during the transition period. He kept on all of the Foreign Service officers. Even when he intended to replace them, as he did, for instance, me, he kept them on until a replacement had been named and confirmed. We actually worked very well together during that period. I had known him before in several capacities. The transition at State went quite smoothly and really was almost a model, a textbook, of how to do it, I think. Powell stepped quite smoothly into the new responsibilities, and there was a new team there, the bulk of whohe had career officials either in an acting capacity or holdovers in all the important positions in the department almost immediately: his deputy secretary, the undersecretary of political affairs, regional assistant secretary. So there really weren't any significant balls dropped or problems. On the White House side and the interagency side, it was very different and much more difficult.

Q: When this happened, moving up to January 2001, were there things that were ongoing vis-ï¿½-vis European Affairs that were put on hold?

DOBBINS: Not really. No, I don't think so. During the period, I had easy access to Powell. He paid attention to the issues I said were important. There were various alarms and excursions in the Balkans, the outbreak of what could have been a civil war in Macedonia that we dealt with, various issues with the Europeans, including this issue between the EU and NATO and bringing the Turks onboard, which we advanced during the period. He visited the Balkans with me during the period and met all the leaders, and also we had a NATO meeting, the normal spring meeting, where he met the rest of the foreign ministers, and he would see any visitor in Washington that I recommended to him. There were a number during this period.

No, I think there was strong continuity. Obviously, we weren't launching big, new initiatives in these first few months, and the Clinton administration had left Europe in pretty good shape for the new administration. There weren't any pressing problems or unresolved conflicts that they needed to be aware of, so it went pretty smoothly. Our problems were mostly in Washington, where Don Rumsfeld wanted to pull all our troops out of the Balkans and we needed to head that particular ...

Q: What was behind that?

DOBBINS: Well, I think it was a combination of the ideological "nation-building is bad, U.S. troops shouldn't be doing it, this is somebody else's job" and a feeling that we wanted to retain flexibility and didn't want to get bogged down in these kind of long-term peacekeeping missions. Defense made a strong effort to try to persuade the White House, and Powell backed me, and we were able to turn back that effort.

Q: You mentioned Macedonia when you were with the Bush administration. What was the problem and what were we trying to do?

DOBBINS: The problem was that the Albanian minority were dissatisfied with the power-sharing arrangements, felt they were discriminated against and were prepared to take up arms. Like the Albanians in most of the countries in that area, they were a rather clan organized, heavily armed, semi-criminal enterprise, and so they mounted a fairly serious challenge. Actually, it shouldn't have been a serious challenge, but then the Macedonians, the Slavic Macedonians, overreacted and responded with a greater degree of force, and clumsily applied force, than they might have needed to do, thereby inflaming the situation. Radical elements in Kosovo were undoubtedly fanning these flames, and Macedonia is a rather weak, ethnically divided state, which could have erupted into civil war, and if it had, would have further reopened all of the other quiescent issues in the Balkans.

Q: While you were dealing with Europe, again, when Bush came in, early on, which is the first time you were there, were you getting any reverberations of disquiet about the Bush administration. Because today, what is it, three years later or so, there are a lot of people in Europe who really don't care for the Bush administration.

DOBBINS: At that point, more of them were willing to give it a benefit of the doubt. I think the Europeans' first concern was that he was going to carry through on his election campaign promises to pull out of the Balkans, and they were reassured when we turned that effort aside and Powell was able to tell the NATO foreign ministers when he met with them that we went in together, we'll go out together, which they counted as a very satisfactory statement of our position.

The second issue which was beginning to bubble during this period was missile defense, the administration's decision to dump the ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile) Treaty, which they hadn't formally done, but which they'd expressed an intention to do, had gotten the Europeans very nervous, and that was the main focus of trans-Atlantic angst. Now, it's since been replaced by a lot more serious problems. It was the sort of thing one worried about when you didn't have anything else to worry about. It largely went away as an issue because the Russians essentially said, "Okay, fine, we're not going to get excited about this." It was hard for the Europeans to get excited about it if the Russians didn't get excited about it, but they didn't like the Bush attitude toward the ABM treaty. They didn't like the Bush attitude toward the global warming treaty ...

Q: Kyoto.

DOBBINS: ... and his sort of dismissive attitude. They didn't like the Bush attitude toward the International Criminal Court, but these were not flaming rows, but irritations in the relationship. By and large, they liked Bush. On his first foray into European diplomacy, he went to, I can't remember, I think it was a NATO summit, maybe a G-8 summit, and he made a good impression and people were pleased and he was saying the right things and there weren't any huge problems in the relationship at this time.

I attended Bush's first meeting with Tony Blair. It was lunch at Camp David, and it was clear that Bush was very different in his approach to these issues than Clinton. Clinton liked intellectual exchange. He was curious. He liked ideas. He liked foreign policy, and he liked to learn from people he encountered. Bush had a set of talking points. When they were exhausted, he clearly didn't want to continue the discussion. He just didn't see it as an opportunity for him to learn more about Europe. I don't know whether it was that he didn't want to expose his ignorance, or he was generally uncurious or he simply felt that he'd devoted enough time to this. I think he was probably a little uneasy with the complexity of some of the issues and didn't want to expose the degree to which he wasn't familiar with them. So he'd go through the talking points that he'd been given. Blair went through the talking points that you would have expected, and then the conversation ended. Clinton would have said, "Well, tell me more about that, Tony. How does this EU work, anyway? I've heard about it, but how does it work?" And you didn't get any of that. So the discussion petered out after a while, and then they went off and took a walk in the woods and revealed that they used the same kind of toothpaste.

Q: Well, who replaced you when you left?

DOBBINS: Beth Jones.

Q: Where did she come from?

DOBBINS: Beth had served with me in Germany. She was in the mission in Berlin when I was DCM in Bonn. I think that's the only time we actually served together. She was head of the economic sector in the mission in Berlin. Then she had served as an executive assistant to Warren Christopher, and had gone from there to be ambassador to, I think, Kazakhstan, one of the Central Asian countries, and became a Central Asian expert.

Her expertise in Europe, traditionally, what you'd call the old Europe, was not extensive. I don't know if there were other assignments, other than the one in Berlin. She had developed expertise and interest in Central Asia, and those countries had been in EUR when it was the Soviet Union, had been taken out of EUR by the Clinton administration and were put back in EUR by this administration. I told Powell I thought it was a mistake. I thought it was appropriate to put Russia back in Europe, but I thought Central Asia simply made the bureau too big and unwieldy and the assistant secretary ...

Q: It seems it would fit more to South Asia or NEA (Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs).

DOBBINS: Yes, if you gave it to South Asia, you'd have a bureau that was more appropriately sized for a bureau, since at the moment it's just an office that's called a bureau. But, in any case, the result I think has been that the European bureau does lack a focus on the traditional areas of East-West and trans-Atlantic diplomacy.

Q: What happened to you?

DOBBINS: Well, I had been assuming that I would leave the department at this stage. I had been doing job interviews and looking for other opportunities. From a financial standpoint, it certainly made sense to retire. I had 37, 38 years of government service at that point, so financially I had incentives to leave and do something else, and then 9/11 came along and I was asked to do Afghanistan, which I did and which kept me in service for another, I guess, six or eight months.

Q: What were you doing in Afghanistan, or should we try this another time?

DOBBINS: Why don't we do one more and we can probably wrap it up with Afghanistan?

Q: Okay, well, then we'll talk about Afghanistan the next time, and we'll also talk about what you've been doing in Rand.

DOBBINS: Okay, sure.

Q: Okay, today is the 28th of April, 2004. Jim, first the dates. In Afghanistan, when did you get involved in Afghanistan.

DOBBINS: I was asked to become the representative to the Afghan opposition in October of 2001. I engaged in some shuttle diplomacy in the region and then represented the U.S. at the Bonn conference, and then we installed a new government and then I went to Karzai's inauguration and raised a flag at the embassy in mid-December, and then came back and continued to oversee Afghanistan on an interim basis from the State Department until I left. I left on April 30, so 1 October to April.

Q: In the first place, what were sort of your orders, your instructions, whatever you want to call them? What were you supposed to be doing?

DOBBINS: The idea was to try to form, as quickly as possible, a successor regime to the Taliban, which would have brought acceptance and legitimacy in Afghanistan itself and would prevent the opening of a power vacuum and perhaps a continued civil war once we and our allies in Afghanistan had succeeded in ousting the Taliban. So the initial mandate was to represent the U.S. to the various elements of the opposition to the Taliban, some of which were expatriates, some of which were actually fighting in Afghanistan itself, to see whether a broad coalition among them could be formed, which would allow a successor regime to be quickly installed. My task was to represent the U.S. to them and to the other countries involved that had an interest in Afghanistan, so essentially to do the international diplomacy attendant on the military campaign, which was then just taking shape.

Q: Well, in the first place, what was your relationship with the Pentagon and the military side of things?

DOBBINS: The Pentagon were quite supportive of this. They recognized a need for this piece to be put in place. I flew down and spent a day with General Franks, the CENTCOM (Central Command) commander, who was very interested in this. He briefed us in some detail about his intentions, his plans, where the campaign stood. I spent some time at the Pentagon, met with Paul Wolfowitz, and spent a lot of time at the CIA getting briefed on their operations in Afghanistan. Then, I formed a team, which included representatives of the JCS (Joint Chiefs of Staff), of OSD and the CIA, as well as State, who traveled with me and participated in all of these discussions.

Q: What was sort of the international practical interest in Afghanistan?

DOBBINS: Well, you had the countries that had been pulling apart for 20 years, which were Pakistan, Iran, India, Russia, principally. You had the other neighboring states that had varying interests, but were less significant: Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan. China has a tiny border. It didn't play any significant role. I already mentioned Iran. Then you had our allies in Europe: Germany, France, the UK, principally, who were prepared to contribute to both operations against the Taliban and then to peacekeeping in the country. We had Japan, which was a major potential economic donor. Those were the major countries. The forum for bringing a number of them together was called the two-plus-six mechanism. These were the neighbors of Afghanistan plus Russia and the U.S. So the neighbors were Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, China, so it was two-plus-six. They met in New York initially at sub-ministerial level, and I attended that meeting for the U.S., along with Richard Haass from the State Department. Then the next day we met at ministerial level and Colin Powell attended that meeting.

That meeting authorized and mandated Lakhdar Brahimi, who was the UN secretary general's special representative for Afghanistan to call the Bonn conference and to bring the elements of the opposition together. We had been hoping that they were going to get together of their own accord, and there had been various schemes to do so, but one side or the other always pulled back, so we decided to take the initiative and have the UN call the conference. Then my job, essentially, was to round up the participants and make sure they actually were prepared to show up.

Q: Well, of the neighbors, in the first place, how did you deal with Iran? We didn't have diplomatic relations with the country.

DOBBINS: I saw that was going to be critical and I secured an agreement from Powell that I would be able to deal with them normally in any circumstances involving Afghanistan. They participated in these meetings in New York.

Q: Was that their UN representative?

DOBBINS: Their foreign minister.

Q: Oh, their foreign minister came.

DOBBINS: And their deputy foreign minister, who was my colleague in Bonn, came as well, so we met them there on a multilateral basis, but there I did not have any bilateral dealings with them. Powell did shake hands with the Iranian foreign minister, which was observed and photographed and commented on, at the conclusion of this meeting, of this multilateral meeting. But then, my next discussions with them were in Bonn. They sent a delegation and we met quite frequently. We scheduled a meeting every morning in which the Italians and Germans also participated. But then I also saw them sort of casually. We were all in the same building and attending meetings and meals and often they and I would show up first for breakfast, so I'd go over and sit at their table and we'd have an informal conversation over breakfast in the morning, and then we'd have a more formal conversation. By and large, I met with them at least a couple of times a day, and over time they became quite helpful.

Q: I would have thought that they would have had a certain sympathy for the Taliban at one point, or had they sort of shut this extreme Islamism or not?

DOBBINS: They may have had at some fairly distant point, but they had been supporting the Northern Alliance in trying to overthrow the Taliban for a number of years. The Taliban was anti-Shia, was very repressive of the Shia minorities in Afghanistan. At least for a time, the Taliban were actively promoting the drug trade, which tended to go through and disrupt Iran. The Iranians had something like, I think, 2 million Afghan refugees in their territory whom they desperately wanted to ship back to Afghanistan, and they knew they couldn't as long as the Taliban were in control. So they had a major incentive as regards refugees.

The disorder along the border had been very expensive. They'd lost several hundred, by some count, several thousand, border police to areas in Afghan drug incursions and other things, so they were paying significant costs and had made a significant commitment. They were the principal source, I think, of training and arms for the Northern Alliance.

Q: Did they have any warlords under their jurisdiction or support?

DOBBINS: They supported most of the Northern Alliance elements. The warlord who was in the area who was closest to them was Ismail Khan, and just by reason of proximity they probably had more influence and more support for him than for the ones who were more distant and more difficult for them to reach. But they certainly were supporting the Tajik core of the resistance as well.

Q: At any point, I mean, in the formal, informal conversations, particularly the informal ones, did the thought of, "When are we all going to get back together again?" come up or not?

DOBBINS: You mean U.S.-Iranian?

Q: Yes.

DOBBINS: Well, they knew that my brief didn't extend that far. They would occasionally try to pass along information. For instance, when this ship was seized on its way to Palestine with arms, they made clear that this hadn't been authorized by the president and that he was as annoyed and puzzled as we were, and if we had any information as to who was responsible, they would appreciate it. But, by and large, we stuck to Afghanistan.

Q: In the meetings and all, were they a positive force? Was everybody sort of really working off the same script?

DOBBINS: There were some differences. One of their core desiderata was that the shah of Afghanistan not return and reassume that office, since that would set, from their standpoint, an unhappy precedent. The shah, king as we called him, but the shah of Afghanistan in fact did want to return but was not looking to reassume the throne.

Q: He was an elderly man, wasn't he?

DOBBINS: He was an elderly man, and while some of his supporters had more grandiose ambitions for him and his role, he was prepared for quite a modest role. There was a significant royalist sentiment at the Bonn meeting, and this was an area where the Iranians were particularly sensitive. I think for a while they talked very positively with us but were sending less positive signals to some of the Afghans. When I called them on this and said that it was important that everybody be hearing the same thing, they altered their behavior and became considerably more helpful, not just in what they were saying to me, but what they were saying to the Afghans as well.

Q: Well, did you have any feeling that there was a division within the government? One always hears about the hard-liners and the less hard-liners and all.

DOBBINS: Yes, there were some, and occasionally there would be veiled illusions to these difficulties. I don't think there were that many, though, on Afghanistan. There were ones in other areas. For instance, they made pretty clear that probably others in their government without the support of their president had shipped these arms to the Palestinians, so yes, there were allusions of that sort. On Afghanistan, there weren't too many. The Iranians proved quite helpful on a couple of occasions.

First of all, they're the ones who insisted that the document, which emerged from Bonn, commit the Afghans both to democracy and to cooperation with the international community and the war on terror, which no one else had thought of. It was the Iranians who put both of those into the Bonn document. Then, in the concluding hours, the Iranian deputy foreign minister and I, along with the German and Russian and Indian representatives, sat up until 5:00 in the morning with the Northern Alliance representative, essentially bargaining him down from his maximal demands for number of seats in the government to something that was more acceptable to the rest of the group assembled there. So the Iranians played a quite helpful role.

Then the Iranian foreign minister was the most senior representative at Karzai's inauguration. He apparently heard that Ismail Khan was having some thoughts about whether he would show up, and so his plane flew into Herat on his way to Kabul and picked up Ismail Khan and brought him along, just to make sure that there was no doubt as to the full support for Karzai. So they were quite helpful throughout this process and continued to be. I met with them in Geneva a couple of months later, and they offered to be helpful in building an Afghan national army. I met with the Iranian general who had been in charge of assistance to the Northern Alliance throughout the war and had been active in Afghanistan throughout this period. They offered to quarter, clothe, feed, pay and train 20,000 men. I said, "Well, some of that might be all right, but if you trained them and we trained them, then they might have conflicting doctrines," and the general just laughed and he said, "Well, we're still using the manuals you left in 1979, so you don't have to worry about that."

I said, "Well, maybe they'd have conflicting loyalties." And he said, "Well, we're still paying the troops you're using to chase down the Taliban. Are you having any difficulties with them?" And I had to admit we hadn't. They wanted to be helpful in Afghanistan, and while there may be elements of their intelligence service that were operating on a different agenda, both their military and their Foreign Ministry were trying, insofar as one can tell, to be supportive of the same goals as we were.

Unfortunately, there was no receptivity to this in Washington. I briefed Powell on these discussions, particularly the ones with the Iranian general and the offers, and he said, "That's very interesting. You have to brief Rice." So I'd brief Rice and she'd say, "That's very interesting. You have to brief Rumsfeld." So I finally briefed everybody in the situation room, all of them, and they listened and there was no discussion and there was never any follow-up. Powell sent a personal thank-you note to the foreign ministers of everybody who participated in the Bonn conference, except the Iranian group, who had been among the most helpful.

Q: What about on the Pakistan side, you mentioned, for example, the intelligence service. From the press or reading of the paper, I had the impression that the Pakistani intelligence service was almost in bed with the Taliban or something like that.

DOBBINS: Oh, more than that. The Taliban was a creation of the ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence).

Q: Now it's sort of the chickens had come home to roost at this point. How did you find Pakistan dealing with this, with you?

DOBBINS: They were in a difficult position. Musharraf had, in the aftermath of 9/11, undertaken to abandon their commitment to the Taliban and had taken a number of steps in that direction. I met with the head of the ISI, the Pakistani intelligence service, in New York, a week or so after I took over. Then I met again with him in Islamabad, and I did that a couple of times, as well as meeting with others in the Pakistani government, the Foreign Ministry. There was always a question of whether they had completely severed their ties, and there were always reports that there were elements within the ISI that weren't fully under control and were continuing to support the Taliban, despite Musharraf's probably genuine desire that they not. And, of course, the Taliban and Al Qaeda elements are continuing to operate out of the areas of Pakistan that border on Afghanistan.

But, by and large, because the Pakistanis were so unpopular in Afghanistan as the result of their support for the Taliban, our effort was to neutralize them. They weren't likely to be helpful. We just didn't want them to be unhelpful. They came to the Bonn conference, they had the bad judgment of sending their ambassador to the Taliban to the Bonn conference, which people raised eyebrows at, and he sort of sat in a room by himself and didn't get to talk to anybody much, because very few of the people therthis was a conference of anti-Taliban elements, so Pakistan had very little influence with them. There was a lot of antagonism toward Pakistan. But the Pakistanis by and large didn't make any difficulties. They went along with this unhappily but more or less cooperatively.

Q: Well, your brief was not the military campaign. I'm thinking along the Pakistani border and all, which the battle still continues there. Did that intrude or was it somebody else's problem?

DOBBINS: At the time I took this, the military campaign had hardly begun. While I was actually on the road, Kabul fell. I flew into Afghanistan and met with all of the Northern Alliance leadership just a few days after Kabul fell, and at that point there probably weren't more than 200 American soldiers in the whole country.

Q: This is tape nine, side one, with Jim Dobbins.

DOBBINS: And secured their agreement to come to the Bonn conference. At the Bonn conference itself, the Taliban had been chased out of most of northern and central Afghanistan at that point, but were still holding Kandahar and some of the south and Hamid Karzai was leading a group of insurgents that were besieging Kandahar and trying to force them out of there. He would call me every couple of days from the front for bulletins on what was happening in Bonn. I was kept apprised of the military situation, but I didn't have any real role with respect to it, no.

Q: This brings a question then, by the time you left in April, was there concern on the part of American military commanders or other people you were talking to that the United States was looking ahead to doing something in Iraq and so was limiting itself to Afghanistan or not?

DOBBINS: It was pretty evident that the administration wasn't going to commit the resources to Afghanistan that would have been needed to establish a stable and secure environment and allow reconstruction to go forward. When Rumsfeld first came to Kabul in early December and I met him at the airport and briefed him, he was going to be meeting Karzai and Fahim thereafter, and he said, "Well, what are they going to say?" And I said, "Well, they're going to ask for a larger peacekeeping force."

The Pentagon had reluctantly agreed to support a 5,000-man peacekeeping force for Kabul, which the British undertook to organize, so Rumsfeld said, "Well, what would a peacekeeping force take for the country as a whole?" And I said, "Oh, if Kabul takes 5,000, maybe it would take another 20,000 to at least secure the other major metropolitan areas." And he just blanched and shook his head, that clearly it was well beyond what he was prepared to support, and in fact the Pentagon opposed other countries participating in such a force, even without our participation for six months or so. Then, after six months or so, he changed his mind and was prepared to support it, but by that time countries that would have come in had lost interest and moved onto other issues. So it was definitely a missed opportunity.

Similarly, at the Tokyo donor's conference, where I accompanied Powell, we just pledged again the money we'd already allocated for Afghanistan. We had no new money, and the amounts that were being talked about at Tokyo, while they sounded big, were astoundingly small against the size of Afghanistan and the scale of its needs. Kosovo, after 11 weeks of air war, got 25 times more assistance in the first year after the war than Afghanistan got after 20 years of civil war on a per capita basis from the United States and from others in the international community. So it was pretty clear that this was definitely going to be a resource-constrained effort, and that the administration regarded this simply as the opening campaign in a broader war and didn't want to get bogged down, didn't want to make a major commitment and wasn't prepared to commit large-scale military or economic resources.

Q: Was Iraq a subject at all, just in talking to the American military and all?

DOBBINS: It was a subject here in Washington often enough. It was clear that there were elements in the administration that wanted to turn next to Iraq, and that was kind of common knowledge. I had mentioned this to Powell and Armitage several times. I mean, wasn't telling them anything they didn't know, but at this point it wasn't a certainty and I, frankly, at that point, had difficulty taking it very seriously, since there didn't seem to be any very compelling need to invade Iraq, which was quite obviously being adequately contained and constrained through the measures that were underway.

Q: Incidentally, were you running across in dealing with this, dealing with our own government, the Bush II administration had come in, and particularly Rumsfeld and all, with a real aversion to what was called nation-building.

DOBBINS: Right.

Q: Was that still a prevalent attitude?

DOBBINS: It was, and it was one of the things that colored their refusal to consider putting peacekeeping forces throughout Afghanistan. We had a number of discussions, interagency discussions, on this, and I was pushing the necessity. British diplomats were also pushing the necessity. The Pentagon was resistant. The military was resistant just on the usual grounds that they're resistant to getting committed to things and having their resources tied down. They didn't take a principled opposition to peacekeeping as a role. But I remember at one point, Elliott Abrams, who was in charge of an office in the NSC, which had some relevance to this, although it wasn't the office that was in direct charge, circulated a paper which broadly attacked the whole concept of peacekeeping and argued that it had been demonstrated not to work, which I was rather flabbergasted by.

So yes, the sort of ideological opposition to peacekeeping and to anything Bill Clinton might have done was an element. I don't know that it was the dominant element. I think the dominant element was a desire not to get bogged down in Afghanistan and lose our freedom of action vis-ï¿½-vis Iraq, but it was at least a secondary element, and it was probably important in the initial opposition of even allies doing this.

Q: Going back to the Russians, what sort of role did they play in this?

DOBBINS: Since their own forces had left Afghanistan, they had continued to back various elements there. They continued to back with money, equipment, and the Communist leadership that they had left behind. When that leadership was overthrown, they supported what became the Northern Alliance against the Taliban, so they were supporting the Tajik and Uzbek resistance to the Pashtun-dominated Taliban government. They, along with Iran and India, were the principal sponsors of the Northern Alliance. They were quite influential, and they were helpful. In fact, in the end, we had gotten a deal or close to a deal in Bonn, but it needed to be ratified by the Northern Alliance leadership then in control in Kabul, and I asked Colin Powell to get the Russians and other governments that might have some influence there to exert their influence, and he spoke to the Russian foreign minister. And the Russian ambassador in Kabul went in with a note, which the Northern Alliance foreign minister later told me was quite influential, because it said, "If you don't accept the deal that's been reached in Bonn, you should not anticipate any further Russian assistance," which he said definitely got their attention and was taken very seriously. So I think the Russians, like the Iranians, proved very helpful. Of course, the Russians were also facilitating our access to military facilities in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Q: I would think that maybe in the greater field of foreign affairs the Russians would say, "Fine, you do this," but I would think there would be the grinding of the teeth of Soviet military people to see American boots on the ground in Central Asia, in what had been the Soviet Union.

DOBBINS: I suppose so, and there may have been conservative elements that were opposed to this, but in addition to my discussions with the Russians and the envoy they sent to this meeting, we had fairly broad exchanges with them here. Armitage and his opposite number, the number two in the Russian Foreign Ministry came with a big interagency team and they spent a whole day discussing not just Afghanistan, but the region as a whole, but principally Afghanistan. So there were very extensive discussions with them, and they had made their choice and saw that this was an opportunity to develop their relations with Washington, and they did so successfully.

Q: How did you find the various groups in Afghanistan, the Northern Alliance and others who were involved, when you initially went to make contact with them? Was the alliance really a close-knit one?

DOBBINS: Well, the first group I went to see was the royalists. I went and called on the ex-king, who lived outside Rome, and met his entourage. I then went to Pakistan and I met a number of the expatriate leaders who were living in Pakistan, and then I met the Northern Alliance foreign minister in Uzbekistan, in Tashkent. We had a meeting there and gave a press conference, and he said he would come to the Bonn meeting, although it wasn't yet decided that it would be in Bonn. He said, "I'll go wherever it is," and that was an important breakthrough, because they had been equivocal about whether they were prepared to participate before that. Then I flew into Bagram Airbase to meet the lest of the leadership, including Rabbani, who was their president and Fahim, who was the defense minister, and Qanuni, who was the interior minister, and a number of other generals and assorted dignitaries.

The Northern Alliance had some coherence. They were fighting together. They had lost Massoud, who had been killed just around 9/11, also by Al Qaeda terrorists. So they'd lost their most charismatic figure, but they were still pulling together, and Fahim, who was acting as the defense minister, was apportioning aid that was coming in from the United States and the Iranians and the Russians to all of the factions. He wasn't holding it all for himself. But clearly, the individual military leaders had a good deal of autonomy and expected to play a political as well as military role. And there was a tension between Rabbani, who wanted to stay, and most of the rest of the alliance, which recognized that if they were going to form a broader coalition government with legitimacy and with adequate representation from the Pashtun elements, which most of them didn't represent, he was going to have to go and be replaced by somebody. So I got a clear sense from the foreign minister, the interior minister and the defense minister that they were prepared to see a new person brought in, and in fact, Abdullah, the foreign minister, suggested the name of Karzai as somebody that would be well suited to the task of leading the new government. He recognized that Rabbani would need to go, and he made clear to me that I ought to make clear to Rabbani that he had to go.

Q: Could you talk a little about Rabbani and your impression of him, and where had he come from?

DOBBINS: Well, he had been president. He had become president after Najibullah was overthrown. He was a dignified, older man, came from a religious upbringing and he was a religious intellectual, I guess, theologian. I mean, he wasn't fundamentalist in the sense that the Taliban was. He didn't hack off people's hands. But he was a conservative Islamic leader and was also a somewhat divisive figure. He had led the Northern Alliance through some of the worst elements of the civil war, and clearly was not a figure around whom the nation could rally, but with us he played a fairly straightforward role. He wasn't enthusiastic about leaving, he maneuvered to try to prevent it, but in the end he accepted it with good grace, participated in Karzai's swearing in ceremony and played politics thereafter in a not irresponsible way.

Q: Well, as you went into this, Afghanistan having a culture that's not ours, were you getting good briefing on what makes Afghans tick? I mean, tribal rule, tribal agreements and that sort of thing?

DOBBINS: Reasonably so. The U.S. had turned to this and begun to generate a lot of briefing papers and a lot of background material on Afghanistan, and people who had been Afghan experts and largely on the fringes of things suddenly became more sought after. I recruited one mid-grade Foreign Service officer who had a lot of experience in the region and had followed it for years, a guy named Craig Karp, who was a bit of a maverick in the Foreign Service, but who knew a lot about Afghanistan and about its policies. He'd been on the Policy Planning Staff, and Richard Haass, who was the head of the staff, recommended him. He looked a bit like an Afghan. He'd served there and he had the beard and spoke the language, and so I had him as my principal State Department guy on the team. Then I had people from OSD and JCS and CIA, some of whom knew a lot about Afghanistan, others of whom, like me, were just learning. I got support from the Bureau of South Asian Affairs in the State Department. I felt I was getting enough information to operate on, and obviously as I went around, I talked to people. I'd found out, having done this four or five times, that you don't necessarily need to know why people hate each other to know how to get them together again. The reasons they hate each other are multiple, but the techniques you have for reconciling them are fairly limited, so while it's useful to know where the fault lines and tensions are, you don't necessarily have to have followed every turning point in their national history for the last 500 years. Afghans were, it turns out, a lot less conflicted than Yugoslavs. Yugoslavs hated each other for centuries. The Afghans, by and large, their complaints went back 20 years or so. They didn't start with the 9th century when you asked them why they were having difficulty getting along with the guy in the next room. With Yugoslavs, you got a multi-century discourse whenever you asked that question. With the Afghans, basically, they sort of feel they were all getting along fine until the place collapsed under the Soviet invasion. Their grievances by and large were grievances of the last couple of decades.

Q: Was Karzai a well-known figure before? He sort of burst on the stage, very charismatic, at least on TV.

DOBBINS: I wouldn't say he was well known. He was younger than most of the people I was dealing with, not terribly younger, but younger, I guess. Maybe he was in his late 40s, early 50s. Most of the people I was there with were a little older than that. He was from a fairly prominent Pashtun family, had been a participant in the resistance to the Soviet Union, had been a junior minister in an early Taliban government, but then had left. I think his father had been prominent, had been assassinated by the Taliban.

He had been active in the opposition to the Taliban, particularly internationally. The Iranians, the Russians, the Indians, all knew him pretty well, all had a favorable impression of him, and they all raised him with me as a possibility, before I had met him. I had spoken to him on the telephone, but I hadn't met him. So I would say he was one of a number of people in that category, of ï¿½migrï¿½ leaders from prominent families. But he was one who had managed to maintain good relations with a very broad spectrum of people, which was unusual.

I think the first person who mentioned him to me as a possible successor to the Taliban and to Rabbani was the head of the ISI in Pakistan, and then the next person who mentioned him to me was the Northern Alliance foreign minister, who said he would be a good candidate, and then the Russian Ambassador and then the Iranian deputy foreign minister raised his name as a possibility. And all of them said they knew him and thought highly of him. He, of course, at that point was being supported by the U.S. in his insurgency efforts in southern Afghanistan, so he had an unusual ability to win the confidence of a wide variety of disparate governments and individuals.

Q: Did you find within the CIA, the Pentagon or Congress or something, in Iraq we had this exile group of Iraqis who had gained the year in the U.S. government. Was there anything comparable to that in Afghanistan, or were you given a fairly clean slate to deal with as far as advocates within our government?

DOBBINS: Well, there was less. There hadn't been much interest in Afghanistan on the part of the U.S. government prior to 9/11, and any efforts to undermine the Taliban were fairly modest. So some of the opposition figures were known in Washington, but they weren't prominent here. They hadn't found patrons within the administration. So, in that sense, yes, I had a pretty clean slate in the sense that I wasn't getting pressure to favor this group or that group.

Q: Well, how did things develop as you went around to the various groups? In the first place, was there such a thing as you could sit down and talk to the Northern Alliance, or essentially were you having to talk tl hate to overuse the word warlord, but various centers of power?

DOBBINS: There were four groups that ultimately were represented in Bonn, of which the most important was the Northern Alliance, and it had a single representative there. But at the same time, that representative made clear that he had difficulties with his own constituency. He had to satisfy a number of different constituencies and couldn't necessarily speak for Rabbani as president, particularly on the issue of whether he was going to be replaced, so we did need to talk to the others and we did. Zal Khalilzad, who was on the NSC staff at the time, was effectively my deputy in the Bonn negotiations. He was a native speaker of Afghan, and so he called Rabbani, he called Fahim, he called Ismail Khan on the telephone during the conference at various points to press on them certain positions.

I communicated with Fahim and Karzai through CIA channels. So, yes, we worked people who weren't at the conference site as well as those who were. In addition to the Northern Alliance, there was the royalist group, called the Rome group, because that's where the king was. There was a group of people who were more associated with the Pashtuns and with the Pakistanis, and then there was a fourth group of people who were more associated with the Iranians. So there were four groups, not all of equal weight. The Northern Alliance was the most important. The royalist group was the second-most important, and then the other two were smaller and less significant, but they all had to agree to the end, and there were 40 or 50 Afghans at the Bonn conference.

Q: Well, how did the conference go?

DOBBINS: The conference took place in a large conference facility where all of the participants and at least senior members of the national delegations had quarters. We all ate together in a big dining room. The Afghans and the UN met. The national delegations didn't actually attend the sessions. The sessions were between the Afghans, with Brahimi chairing, which began to develop a document, which ultimately became the agreement and, in effect, the new constitution of the government, or interim constitution. We were all kept apprised of the results and then worked with the Afghans on the fringes. So I had a suite and I would meet through the day with either delegations of people or individual Afghans, and then we would meet again with groups of national representatives or individual national representatives to work out different points, to try to agree on what we want the Afghans to agree on. The Afghans wanted us to do things. They wanted commitments on a peacekeeping force. They wanted things from us. So it was a bit like a mini United Nations, with a smaller number of countries and people, but it was multilateral diplomacy of a fairly traditional sort.

Q: These phrases get bounced around in the papers. I'm not going to pronounce it correctly, but they were all talking about having this loya jirga, or something. What was this called?

DOBBINS: The loya jirga, it just means a grand council, is the translation, and it's been a traditional Afghan device, sort of proto-democratic. It represents the tribal and clan leaders of the society who periodically get together at a national level to debate and decide on big issues. And in the case of the Afghans, it effectively became a constituent assembly. You had one six months after the Bonn agreement, which endorsed and somewhat extended the government. It made it a somewhat larger government, and the interim government became a provisional government at that stage. Then you had one a few months ago which adopted a new constitution.

Q: As you were putting this thing together, all of you were doing with, did you have any feel, concern, were there groups within Afghanistan, either represented or not represented, that concerned you, that might be a really divisive group that had some power?

DOBBINS: Other than the Taliban, who were on the run at that stage, the Bonn meeting was broadly representative. The problem was that since the Taliban had pretty much monopolized leadership in the Pashtun areas of the country, which are probably more than 50 percent of the population, the Pashtun element in Bonn and the Pashtun element in the resultant government were less dominant than the Pashtuns felt they should be. Karzai was a Pashtun and the Tajik and Uzbek and Hazara, which are the Shia elements, which had composed the Northern Alliance, had a stronger position. They had the bigger ministries, for instance, in the government, so there was a perception, which has been a continued source of unhappiness on the part of elements of the Pashtun society, that they are underrepresented in this arrangement. Of course, the degree to which the military commanders like Ismail Khan and Dostum would respect the results was unknown, although by and large they did express their support, and by and large have proved willing to be gradually co-opted by the system and play within its rules, within some limits.

Q: Was the opium trade something that we were concerned about?

DOBBINS: Not at that stage. It certainly wasn't anything we were prepared to do anything about. The Taliban had effectively banned it, so it wasn't an immediate issue, but it was clear that the Pentagon took the position that they were not going to allow U.S. forces to be used in any respect in a counter-narcotics role. They were not going to use them to prevent cultivation, they were not going to use them to prevent manufacture, and they were not going to use them to prevent transporting.

The British made an effort by using money to buy the crops and by being willing to use their forces, at least in a limited fashion, to protect those who were supposed to be on behalf of the government destroying crops and interfering with the trade. But the U.S. has not put any significant money into this, and it's certainly not been willing to engage its forces. Nearly all the drugs go to Europe. None go to the United States, so our view, I guess, although it's not one that anybody ever expressed to me in these terms was, "It's not our problem." This attitude has since changed.

Q: What about India? With Pakistan so involved in this thing, I would have thought that the Indians would have seen this as a good chance to stick it to the Pakis or something like that.

DOBBINS: That was a problem. The Indians had been supporters of the Northern Alliance and wanted to help the new government, but they recognized to the degree the new government became identified with them, it would be more difficult for Pakistan to acquiesce and more tempting for the Pakistanis to once again destabilize it. So while the Indians were quite helpful in Bonn and I worked quite closely with the Indian representative there, they had to be somewhat discreet in order not to sort of inflame the Pakistanis into again proving unhelpful. The Pakistanis were the one country that actually did have the capacity to completely disrupt this arrangement if they tried. But by and large, the Indians were prepared to be discreet and not use this occasion to make the Pakistanis even more miserable than they were.

Q: Was there on our part a concern that you were getting from others, saying, "Don't push the Pakistanis too hard because Musharraf is not in complete control. He's got his fundamentalist element, which is very strong in Pakistan, and we have to be a little bit careful about this."

DOBBINS: Yes, I stayed with our ambassador to Pakistan on both of my trips.

Q: Who was that?

DOBBINS: Chamberlin, Wendy Chamberlin. This was a real preoccupation with her. We were putting a lot of burdens on the Pakistanis. They were proving quite helpful in a number of fashions, but Musharraf did have significant opposition and there was only so far he was going to be able to go. By and large, however, as I've said, what we were looking for the Pakistanis to do during the period I was there was essentially to be passive, to not interfere with what we were doing, and they were with some exceptions willing to accede to that.

Q: Did the NSC play a role in what you were doing?

DOBBINS: Well, yes. Zal Khalilzad was the senior director of the NSC, and he was my deputy in the Bonn meeting.

Q: He was a native Pakistani. He's now there as ambassador.

DOBBINS: Native Afghan.

Q: But did he come with an attitude, because most people who come out of a country come with an allegiance, which almost gets magnified when they come to the United States and go back to the native country?

DOBBINS: He'd left fairly young. He may have been eight or nine or something like that, so he certainly had kept in touch. He knew a lot of the Afghans, he kept in touch with them over the years, and so he was well informed and was well known to many of the Afghans, but no, he didn't come with a bias and worked quite happily with me, and for this period under my direction. He succeeded me as the president's envoy for Afghanistan, and we worked together as a team, and he was extremely helpful because of his command of the language and his knowledge of the individuals. But on the political issues of how to share power in Afghanistan, there weren't passionately felt views in Washington and I was given pretty much a free hand. Essentially, anything we could get agreed was likely to be treated with a sigh of relief in Washington.

Q: Well, by the time you left in April, how had things gone?

DOBBINS: Well, initially they had gone well. The initial phase of the campaign was brilliantly successful; a new government had been immediately installed. The government was very progressive, saying all the right things. Karzai was telegenic and cooperative and moderate and broadly popular in the country. We were still trying to do this on the cheap. We still hadn't asked Congress for any money by the time I left, so we had virtually no money for any of the programs that needed to be done. We hadn't started training the police. We hadn't started training the army. We were just talking about all these things. We were still resisting an expanded peacekeeping role in the country, and opposition in the south and from residual Taliban elements in Pakistan was beginning to build. It was, in many ways, an opportunity that was being wasted.

Q: Well, then, is there anything else you should talk about, any other development in this particular ...

DOBBINS: I don't think so.

Q: Then you left in April 2002?

DOBBINS: Yes.

Q: You went to what, Rand?

DOBBINS: I went directly to Rand. I left on April 30th and showed up for work on May 1st.

Q: What do you do at Rand?

DOBBINS: I run the International Security and Defense Policy Center at Rand, which is the component of Rand that does international security and defense policy studies for the Pentagon, for other allied ministries of defense, for other agencies of the U.S. government and for foundations and private sources of funding as well.

Q: I find these various sort of think tanks around town, what role do you think you play?

DOBBINS: I think different think tanks play different roles. Some of them are overtly partisan. There are conservative think tanks, clearly identified with the Republican Party. There are Democratic think tanks, clearly identified with the Democratic Party. There are think tanks like Brookings that become the sort of intellectual home for the administration that's out of office, so it's filled with Democrats when the Republicans are in office, and then the Republicans will go there when the Democrats leave office. It's a place where the party that's out of power can gain intellectual nourishment. There are a lot of different types.

Rand's doesn't have a large endowment, so we do studies for people, by and large, who are actually going to make the decisions that we're doing the study for. In other words, if AEI (American Enterprise Institute) or Heritage does a study, it's because they want to influence the national debate on an issue, similarly with Brookings or one or the others. They're doing a study the intent of which is to influence the national debate. The money for the study comes either from their own endowment or from foundations or philanthropists or other sources of funding. Our studies, by and large, are done for an element, normally a part of a governmenthe Pentagon or the State of California or somebodwho actually has to make a decision about a given issue and wants advice on it.

Our studies are usually published, but in the first instance, they're not drafted for the general public. They're drafted for the decision maker who actually has to make the decision and who wants advice on that decision before he makes it. So whether it's the Pentagon wanting to know whether to buy a new bomber or a ballistic missile, or whether it's the State of California wanting to know where to put its marginal dollars in public health or transportation systems. Our focus is on improving public policy through research and analysis.

Q: Can you reach into the government to sound out their expertise? If you're looking at a bomber, you really have to. Or policy towards Iraq today? In a way, you want to talk to the people who are actively engaged.

DOBBINS: Sure. We have a $30 million program of support for the U.S. Air Force, and the U.S. Air Force draws on that, and obviously they give us the data we need in order to make informed judgments about whatever it is they have us studying. We do about $30 million worth of studies just for the U.S. Air Force every year, and the people who do it have all of the necessary clearances and they get access to the data, and then they provide their reports. Sometimes they're classified, but quite often they're not, and they're ultimately available to the general public as well.

Q: What are you working on now?

DOBBINS: My center is working on 40 different projects for 25 different clients, including six different governments: the U.S. government, the British government, the Qatar government, German, Italian, Swedish. Personally, I'm doing a second volume of our History of Nation Building series. We did one last year called The U.S. Role in Nation Building: From Germany to Iraq, which looked at the American experience in nation building in Germany, Japan, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. We're now looking at the UN's role in places like the Belgian Congo, East Timor, Cambodia, and ultimately Iraq as well, so that's what I'm working on personally.

Q: Who's interested in this?

DOBBINS: The first volume has gotten a lot of attention, because it related what we've learned over the last 50 years to Iraq and how we might apply it in Iraq. It's become an important source material for the national debate. It's cited fairly regularly on the Hill and elsewhere, both by critics and defenders of the administration, although more often by critics, because the administration did fail, initially at least, to heed many of the lessons that we had learned over the last decade in the Balkans and elsewhere.

End of interview