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

MICHAEL METRINKO

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: August 26, 1999

Copyright 2005 ADST

Q: Today is August 26, 1999. This is an interview with Michael Metrinko. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. First of all, Metrinko sounds Ukrainian. What's the name from?

METRINKO: Metrinko is Ukrainian. We are Lemko-Ukrainians, from the Carpathian Mountains in southern Poland or, as it is today, southern Poland. At the time my grandparents left, it was Galicia, Austro-Hungarian Empire. My grandfather got his citizenship in America in 1896, so the family has been here since the early 1890s. It's more than a hundred years now.

Q: What was the impulse - there's obvious impulse, but the 1890s was not -

METRINKO: In Galicia it was a major time for immigration. I've been back to the original villages. I've talked to a lot of families who live there today in the same villages, and I've done a great deal of study, both formally (some post-graduate work in history of the times) and informally myself when I was in Krakow, Poland; but the reasons were simple for departing from Galicia. It was the poorest province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was a Western-looking area; in other words, they looked to America and to other countries to find work, and families had simply gotten too big for the amount of land they had. Medicine had improved tremendously by the late 1800's in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The amount of land each village family owned had not increased; it had gotten smaller and smaller, and so more and more people were leaving the villages. In some cases hundreds and hundreds of people would leave a particular town or village every year.

Q: How did they get out? Was there a problem? One looks at the Jews in Russia at the time, or -

METRINKO: Russia was different.

Q: And of course that included Poland.

METRINKO: Parts of Poland.

Q: And it often was a problem getting out.

METRINKO: There was no problem from southern Poland. That was the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The rulers were "enlightened" (quote-unquote) and people from there knew about jobs in America. I can give you two examples of stories of traveling that I know of, on my mother's side. I talked to one of my mother's aunts, her mother's sister, about how she physically came to America. She was from a very small village in the Carpathian Mountains of southern Poland. I went to the village perhaps 40 or 50 times. I know it well. When I went there for the first time in 1983, the village still did not have any asphalt or electricity. That came in the later 1980s. In 1983 it looked much as it had looked 100 years before, which meant that it was impossible to drive there. You had to stop the car short of the village and walk in because the roads were filled with stones and boulders. You don't have to keep roads clear if you are just using a horse to move about. The houses were made of a combination of plaster and some wood, no stone, thatched roofs very often, and absolutely remote from any places you could think of as the modern world. A hundred years ago it was even worse because there weren't any place in the area that had telephones or electricity or asphalt.

I talked to my great-aunt about how she physically got to the United States, and she said that somebody from the village had gone before her, sent a letter back saying there was work in America, and mother's aunt corresponded with this person, wrote a letter, got a letter back saying that her name had been registered and she could pick up a ticket on the boat if she could get to Bremen. She knew that it was a city in Germany. What she did was talk to her parents about this, talk to the village priest about it. Several people started at the same time. When she was ready to go, her father bought her her first pair of real shoes (she was already a teenager), her father bought her a pair of shoes, her mother helped her buy a coat, and the village priest wrote the word America and pinned it to her coat with a pin, as a label, and she simply started to walk. And it took her approximately a month, a little bit more, to walk from her village to the port. And every time she arrived at a new village, people would look at the label on the coat and say "America" and point off in the direction she was supposed to go. This would sound strange today, but at the time there were thousands and hundreds of thousands of people doing this in Europe, especially in Eastern Europe (if you could get out of Eastern Europe) - too many people in the family, small houses. They had a two-room house, one room of which was used for the animals; they had eight or nine children. Now the generation before the families had been smaller because children were expected to die. In her generation none of the children died, so suddenly the land was the same - that was going to go to one of the children - but the others had to find something to do, and there wasn't any work in that part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Q: In the first place, when and where were you born?

METRINKO: I was born in 1946, November, in a hospital in Scranton, Pennsylvania. My home town was seven miles away. It was called Olyphant, Pennsylvania. Olyphant was a small coal-mining town, anthracite coal-mining. And the house I was born in was my grandfather's house. They'd been living in the same house since 1904. The house had been built in approximately 1860. It was a huge Victorian house that had been built as a hotel by the German Workmen's Group. My grandfather bought it in 1904, turned it into a private residence.

Q: Well, now, Galicia I think of as being a mining area. Was it?

METRINKO: Not really. Galicia has oil, to some extent, the farther reaches of it. In other parts they had salt mining, but some small amounts of coal mining, charcoal, things like that, but not mining as such, not the way you'd think of it today. The immigrants who came to the coal-mining areas came because that's where the work was. The would have preferred, probably, to have been farmers, but they either didn't know about farming or they didn't have the stake to start a farm.

Q: Did your family, when you're talking about the ones who came over, your grandfather and all, did they end up in Pennsylvania?

METRINKO: They all came to Pennsylvania, partly by chance. My mother's mother went to Connecticut first, met somebody who said the jobs were better in Pennsylvania. She moved to Pennsylvania with two of her sisters. My mother's father came a little bit later. He was the only one who came from Ukraine proper, and he was escaping from military service; that's why he left there. Ukraine proper, but even at the time it was still Bukovina and part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. My father's father, who was middle class, certainly compared to my other grandparents (he could read and write several languages, German, Russian, Polish, English, etc., probably Latin as well) but well educated and, from the genealogy that we've worked out, from quite a decent family. He came first to New York City and from New York City went to Alaska in the 1880s, and came back from Alaska, by chance met his brother, who he did not know was coming to the United States, in this small town - they were both visiting the same relatives - and decided to stay there. He became a businessman. He married a girl, my grandmother, who was from a village right down the road from his in Poland, Galicia, but whom he had not known until he got to the United States. She was several years younger. None of them, by the way, ever worked in mines. For some reason, all my father's family became businesspeople.

Q: When you grew up, were your grandparents around?

METRINKO: When I was born I still had two grandparents alive. My father's mother lived in the house with us. She died when I was 16. And my mother's father lived in a small town approximately two miles from where we lived. He lived in the family house there, and we lived in the Metrinko family house in Olyphant.

Q: Did you feel that you were part of a family that your roots were elsewhere? In other words, the language and all that?

METRINKO: My parents in the house often spoke Ukrainian. They spoke it with my grandmother because my grandmother spoke no English. She spoke Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, but no English. She also spoke a little bit of Yiddish, from what my parents tell me, because that was a lingua franca in that part of Galicia. When I would talk to my grandmother, for example, and this went on till I was 16, and I never thought about it until much later, I would speak to her in English and she would reply in Ukrainian. I understood her replies; she understood my English. Neither of us could speak the other's language, and I do not know how that happened. I understand it's not unusual.

Q: It's quite usual.

METRINKO: My grandfather who was still alive spoke quite decent English.

Q: What were the occupations of your mother and father?

METRINKO: My mother was a housewife. When she married my father, World War II had just started. My father was a businessman, and my mother moved into the house and simply started taking care of a huge house. By "huge," I mean a house that had, at the time, 50 or 60 rooms. It was a big house. She took care of that. We had a housecleaner who also took care of a lot of it. We didn't live in the whole thing. We had it subdivided, and lots of it was given up to apartments and stores and everything else. I'll explain that. But she also took care of my father's two brothers and his mother, and then she had three children. So she did the housekeeping, cooking, cleaning, etc., nurturing for a husband, his two brothers, who were both older than he was, who were not married, and his mother, in addition to her own three children.

Q: Where were you in the birth order?

METRINKO: I was the middle son, three sons.

Q: You say your father, then, was in business, and obviously he was a property owner.

METRINKO: A property owner. My grandfather, when he bought the house in 1904, bought what was then a hotel and a large house next door to it. He joined the two together. In the house that was next door he made three apartments. The jointure part became an apartment on the ground floor and a store on the main floor. There was our house and, in fact, he attached another large building to the main house. There was a ballroom, or a dance hall, with three apartments underneath it. And also the hotel had a bar, of course. And so in the 1900s, my grandfather, my uncles, and my father ran the grocery store, they ran the bar, they ran the properties - there were six apartments in this complex - plus a communal oven back of the house. And it was the last house before you got to the railroad tracks, before you got to the opening of the coal mines. And across the street from our house we had a series of approximately 3 or 4 layers of track, with trains passing by every 15 minutes for the whole time I was growing up, including a major water tank there for trains to stop at to get water. The old steam locomotives need a lot of water. There was a culm dump, maybe a quarter mile from the house, where all of the stuff being pulled out of the mines was being emptied. This was larger than one of the Egyptian pyramids, and the little lokies would run up and down this all day long from the mine openings taking the trash that they weren't going to use from the mines, the dirt they had mined out, and dumping it and making this pile, the culm dump, even bigger. At any time there were hundreds of men, coal miners, working in the area, either on the dump or in the sorting houses or in the sheds or in other areas there. And every time there was a shift change and the men would change, they would all come down and stop at either one of the two bars right there. Ours was one; across the street was another bar. So the Poles, the Ukrainians, the Slovaks, anyone who was of Eastern European origin would come to ours; the Irish and Italians would go to the one across the street.

Q: Was there a concern about these slag heaps landsliding - because in Wales they've lost villages that way?

METRINKO: This one, no. I've never heard any expression of concern. There was no sense of environmental concern, certainly, even though it was very typical of these to catch fire and to burn forever. The one near our house never caught fire (and now, by the way, it's gone and the area has been reforested and it's almost beautiful), but at the time, all around my town there were coal mines and culm dumps, which were sort of perpetually on fire, so the whole valley, that whole area of northeast Pennsylvania, there was always a mist or a haze over it from burning sulfur, sulfur smoke. And you could go two or three miles in any direction and see burning dumps. They'd been burning for maybe 20, 30, 40 years and could not be put out.

Q: This is before we get to school, but how would you describe sort of the culture there? I mean you have miners, who are obviously... this was not a job that many people wanted to do, and these were people from certain areas, and this was the work of opportunity, dangerous work and all that, and hard drinking and all that.

METRINKO: Hard drinking, fighting, etc. - yes. It's a strange culture. The town of Olyphant, when I was growing up, had approximately 7,000 people. There were something like 10 or 12 exquisite churches there. The miners and their families had poured all sorts of money into absolutely beautiful churches. If you had been in Europe and seen any of these churches you would have immediately gone on a tour of the inside they were that lovely - and still are that lovely. In fact, now there's a church tour that concentrates on the town. At the same time, it was a very multilingual town. The town consisted of Italians, Irish, Jews from Eastern Europe, Ukrainians, Poles, Slovaks. The churches were Welsh Baptist, Episcopalian, there was a Slovak Roman Catholic Church, there was a Polish Roman Catholic Church, a Ukrainian Greek Catholic church, an Irish Roman Catholic church. There were convents belonging to all the Catholic churches. There was a synagogue right next door to the Russian Orthodox church, which was catty-cornered to the Polish Roman Catholic church. And everybody lived mixed up. There were no streets where every body was Irish, everybody was Jewish, everybody was Italian. Houses were just totally mixed. You could have a Jewish family living next door to a Polish family living next door to a Ukrainian family - it made no difference. And basically, we all mingled.

Q: I was just thinking, when you put a synagogue, a Polish Catholic Church, a Russian Orthodox church - and these are, particularly on the Polish and Russian side, not the most tolerant towards the Jews back in those -

METRINKO: We had no problems there.

Q: What were the Jews doing in the town? I can't think of them as being miners.

METRINKO: They were businesspeople. When I was growing up, the first original generation of immigrants were all still there. My grandfather had died and my grandmother had died, but my great-aunts were still alive. Other grandparents were alive. Everyone else's grandparents were alive. And everyone that I knew were people that had emigrated directly from some other country to the United States, to this town. It was a town of a wide mixture of ages, from the very old to babies. In fact, living right up the street from my house, about four or five houses up, was a Civil War veteran, when I was growing up, and he was the seventh or sixth last one in the United States at the time. But it was that sort of town. I knew veterans of the Russo-Japanese War. I knew people who had been to Fatimah to see the appearances there of the Virgin Mary. I mean, these were all people living in the town. It was a strange place.

Q: What were you getting from your parents, because we are talking about a period of time where often people have rather narrow views? You know, they'd always talk about little Irish dressmakers or the micks or... you know, that whole thing, but this doesn't seem very conducive to that.

METRINKO: Let me give you some examples from the family. I came from a rather strange family. My mother's family and my father's family are both large. On my mother's side, only one of her sisters and brothers went to the university. That was my aunt who became a nurse. With the exception of one aunt, the others all married out. In other words, one married a Lutheran from Oklahoma City; one married a Roman Catholic Pole from Connecticut, moved out to California to live.

On my father's side it was far more varied. My father's oldest sister went up to New England to university back after the turn of the century, literally. Around 1910 or so, 1912, she went to school in Springfield, Massachusetts, ended up marrying a Boston Brahmin. So I used to go up there and spend holidays. They had a house there, an art collection and all this stuff, in Massachusetts. My father's next sister married a state trooper from Newport News, Virginia, and they both became public school teachers in Washington, DC. So my first memory of a visit, of a trip, was in 1949, when I came to Washington and spent a summer there and got to see President Truman walking down the mall on July 4th, when the President would actually come and address the people. My oldest aunt's husband was Protestant. My aunt basically became some sort of Protestant. My next aunt's husband was, again, Protestant, raised the children kind of Catholic, but only vaguely so. My father's oldest brother lived with us. He had been married and divorced. His next brother never married, but they also both went to university. One of my uncles went to New York University; the other one went to St. Thomas' College in Scranton, Pennsylvania. The aunt who married the state trooper also went to university up in Massachusetts. The next uncle down went to school in Massachusetts after World War II and married an Episcopalian from the far western part of Pennsylvania. Everybody married out. Everybody scattered. My mother and father each married another Ukrainian and stayed in the hometown area, but the others were mixed, you know, instead of sort of crowding around.

Q: When do you recall family life, sitting around the dinner table, what did you talk about, or were books part of the discussion? Was the world?

METRINKO: It's funny. I think we probably got more magazines and newspapers in the house than the public library did. Right now I get something like 26 different magazines and newspapers and journals. Some come every day, some come once a week, some come once a month. It's the same sort of group that I remember my parents getting and my uncles getting in the house. One of my uncles was the superintendent of schools for the whole area, one of the ones who lived with us. The other uncle who lived with us read constantly - everything, history, biographies, etc., etc., novels. My father read all the time. And it's funny, but they never tried to stop me from reading even the adult books. My parents were members of the Book-of-the-Month Club, for example, and from the time that I first learned to read, first grade, I had access to any book in the house. They never said a word about my picking up one of their adult novels. And everyone had been to university, except my parents; everyone expected the younger generation in the house to read and write as quickly as possible. I still have some of my grandfather's collection of books from the 1800s and his original desk, too. It's huge old floor-to-ceiling secretary desk, and it's stuffed with books. I got that from the house in Pennsylvania.

Q: Well, now, were there discussions in the house, of politics, current events?

METRINKO: All the time. Politics - both my mother and father were... My father was the Republican Party chairman of the town and had been for most of my growing life. My mother was Republican Party committeewoman. Back in the first Eisenhower election as president, I remember riding in the inaugural parade in Pennsylvania because my father had one of the cars in the parade to wave to people from. So politics was always there. My father had political positions in the sense that when the Republicans were in charge in Pennsylvania he had a good job and he worked and then went back to running the bar. And he was always the chairman, so there was always talk about politics. In fact, the Republican votes were basically counted in our house. When there was an election, all of the chairpeople or the committee people would join in our house, and it was from our dining room that results would be telephoned to the other bodies and organizations.

Q: Which school?

METRINKO: I started out going to the Olyphant public school, where my uncle was the superintendent - and then later he became superintendent of the whole jointure, the whole area there - until seventh grade, when one of my friends said that he was going down to take the examination for the local preparatory school in Scranton. Since he was my best friend - everybody in seventh grade has a best friend - I tagged along one Saturday, took the exam as well. I passed; he didn't.

Q: This is how so many people came into the Foreign Service, by having a friend or a girl friend or something persuading them, why don't you come along?

METRINKO: I don't want to do it alone. It's called kismet. I passed and decided, What the hell, I'll go to this school. It was a Jesuit school. I didn't know what a Jesuit was, and until my first day of classes I did not know that priests were the teachers there.

Q: Your family was Catholic?

METRINKO: Yes, we are Greek Catholic, as opposed to Roman Catholic. We're under the Pope, but there's a different hierarchy.

Q: Your priest would be married?

METRINKO: Ah, that's raising a bad subject. Everywhere in the world except in the United States, the priests of my church can marry. In the United States they cannot because it caused such a great scandal for the Irish and Italian bishops. Back in the 1800s they got the United States restricted for married clergy. I was baptized by a married priest, but from then on they started to replace them.

Q: But through the seventh grade you were at a regular school. How did you find the schools?

METRINKO: Elementary school?

Q: Yes, elementary school?

METRINKO: Elementary school was good. I liked to study. I liked to read. I always have. I mean, I was brought up in a house where everyone at the lunch table would open up the newspaper. We didn't have conversation so much as people reading magazines, newspapers, etc., all over the place. And if people went into the bathroom they might be there for an hour or two, you know. We had more books in our bathroom than most people have in their libraries.

But the school was good. There was a problem with it. Whenever I did something that was good, somebody would make the comment that it was only because of my uncle being superintendent that I got the A's, that I got this award, that I got that award. And yes, I did get awards, all through elementary and junior high school, all sorts of things, from the Rotary Club, from this group, from that group, you know - best picture for the post office art thing, etc. - and it was really bothering me by junior high school that whenever I did something someone was sure to say, Oh, it's only because of your uncle. I was desperate to get out to show that I could do it myself. And I did.

Q: Well, how did you find the education there, coming from such a mixed group? This would be during the -

METRINKO: The '50s. The education from my grade school to high school? The education in a town like Olyphant was always of a very good standard for one reason. The teachers and the people of the town knew that the only way to get out of the town and get a good job was to get an education. Everybody there had some coal miner coughing his lungs out lurking in a back room of the house because the person had not had an education and had had to go into the mines. The mines were still open in the '50s. They didn't start closing until the late '50s, early '60s. The alternative always was you either get an education, get a university degree, or you're going to end up working in one of the local factories on a factory line or you're going to end up working in the coal mines. It's wonderfully salutary.

Q: Oh, yes.

METRINKO: There was none of this spoiled, you know, Well-does-it-matter-if-you-go-to-school-or-not? stuff. You went to school, or you know what the option was. There were no other options.

Q: Well, I take it, too, that you weren't running across the problem where parents weren't backing up the teachers.

METRINKO: It was a small town. In a town of 7,000 people several of the teachers had been my father's teachers. They still hearkened back to the time when a teacher was not allowed to get married, sort of like the old days for women in the Foreign Service. We had a large collection of spinster teachers who had gotten quite old, knew our mothers, our fathers, our uncles, and our aunts and were strict, by the line, you know. There were no discipline problems in the school. There certainly was corporal punishment. I remember turning the page once in first grade because I wanted to get to another page in the primer and getting my knuckles rapped by a ruler very badly because I had been told to stay on page one. This was old-line teaching. And I still remember all the teachers' names, too.

Q: So you went to this Jesuit school. Was this equivalent to a high school?

METRINKO: Yes, it was the last four years of high school.

Q: You were there from when to when?

METRINKO: I finished there in 1964, so 1960.

Q: What was the school's name?

METRINKO: Scranton Preparatory School, or Scranton Prep. At the time it was an all-boys' school. At the time it had, oh, altogether maybe 350 students in it, in all four years. It was considered the best school in that whole part of Pennsylvania. It was certainly the most rigorous - excellent discipline, excellent curriculum, and everybody from the school went to university. I mean, there were no ifs, ands, or buts about it. If you went there and got through, you were going to get accepted into a university. This was back, of course, in the days when not everyone got accepted into university, when there was a real cut-off. A lot of students don't realize that today, that you could not just sign up at a school the way you can today. You know, you simply had to get through all the examinations, and if you didn't get accepted, you didn't get accepted then. If you went to this school, you got accepted.

Q: You mentioned reading a lot. Did you read the stories of John O'Hara at that time?

METRINKO: All the Pennsylvania stories? Sure.

Q: Were they sort of -

METRINKO: That was the society.

Q: I was going to say, that was sort of upper - class, wasn't it?

METRINKO: Well, John O'Hara was not upper-class. He was more solid middle, slightly upper-middle.

Q: They used to say that he wrote his stories because he wasn't really admitted into Yale or something, or the upper Eastern establishment used to feel that he hadn't been accepted so he wrote his stories with a certain amount of bitterness.

METRINKO: He wrote stories about people who were part of the country club set, people who had cottages on the local lake, people who were doctors and lawyers and used car dealers or new car dealers and who went to Europe on vacations once in a while. That kind of describes a lot of the people I knew and some member, but not all, by any means, of my own family, because my own family went all the way up from one uncle who was an uneducated never-finished-high-school janitor all the way up to an uncle who got his doctorate at Harvard and taught at a university in New England. So it was all the way back and forth. Probably one of the most interesting things about growing up is that I could go from one end of the spectrum to the other and deal with people from the Harvard set at my uncle's and aunt's house in Massachusetts and then come back and sit at my other uncle's table and have a drink with him.

Q: Let's talk a bit about Jesuit education during the '60s.

METRINKO: Penal servitude?

Q: How did it work, and then what were you interested in?

METRINKO: They didn't give you a chance to be interested in something. You were told what you were going to be interested in and what you weren't going to be interested in. The education system was the old classic education system. Number one, the schools were all boys. Number two, coat and tie required, so I had to learn very quickly how to tie a tie. You had to have your hair cut short. If you were seen smoking, it was automatic dismissal from the school unless you were a senior. If you were seen drinking, automatic dismissal. If it was reported that you were drinking, automatic dismissal from the school. The school was run on very traditional conservative lines. We had Latin two hours a day every day of the year my freshman year. A strong emphasis on the humanities, history, English, Latin, math, science - very straight, no frills curriculum. There were extra-curricular activities, but very, very limited. You weren't there to have fun; you were there to study. And the curriculum was designed in a way that every student had a minimum of three hours of homework a night. The teachers, during their meeting sessions, would decide what the homework assignments were going to be so that they knew you were studying three hours a night or so in order to prepare yourself for the next day. If you did not do the studying one night, it showed very quickly the next day. And this was true for all four years.

We had a prefect of discipline who was busy, and discipline was extremely good in this school. There was no mouthing off, no fighting, nothing like that. It was run on very, very strict Jesuit lines. What can I say. It was, I thought, and excellent education, now that I look back on it, absolutely excellent. The discipline was there, the curriculum was there. I liked the classics so much that in my second year, when we were given a choice of either taking the Greek course or the Science course (this meant that you were going to spend the next three years, one hour a day, either taking science, biology, chemistry, physics, etc., or taking Greek in addition to your Latin), I wanted the Greek. My father took one look at it and said, "No, you're going to study science." Thank goodness, because everyone who went into the Greek studies program had a little bit more difficulty getting into university later - not difficulty, but a little bit more. They had to take make-up science courses because practically every university required some basics in science.

I did very well in school. I took lots of gold medals. I was probably, in the graduating class, either three or four - I've really forgotten.

Q: Were you living in Scranton?

METRINKO: No, I lived in Olyphant, and I would either hitchhike or take the bus every day. It was half an hour's drive to the school.

Q: You were there '60-64. For a Republican family, John Kennedy was the first Catholic to run successfully for President, and also there was an aura about him. Did that penetrate down at your level?

METRINKO: Oh, yes, sure. When Kennedy and Nixon were having their campaign, I was head of the debating team there that was pro-Nixon. We had to have a sort of presidential campaign debate. And the amazing thing about it was that the school, which was heavily Irish and Italian, by the way (there were two Ukrainian Greek Catholics in my class, for example - I was one of them) - there were two Protestants, no Jews at that point - everyone else was either Irish or Italian or some version of that - but in a class where everybody was pro-Kennedy, I managed to get the votes so that it was 50-50, which I thought was amazing. Kennedy was assassinated when I was a senior, 1963 - yes, I was a senior - then I started in '59. I'm sorry, I'd forgotten the year I started. When the news came over we were all summoned to the main assembly room of the school, and the headmaster told us the news and asked everyone to pray, and immediately the entire school, with the exception of two people, got on its knees. I remained standing, and my best friend, who was a Protestant in the class, remained standing too. I did not like the Kennedys then or now.

Q: One thing this Kennedy thing did, it made much more awareness towards public service and all that.

Were you getting much of this? Was public service something thrown at you as an option, or were the professions more than service?

METRINKO: No, not particularly. The professions, certainly. That was going to be left to university. The standing rule - it even talks about this... In fact, we had a mini-reunion here in Washington three or four months ago, several people who had been to the same high school, one or two from my year, one or two from the year after and the year after that, and we talked about the school because we'd all had the same teachers, the same headmaster, and the same prefect of discipline. We had not known, graduating school that we were allowed to actually apply to schools that were non-Jesuit for university. It was that restricted. When they talked about potential future careers, it was to be a teacher, to be a doctor, to be a lawyer, so public service in that sense, but not aimed really at government work. This was a small town, remote from Washington. I knew about Washington because I had family here, and I'd come here on vacations; but most of my classmates had not been to the City of Washington. I don't think anybody would look forward in high school to a career in government. It's not something you start thinking about in ninth grade or tenth grade.

Q: How about the military?

METRINKO: From my high school, no, not at all; from my junior high school, yes. It was very common for guys from my junior high school, when they finished high school, to go into the military. My uncle, one of the ones who lived at home with us, served on the local draft board. We knew all about the military. It was part of our lives. I think I grew up in World War II, even though I was born right after it was over because that was what people talked about. But going into the military from my prep school - no, not at all, never even a whisper of that. No one did it. They became doctors, lawyers, whatever, teachers.

Q: Well, then, you graduated, what, '63, '64?

METRINKO: I graduated '64 from high school.

Q: Were you pointed towards anything?

METRINKO: When I started looking at possible universities in 1963, again, we were almost force-fed into the Jesuit educational system for university. So I looked at three Jesuit schools, Fordham, Georgetown, and the University of Scranton. I applied. I was given full scholarship offers from Georgetown and from Fordham. My father had told me when we talked about do we have the money for me to go to university, what he had said was, "If you go to the University of Scranton, you could live at home, and I'll pay your tuition; if you go anywhere else, you'll have to pay for it yourself." So I immediately knocked off the University of Scranton from my thinking, swore I would never go there, and luckily I got these scholarship offers, so by loaning money and the full scholarship, I went to Georgetown.

Q: So you went to Georgetown from '64 to '68.

METRINKO: Yes.

Q: What was your impression of Georgetown when you first arrived there?

METRINKO: To begin with, I had already had two cousins who had gone through Georgetown, with my family name, and in that decade, 10 or 15 years, I eventually had three cousins with my family name, my younger brother, and two cousins on my mother's side who went there too. So we had a whole slew who went to Georgetown. When I first got there - what can I say? - I liked it. I knew people there. There were three of us from my high school who were coming here, to start out with. I had worked for the summer at a summer camp up in the Poconos as a dishwasher, and one of the other guys on the staff, who was from New York City - today I can't even remember his name, but we were good friends the first part of freshman year, the way things are - I liked it. I felt very much at home at Georgetown. I mean, I had an uncle living here in the city, cousins in the city, another cousin who was a senior when I was there who immediately took charge of me and invited me over, introduced me to people and talked to me, etc.

Q: One of the things that often happens is that when a kid comes out of a strict school and all of a sudden hits a university, they go -

METRINKO: - ape?

Q: - ape. How about you?

METRINKO: No, lots of them did, because there was drinking here, and most of the states had far stricter drinking regulations than Washington. At the time here in Washington, you could drink at the age of 18. When I got here I was already of drinking age, but I had been accustomed to being around alcohol my whole life. My parents certainly trained me how to drink. They used to give us claret or burgundy or something like that on holidays, and a sip or beer or some wine was not uncommon at all at our house. So the alcohol didn't mean anything to me. It wasn't a challenge, like something new and forbidden; I'd had it. Drugs did not start until I was probably in my junior or sophomore year; they became more prevalent. I tried different stuff then, but it didn't mean so much to me either. The interesting part was girls. I had gone to an all-boys school. That was very, very pleasant. We basically had a good, pleasant time.

Q: Where did Georgetown men find girls, because it was not coed in those days?

METRINKO: No, Georgetown was. The only school that was not coed was the college. At the time the Foreign Service School was coed. Two of my female cousins had gone to the Foreign Service School, and one of them was still there, as a senior. Georgetown was coed - the nursing school, the School of Linguistics, the Foreign Service School; and also we had Trinity, Dumbarton, Marymount, and Visitation, all within easy commuting distance, all of them at Georgetown all the time for mixers. Georgetown, the city of or the town of, the bars were filled with girls from other states and other areas coming in for the weekends. There was no problem at all and very, very pleasant.

Q: What studies did you do?

METRINKO: I went into the School of Foreign Service - not because I wanted to be a Foreign Service officer. I didn't know what a Foreign Service officer was. I started out at the Institute of Languages and Linguistics and then transferred to the School of Foreign Service. But the reason that I took the Institute was that it was the only school I looked at that did not require you to take science or math, and I would have gone far to find a school like that. I didn't know about economics at the time.

Q: We liberal arts types always ran across that. Was Father Healy running the School of Foreign Service?

METRINKO: Yes, he was. He was still there.

Q: What was the School of Foreign Service like then? What sort of course were you taking, and who was teaching?

METRINKO: Good gosh, I can remember my teachers back in grade school sometimes better. Well, there was Charles Carroll - no, not Charles Carroll - Carroll Quigley.

Q: Yes, I was going to say, Charles Carroll was -

METRINKO: - had been dead for about 200 years.

Q: Yes.

METRINKO: He went to Georgetown.

Q: His statue's out there, isn't it. Well, anyway -

METRINKO: Carroll Quigley was there with his infamous, very good, eye-opening course on development of civilization. I had that my freshman year. Good gosh, Father Zriny for economics, the first economics teacher I had and one in a whole string of non-American and non-native English speakers. For years and years and years I assumed that you had to be a foreigner with a heavy accent to teach economics.

Q: How would you characterize the students in your class, not the ones farther along which came into the School of Foreign Service? Did they know what they were doing, or was this just a place that didn't require physics?

METRINKO: No, we had a lot of students who were very focused. One of the very first students I met there - in fact, I had just moved into my dormitory room and had met my new roommate, and there was a knock on the door, and we opened the door and there was a very tall guy there from Arkansas who said, "Hi, my name is Bill Clinton, and I'm running for president of the freshman class, and I'd appreciate your vote." And so he was one of the first people I met at school. He was in my class. I'll give you a few examples of others. Lucy Johnson was at Georgetown at that point. We had the daughter of one of the African kings, whose name I do not remember, and I dated once or twice a very pleasant girl from the Philippines, and one day I asked her - we were talking about family - I asked her what her father did for a living, and she said, "Oh, my father's in the government." And I said, "Oh, mine is too," thinking of my father, who then had a job in the tax department of Lackawanna County in Pennsylvania. And I said, "What kind of government work does he do?" And she said, "He's the president of the Philippines." This sort of thing. There were lots of very focused, very intelligent, very well-traveled people - not by any means all. There were lots just like me, from small towns, from Jersey City, from Newark, from New York City, from the Bronx, from New Jersey, who were there because they had been very good and sharp in high school and had gotten into Georgetown, the Foreign Service School of the College, and they were starting to go up - Bill Clinton, for example.

Q: Well, did you, as you were doing this, begin to find, figure out what you wanted to do?

METRINKO: I did and I didn't. A lot of what we do in life is chance. What I desperately wanted to do when I finished college was to go into the Peace Corps. I had wanted to do this since I first started to read about it in the early '60s. And five or six years, seven years later I still really wanted to do it. I had a girlfriend at the time, in junior year, who wanted to go into the Peace Corps too. She wanted to go to Turkey because she had once visited there with her father. Her father was an Army attachï¿½ at one of the embassies. She had spent a couple of years living overseas. Because she wanted Turkey, I put down Turkey too. I got accepted to Turkey in my senior year; she was rejected by the Peace Corps. (Shows the kind of people I hung around with). But I ended up going to Turkey in the Peace Corps.

Q: Had government service begun to become a possibility as you were at Georgetown?

METRINKO: In college I didn't think about it that much. We were focused on other things. These were the years of the Vietnam buildup. I had a lottery number, and my lottery number was very low. I was going to go off and get drafted if I did not go into the Peace Corps. I would say my going in was a combination of the two things. I wanted to go in and had wanted to go in since before I'd ever heard of Vietnam, and at the same time, it was a way to avoid going into the Army and also doing it legally and sort of not in a bad way.

Q: Was Vietnam raising its head while you were there?

METRINKO: Oh, yes. I'm trying to think if I was a junior or a senior. I've forgotten now. But every last one of my friends and I got ourselves a lottery number. That was the year of the big lottery.

Q: With that, were there protests?

METRINKO: Not yet. It didn't start until afterwards. Georgetown, up until 1968, was what they used to call a "hotbed of apathy." That was the expression used for it. Nobody was protesting yet. That all started a year or two years later. When I was at Georgetown you still had to wear a coat and tie to class every day. You had to be in class before the teacher, or you did not get into class. It was still a fairly well disciplined school. The first year that I started, you had to be in your dormitory by a quarter of eight in the evening. There was a lights-out policy too. The concept of having a member of the opposite sex in the dormitory was just... nobody... it was inconceivable. There was one day a year when we had Visitors' Day, when if you had your door wide open and sort of stuck wide open, you could have a female actually come into the room, put her feet on the floor of your bedroom. But other than that, that was the only day of the year. But by the same token, we had maid service too, which was kind of nice, freshman year. That started to disappear. Maid service disappeared. Curfews also disappeared when I was there.

Q: What about studies? What sort of subjects were there?

METRINKO: Competitive, rigorous. Again, for me, solid language, history, economics, some linguistics, a lot of government courses.

Q: Did the school lend itself to sort of focusing on one area of the world or not?

METRINKO: No, I took courses diverse as History of Russia, the History of India, several European courses, standard Western European courses. Economics covered the whole gamut of the world. Comparative government also covered a number of systems. I took French as my language, but you could have taken Chinese or Russian or German or whatever. You got into those areas, those regions, to study.

Q: Was there any opening to the government out there - you know, visiting people coming in from Congress or from other countries - that sort of thing, because you were in Washington?

METRINKO: Yes, Georgetown is a unique school in that sense. One of the best things about it is that every government leader who came through would come there to talk. They had a very, very active program, and I thought a wide variety of people coming in from other countries. For example, King Hussein came to give a major speech. But people would come in all the time like that, and the student body was a very diverse one. We had the sons and daughters of a lot of diplomats there. For example, one of my classmates, Turki Faisal, the son of the king of Saudi Arabia, was there. His roommate later became a good friend of mine. He was the son of the Turkish ambassador to the United States at the time. One of my closest friends freshman year was a guy from Thailand. And I used to date a girl from Thailand. Another girl that I dated was from Rumania, the daughter of a diplomat. So there was a diverse foreign body there. Teachers were very often from foreign countries. The Jesuits are an international body. It's a very strange group of clergy. They come from all around the world, and they would come from all around the world to be assigned to Georgetown University too, and then go off again to other places.

Q: I'm not sure exactly when John XXIII came in. When did that happen?

METRINKO: That happened just before that. We certainly had the effects of that, both in my high school and at Georgetown. A lot of the old church furniture, the altars, etc., had disappeared. Priests changed the way they did mass. It was becoming - you know, you had more of the blues masses and the jazz masses and other things. I can think of all sorts of folk masses that didn't make them necessarily more familiar to us because if you were middle-class American a jazz mass or a folk mass or a blues mass had nothing at all to do with your own background, but it was an attempt to try to meld different things together. They were then starting to go away from Latin and into the vernacular. All that was happening at that time.

We also saw the demise of the education system in the United States and parochial schools too, the same thing.

Q: Were you feeling during this period the desegregation, the effort to reach out to the black community, essentially?

METRINKO: Yes, Georgetown was involved in it. I was in a group called the GUCAP, the Georgetown University Community Action Program. I was a tutor for some black kids in the city. There was that. Very few black students came to the campus unless they happened to be the children of black diplomats or very, very well-off blacks from African countries or from somewhere else. The number of black students was very limited at Georgetown, but... I'm just trying to think. The basketball team - I doubt there were any blacks on the team at the time - that sort of thing. Attempts to reach out. I guess people thought it was politically correct, and there was certainly a lot more community action going on than had gone on in previous years, but it was also a time - 1968 - when Martin Luther King was killed and Washington caught fire. Then there was a reversal, a real sort of becoming an island again, a lot of fear too. The city was closed down for a week or two.

Q: The 82nd Airborne marching through town in full combat gear.

METRINKO: And tanks, if I remember correctly, on the various bridges coming into the city, to check cars and things like that. Strange times.

Q: You wanted to be Peace Corps. Did that mean anything except to be Peace Corps?

METRINKO: No, I wanted to leave the United States. I wanted to see what life was like out of it. I'd had so many friends who were from other countries. I knew that my own family background was not in the United States, that we had come from other places. I just wanted to get out. I had been reading books since I was a child, since I was a baby almost. I would routinely go through more than 100 books a year, and I was desperate to leave lower middle-class Olyphant, Pennsylvania, and go off and see the world - and not in an Army uniform - just to go off and see the world. And the Peace Corps fit the bill. I couldn't do a grand tour, but I could sure go off and live somewhere interesting.

Q: You went into the Peace Corps in '68?

METRINKO: In 1968.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your indoctrination training, and all.

METRINKO: Indoctrination training was actually rather funny. I was told to report to Eagle Rock, Los Angeles, California. Eagle Rock has a very good small school called Occidental College.

Q: It's sort of between Pasadena and Beverly Hills and that area.

METRINKO: Right. It's a very, very beautiful little school, a little gem of school out there, and they had a contract for running the Peace Corps training for the summers. So I went off to Eagle Rock and showed up in Los Angeles for what was supposed to be two months of Turkish training. I had a great time. I immediately liked the Turkish teachers. I had another cousin who had also been through Georgetown, living in Los Angeles at the time, who was delighted that I was out there and used to show up and pick me up in her convertible and whisk me away from classes at the school and off to things on weekends. The summer school was in session, and it consisted mostly of girls who were living in the sorority houses there. I had a great time with them. I spent a lot of my time fooling around during training, going out to the beaches, touring around, spending time with my cousin. I had a private dinner one day with Tiny Tim. My cousin introduced us. You know, this sort of thing. It was great fun. I went off to Palm Springs. I got to Las Vegas. All the sorts of things that you do in about 10 weeks of frenetic activity. I disappeared one day with one of the Turkish teachers, who suggested that we cut class. He was a Turkish university student there who was teaching us Turkish, and he wanted to go off and do something, so I went off with him and spent the whole day with Turks, came back and discovered that we had had a surprise inspection from Washington, and I was being summoned - they had left notes all over for me - because they were worried about my ability to adjust to foreign countries, and the people from Washington had wanted to talk to me. I was not a group player. The Peace Corps head of our program at Eagle Rock was a professional psychologist. He used to sit around with a notepad taking notes all the time as we talked our interacted or did things. And he had realized he rarely saw me in groups. I was always off doing something, so he had decided I was not going to make it in Turkey. Well, they literally told me that I should drop out of the program in Eagle Rock because obviously I was not cut out for the Peace Corps, and I reminded them that they had said that everybody in training in Eagle Rock would go to Turkey, and the final cut would not be made until after our month in Turkey. They had said this; they could not tell me to leave if they were telling the truth then. And they got annoyed, but they said it would depend on my Turkish examination. And I went into the Turkish examination, and the teacher, the examiner, was from FSI. He had come out from Washington. And one of the first questions he asked me, in Turkish, was my name and where I had gone to university. And I told him, and he immediately said, "Oh, Georgetown" - in English - that he also had had some affiliation with Georgetown, and the next thing I knew we knew all sorts of people in common, because I knew people at FSI, courtesy of their children whom I had gone to school with, and he spent the next 20 minutes laughing and talking in English about Washington, DC, and this place and all the people we knew in common, etc., etc., etc. He forgot, literally, he was giving me a Turkish examination. And when they announced the scores, I came out as the highest score of the entire group, which nobody could understand. And he was gone. But he had conducted the whole examination in English. It was great, you know.

Anyway, I went off to Turkey and arrived in Turkey and got off the plane and immediately loved it.

Q: You were there from, what, '68 to '70?

METRINKO: '68 to '70 - but got off the plane, saw people standing at the awful Dogpatch airport - the airport in Ankara back in 1968 was like something left over from World War I. A dust storm was blowing, and there were women standing there veiled. And I though, This is where I want to be. And by the next day I had made Turkish friends.

Q: Where were you sent?

METRINKO: Well, they were so sure I was not going to make it in Turkey that they assigned me as a problem case to Ankara, and I spent two years teaching at Hacettepe University, which was great.

Q: What was Ankara like in those days?

METRINKO: Ankara in those days, 1968 to '70, still had wide boulevards. Attatï¿½rk Boulevard, which is the street the embassy is on, was lined with big old houses and with buildings set half a block in from the sidewalks, with huge gardens with trees in front of them. Restaurants typically had huge, huge gardens. It was a city of gardens, pleasant villas, small apartment buildings, only one hotel that you would even think of as being a decent hotel. There was one traffic light in the entire city. As we used to say, "Let's meet at the light," and everyone knew what it was. And that was way, way, way down away from us. The university that I was teaching at was a great place. The students were all my age. I made lots of friends there, had a good time for two years.

Q: How did you find the state of Turkish education when you were there?

METRINKO: I thought the university was quite good. It was highly selective, of course. You don't get into a university easily in Turkey. You had to pass very rigorous exams. They took a small percentage of the graduating class of every high school. My students tended to be bright, spoke or learned to speak quite good English, well educated, well brought up, nice people. I had Turkish roommates who were well educated or in the process of becoming well educated, bright decent people.

Q: How dedicated did you find them?

METRINKO: The students were hard-working. To stay on in the universities they had to work, and they did. It was not a free ride. At the same time, the universities were rife with problems, basically political problems. This was when socialism was rearing its head. There was lots of anti-American stuff going on because of Vietnam. Political troubles in Turkey itself - the problems were having a resurgence then, so there were also political problems there in the universities at the time. The universities went off on strike several times when I was there.

Q: Well, did the university end up, as so many universities around the world do, except in the United States and maybe England, with the students being practically expected to be quite radicalized and demonstrate practically extreme socialist, Communist or stuff? Then when they graduate they go out into the world and they do a complete turnaround.

METRINKO: Yes, that's fairly descriptive of Turkish universities except for the Kurdish ethnic problem. But at the time it was less Kurdish and more socialist versus far right. The solcu and the saci, the right and left. And there were students with beards and students without beards. If you had a beard, you were a socialist hippie. Everybody had a moustache, but you either had a beard or you did not have a beard.

Q: What about Islam at that time?

METRINKO: In the universities, almost no mention of it. The university that I was at, one of my classrooms where I taught probably five days a week in the afternoon, that particular classroom had been built... it was a brand new university. In fact it was still under construction. And our particular building had been built right next to the minaret of a mosque, a very old minaret of what was then still a village mosque, because we were on one of the outskirts of the city. The muezzin, the guy who did the call to prayer, would climb the minaret and do the call to prayer in person. I could see him standing about 70 or 80 feet from me, and the top of the minaret was on a level with my classroom, so we had a beautiful view of him. I would always stop the class when he was doing the call to prayer, and the students would laugh at me for even paying attention to it. He had a beautiful voice. But the students themselves, not religious, at least not on the surface religious at all.

Q: Women students with head scarves?

METRINKO: No scarves at all in the universities then or now. Scarves weren't allowed, and this was the time of the miniskirt, so a typical Turkish girl, if she were middle class there, would be wearing a miniskirt and high boots, and long, long hair, you know, sort of flowing freely. It was a wonderful time to be in Turkey. The girl students were absolutely beautiful.

Q: Where did your university sort of rank in the pecking order?

METRINKO: It was a new university, a medical university attached to Hacettepe hospital in Ankara. It was very, very new. The first building was still under construction, the first several buildings. It was surrounded by mud fields and construction fields. It was part of the hospital complex. When you were sitting in the school cafeteria, for several months of one year, the operating theater was on the other side of the cafeteria, and the connection was through the cafeteria. So bodies were being wheeled through the cafeteria on stretchers to have operations and medical treatment. It was that new. They still hadn't gotten the complex put together. The pecking order wasn't applicable yet. If you wanted, the old established university in Ankara was Ankara University, which had a law faculty and the political science faculties attached to it. The other one in Ankara was the Middle East Technical University, METU, which taught all courses in English - engineering, hard sciences. Ours was social work, pre-med, things like that.

Q: How did you find your language training was going?

METRINKO: I think as with all language training, you learned the theory of it in FSI, although I never had any FSI training in Turkish. You learn the theory of it in language class and you learn the practicality of it when you meet friends and start going out. And that's how I learned Turkish.

Q: But how about your teaching English?

METRINKO: Oh, that was fine. The students were interested. They knew they had to study it. They knew that to get ahead in Turkey you had to have English at that point. They were serious about it.

Q: What about the view of America, because we are talking about the Vietnam time and all this?

METRINKO: The view of America versus the view of Americans. Students were basically anti-America. Our government was doing some awful things. They were seeing it all in the news in Turkey, so they were becoming more and more anti-American government, anti-American Army. We had a lot of military bases in Turkey at the time, US military bases, including one in Ankara. These became the focus of attention, too. Towards myself, never anything personal. My friends were Turkish, and some of the most radical in my class were friends of mine. We'd go out drinking together. We would argue about Vietnam, but I wasn't a supporter of Vietnam either. In fact, the years that I was there, a lot of Peace Corps - not me, but a lot of them - took part in an anti-Vietnam demonstration in Turkey, caused a lot of trouble, actually for the Peace Corps there.

Q: How did the writ of the Peace Corps work with you while you were there?

METRINKO: The Peace Corps is a funny organization. It didn't at the time exert any real discipline over us, so that I would go to the Peace Corps office occasionally to get mail, to look at other things, but not really hang around at all - there was no reason to. I knew people on the staff, of course. I knew other people who would drop in to get a newspaper or to pick something up or drop something off, but we didn't really have a close, close connection to it. It was there; my apartment was half a mile away from it. I would usually have breakfast at a place that was only a block or so away from it, but by no means did I go in on a daily basis.

Q: Well, were they monitoring you, or how did that work?

METRINKO: In theory I guess they were, but I don't really remember anyone from the Peace Corps office coming down to the university. And there were seven or eight of us assigned to the university. They had yearly Peace Corps assemblies when we would all go off to a hotel somewhere off in the outskirts or one of the provinces and get together and talk about the Peace Corps, talk about what we were doing. They did that twice when I was there and were sorry for having done it each time. The first year when I was there we took a vote, and the vote came out almost unanimous from the volunteers that the Peace Corps should not be in Turkey, that Turkey did not need Peace Corps. And the Peace Corps staff got very upset.

Q: It was really designed for a different country, anyway. What did you and your group feel was the rationale for keeping the Peace Corps there?

METRINKO: Political reasons. Part of the Turkish government wanted to look as if they were very receptive to the United States. And I don't think that the Peace Corps at the time ever looked at pulling out of places; they just wanted to get into more places. There was an unlimited supply of volunteers; there was lots of money in the budget - Kennedy and Johnson both supported it - and it was, you know, it was a good idea, it seemed, at the time.

Q: Did you have any contact, feel, knowledge of the American diplomatic establishment in Ankara?

METRINKO: Very limited contact. I knew one of the Marine guards at the embassy because he was dating one of the girls in my Peace Corps group. Other than that, I think I may have been to the embassy cafeteria occasionally, and that was it. We could also cash checks, if I remember correctly, in the embassy Budget and Fiscal Office, and it was a way to get American dollars if we were going on a vacation or a trip somewhere, because they were not easy to get if you got a check and you wanted to cash it. You would go to a Turkish bank and wait forever.

Q: What was student life like there while you were there?

METRINKO: Guys and girls studied together at the university. Because it was a university in the capital city, and I guess considered one of the up-and-coming universities once it got off the ground, we had a fairly middle-class group of students there, middle-class and slightly upper-class. Life was easy. I mean I would go out on weekends all the time with the students - with the guys, basically - to go drinking for a night - not every weekend, but it happened a lot. There was some traveling. I'd go off on trips sometimes with students, things of that sort. It was rather free and easy in class. This was 1968. I was 22, so I was almost the same age as a lot of my students.

Q: How about the Kurdish problem? Did that intrude?

METRINKO: It didn't exist. Officially there were no Kurds in Turkey.

Q: They were "Mountain Turks"?

METRINKO: Mountain Turks. I had Kurdish friends. Two of us - myself as one volunteer with a Turkish roommate and the people who lived in the next apartment building over, two volunteers from a different group, had both taken in Turkish high school students who wanted to come to the capital city to complete their high school education. It was quite often done in Turkey if you were from a provincial town. The parents would send their son to the capital city to get into what they thought was a better high school to improve his chances of getting into a college. I had one of the students living with me, and in the next apartment over was one of his closest friends. And the next apartment with the other Peace Corps Volunteers was the next building over. It was maybe 100 meters from our place. They had a Kurdish high school student, and my student and that student were very close friends. They were always together. So I got to know the Kurdish student very well, went back to his village with him a couple of times, in Eastern Turkey. I also had some Kurdish students of my own. The were very circumspect, very guarded, but could be very vocal in private, when you got them out of the Turkish environment. And I certainly saw some good examples of what was happening to the Kurds when I went out with these students.

Q: What was happening?

METRINKO: Well, if you village had a Kurdish name, the name had been changed to a Turkish name and you had to use the Turkish name. You could not give y our children Kurdish first names; they had to be given Turkish first names. You weren't allowed to register with Kurdish names. You were not allowed to speak Kurdish in public. It was considered an illegal language on the streets; therefore, they weren't going to teach anyone Kurdish. They could speak it inside their own homes, with their families.

You'd hear quite a bit about Kurds - the Kurds this and the Kurds that. Of course their existence was being denied in the public press and regular history books. As far as I know the US Government went along with this lock, stock, and barrel - which it does today too, for that matter.

Q: Were there radical leftist Marxist-Leninist organizations in the university?

METRINKO: In the Peace Corps?Sorry.

Q: I was just thinking about the university and -

METRINKO: If there were, and there were, members would never have introduced themselves to me as a member of a Marxist-Leninist, whatever, group. Did the guys I went out drinking with have tendencies in that direction? Yes, probably. We had a lot of discussions about politics. A lot of them were not happy. My students also went off on strike routinely, especially in 1970. There were a series of strikes, against the university, against the government. But as to their particular affiliation with this or that group, I can't answer. They would never have talked to me about that.

Q: Well, then, what were you thinking about? You had a two-year term. What were you thinking about doing?

METRINKO: What I wanted to do was to spend a third year in Turkey. I had put off making a decision. I wanted to spend a third year there. My uncle was on the draft board in Pennsylvania, and I talked to him about what would happen if I came back to the United States. I wanted to go into graduate school, study Middle Eastern studies, get a master's degree; and it was something I had never thought about before going to Turkey, of course. I just fell in love with the area, the language, the people, everything else. I talked to my uncle, and he said that as long as I stayed in the Peace Corps I would be considered draft-exempt by our draft board because they were exempting all teachers and Peace Corps volunteers. I came from an area that was oversubscribed for the military. They had enough volunteers; they didn't have to draft people. He said if you came back here and you simply start going to school again, with your lottery number you'll go into the army almost immediately. So I decided to spend a third year in Turkey. I was signed up for it, everything was approved, I was going to spend a third year not teaching but working for the Ministry of Tourism, which would have been great. By this time I spoke Turkish well, I knew the country, I had English, etc. I had traveled all over Turkey. Everything was set, and then all the universities in the country went off on a massive strike in the spring of 1970. The strike went from week to week to week and ended up with a whole series of demands being made by the strikers. One of them was that all Americans had to leave Turkey. Well, the government decided, and I guess the embassy decided, they certainly weren't going to sacrifice the U.S. bases, and the American soldiers there, but to at least give a sop to the demonstrators, they might as well let the Peace Corps go. We were the ones who were visible, anyway. And we were the ones who looked suspicious, because nobody really knew what we were doing. We were teachers - what does that mean? What does Peace Corps mean? At that time, we were waging a major war. So the Peace Corps in Ankara disbanded. That's fine. At the time that it was disbanding, I kept hoping that we'd be able to stay on or I'd be able to stay on, not as a teacher, but at the Ministry of Tourism. I walked into the Peace Corps office one day to discuss this. It must have been in the early spring of 1970, and there was a notice on the bulletin board there that an American archeologist was looking for an assistant and an interpreter. I took the notice off, called and got in touch with the person. We hit it off. He had just been given a license by the Department of Archeology, the first foreign archeologist in years and years, to go up all along the Black Sea coast and do a survey of potential excavation sites. He offered me the job of going with him. The Peace Corps agreed to let me go and continue as part of my Peace Corps service, pending what might happen at the Ministry of Tourism, since this fit exactly into tourism anyway. So I went off with him for several weeks and toured the entire Black Sea area - not toured it, you know, staying in some pretty awful places - but got to see archeological sites from Sinop to Trabzon.

Q: We'll pick this up in 1970, after you've finished this time with an archeologist.

***

Today is May 18, 2000. Mike, you're at 1970, and you've just finished going around looking at archeological sites on the Black Sea, was it?

METRINKO: The Black Sea.

Q: Okay, so what did you do after you came back and went to work?

METRINKO: That period, more to the end of the Peace Corps presence in Turkey, I was one of the very last of the volunteers, probably the second or third last, to leave the country. The Peace Corps presence left there because of the growing anti-American feeling that was rising in the student body in Turkey, the leftist press, etc. Turkey was going through a period of extreme civil problems, civil unrest, if you will, and the Peace Corps was seen as too much of presence, too obvious a presence. We were at all the Turkish universities, throughout Turkish schools. They got rid of us. That was fine with me. Because the program was ending so abruptly and so early, and because I had expected to spend a third year in Turkey - I had made all my plans to do this. I had already been assigned to a new position in Turkey in the Peace Corps - and suddenly found myself without an assignment; and the Peace Corps in Washington offered several of us Peace Corps assignments in other countries. On the list of countries was Iran. Because I had been to Iran on a vacation and had really liked it and had wanted to go back, I decided to go to Iran. I originally thought I would go there for one year. That was my plan, to leave the Peace Corps after three years in the Peace Corps. Instead, I went Iran and ended up liking it so much that I spent three years more in Iran.

Q: Okay, so I wonder, this was 1970 to '73 you were in Iran in the Peace Corps. Well, let's talk about what you were doing, where you were, and the state of things there at that time.

METRINKO: Peace Corps training in Iran took place - it was all in Iran, unlike my Peace Corps studies for Turkey, where I'd been trained in the United States partially. All Peace Corps training for Iran was actually conducted in the country of Iran. And I spent two to three months in the city of Hamadan in western Iran. And my first assignment would be in the town of Sonqor (or Songhor). Sonqor was a Turkic town surrounded by Kurds in Khorramshahr Province, which is in western Iran. It was not very far from the border of Iraq, and the town of Sonqor, according to local legend, had been founded by Bay Sonqor, the grandson of Genghis Khan, who was allegedly in the area on a hunting trip and had a hunting accident and broke his leg and had to camp there for several months until he was recovered enough to leave. He liked the place, established a tribal presence there, and the Turkish town of Sonqor came into being. Sonqor has a Turkish name. The Turkish which is spoken there, according to linguists, is closer to the Turkish of Central Asia, rather than the Turkish of Azerbaijan and Turkey. Also, I noticed later that the carpet patterns, the ones that were native to the people of Sonqor, I saw the exact pattern in carpets that came straight out of Central Asia. In fact, I've made mistakes in thinking one carpet was from Sonqor and it turned out to be directly from Bokhara. You see the Bokhara city pattern as well. These patterns are only found in these two cities as far as I know.

I spent one year teaching in the local high school. I was responsible for all of the first-year English classes in the two boys' schools. We had more than 200 students, and all the students had three English classes a week. It ended up being a pretty full-time week. The students there were very different from the university students in Turkey. Number one, they were all guys. First-year high school, which meant an average in age of anything from 11 or 12 up to 18 or 19. The first year high school was the year traditionally in Iran when students came in from the villages to the nearest city or the nearest town to continue their high school education. Most Iranian villages had up to the sixth grade or seventh grade, but not much beyond that. This was the time when village students were showing up. This meant that I had a very heavy contingent of Kurdish students who had a lot of trouble speaking Persian, along with the town students from Sonqor itself, who were basically Turks. So it was mixing Kurds and Turks, almost no Persian presence at all. Persian was the state language, the official language. Everyone in the town was trilingual. They all spoke Kurdish, Turkish, and Persian, and I spoke Turkish and Persian, so that made me at least good in two of the languages, and I learned to get along in Kurdish.

Q: What was the Shah's government doing at this particular time that you were seeing evidence of in Sonqor?

METRINKO: Well, he was sending Peace Corps teachers, for example. The Shah's government was trying to open up the education system, trying to spread literacy in a country that had been historically illiterate. The closest friends I had there were Iranian guys from the town, several of whom were village schoolteachers. I met a group of guys my age very quickly after I got there. They all had high school diplomas and they had been sent out to teach in various of the villages around Sonqor, within one, two, three hours' walk. And they became my friends, and I spent a lot of time, because of that, out in the villages. That was one indication of what the Shah's government was doing, making sure that at least basic literacy was getting to every nook and cranny of the country.

Other than that, there was a good clinic in the town - a couple of good clinics, as a matter of fact. The town was small, by the way. It had 9,000 people. Electricity had been brought in that year. It was the first time people had had electricity. This meant, of course, very basic electricity, usually a light bulb hanging from the ceiling, and that was it. And when I say light bulb, I mean exactly that - a light bulb hanging from a wire. There were no televisions in the town. There was no television reception in the town. I had a short-wave radio, so I could pick up short-wave broadcasts. Other than that electricity was not used for anything at all - maybe an occasional tape recorder, but not much else. No televisions at all. The town was a strange and somehow very attractive place as far as people were concerned. It was on a plateau, a large plateau surrounded by mountains, and you had to pass through some pretty heavy mountains to get to the town proper. I think that's why it retained its Turkic identity. Nobody had gotten into that place or out of that place in so long.

The town of Sonqor, if you tried to go there up until World War II, the nearest city was Khorramshahr, which was about four hours' drive away when I was there. If you tried to go through Khorramshahr to Sonqor up through World War II, the trip would have taken approximately one week by horseback, donkeyback, or camelback. The path over the mountains is a rough one. There are a lot of mountains in between. It's just a long, dry haul to get to the city. By the end of World War II, my understanding is that the British Army and the American Army had pushed through and at least leveled off somewhat a road you could drive a jeep over, and the trip had gone from a week to the longer part of a day. The road had improved considerably by the time I was there. We were serviced by a bus and you could get there in approximately four hours from the city. The town was certainly one of the most conservative towns anybody had ever seen in Iran. Every woman in the town, with the exception of a single woman only - I can tell you who she was - wore a full dark chador, a full black heavy veil that Muslim women in Iran... that has become famous since the revolution. In the time I was there, I rarely saw a woman's face. The society that I was in was totally male. I had a landlady, of course, in the house that I shared with an Iranian family, but I rarely saw her face. She would normally, as soon as I walked in from the courtyard, cover herself up and then talk to me through her veil. Once in a while, if things relaxed in the course of a day, I saw her face, but not very often. Other than that, my best friends - and I found very good friends - and I would only see the older women, for example their mothers or their grandmothers occasionally - they'd be allowed to come out and talk to me. Other than that, I never saw the women in any of the houses I went into. If I did see one, it would be someone totally veiled who would simply say "Welcome," or "Welcome to the house," and then would disappear. From then on I would only see a hand from behind a wall holding trays of different foods. If you had been dropped in from outer space you would have assumed that only men existed in the city except for lumps of black walking around the streets in heavy black veils. There was no cinema in the town. Someone had tried to build a cinema there. He was warned by the local clergy that this was a sin because films and the cinema industry were anathema to Islam. He persisted, and he died. And the clergy then collected money in the mosque to help pay his wife through gifts so that she would not starve. He was killed for trying to build a cinema. Other than that, it was a very pleasant time. I had no problems there. I had a lot of friendships there. I still get telephone calls from people in the town on holidays, Christmas, etc.

Q: Well, now, what was the situation that you were seeing in Iran? How was the Shah perceived at this particular time?

METRINKO: 1970. The Shah was very much disliked in the town that I was in. The town had, for pro forma reasons, requested permission to put up a statue of the Shah and was turned down by the palace, which refused to give them permission to put up a statue. The town was known in the area of Khorramshahr, in joking, as "Stalingrad." It was a town that had been heavily influenced by the Tudeh Party, the old pro-Communist party. It was a town of separatists. A lot of people in the town had died fighting the Shah's armies. The people were not pro-Shah at all. There were pro-forma celebrations on the Shah's birthday and at other times, but in general the feeling was rather anti-Shah. One example I can give, I have a photograph of myself that was taken by someone else in Songhor at the time of the Shah's birthday in November, 1970. It was a little celebration with the normal folkloric dances and people like that in the central square of the town, and I was standing with a friend who was one of the local bank presidents. We were standing at the edge of the maidan. Somebody was giving a speech, and approximately every 20 or 30 seconds he would call out, "Shahanshah aryah mehr!" And everybody would clap. My friend would clap, too. This means, "Shah of shahs, the light of the Aryans." It was a title used by the Shah. I turned to my friend the banker, and I said, "Why are you clapping? You can't hear anything he's saying? I can't." And he looked at me and said, in a whisper, "If I don't clap now, I'll be in jail tonight." So I started to clap, too, whenever they'd say "Shahanshah aryah mehr!" That man, by the way, later on, after the revolution, became one of the heads of the regional Islamic banking system. He was put in charge of a big chunk of the country to turn the banking system Islamic.

Q: You were from America. Did they kind of know what America was, have any feeling for it? Or were you just a helping hand?

METRINKO: No, the Iranians never accept the idea of somebody helping them. They are the most suspicious people in the world and accept nothing at face value. There was a basic assumption that I was a spy of some sort or there for some nefarious purpose. That did not stop the friendships because Iranians accept nefarious purposes as part of their culture. They never quite knew whether I was working for their own government or another government. Most of the people in the town would not have known where America was, no. For example, I was invited once to dinner to the home of one of the other teachers, and his wife was present at the dinner. That was a bit unusual. This was an educated family, by the way. And after the dinner was over, the wife looked at me and, addressing me directly, said, "You're probably wondering why we invited you for dinner tonight." Well, I had been wondering. And she said, "The reason is that I have a brother who's living in your country, and I thought that if we became friendly with you, you might have your family invite my brother to dinner at your place." I said, "That's great." I said, "What's his address?" And she went and got a piece of paper and handed me his address, and he was living in Frankfurt, Germany. I looked at it and said, "But I live in the United States of America." And, "Yes." She assumed they were the same place. If you were from America, you were just from out there. Now that changed absolutely 100 percent in a few years.

Q: Now we're sticking to this '70 to '73 period. What were you picking up? Because this is always a very... this area, I would assume, had been one in which there were unpleasant neighbors around, not only Iranian, but you had Iraqis and Turks. In typical way, how were relations there?

METRINKO: Relations with Iraq... the Iranians and the Iraqis had had relations for 3000 years. It's been hot and cold throughout the length of that 3000 years. They've been fighting with each other and visiting each other and trading with each other constantly through that whole period. The Persian Empire wiped out the Babylonian Empire. That was only the beginning, and it's gone back and forth, back and forth, back and forth all along. When in I was in Iran in the early '70s, the business of border security had been turned over in large part to the Kurdish tribes who lived on the border. The Kurdish tribes went back and forth; each came into the other's country all the time. People visited, they did trading, they did black market smuggling all the time. Also, despite flare-ups and the Shah supporting Kurds in Iraq, for example, in Iraq in this period lived some of the major Iranian Shiite religious leaders. They lived in the shrine city of Najaf. There was a huge Shiite presence in Iraq - still is, the Shiite religion of Iran - and a lot of religious leaders went back and forth constantly. Khomeini lived in Iraq at that point. There were Iranian religious families living around the shrines of Iraq who had been there for hundreds of years but still considered themselves Iranian, and they had Iranian passports. Was there a problem? Well, for one part of that period, you couldn't visit Iraq. In fact, Iran accepted a lot of Kurdish refugees from Iraq who had fled across the border. For other periods of time, it was fine. One could go easily - not Americans, particularly - but people could go easily, and Iranian pilgrims always visited Iraq. So was it a friendly border? No, but it was a much-traveled border, and people did go back and forth, and there were treaties between the two countries.

Q: Did you get any repercussions of that, or was that farther away?

METRINKO: It didn't touch me at all. To the best of my knowledge, none of the refugee Kurds came into the Sonqor area. I only saw them later, up in the Caspian.

Q: What about the relations between the Turkic and Kurdish speakers?

METRINKO: In Sonqor it was absolutely fine. They all spoke each other's languages, and in fact most of them were intermarried. I don't think there were any pure Turkic peoples or pure Kurdish peoples there. The language you spoke... people would routinely, for social reasons, use all three languages. So even illiterate villagers or illiterate townspeople, who had had no formal education at all, spoke all three.

Q: What was the value of teaching English at this thing?

METRINKO: My students could never understand. The value of teaching English was that the Shah had realized that if anyone wanted to really go past small town life in Iran, if they wanted to go off the university, English was going to be a requirement. The books of the world are written in English, and technical subjects are taught in English best. At the time the Shah was developing a very good military relationship with the United States, and the Iranian helicopter system, weapons system, the airplane system, were all being provided by the United States. It required knowledge of English to buy this, to maintain it, to continue dealing with it. He wanted his soldiers to speak English. The soldiers came from small towns. Well, he wanted kids in school to start doing English then so they could continue using it as they got older, and the Shah had always been an Anglophile, in his own way.

Q: How were your students reacting to learning a fourth language?

METRINKO: It depended. I had students with whom I am still in touch from that period, who studied in high school under me and who learned English extremely well. It opened up a way of getting out of the town or going off to university, because they had good English [skills]. And several of my friends now are guys who studied English under me at that school.

Q: You mentioned, was it Tudeh party? What was both local Communist and Soviet Communist influence in the area that you were seeing at that time - or did you see it?

METRINKO: The presence of the secret police was so strong, or the implied presence of it-

Q: You're talking about SAVAK.

METRINKO: SAVAK - was strong and so heavy that nobody would have spoken to me about a Tudeh activity or Communist Party activity, but there was also an underlying current of anti-Shah feeling linked to everything. Could I say that this person or that person was a Communist? No. But I could certainly think of all sorts of people I knew there who were anti-Shah. What did I actually see in the way of political activity or sort of underground activity by the Tudeh Party or by any of the other opposition groups? Nothing, per se. But the town itself became a real hotbed of revolution as soon as the revolution started in 1978.

Q: I would have thought that for a normal secret policeman who ends up in a small town - I mean we all know how the system works - you don't get your smoothest operators there. Just having an American teaching there even though the Shah was fomenting this would have been highly suspicious.

METRINKO: Oh, I'm sure they had a lot of fun watching me.

Q: You know, and here you are messing around with the young... what passed for intellectuals... anyway, the people who were going to be in Iran, the young people in an area that's not very friendly to the Shah. Did you feel the hand of the police?

METRINKO: Not specifically, although as a teacher, subject to the regulations of the Ministry of Education, there was a heavy hand on all of us. For example, I was not allowed to leave the town without getting permission from the head of the school, and you had to get this every time you wanted to leave the area of the town. It wasn't difficult for me to get it; he always gave it when I wanted to go away, but I still had to obtain it so they would know where I was. Other teachers had to do this as well. Did they watch me specifically? I'm sure they did. I'm sure I was great practice for them. But was I ever told not to do this or not to go there? No, not really. I think there were more interested to see who would become friendly with me than what I would be doing.

Q: Well, then, you were there for about a year.

METRINKO: I was in that town for a year.

Q: So '70-71.

METRINKO: Correct.

Q: Where did you go in '71?

METRINKO: In 1971, I was invited to participate in a seminar the Peace Corps had agreed to run for one of the training colleges. It was up on the Caspian, and it was supposed to be an intensive English seminar, where approximately 100 students from one particular small university, a college that is a university now, were going to spend six weeks of the summer studying English intensively. The head of the school was very interested in this. The Peace Corps contacted me. I volunteered to go up and do this, too. I think there were about 14 or 15 teachers there from the Peace Corps. From the very first moment I arrived there, I thought it was great. I finally had students in front of me who seriously wanted to learn English. They were older, they were intelligent, it was a very, very good college and really cream of the crop students. And the education experience was totally different than I'd been having in high school. The high school experience, I should say, was... Did you ever see Blackboard Jungle?

Q: Yes, Glenn Ford and Sidney Poitier.

METRINKO: It was sort of like that, except that you had to use your fists in almost every class to keep order.

Q: Good heavens.

METRINKO: I was teaching in rooms where I would have 70 or 80 young male students, all of whom were in their teens. Imagine a room with 75 guys in it, all cramped in together and sitting four people to a bench that would only hold two comfortably, and they were between the ages of 13 and 18. And you are a foreign teacher. It wasn't only me. I adapted quickly to the teaching methods. On first entering the school system there, one of the other teachers, a very pleasant man, asked me if I would like to watch his classes first just to see what the teaching methods are in the town. I thought this was a good idea. I went into one of his classes, and I saw him turn from a pleasant, amiable gentleman who spoke quite decent English into a sort of monster, smashing students, screaming at them, insulting them. I didn't say anything. We walked out of the classroom, and I told him I could never teach like this, this wasn't the American way, it was counter-productive - all those fine words. These were the hope of Iran, the youngsters who were going to lead the country, etc. He told me that - I'm still a friend of this guy, by the way, all these years later - what he said was, "Michael, in this town, our students get beaten up by their fathers, they get beaten by their brothers, they get beaten by everybody in the alleys they live in. They only understand force. If you try to talk to them nicely or if you are too polite, they will think you are weak. I told him - I assured him - he was wrong. For the next several days, until the end of the week, I tried teaching the liberal, pleasant, nice way I had been able to do in Turkey in the university, and by the end of the third class or so in each of my classrooms not only was I being ignored by the students, they didn't even acknowledge my presence in the room. They were throwing things, fighting with each other, and basically having a free-for-all before I entered. I thought about this over the weekend, and at the beginning of the second week of school walked into one of my first pandemonium classes, walked over to the biggest student in the room and beat him up in front of the others. The class went silent. I walked out, came back in, everyone stood up. I said, "Good morning." They said, "Good morning." I looked at them and said, "Page one, open it." And I had great classes for the rest of the year - but it involved, every week in each of the classes, physically beating somebody. This was accepted and common. It was considered routine teaching practice. And you could use your fists, though that wasn't really encouraged because you could hurt your fists on students. Usually what you just did was throw them out into the hallway and summon the prefect of discipline, who was walking up and down the hallways with a stick or a length of rubber hose and who would simply lay into them as soon as they landed in the hallway. We routinely performed massive physical intimidation on the students to keep them quiet. That included up to use of the bastinado.

Q: That's hitting somebody on the bare feet with a rubber hose or two sticks.

METRINKO: Two teachers holding the student upside down about half a foot off the floor and a third teacher beating the soles of his feet with either a rubber hose or a stick. It's very effective. I had great classes all year, and I was able to teach a lot of English. A lot of my students learned English. A lot of my students got severely beaten by me as well. But it was the only way to survive there.

Q: All males?

METRINKO: Completely. This was like penitentiary life without bars.

Q: Where were you? This was on the Caspian Sea, or -

METRINKO: What I've been describing has been Sonqor and the teaching methods there. The Caspian Sea, number one, half my students were girls, and very pleasant girls. None of them were teenage males. They were university students at school in Teheran. These students were all interested, intelligent, and eager. The students at this school had all been chosen by scholarship. They were there because they had already spent several years as teachers themselves. It was called the Literacy Corps Teacher Training College. The school only took people who had a minimum of several years of teaching experience behind them, gave them full scholarships to come do a four-year degree program. In Iran at the time you could teach up through high school with only a high school diploma yourself. It's probably changed by now, but at that time you could have a high school diploma and become a teacher. So we were teaching people who had several years of teaching experience and had gotten there by scholarship. They were interested, eager, industrious, etc. It was like a dream school - beautiful campus, everything was wonderful about it. They had a summer campus up in the Caspian where I was. I developed a lot of friendships with students there, and the president of the school asked if I would consider transferring to the school full time, become an English teacher at the school itself and continue teaching at the college level. I thought about this for all of maybe a minute and decided this would be a great idea. It was the difference between going back and basically flailing away at unwilling teenagers or continuing in the university environment. There was no choice.

So it got arranged. The Peace Corps had no problem with it, and the president of the university was a good friend of... in fact, he had been the Shah's tutor, and they just gave the necessary orders and the Ministry of Education arranged my transfer, and it was all done immediately.

Q: What was the name of this school?

METRINKO: In Persian it was the Danesh Serai Aliyh Sepahi Danesh - the Literacy Corps Teacher Training College.

Q: Where was it located now?

METRINKO: Physically the campus was near the town of Varamin, about 30 kilometers outside of Teheran. A very nice campus, it had been an old agricultural facility. In fact, the original facility had been put up by AID after World War II, what was then called Point Four. It was a beautiful campus, some fine old buildings, and a lot of nice, new buildings. I had a beautiful office with large windows overlooking a nice green campus that was watered and rose beds all the time. A great place. Tennis court, swimming pool - the whole bit. A nice Peace Corps experience, too, by the way.

Q: You were there from, what, '71 to '73?

METRINKO: That's correct, yes.

Q: Can you describe how you saw the attitude of these students - I mean, obviously we're talking about an elite - and your relationship with them?

METRINKO: The students, first of all, came from cities and towns all over the country. They weren't from one town. So they represented every tribal group, every religious group in the country. There were Christian students. There were Shiite students. There were Sunni students. I had Kurds and Turks and Armenians and this and that and Gashgahi, people from the Caspian, people from, you know, the Afghan areas, and from up in northern Khorrasan. Arab students from the Arab provinces. It was a whole mixture. Every one of them was there on a government scholarship, every one of them had been a government teacher. There was a great deal of activism there, certainly a lot more open talk about SAVAK, what it was doing, a lot more open talk about politics. No one in public would criticize the Shah, because you could be put in prison for doing that, but privately many of them did to me. Some of the students were reputed to be members of various underground groups, and at least one of my students was executed.

Q: Were they trying to sound you out, drag you in, involve you, or how did this work?

METRINKO: I wouldn't say that because, there too, none of them knew where I was really from. They had a far better idea, of course, of the United States in politics, probably a better idea of the American-Iranian political relationship than I had. But were they trying to sound me out? Yes. I would joke about things that they did not. They could lose a lot more than me by reading the wrong book. I had a roommate from the school my third year who, I know, was pulled in by SAVAK and told that he had to report about me, what I did. And it really frightened him. He told me all about it. He really got frightened. So we agreed that he had better start reporting things that they would have found out anyway.

Q: Was there much of a drive to try and go to the United States to be educated later, because as a consular officer elsewhere I know roving bands of Iranian usually young men were all over Europe trying to get visas to the United States.

METRINKO: The time period here is the crucial thing. My Peace Corps experience in Iran was from 1970 to 1973. The oil money was just filtering in. Up until 1970, the normal Iranian did not have a car, did not have a television, did not have a telephone. When I went to call from Sonqor to Teheran - forget calling outside of Iran, it was not possible - but to make a call from Sonqor, my first Peace Corps site, to the Peace Corps headquarters, for example, in Teheran, I would have to go to the post office on one of the two days when we had a telephone connection open, stand in line, and it was only open for a couple of hours when the town was given the rights to use the telephone lines. And you had to register your name, give the number, and eventually somebody would start to connect. It was a matter of using old phones that had the turn handles on the side and a telephone operator would keep twirling this and saying, "Khorramshahr, this is Sonqor, Khorramshahr - Sonqor - can you hear me?" And Khorramshahr would then pass you down the line to the next city, Hamadan. Hamadan would pass you down to Zanjan, and you could hear all the operators talking to each other: "Zanjan, this is Hamadan. We need a line to Teheran." And it was done that way. I say that because it's an indication of the sort of communication in the country. There wasn't any feasible way to get information there, if you were in a small town. There was no money. There were no cars in the towns when I was there in the Peace Corps the first year. I have pictures of the town taken in 1970, on regular working days when you could see the dirt street from one end of the town to the other, and there would be one jeep parked on the side, and that was it. By 1975, 1976, there were traffic jams all the time because people suddenly... the oil money just spread all over the place, and if you didn't have access to oil money per se, you had access to the jobs that the oil was creating - the construction boom. So people had money. Once they got the money, it meant that all sorts of people would then look out of Iran for education. And Iranians have always been interested in education and in traveling. They like to travel. It's just part of them. There are countries whose people never travel. Iranians like to travel. I think that may be one reason they had so many shrines - because they liked to travel to them. So once you had a family sending a nephew or, say, a son to the United States, then this would attract others in the family. The mother would go on a visit, the sister would want to go on a visit, the younger brother would look at this and say, "If Farid went, I want to go too." Another nephew, another cousin behind it. And this sort of skyrocketed in the course of just a few years. But up until 1970-71, very, very rare, exceptional students.

Now, in my second Peace Corps site, in the training college, they had a program where they would take the top several students of every graduating class and give them fellowships to go to the United States or to England to study. They liked the United States. They would send them off, and they could get their master's degree and their doctorates in the US, and a lot of my students from that time came here and do have doctorates. Some of them are still here. But there was that focus by the government ministries also, sending people out, and the government ministries did have direct access to oil money.

Q: Everybody was sort of on the government payroll, essentially, there. Did this keep down political activity?

METRINKO: It did, and it didn't. I'll give you an example. One of my favorite students, a girl, was arrested when I was there, and I knew she had been arrested. All the students talked about it. The head of the school was a good friend of mine. He told me she'd been arrested. And through a combination of totally accidental circumstances, I was able to follow her case until the day when she was eventually released. I was sitting in an Iranian friend's house when this girl's father and uncles came to try and get my Iranian friend to intercede with the Shah. The Iranian friend I was with did not realize that I knew the girl. He had no way to know this. He was a very upper-class Iranian, a friend of the Shah, who was writing a book in English, needed some help editing it, and had found me through friends and just asked if I'd be interested, sort of pro bono, helping him to edit this book. I agreed to do it because of a common interest in it. I would sit in his garden... in fact, he lived in one of the Shah's old houses that was given as a gift. I would sit in his garden every weekend, the whole of a Friday or Saturday, have lunch with him, and we would just go over his manuscript of the preceding week. It was great fun. Except one day a whole group of people from the town of Shiraz came to see him, came into the garden. He told me what it was about in English, even though I was following all the Persian, and said, "Here was the daughter of " "this girl has been arrested, and they want to get her out of prison, and they hope that I can do it as a friend of the Shah. I've been waiting for them to come to see me." I heard the family explain the whole thing, and none of the family knew that I spoke Persian or that I knew their daughter. They had no way of knowing this. But eventually, she was released at least temporarily and then re-arrested. I saw her the day she was released. Yes, there was that activism. She was picked up for reading the wrong books, political books, things like that, nothing that anyone would consider anything at all in the United States. But in Iran, reading was heavily censored. Did other people complain about the government? Yes. Did they do it all the time or too vocally? No. Did people go to prison there? Yes. A couple of times students from my classes disappeared, and I would be told that so-and-so was in prison, and I just sort of ignored it for a while. They usually came back out.

Q: What about - again, I'm sticking to this '70-73 period - the influence of the mullahs and religion and that sort of thing? I mean, how were you observing it?

METRINKO: It was always very strong. The students that I was dealing with... Well, in my first Peace Corps site, everybody was ostensibly very conservative, very religious. There was no alcohol in the town, there was no cinema in the town, women were all dressed right to the tops of their heads in heavy dark veils. It was everything that Khomeini could have wanted in a post-revolutionary town. So when people today talk about how Iran was so different under the Shah, that's bullshit. Much of Iran was as heavily conservative as it is today. That having been said, my students at the university level, I'd say that a fair number of them were strongly religious. If they had alcohol, it would be a beer now and then, nothing else, very unlike the Turkish students I had had. They were religious, they prayed, most of them. It was very common to see people praying at prayer times on campus. Girls, even if they weren't wearing veils, they were still conservative acting. I got into some of the Sufi circles, the Iranian mystic circles, when I was there, because I was studying at the University of Teheran at night, and some of my students were involved in Sufi mysticism. I was invited to spend a couple of evenings at one of the Sufi monasteries out in the western part of Iran and did so. I got to know some clergy there, very different from the traditional Shiite clergy, but still a religious part of the country expressing itself in a traditional religious way. I didn't hang around with wild people. Most of the people I knew were observant, or at least quietly observant or quietly observant Christians too, because there were Armenian and Syrian students. But there was no wild stuff; they were all quite conservative.

Q: Well, did you have any contact or feel for the embassy or the American presence while you were there?

METRINKO: You know, I'm trying to think. Not really. I mean, I went to the Peace Corps office occasionally, got my mail at the Peace Corps office. Other than that, the embassy occasionally for a hamburger or a cheeseburger, something of that sort, but not really.

Q: You weren't being impacted upon by Bell Helicopter or mechanics and all that, which were elsewhere?

METRINKO. No. Well, one thing was changing, and this is what stopped the Peace Corps in Iran, too. That presence was just building up as my Peace Corps assignment was winding down. That presence came in when the Shah had enough money from oil to start buying big-time. It started in 1972-73. By 1973, it was very, very easy to get a job teaching English, for example, for the Iranian military through a Bell contractor or other contract. They were desperately seeking out native English speakers because they had to start teaching vast numbers of Iranian soldiers and helicopter and airplane technicians how to speak English. I could have left the Peace Corps and gotten a job teaching English for 10 times what I was getting paid by the Peace Corps and still have the Peace Corps experience. I didn't because I was close to the end of my time anyway and because the American Embassy, apparently, was so upset about the types of jobs... not so upset - they were trying to save the Peace Corps and had gotten the agreement of some of the companies not to hire Peace Corps volunteers who were still active Peace Corps volunteers. As it turned out, the Peace Corps basically disappeared of its own weight, the weight of changing times, about a year or two after that.

Q: Well, in '73 what happened?

METRINKO: In 1973, I had gone to graduate school; I had also taken the Foreign Service Exam. I took the Foreign Service Exam in Teheran. I passed the written part of the exam, received a letter telling me that I should report for an oral exam, and left Iran, having applied for graduate school and having gone through at least one half of the State Department examination process, went back to the United States, took the oral almost immediately after getting back, was told immediately that I had passed it, and was also told that within a few months I'd be getting a call to come to one of the classes. I received the letter from the State Department and the letters accepting me into all graduate schools the same week.

I had planned to go on to graduate study in Middle Eastern affairs. Two of the schools offered me fellowships. I knew that it would take me another four years at least to get a doctorate. I wanted to go into the Foreign Service eventually one day anyway, and at the time, because of the way Foreign Service accepted entrants, I was going to be given as high a salary as I could get even with a Ph.D. anyway, based on the Peace Corps experience and five years of work. So I just looked at it and thought, I'd rather have the State Department pay for all the education than go into debt getting it myself, especially if the result is that I still want to go into the State Department.

Q: So you came into the Foreign Service when?

METRINKO: I came into the Foreign Service in one of the classes in 1974. I had a temporary job at the Internal Revenue Service for several months, knowing that I was just waiting to go into to the State Department. The IRS knew it too. It was a job in my home town.

Q: Well, now, do you recall any of the questions or the formulation of the oral examination at the time?

METRINKO: The oral exam was given in Rosslyn, at one of the new high-rise buildings there. I went before a panel of, I think, four people, one of whom was a woman. They asked me basic questions about my experience in the Peace Corps, where I had been, what I had done, something about my languages. It was very pleasant. They posed a question about the evacuation of American citizens and asked me to sort of talk about what I might look at if I had to be in charge of an evacuation, with whom would I get in contact, what would I do if I were evacuating. It was all rather simple, very pleasant, probably 15 or 20 minutes. It was more like a social conversation than an examination. And I left, and they came out about five minutes later and said, "You've passed the exam. Now just wait for the letter."

Q: So in '74 you started the process. Can you talk about it? What was your impression of you're A-100, the basic officer course.

METRINKO: I thought it was pretty good. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I wasn't there for a lot of it because I got hauled out immediately into a Cyprus task force. The Turks had just invaded Cyprus, and -

Q: July 14, I think, 1974.

METRINKO: I don't remember the date at all.

Q: Well, I had been consul general in Athens for four years, and I had just left on the first of July. I would get the hell out and get back to the States, and so I recall it vividly.

METRINKO: Yes, well, the junior officer course started in, I think, late June. As soon as the invasion started, the State Department put together a task force. I volunteered for that because I spoke Turkish and I knew the area, and I was there for about two weeks, and that was that. So much for junior officer orientation. I had a good class. I still see friends from the class. But it was a good class. A variety of people are still at work in the Department. Many have left, of course.

Q: Well, then, what did you want to do? Did you want to go right back to where you'd been?

METRINKO: No, actually, when I left Iran, I took a slow trip back. It took about six weeks. I hitchhiked out of Iran. I hitchhiked in and out of Iran many times in the course of those years. I hitchhiked out of Iran, across the border, hitchhiked around eastern Turkey, traveled with a Turkish friend hitchhiking around southern Turkey for a couple of weeks, and really said goodbye to Turkey and Iran. I wanted to go into the Foreign Service to see other parts of the world. Then as they started to talk about personnel assignments, the guy who was our personnel counselor at the time went on and on about how it's the new Foreign Service, with the open assignments process, and you can go anywhere in the world that you'd like to go, and these are the possibilities, and you're lucky because you're in a rank where you can really do anything at all, and this is the start of a whole new life. And I looked at the list, and there were really some great places on there. And when it came my turn to have my career counseling session, the onward assignment counseling session, he looked at me and said, "Where have you been thinking?" I said, well, this one, this one, this one all sound great. He said, "What about Turkey?" And I said, "No, thanks, I've just been there." Again he said, "Well, what about Turkey?" I said, "No, I just got out of Turkey. I just was there a matter of weeks ago." And then I got suspicious and said, "You've told us that we can ask for anything in the world that's on the list. There are lots of places here" - Southeast Asia, the Pacific, etc. He said, "Yes, well, you know there's a job that we might be able to get for you in Addis Ababa." I said, "There's a civil war going on there now. Isn't the embassy closed or closing?" He said, "Well, yes, but what about Ankara? Have you thought about that?" Well, the upshot was that I found myself back in Ankara. They needed somebody who spoke Turkish.

Q: So you were in Ankara from '74 to when?

METRINKO: '74 to '76. I had just left Ankara.

Q: Yes, that takes all the fun out of it.

METRINKO: I spent my vacation money in Ankara saying goodbye to Ankara.

Q: When you were in Ankara, when you went there, what was your job?

METRINKO: When I went there I was so new to the Foreign Service, I had missed the part of the orientation because I was Cyprus task force, about informing the embassy that I was arriving. So I simply went, picked up the ticket, left, and went to Ankara. It was possible to do this. I got to Ankara, spent a couple of days with friends, went up to the embassy one morning and said, "Here I am." And it was quite a surprise to Ankara that I was there already. They had assumed somehow that I'd be in language training for a couple of months.

Well, my first job, I was, according to what the personnel system had told me, I was going to be 90 percent consular officer and occasionally fill in when somebody was absent from the political section. I got to Ankara and discovered the embassy had a different version of that, and it was 90 percent political officer, occasionally filling in- (end of tape)

Q: It was '74-'76. Who was the ambassador when you got there, the DCM, and a little about your impression of the embassy.

METRINKO: The ambassador was William Butts Macomber, who was a political appointee, who had been a political appointee with the State Department for, I think it was, about 20 years. He had been head of administration; he had been staff aide to John Foster Dulles, Dean Acheson. The DCM the whole time I was there was Donald Burgess, who was a straight career employee, an old Middle East hand, who went on from there to become our ambassador in Khartoum. Macomber went on from there to become the president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Both professional, both good in their own way. I'm trying to think of some of the other people at the embassy. I can go through naming lots of people's names, personalities.

Q: We don't need that, but what was your impression? Was it a happy embassy? How did it run?

METRINKO: Was it a happy embassy? No. I'd say there was a fair amount of tension in the embassy. Individuals there were happy, depending on whether or not they were acclimated to Turkey. I went there having Turkish friends all over Ankara, all over Turkey, speaking the language, so it was different for me. I was just coming back home again. But for a lot of people there it was a foreign experience they did not like.

What can I say? My job there was supposed to be, as I said, consular, part-time political. Instead just a few days after my arrival, the staff aide's father got seriously ill, and the staff aide had to leave for two weeks. I was told to report to the ambassador's office, being the youngest piece of meat, I guess, in the political section, and found myself a staff aide for the next two weeks, hated every second of it because the ambassador, while he definitely had gifts, was also a workaholic who had no life outside the embassy and expected his staff to be there the whole time, too. I spent two weeks hating it, just waiting for the staff aide to get back. The staff aide returned. The ambassador called us into his office and announced that he had decided that the staff aide needed some broadening experience and would go to the Political Section and I would be the new staff aide. I was the ambassador's staff aide for a full year. It was a definite learning experience.

Q: I'm told Macomber had a well-deserved reputation for his anger. I mean he would blow up, but it didn't last long.

METRINKO: Macomber went up and down, hot and cold, from frigid to volcanic, approximately 15 time an hour. You never knew, when you were walking in with him or talking with him, whether he was going to explode or love you. You never knew. It was very, very difficult to deal with him. He was extremely sharp. An intelligent person, he liked Turkey, the Turks liked him. At least, the Turks like him for what they saw, the good side of him. I remember once a Turkish friend of mine from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a woman, was at one of his receptions, and she and I were talking, and someone made a comment about how pleasant the ambassador was, and she looked at me and she said, "You know, he's so nice to me now because I come and see him from the minister" - she was one of the minister's secretaries, minister of foreign affairs - "he's always so pleasant and so charming when he's seeing me, but he doesn't know that I used to be an operator at the military base here, and I would have to deal with him late at night when he was trying to get calls through to the United States, and he would curse at me." He always forgot that. He never remembered that the person he needed right now was the one he had just cursed at and insulted a minute back. He was definitely sharp and knew the Washington world. He was extremely hospitable, and some of the things he did in the embassy I've tried to use through my whole career because I thought they were great. He was the most democratic person I've ever seen, and he really did believe that everyone in the embassy should use the ambassador's residence all the time - whether or not they wanted to. This meant that if he was having a dinner for a Rockefeller and it was going to be a sit-down dinner for six people, one of the six might be a GSO FSN or a driver, and another one was going to be Princess So-and-so who was passing through the city, and the other was going to be a junior officer. He had a standing rule about including everybody in everything, and his hospitality was extraordinarily good and effective. He could meet anybody whenever he wanted to, and he made it very clear to everyone in the embassy, from the Marine guards to the FSNs to this to that, that he wanted us at the residence to share things, and we were all considered equals. I was at so many events there because of that, unlike any other ambassador. I know, I've met, many ambassadors who had no idea that they had junior officers in the embassy, but only knew their political counselor and DCM and that was that. Macomber was exactly the opposite, very effective and got himself into some very amusing and unusual situations because of this focus.

Q: Do any come to mind?

METRINKO: Oh, yes, sure. One came to mind. His standard thing, when he was inviting FSNs or embassy staff to the house, was please bring a Turkish friend. This was partly to make the events representational, and he had to have more than 50 per cent [non-] American presence or embassy presence. And one day he decided to invite all the Marines for some event or other. All the Marine guards were supposed to come. You always got fed well at his place. So he invited the Marine detachment, as many of them as could be off duty. And they thought this was great. Now we had a funny Marine detachment there. It may have been the most unusual one in the world at the time. The gunny rarely spent time at the embassy. One of the USMC sergeants - I've forgotten his title now - was working part-time and living at a house of prostitution. He was the bouncer at the house. I only found this out because I was talking to him once very, very late at night when I'd been called in for some duty and asked him if he spoke Turkish, and he started to speak to me in Turkish that was absolutely fluent and beautiful except it was gutter Turkish of the worst, vile type. I asked him where he had learnt it, and he told me that his girlfriend was the madam of the local house of prostitution and he stayed there with her as the bouncer. Because all the Marines wanted to bring girls to this reception, the whorehouse closed down for the evening, and they escorted prostitutes. It was one of the better receptions ever held at the residence, and the ambassador kept saying, "Gee, it's so nice that the Marines know such lovely young Turkish girls." But everybody had a great time, and the ambassador, I don't think, ever found out.

Q: What about Mrs. Macomber? She had been John Foster Dulles's secretary.

METRINKO: Very, very professional, lovely person.

Q: I've heard very fine things about her, and as a staff aide you would have had to work with you, didn't you?

METRINKO: Dealings with her, she was always pleasant. She was very professional and sometimes acted a bit like the dragon secretary that she had been, protective of the Secretary. But she was fine. She had a good sense of humor, also -

Q: Phyllis.

METRINKO: Phyllis Macomber. Also very hospitable. I liked her. I mean, I still do. She was always pleasant, and very old-school. This was still back in the days when... I think the year before or two years before they had stopped rating spouses. It had been a very recent change.

Q: It was just about that time.

METRINKO: And she was definitely old-school, as was the DCM's wife.

Q: The DCM was?

METRINKO: The DCM Don Burgess's wife, again, very professional, very old-school, white gloves, the whole bit.

Q: Well, now, you arrived there in 1974, and of course you had already talked about the Cyprus thing, and '74-76 was not a very good period in Turkish-American relations, mainly due to the Greek lobby and particularly Greek congressmen.

METRINKO: We had the Greek lobby, we had an arms embargo against Turkey, so that no armaments could come there, which made the military relationship a bit delicate. But we also had Turkey in CENTO. CENTO headquarters was in Ankara, and so there were American diplomats assigned to CENTO headquarters, and we had a lot of visits because of CENTO. Turkey was in NATO, so we had Alexander Haig showing up frequently there. We had Kissinger there several times. The combination of Kissinger, Haig, other visitors - there was just a steady stream of very high-ranking American visitors there all the time. So I got to meet Kissinger, I got to meet Haig, etc., any number of senators. Congressmen and senators were always there.

Q: As so often happens in the American body politic, you have the executive - the President, the Secretary of State, and all of that - and we have a very solid relationship with Turkey, and it makes very good sense; and then you have on the Congressional side, next to the Jewish lobby, the Greek lobby is probably as strong as any ethnic lobby in the United States.

METRINKO: And the Cuban-Americans.

Q: Yes, the Cuban-Americans probably even smaller, but the Greek lobby is all over the place, even more than the Jewish lobby, and a big number of Greek-American congressmen. And my time in Greece was... I mean, I've never seen anything so infectious within the Greeks and the Greek-Americans as this hatred of the Turks. It's unreasonable.

METRINKO: And the Turks have, or had, no concept of lobbying. They also had very little, they still have very little concept of discussion. Turks don't talk about things; they want it their way or not at all. They're not good at bargaining or at discussing things. I had a Turkish roommate. They're great at some things, but discussion, being open minded, thinking of other people's position, or acknowledging problems in their country's history are not strong points.

Q: I'm still interviewing David Jones, who was involved in a series of things dealing with both, and he said although the Greeks seem to be giving us a rougher time, you can usually eventually get something from the Greeks, but the Turks sort of have a position and it stays that way.

METRINKO: It stays that way, and you cannot talk them out of it, and eventually it becomes solidified, and they make a law saying you cannot talk about it. I remember when I was in Turkey you had the Lebanese civil war sort of raging on and on and on. And at the time, a lot of the major banks and financial institutions that were based in Beirut talked about coming to Istanbul or Ankara as their base of operations. They wanted a country that was Muslim because they wanted to continue handling the Arab money. They were interested in Turkey for lots and lots of reasons. They thought of Istanbul as being cosmopolitan. And they started making all sorts of approaches, not only to us but through us and to the various Turkish ministries. They were met with a total stone wall. The Turks would not allow them to open up hard currency exchange accounts; they wouldn't allow them telephone lines. They basically were totally uninterested and, more than uninterested, made them feel unwelcome. And these were major banking concerns, major financial institutions. I remember talking once to somebody in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about this and saying, "Hey, if you allow these people to come in, you will become the financial center of the Middle East. You will also get a lot of spin-off development money for things in Turkey because when they come here and have the money for development and investment, they're going to look at projects in the area, right around their eyes." And the answer was, "We don't want foreign investment or foreign goods like that in Turkey." Period. Click. And they never got them; they went to Greece. But they wanted to go to Turkey first.

Q: How did you find the Turkish-American relationship? In a way, you were kind of a fly on the wall, being the ambassador's assistant.

METRINKO: The ambassador was quite popular there. We had a number of incidents there that were unpopular. Well, the Turks liked, number one, the fact that Kissinger was there several times, that Haig seemed to be living there at certain times - I mean he was there so often. There was a very active, in Ankara, Turkish-American friendship sort of society going, and it involved a lot of husbands, wives, etc., very active, very pleasant. There was nothing anti-American as such. The Turks never blamed the embassy for the problems. They never really blamed individual Americans in Turkey for the problem. In fact, it was always a bit strange to me that when the Greeks reacted by burning down our embassy in Cyprus and assassinating our ambassador and his secretary the answer was more anti-Turkish tirades in Congress and almost nothing against the Greeks. The Turks couldn't understand that either. We never had a problem at the embassy . There were no demonstrations, no anti-American protests, no marches against the building, nothing like that. To me at least, there was almost no effect at all. I certainly had lots of Turkish friends, including a lot of official friends, Turkish diplomats, Turkish military friends. The social life just kept on; it never changed. There was no policy of freezing us out or anything else.

Q: Well, now, there have been periods - the '74 to '76 period - where there have been extreme leftist groups, "Gray Wolves" or other things, but essentially terrorist groups which were anti-foreign, particularly anti-American. Were they around at this time?

METRINKO: I'm trying to think if we had anything at all at the embassy. I don't recall anything. There was some stuff, I think a couple of bombs were probably thrown at the Merhaba Palas, which was the military temporary housing in Ankara. Bombs would go off occasionally against Turkish targets, too. Other than that, probably if you talked to somebody who was in the military there at the time, they might give you a different story about Turkish feelings. I didn't see it myself.

Q: What were you getting from your Turkish friends about Turkish-American relations and also whither Turkey at that time?

METRINKO: Turkish-American friends - nothing at all. A lot of my Turkish friends were married to Brits or Americans. Other friends were just straight Turkish, with very Turkish lives but nothing at all that was anti-American that I can recall. It never affected my travels in the country, going to people's homes, doing this, doing that. There was no real... I'm starting to speak in Turkish now. The words are coming out in Turkish in my mind. I'm translating back into English. There was no real impact on me, anyway. Whether other people felt there was on their lives I don't know. On my life there wasn't.

Q: Was there a discontent with the government?

METRINKO: Not particularly. I knew people in both the pro-demo... You know, the top level in the Turkish Government has been the same since I was in the Peace Corps there. In the year 1968, I used to sit at little outdoor cafï¿½ where they sold biscuits and pastry in the morning, where you could have tea. I used to go there every morning for breakfast, and I would see the prime minister pass by because his house was near there. He'd be walking down to his office, and every morning for about two years he would pass me by and say good morning in English to me because he knew I was an American, and I would say "Good morning, Mr. Prime Minister." I would continue drinking my tea, and he would pass by. That was Demirel, who was prime minister forever, and then president. He's still a major force in Turkish politics in the year 2000, and I'm talking 1968! His successor was Ecevit, and it was

Demirel-Ecevit-Demirel-Ecevit-Demirel-Ecevit - I really don't see much difference between the two. I think probably when they were a lot younger there was, but is there much of a difference? Probably not really. There aren't that many names in Turkish politics. It's not like there is a clear-cut choice. There have been times when the government has got more conservative, but were people dissatisfied with the government? Well, I had a lot of Kurdish friends - they sure were. They weren't dissatisfied with the government so much as they were dissatisfied with Turkish Turks. But even they were often intermarried. Open dissatisfaction? No. Hatred of the government? No. Was there in Turkey such a thing? Yes, absolutely, and a lot of people went to jail or got killed fighting for a different type of government there. Did I know them? No. The embassy in Ankara has been traditionally or was traditionally even less professional about dealing with the opposition than the one in Teheran was.

Q: Why was that, do you think?

METRINKO: I'm not sure, but I think that traditionally our embassy in Ankara has basically just toed whatever line the Turkish Government has wanted it to as far as internal developments go. If the Turkish Government said that so-and-so was a terrorist, the embassy parrots it back. The embassy has been so silent on the subject of the Kurdish genocide there that it's extremely dishonest, I would say. It's been extraordinarily unprofessional through a succession of ambassadors. It's sad.

Q: Was this an issue among the junior officers at all at the time?

METRINKO: Kurds didn't exist. They did not exist because the Turkish Government told us they didn't exist.

Q: They were "Mountain Turks," were they?

METRINKO: Mountain Turks, yes.

Q: Just like in Israel, Golda Meir used to say there's no such thing as the Palestinian. We get caught on these things. Well, you were with the ambassador through his moods for a year.

METRINKO: It was more than a year. I saw him do things that would not even have been believable in the best of comedy fiction.

This ambassador is the only one, I think, who's ever had the balls to tell Kissinger that somebody who was coming in Kissinger's party was not welcome in Turkey. And he did this. He refused to let one of Kissinger's guards in because he didn't like the guy. And Kissinger accepted this. I saw him do this telegram.

Other stories about him. Well, the ambassador was... he liked dogs. Saying he liked dogs is not enough. He had a fetish about dogs. He loved dogs. He loved street dogs, and whenever he saw a dog on the street in Ankara he would stop and pick it up and then he would carry it home. He turned the entire garage there - it was a three- or four-bay garage - into a kennel, blocked it off, and had only dogs in there. At one point he was up to 26, I think. I tried to count them. These were street dogs. Well, one of his best tricks was he'd show movies on Saturdays. He had a little theater in the residence. And new people who arrived in Ankara were always invited. Any of the American families, especially the military families, would come up to the ambassador's residence and see these old reel-to-reel movies. And what he would do would be to disappear from the movie while everybody was engrossed in it with little Timmy and little Jimmy and little Jamie or little Mary Ann, and at the end of the movie, the kids would come back and say, "Mommy, Mommy, look what the ambassador gave me - a puppy.!" That's how he'd get rid of the puppies. Everybody knew about this, and nobody would tell the newcomers because everybody else had gotten screwed.

He had two dogs himself. One of them was Benjamin, and the other was called Tripod by everybody because he only had three legs and would do a sort of peg-leg routine across the floor.

Q: Of course, in a Muslim country dogs are not -

METRINKO: They are considered unclean.

Q: Yes.

METRINKO: They were considered very unclean in Turkey. Two more stories about dogs. The July 4th reception at the ambassador's residence, my last one there, I had been in the back sort of dealing with people down in the back garden, and a Turkish general saw me and walked over. He had just come out of the residence, and he walked up to me and said, "Michael, you must tell your ambassador something. I have just been introduced to his dog, and he made me shake its paw." He said, "He is making all of the Turkish guests shake his dog's paw. Please go and tell him that we do not think dogs are clean animals."

Well, that was one. The other one was my first winter as staff aide. We had just gotten him off to the United States. Because of his CENTO responsibilities, his NATO responsibility, the Cyprus War and other things, the arms problems, he was in the United States quite frequently. We had gotten him off, and the phone rang. The phone rang in his office, and it was for me. The office configuration was such that the three secretaries, the DCM's and the ambassador's two secretaries sat in one room. To the right was the DCM's office; to the left was a waiting room for the ambassador's office, and then the ambassador's suite. If you stood in the waiting room, you had a line of sight for all three offices. They had big doors opening from one to the other. The phone rang, someone said, "Michael, it's the ambassador, he wants to talk to you." I picked up the phone from one of the secretary's desks. The DCM's secretary and the ambassador's two secretaries also picked up phones, and I could see the DCM pick up the phone, too. We were all protecting each other. The ambassador said, "Michael, I forgot to tell you something when you dropped me off at the airport yesterday." He said, "There's a dog, a big black bitch up at the officer's club, and it's going to have a litter of puppies." I said, "Yes." He said, "I want you to take her and take her back to the residence and tell Phyllis I said it was okay, because I don't want her to have her puppies in the cold weather. I want her to have her babies in the residence." I said, "Okay." And he said, "Oh, and by the way," he said, "take the father, too." And I said, "The father?" And he said, "Yes, the father." I said, "How will I know the father, Mr. Ambassador?" He said, "Oh, it's a really big dog; it's one that walks with a limp and it has this big brown think on its nose." I said, "Okay, I'll take it up." Fine, fine. Well, when he said, "take the father," I had taken the phone away, and I was staring at it in my hand, thinking I hadn't heard him correctly. I looked up. All three secretaries and the DCM had their phones away from their faces and were staring at the phones. It was like the only reaction. We put the phones down, and the DCM walked over and he said, "I wonder how he knows it was the father. Do you think he stood there and watched them doin' it?" But I'm not going to go and get pregnant dogs and stray street dogs myself. What do I know about dogs? I got the local army vet from the army base, and he and I and his helpers went out in a military vehicle with a big dog box and got the dogs, took them back to the residence. And his wife's face, when I told her that the ambassador had said that he wanted her to have the puppies right there with the father watching - it was... an interesting experience.

Q: We're talking about a very interesting time. Did you get any feel for how Macomber dealt with the president, the prime minister and all? Were relationships strained?

METRINKO: No, the relationship was not strained at all. The relationship, in fact, between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the embassy was extraordinarily good. The minister's special assistant and his two secretaries were three of my closest friends there. I'm still in touch with them even after all these years. We did everything together. We were good friends. The minister's special assistant and I lived less than a block apart. We were together a lot and became good friends. But the ambassador was so energetic, and he had such an open, engaging personality when dealing face to face with officials or face to face with anyone who didn't work for him, that he was excellent at that, and they liked him and he had a good reputation. It's only when you worked for him that he would blow hot and cold, hot and cold, hot and cold. Turks liked him in general. They thought he was extremely strange, but he appealed to them somehow. I think he was quite effective. He would call them up at one o'clock in the morning. He was on top of everything to do with the political relationship and very actively on top of it all the time.

Q: I would have though that we had a real bone to pick with Congress at this particular time.

METRINKO: The ambassador, I think, was supportive of Congress. He loved visitors. He would encourage people to visit him, and every time a congressman came through, the congressman was treated like visiting princes. I've seen embassies where congressional visits are handled, but just handled and that's all. Macomber went out of his way to handle them well - full-court press. I thing that as much as anything helped Turkey. It would also encourage to the Turks to do something. And the Turks understood this, probably. They had a story to tell. They wanted us to accept their version as the only possible version, but they would still deal hospitably with visiting congressmen. And they understood that.

Q: Well, then, in '75, you got out of that hot spot, and where did you go?

METRINKO: I started to hate the job because I never had any time off, and I mean literally no time off - no Sundays, no Saturdays. I was there every evening. And my social life was more and more just going to his receptions and going to his dinners, working through them. And I was getting only a couple of hours of sleep a night.

Q: Had other staff aides been married? Because I would think that this would -

METRINKO: I don't know. My predecessor had not been. But I'd only wanted it for two weeks, and I was the only staff aide that I knew. And the ambassador seemed to be quite content with me. I talked to the DCM about the possibility of changing because it was slowly driving me crazy, and he said, "If you want to change, you're going to have to get out of it yourself, but you don't want to just quit and, you know, leave the job." He said, "You have to find a way to get somebody else into it and get yourself out of it." But I did. I did a campaign - it took me about two months - and part of the campaign was letting my hair grow very long. It was that time in the Foreign Service when it was becoming unclear what you could or could not say about hair. I let my hair grow right to my shoulders. I started smoking. I hadn't been smoking in a number of years. I decided it was worth it. I knew the ambassador hated smoking, disliked people who smoked around him, but also knew that he'd never say anything about this because in 1975 you could not say anything about people smoking. He had a box of cigarettes that he kept on his coffee table for Turkish guests and other guests. I started taking cigarettes from the box and smoking them in front of them, if he had guests that I was taking notes for, something like that. He would look at me, but he never said anything. I then started really building up another junior officer at the post who I decided was my best possibility of a replacement. I was sort of Byzantine in my approach. I kept dropping things about what a great social life it was, the ambassador's receptions and dinner and this and that and Princess that and the Hohenzollerns coming through, you know, and Rockefellers and others. This guy was a GSO. He was a great officer, but he was a GSO, so he never went anywhere. No one ever invites the GSO to anything, and his wife was starting to feel this, and I would just keep talking about the wonderful social life you have as a staff aide, always with the ambassador and the generals and the this and the that. I wanted his wife to push him for it. And then anything... because I had control of what the ambassador read, I made sure that for about a month anything at all that had been done by this guy the GSO I would underline with comments like "He did a great job on this. He really pulled the chestnuts out of the fire on this one. So-and-so's really good."

Q: This is the most disgusting story I've ever heard.

METRINKO: Sorry, but I was desperate to get out of the job. I had no life. I had no life at all. I worked on the guy's wife, I worked on the guy. I did everything I could. I kept building up... I built up his reputation to a fever pitch in the office, and then, thank God, a telegram came through. It was Martin Hertz talking about staff aides. Martin Hertz - God rest his soul - used to love to pontificate about the Foreign Service and the philosophy of it.

Q: Oh, yes.

METRINKO: I was his control officer when he came to Turkey on a visit.

Q: I knew him in Saigon.

METRINKO: Nice guy.

Q: Very.

METRINKO: Really liked to pontificate. And he had written a telegram about the care and feeding of staff aides, and the best length of time to have a staff aide and what their duties should be, etc. Well, this was not normally something I'd waste the ambassador's time with, but I carefully and judiciously underlined it and had it in the ambassador's traffic one particular day; and very late one night, as the DCM, the ambassador, and I were sitting there going through the day's events and the traffic and everything else, the ambassador pulled it out and asked the DCM if he had seen it, and my ears, of course, were right up to the ceiling at this point. And the ambassador said, "It says here that no one should be a staff aide longer than four or five months. I've never had one for that long. The maximum is about three months you should have one for." And the DCM looked at me and said, "Michael, how long have you been staff aide now?" And I said, "It's going on 13 months." I said, "We passed the year a couple of weeks ago." The ambassador said, "Has it been that long? You've been here more than three months?" And the next day, it worked. I was GSO.

Q: Oh, how wonderful!

METRINKO: And thank God. My blood pressure came down, my weight dropped, I stopped smoking.

Q: Did you get a haircut?

METRINKO: I cut my hair. Everything was wonderful then. And I was able to start using Turkish again. Sitting in an office surrounded by Turkish FSNs, it was great - because I never used it in the ambassador's office. No one ever used it. We had to deal in English all the time.

Q: Why don't we talk a bit about what does a GSO do?

METRINKO: GSO.

Q: It means General Services Officer.

METRINKO: My specific job was I was the customs and transportation officer. I was responsible for immediate supervision of the motor pool, dispatcher, other drivers, the cars; and as customs officer I was responsible for the pouches and shipments of household effects, all official shipments that came in and out of the embassy. And this also involved AID and also involved in a general way military shipments that came in for people assigned to the base. I had to supervise the staff of guys and the work and also the travel office too. We arranged for shipments of the non-classified diplomatic pouches and also of all personal effects and all air freight. I found it very interesting. I was still, by the way, this whole time, a vice-consul, so I was also doing consular worked for the consular officer whenever she was away. As GSO I supervised the travel arrangements. We had a travel girl, an FSN, who made all travel arrangements, private and official, for people assigned to the embassy. She worked for me. The 16, I think it was, drivers worked for me. Also, I was responsible for the maintenance of the motor vehicle pool. Now I didn't even own a car. I had never owned one at that point. And suddenly I'm responsible for a whole fleet of clunkers, including the ambassador's extraordinarily heavy, uncomfortably falling apart stretch limo with full armor.

Q: This was the period when we had this big limos underpowered - I mean, our limousines were far underpowered all over the world, weren't they?

METRINKO: All over the world they were heavily armored and they hadn't been built to take an extra thousand or so pounds of iron. These were the ones where the windows could not be opened or closed because they had Plexiglas on the outsides or they had Plexiglas-Mylar, I think it was called, on the front windshield so that if you were a driver and had to drive this for more than 10 minutes you started to get headaches because of the refracted light. They were uncomfortable, and basically if they had ever been attacked or gotten into an accident, they would have been real sweat boxes in which you would have died. And the tires on them, the extra-heavy tires, if you went over a certain number of miles per hour, they would bust. They were impossible, and yet they were required. We had one of those real clunkers that was breaking down all the time. The fact that the ambassador liked to tool around at high speeds did not lend itself to keeping the vehicles in good condition.

Q: As the GSO often you can end up by being in the unenviable position of being responsible for who gets what.

METRINKO: I didn't do furniture, and I didn't do housing.

Q: Okay, that's like that saying, "I don't do windows," because that's where the GSO becomes the most unpopular person in the embassy, by -

METRINKO: - holding back or giving forth to the wrong people.

Q: Yes.

METRINKO: Well, what I did - my life with the motor vehicles didn't really affect people. It was to get people efficiently from one place to another. We had a very good dispatcher, who normally handled things quite well. He only came to me when it was a big problem or when he needed something or had to go over resources. The drivers, I knew every one of the drivers, spoke Turkish to them all the time, so I had no problem with them. The household effects were a problem because household effects were always delayed. Air freight was always delayed. It was a country that was always full of red tape, especially for the shipment and movement of property. Problems in the office... Well, three men who worked with me, three local employees, were under indictment for smuggling through the diplomatic pouch, and once a month had to go down to the local court and have their hearing postponed for another month. They'd been accused of smuggling watch parts from Germany into Turkey using the American diplomatic pouch. Because they had not yet been found guilty, they were still all at work. As it turned out, the charges were dropped about a year after they had started this process, but once a month they would stand up and say, "Well, Mr. Michael, it is time for us to go to court again." And that was happening. I got to see the bad side of a lot of American employees, the things that they would try to smuggle into Turkey or take out of Turkey that were forbidden or breaking Turkish laws - people who would look at you and say, "No, I have no weapons. I have never owned a weapon." And you would discover they had a collection of high-powered hunting rifles they were bringing into Turkey, probably to sell. Things like that happened far more than once. I was responsible for motor vehicle sales, and at the time there was a regulation- (end of tape)

If you sold your privately owned vehicle for a profit, more than you had paid for it, you were required to either turn the profit over to a local charity approved by the embassy or to return it to the federal government. In the course of my one year as GSO seeing 30 or 40 car sales, I only saw one person who admitted to getting a profit on his car, and when he came in it had been so long in the history of the office since anyone had declared a profit that no one knew what to do. It was literally that long. For years and years everyone had said, No, I did not make a profit, no, I did not make a profit. It was an interesting time because the admin counselor at the time was a very nice man. He came to me shortly after I became GSO and said, "Michael, you have a lot of Turkish friends. I know that you have Turkish friends over at your house. We have a huge representational budget for the admin section. My wife and I prefer not to have any Turks in our house." He said, "You know, [So-and-So] the GSO doesn't really want to have any Turks in his house, either. [So-and-So] isn't really interested in entertaining. On the other hand, we have to entertain, because you know what the ambassador is like. He wants us to spend all of this money." He said, "Why don't you use all of the representational budget. Just send me the list of your guests. Try and make it look like they're good for the section, and you can use the whole representational budget for the year." So I did.

Q: I would think this would give you plenty of license to go after customs people and -

METRINKO: Everything. And I had Turkish friends, luckily, who were, many of them, officials. It was great. So in my second year as a junior officer I had representation, a major post's entire section. I had lots of good parties.

Q: Well, after sort of getting out of that - you didn't have to deal with dogs any more?

METRINKO: No dogs any more, thank God. That was the staff aide's job - the dog aide's job.

Q: They used to call the staff aides "dogsbodies," which was really -

METRINKO: There was probably a reason for that. No more dogs. Basically, I was able to have a social life. I was able to go to dinners. I could show up at the time I said I'd be coming. I had a very pleasant second year in the embassy. And the ambassador would even occasionally remember my name when he saw me. It was fine.

Q: Well, in 1976 you were ready to go out. Where to?

METRINKO: Ready to go out. Well, I really wanted to go back to Iran. I had been there on a brief vacation for about a week. I wanted to go back and serve there in the embassy. I got in touch with my career counselor, and I was told that because it was so popular there would be nothing available in Iran for the next couple of years, forget about Iran - nothing, nothing, nothing there - and to look at other places, at which point a telegram arrived requesting volunteers for Beirut, which was in the throes of its civil war. But the last part of the telegram said that anyone who volunteers for Beirut and spends two years there at the embassy will be given his or her first choice of an onward assignment. And I thought, Great, this is the way I can get back to Iran. So I volunteered for Beirut, and I was accepted, and all that was fine. I got telegrams from the State Department telling me where to put my household effects. They were all supposed to go to ELSO for storage. I was supposed to get, I think, 90 pounds of air freight only, and that was going to go directly to Beirut. I had that prepared and set to go. But that wasn't supposed to go until I was actually on my way to post. I was given three weeks of home leave, and that was fine. I came back straight from Ankara to Washington and went to the Department. I came here because I wanted to see a brother. I went to the Department the first day that I was back, saw someone I knew in the hallway who said, "Ah, Michael, I'm sorry to see that your assignment to Qatar has been broken." I said, "I'm not going to Qatar; I'm going to Beirut." He said, "No, that was broken about a month ago, and you were reassigned to Qatar. But that one's broken now, too." "What?"

Well, as it turned out, the personnel system had been somehow dealing with two completely different sets of instructions about me. The Beirut assignment had been broken because the embassy had been taken out of Beirut. There was no more embassy there.

Q: Moved to Cyprus, essentially.

METRINKO: Moved to Cyprus, and also to Damascus. Consular went to Damascus. And people assigned to the Consular Section, their assignments were broken. I went up to see the career counselor. Someone else was doing career assignments who told me, yes, come up and see me, fine. I went up, and they started, Well, you know, the story about Beirut, etc., gee, it was a shame, you should have gotten a telegraph. All this was going on, and he said, "Look, we have an assignment we're trying very hard to get people for. It's going to be as challenging as Beirut would have been, very interesting. We could really use someone there." I said, "Where?" He said, "Have you ever thought about going to Teheran?" And, you know, it was like totally bizarre. Someone else in the same office two months before had told me nothing available, nothing would be, too popular, etc. And here they were trying to sweeten the pot to get me to Teheran. And, they said, via a TDY in Damascus for six months - great, best of all worlds.

Q: Why don't we talk about Damascus and then save Iran because we want to go in depth on that. What did you do in Damascus. You were there, when in '76?

METRINKO: I arrived in Damascus in November of 1976, and I was there until March of 1977.

Q: What were you doing there?

METRINKO: Straight visa work. I was the NIV officer. It's a good post. I had been accustomed in Ankara to dealing with four to five visa applications a day. There was very little consular work in Ankara. Most of the consular work was in Istanbul. When I got to Damascus, I did straight visa work. There were two American officers in the section. It was a nice section, very pleasant, and we had the Beirut files there, at least part of them. People from Lebanon would come to Damascus for visas. We also dealt with the Syrians. We were doing, I guess, oh, between 70 to 90 applicants a day, which at first I was horrified at and then found I could do quite easily in the morning and process the paperwork in the afternoon. I had a very good time. It was a job that started in the morning, ended in the evening. The embassy was hospitable. It was an extremely professional embassy.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

METRINKO: The ambassador was Richard Murphy. The DCM was Bob Pelletreau.

Q: Oh, yes.

METRINKO: Two Middle Eastern hands, two of the best.

Q: Two of the top people.

METRINKO: They were a great team. They were extremely professional. They were friendly. They were both hospitable. I'm trying to think. There were other people in the embassy - good Lord, Jim Cooper was the political counselor, again, very good. Jim Budeit was my boss temporarily, and then Seton Stapleton, again, especially Seton, very competent, professional officers. We had a good time. I met Americans who were there. I met an American friend who was doing a Fulbright study of the archeology of Damascus. We got along very, very well, and he introduced me to some other budding young archeologists, and I had some Syrian friends, actually, young ones, and also met a couple of Hungarians who were there doing Arabic studies, and had a great time. Many weekends, with a couple of this group, either one of the Dutch archeologists or the American or the Hungarians, I would change my clothes in the embassy on a Friday afternoon, leave my suit there, put my jeans on, and go hitchhiking around the country for the weekend. I hitchhiked all over Syria.

Q: I would have thought Syrian secret police would have been all over you.

METRINKO: Interesting thing about Syria. We were just reopening Syria. We had reopened there in, I think, '74 or '75. I got there a year later. The Syrians were actually very pleasant. They had been very anti-American during the '67-73 period, but the Syrians are correct. I mean, they're correct in the sense of their behavior. There was no outward harassment at all. The people of Syria... There were no tourists in Syria at that point, nothing at all. People simply didn't come there, and this meant that you were welcomed if you were a tourist. The normal Syrian didn't really know very much about the United States, and instead of loving us or hating us, the general reaction was, "Oh, you're an American - that's nice." There was no emotion about it. I found that very pleasant. I had a good time, saw the entire country. I was in the towns, the villages, overnight in Arab houses and other things. I could do this on weekends, come back, have a normal embassy life. And actually, the RSO once, I said -

Q: Regional Security Officer.

METRINKO: I asked him, what would his reaction be if I told him that the vice-consul was out hitchhiking with Hungarians who were there on Communist Party scholarships and going out with local Syrians and hitchhiking around the country and basically coming back to the embassy on Monday morning to start work again? And he would say, "I would prefer that he didn't tell me. I had a great time.

Q: Did you pick up any of the mood from people you were talking to about how they felt about Assad and all?

METRINKO: No, Syrians did not discuss politics with me. I had a great social life, but kept it off politics there. And I didn't know enough about that situation. I had very basic Arabic. I spoke a lot of Turkish and Persian, especially in the embassy, where so many people were Armenian and spoke Turkish, but didn't really touch on politics. Somehow, you know, I liked Syria, but it never affected me deeply. It was a pleasant place for six months. I had a great social life, a lot of young people in the embassy and a lot of young people outside the embassy. I had no ties to the place. I was not trying to live there. I knew it was going to be a six-month assignment, and it was absolutely great.

Q: All right, well, why don't we stop at this point, and we'll pick it up the next time at 1977, when you're off to Iran, which sounds like a very nice pleasant kind of assignment.

METRINKO: It was.

Q: You were in Iran from when to when?

METRINKO: That time, from March of 1977 until January of 1981.

Q: Oh, yes, your assignment was extended.

METRINKO: Yes.

Q: All right, we'll talk about that.

***

Today is May 31, 2000. Mike, so 1977. You're off to Iran. I think you talked about how you got the job, didn't you?

METRINKO: Yes, I got the job because the personnel system made a mistake. I think I did talk about this.

Q: I think you did. So well then, when you arrived in 19. . . Did you get any briefing or anything else at all.

METRINKO: About Iran?

Q: About Iran.

METRINKO: No, I never had area studies either. Of course, I didn't really need them.

Q: I mean were you picking up anything in the corridors about the situation there, whither Iran and all that?

METRINKO: I was a lowly untenured officer going off to the visa section in Teheran. It's not likely that anybody would even have spoken to me. The did not give briefings in those days to untenured junior visa officers. I went to Iran. I wanted to go there because I'd liked the country so much in the Peace Corps, I had lots of friends there, thought I could have a good interesting time there. And also thought that I could be a pretty decent officer since I spoke the language, spoke two of the languages of the country, and knew a lot about the country. I arrived in Teheran in March of 1977 and was assigned to the visa section as a visa officer. It was a very different kind of consular work than I had done in Syria, certainly very different from my rather gentlemanly approach to consular work in Ankara. Teheran was almost a factory type visa situation, a "visa mill," with many, many hundreds of Iranians every morning lining up to get into the visa section. I think we got to 900-1000 on many days, too.

Q: Who were they?

METRINKO: Everybody. We had a huge military exchange program with Iran, so Iranians were being sent off to the United States for training. Iranians had now gotten access to oil money. They were getting scholarships, fellowships from the Government of Iran, and their own families had the money to send them off to school in the United States. The Iranian school system could not handle the population of graduated high school seniors, and for each person who went you had a mother, a father, a brother, or a sister who wanted to visit. So we were up in the high thousands of visa applicants every year. And getting deluged by it. Needless to say, the Department had not kept up with the anticipated demand. There were very few consular officers at the post - very few State officers. There were a couple of Agency officers who were also assigned to the visa section. But I was one of, I think, three regular State officers assigned to the visa section, and for the first several months, from March until I think July or so, I worked in the visa section. It was an interesting job. It caused me some problems. I saw one side of the Foreign Service that I thought was rather sad. I got involved in a fraud investigation of my own boss at the time, and she was moved out of the section because of the implications of fraud in her activities.

Q: What happened? I mean, I'm trying to figure out how the Department in those days dealt with -

METRINKO: Handle it? Cases like this - I won't use names - but what happened is shortly after I arrived in the section I was introduced to the Consular Section "expediter" (quote-unquote), who worked out at the airport and basically helped people from the embassy process through the airport. He would come in every day with several up to a stack of passports and request visas for various people and claim they were all given to him by the head of the airport, the head of security at the airport, or various important people for us at the airport. We were under orders to process these as quickly as possible because it was important for the embassy, orders directly from the head of the visa section. That was fine. I didn't like the expediter. None of us did, among the American officers who were doing visa work, but we were told basically to do whatever he told us to do on visas because his position was so important for the embassy. One day, several weeks after this, he had brought in a stack of passports. He left them with the secretary in the visa section. She came to me a little while later and said some of these passports, the applications aren't filled out. I looked at one, and there was nothing on it to allow me to determine what sort of visa the applicant should get - no purpose of visit to the United States, nothing at all on that. So I asked her who he had said had recommended the visa applicant, and the secretary said he said it was the head of the airport, and I said, "Call the head of the airport, tell his secretary we have to get in touch with this applicant because the we have to ask the applicant a few questions." My secretary came back five minutes later and said, "I just got off the phone with the head of the airport himself, and he told me that he has never met Mr. Barrimi, the expediter, he doesn't care to meet him, he doesn't know anybody who works for the American Embassy, and he has never in his career sent passports to the American Embassy to request visas for anyone else." Well, I wrote this up and marched in quite proudly to the head of the visa section, who reacted with almost a fit of rage and how dare I question this guy. He was doing a rough job for the embassy, I should never have called the airport up, I should never have bothered her about this, and from now on she wanted all the passports directly to her and she would take care of the visas. As soon as the workday was over, I went over and talked to the Security Office, told the RSO what had happened. He asked me and another American officer to start photocopying all the visa applications now being signed by our boss. Within a couple of days he had enough ammunition. He had called in the visa applicants who were getting these visas, interviewed them, discovered a whole range of people paying money to get their visas. Well, the RSO summoned the head of the visa section over, and apparently she refused to cooperate. She was removed from the position immediately and put upstairs doing projects, but she stayed there for another couple of months. And the FSN who had been doing this was fired. I was given her job as an untenured officer. That was fine. I was there for about a month, a month and a half, doing that work when quite by, again, personnel and bureaucratic chance, the position of head of the consulate in Tabriz opened up. The person who was there already got an assignment. He was leaving to go to another city in Iran as principal officer, and Tabriz required a principal officer. They looked at me and asked me if I'd be interested in going out there since I spoke Turkish and Persian, and I agreed. And off I went to Tabriz.

Q: Well, let's talk first about when you arrived in '77 in Teheran. What was the political situation like at that time?

METRINKO: Political situation, do you mean inside the embassy?

Q: No, the political situation outside.

METRINKO: The political situation outside the embassy depended upon who was looking at it. If you were the ambassador, if you were the ambassador's Political Section, if you were the DCM, everything was bright and rosy. If you had any contact with the people of Iran, it was not so bright and rosy. In fact, it was bloody awful, but since so few people over in the front office or the Political Section or the Econ Section of the embassy spoke Persian, and since they had such limited contact with normal Iranians, they didn't seem to realize this. I'll give you and example. Shortly after I got there, I started getting in touch with my old friends, and in the course of a few weeks I saw an old student of mine who had become a police officer, and he was also on the escort for the Shah. His roommate was one of the Shahs "Immortal Guards," one of the Shah's personal bodyguards. That was one. I got in touch with the former head of my school. I had been a teacher just outside of Teheran, and the president of the school invited me out for dinner one night, and we had a nice long talk about the situation. And the third one was a visa applicant who had come in requesting a visa and claiming he wanted to go to the United States so that he could dispose of his art collection.

The three cases are interesting. The police officer, who was a member of the establishment, closely tied to the Shah's entourage, security, the first night that we met and many, many times thereafter, gave me a large number of anecdotes about how people disliked the Shah, how he disliked the Shah, how there was a tremendous rift in security services that were supposed to be protecting the Shah, how some of the police had an agreement with leftists, opponents of the Shah, to not interfere with each other, basically a hands-off policy one from the other, and how, as he said, "I wouldn't kill the Shah myself, but if I saw somebody else pulling the trigger, I would turn and look in the other direction." That's coming from one of the Shah's guards.

Q: Why this animosity?

METRINKO: In his case, the great disparity in money in the country, the way most of the people lived, the 95 per cent at the bottom and the 5 per cent at the top. The number of people around the Shah who were deeply corrupt, basically thieves, and he could see this all day long with his own eyes during his professional duties - the bribery, the corruption, the attitude towards Iran, towards other Iranians by the shah's entourage, by the court - that was his reason.

In the case of the university president, it's very interesting. I started to talk to him... The president had both known a student of mine quite well when I was in the Peace Corps. And I had asked about this student when I came back, when I saw some of her fellow students, and had been told she had gone to the United States, that she had gotten a fellowship from the school and was off to the States getting a doctorate, and that they had heard this from her family. That's fine. This particular student had had a great deal of political trouble when she was a student. She had been arrested. I had seen her getting out of jail when I was a teacher there. She was a very bright, very personable student too, which was why she attracted attention. Great girl. I congratulated the president of the school and just said, "Hey, by the way, you know, it was great, I'm glad you gave a fellowship to [So-and-so] and that she's in the States studying now." He looked at me and said, "She doesn't have a fellowship. She'd dead." "What do you mean, 'She's dead'?" He said, "She was executed in prison." Her family tells people she has a fellowship because they're afraid to let it be known that their daughter has been executed."

Well, I wrote both memos up. The third memo I wrote up was about the visa applicant who, as it turned out, had a great collection of primitive Iranian art, old Iranian religious art, and when he showed me pictures of it during his interview and told me that the Shah's wife and folks from the court would come to look at it and they would send important dignitaries in to see it in his home, I asked him if I could see it some day when he returned from America. He agreed, that was fine. Why was he going to America? He said, "There is so much trouble happening here, so much is brewing here, I see it around me and I see it in the court, and I see it with my rich friends, that I think the country is heading for a major collapse. This collection of mine is my baby. It's my child. I've been doing this my whole life. I don't want it destroyed. I'm going to America to try and find a museum I can present it to." I wrote that up.

Now, I wrote all three memos in longhand because I didn't have access to a classified typewriter. This was back in the old days when you had to type... And I gave them all to the ambassador's staff aide who was going to find a typist for me, and that was fine. I had written them all up, and they were all in fine copy and had all the addressees and everything else on them, and he was just going to get them typed so that I in turn could get them approved by the consul general. Well, that was fine. It didn't think about it because he was gone for a couple of days, and then I got a call, a sort of panicky call, from the main embassy. The chancery building was about two blocks from the consular section. There was very, very little connection between the two. Our work building had no generator, was always surrounded by a mob of visa applicants, American citizens trying to get services, a crowd of people who would sleep out in front of it all night long waiting to get into the early morning line. The embassy was set back. It was on (quote) "a compound." We were immediately open to the street. But I got a call to get over immediately to the DCM's office about my memos. I was kind of puzzled. I was waiting for them to come to me so I could send them in the clearance process. I called over to the staff aide and discovered that he had given them to a secretary in the admin section to type up. She had assumed they were cleared. She had done them in final, dropped them into the pouch, which had then gone off, you know, addressed to various people in Washington, and had also done copies to go up to the DCM's office and the Political Section, which had gotten the copies of these memos after they had gone into the pouch and the pouch was already en route. The Political Section and the DCM blew up because I was working behind their backs and what right did I have to write these? And why had I done this and why hadn't I gotten it cleared, etc., etc, and who did I think I was, what did I know, and they knew so much better, and all this was stupidity, and what was the name of the member of the Shah's guard who was betraying the Shah with his friends? Well, I refused to give that, of course, because I knew that they would turn his name over to SAVAK and he then would have been killed or put in prison. I wasn't going to do that.

I had caught holy hell, but as it turned out, the Department reacted in a different way. I had a call from the Department, a private call to me, from an officer on the Iran Desk, who said, "I found your memos fascinating. They're very unlike what we've been getting from the embassy, from the Political Section. I want to know more about this, and would you please continue to write, just send them directly to me, and I will make sure they get seen."

Q: What did you do?

METRINKO: As it turned out, I was sent off to Tabriz shortly after that, and what I wrote from then on were telegrams that went through the normal clearing procedures. I wasn't about to start to these intrigues now.

Q: I realize you were all sitting off by yourself there, but were you able, or did you ever talk to some of the more junior members of the Political Section? Were they shaking? There was this thing that was pretty well known, that it had been made rather firm that we were not to report anything nasty about the Shah and all that.

METRINKO: That was definitely policy.

Q: I mean this must have gotten under the skin of a lot of people.

METRINKO: I don't know if it ever bothered the political section. I doubt it.

Q: Who were they?

METRINKO: George Lambrakis was the counselor. John Stempel was the deputy. I never saw them.

Q: Who was the DCM?

METRINKO: The DCM initially was... oh, gosh... You know, I know the name so well, I could picture... No, Miklos.

Q: And how about the ambassador at that time?

METRINKO: The ambassador had just arrived, and that was Ambassador Sullivan. Put it this way. Lambrakis and Stempel changed slowly over the next year and a half. Miklos never changed, and he left a few months later anyway. And the ambassador changed dramatically, but it took about a year and a half, in his views. Now, can I blame them? Then, I did; now, I do not. To send people to a country like Iran without the language, without any real grounding in the society and the culture and the history, without any sense for the feel, the smell, the touch of Iran, and to expect them to somehow become prescient when they are surrounded by high walls and security concerns that prevent their getting into society, prevent their wandering around the country - perhaps that's not fair. I don't know how to overcome that in staffing an embassy. If you have an ambassador who's served in the country as a junior officer or, better yet, served in the country in a non-government capacity, that's great. But if you only have somebody who came up through the system and who was always in a different part of the world and they don't have the language or any of the regular human contact with that society, they are never going to understand it.

Q: And plus the fact that we had a mindset. Some countries you can go in and, you know, who cares? I mean, that's the wrong way, but there's room for you to exercise your judgment and often coming in that way you can be a sort of disinterested observer, but Iran had this mindset.

METRINKO: Iran had a mindset and there was another problem, too. Iran did not have a decent press at the time. The Iranian press in English was amateur. It was high school newspaper quality. You got nothing from the Iranian press. The Iranian academics printed things, but that was also childlike. It was not what you'd call very professional or high level. And we were so imbued with the idea that the opposition were bloody and violent that nobody was going to listen to what they were saying. The Shah had convinced us of this; the SAVAK had convinced us of this. The CIA was convinced of it. Therefore, why would you pay attention to somebody who was basically a barbarian? That's they way they would look at the opposition groups. That being said, the American press, American journalists and American academics, were even far more to blame. They had been suckered into the Shah's system. And one of the most enlightening things that I saw through the revolution was a long list of the American journalists who had been accepting gifts and bribes from the Shah's government. It was great. When you know that a prominent journalist has gotten a large gift from the Shah's government, it has to affect her reporting about events.

Q: Oh, yes.

METRINKO: And it went on and on like that. So was it only the embassy? No, because an ambassador also gets his information not just from his political officers and his consular officers and his economic officers. He gets his information from the milieu and from the press and from the journalists and the academics. If they have all become prostitutes, which in the case of Iran most American journalists and north American academics had become, then you can't blame the ambassador.

Q: Well, now, who was consul general at the time you were there?

METRINKO: The consul general when I arrived there was Ward Christiansen, and he was replaced by Lou Goeltz a few months later. Ward I hardly knew at all. I mean, I knew him - he was good, he was okay. Lou Goeltz was really something great, and I got to know Lou very, very well because he would come up to Tabriz once I got there.

Q: Lou replaced me in Seoul, for example.

METRINKO: Lou was a great guy.

Q: Very professional. Okay.

METRINKO: Oh, the DCM, by the way, changed. Miklos left in the summer of 1977 - no I guess toward the end of 1977 - and he was replaced by Charlie Naas, who was incredibly open-minded and professional.

Q: Let's still stick to Teheran. The group you were around, did they have any reflections of the religious community, the mullahs, Khomeini, and all that, or not, at that point?

METRINKO: Iranians could be religious. The people that I knew were not militant religious. A lot of them were deeply personally religious. They would fast, they would pray, they would go to Mecca. They were not militant about it. The name Khomeini did not really become prominent in public, out loud, until the year 1978.

Q: This was not a topic among your friends, and all that.

METRINKO: No, the friends of mine who were anti-Shah - and there were a lot of them - never discussed it in religious terms. They were basically secular people who were opposed on political grounds because they wanted more freedom or they wanted no more censorship or things like that. Those were my friends. Now that's also a self-selected community.

Q: No, but I mean this was true of... I think this is so typical of the Foreign Service type because you don't find, with the exception maybe of a devout Mormon or somebody like that who also is very limited in his sphere, we don't have those roots into the religious community, and neither do we... and I mean, anyway, we're Christian.

METRINKO: We don't associate religion and politics. No one associates religion and politics in that way in the United States. A foreign diplomat is not likely to come here and pay a call on the local cardinal. He might pay a call on one of the Christian Evangelists - maybe not.

Q: But also, I think it would be very hard for somebody from Great Britain, for example, to come and to understand Jerry Falwell or something like that, who from the historical perspective is a fundamental Christian of the far right. I mean they don't even speak the same language.

METRINKO: Now, I can go on later about the religious community and the history of it and what a profound effect that group has on politics later.

Q: We'll come back to that. So you're off to Tabriz, when?

METRINKO: Tabriz, the very end of the summer, early autumn of 1977.

Q: Let's talk about the setup there, the consulate. Who was consul, what did it do? And then we'll talk about the situation.

METRINKO: The physical setup of Tabriz was spectacular. It was one of the grand old consulates. The Tabriz consulate sat on approximately 15 acres of walled in garden. It had 1200 trees inside the wall. It had an Olympic-size swimming pool, a six-car garage, a guest house, an absolutely lovely home, and a beautiful office building surrounded by gardens and landscaping and tree-lined driveways, fountains, bird ponds, fish ponds, a volley-ball field, a field for playing football, a rose garden, grape arbors - the whole bit. It had been laid out by an American architect when America was flush with money, in the 1960s, laid out and set up principally, I think, at CIA pressure, because it was built to serve as a border-watching post. It was right on the Soviet border. I was only 45 minutes by car away from the USSR border. I was also fairly close to the Turkish border, about an hour and a half to two hours, and not that distant from the Iraqi border. It was a very strategic location. What happened, though, was that satellites popped up just after the place was built, and it had been designed for 10 American officers - it went down to one. They had two American officers the year before I got there. It was going to be sold, closed and sold off in a big land exchange deal by the embassy, which is why they hadn't bothered to staff it. But then the closure got delayed because the land deal started to fall through, and they suddenly had to find someone to put out there. There I was sitting in the Consular Section. They put me out there. It was a great job. Instead of going out for a few months - you know, to close the post and be a holding action - I went out there and the revolution started. And it started in Tabriz, which I guess was fortuitous.

Q: You were the only American there, right?

METRINKO: The only American State Department person. There was a small American detachment at the Air Force Base, and we also had an Army attachï¿½ there. They were separate. We were all friends. I saw them socially. There was no sort of chain of command with us. We were all independent.

Q: Talk about Tabriz in the context of Iran at that time.

METRINKO: Tabriz probably had a population of close to a million people, which for Iran made it the second to third biggest city in the country. It would have been Teheran and then either Isfahan or Tabriz. Tabriz was a Turkish city. It had a very distinct identity. People in the city spoke Turkish. It had a heavy Armenian population as well. There were Christian churches there, as there were in most cities in Iran. But it was very non-Persian. It had traditionally been the capital of Azerbaijan. It had also, in the days of the Qajar dynasty, before the Pahlavi dynasty came into power, been the city where the crown prince would sit and rule until his father died in Teheran. So the city had a rather proud tradition of being the seat of the second person in power in the country. That had changed. One could say it was an industrial city, a lot of factories around it, oil refinery, good connections to all of western Iran, and it was the city where, if you were going by land to Europe, you had to pass through Tabriz, or rather the outskirts of it. The roads came through the city. At one point I think it had been far more important. Before airports started carrying passengers and freight, everybody came through Tabriz. Everything entering Iran from the west passed through Tabriz, through the bazaar there, through the roads there. Planes had done away with a lot of the heavier traffic, but still there was a fairly constant flow of people and goods through the city in both directions.

Q: At that time, up in that corner of Iran, was anything going on? You know, there had been Kurdish revolts and all that. One always says it's a rough neighborhood, and you have Turkey and Iraq and the Soviet Union and Iran all up there. Anything going on there at the time you got there?

METRINKO: The Kurds were quiet. They had not had any insurrections in quite a while. Mullah Mustafa Barzani, who was the last of the great Turkish guerilla leaders, had been defanged and actually he was living in Virginia at that point with one or two of his sons here. He died in the United States, in the year 1979. But he was quiet. The Kurds were quiet generally. Smuggling, of course, a lot of back and forth across the border. There is always smuggling, but in general no other activity from the Kurdish areas. Turkic or Turkish nationalism was not really a factor, I don't think. There was so much happening in the country, and there were so many alternative methods of expression that that had ceased to be important for a while. And the Shah was actually not bad in that sense. He treated all the other nationalities equally - rather dismally at times, but fairly equally. And his wife, of course, was half Turkish extraction, so that helped. Other than that, no, the borders were quiet. The people on the Caspian were quiet.

Q: Were the Soviets messing around at all?

METRINKO: The Soviets were not messing around. They had a major project, the electrification of the railway project. There was a rail line that went directly from Tabriz up to the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Trade Mission in Tabriz had approximately 200 Soviets attached to it, which made it fairly large as a trade mission, matched with the one American over at the consulate. But the embassy really believed that nothing was happening in that whole part of Iran, because apparently the Shah had told them so, and that all power and all activity was centered in north Teheran, therefore.

Q: What about listening posts?

METRINKO: No, nothing was there.

Q: That was done on...

METRINKO: I didn't even have communications facilities. I had a telephone, and I eventually got a telex line, which I actually never used. By the time it came in it was moot.

Q: When you went out there, what were you doing?

METRINKO: I was told to go out, spend several months there, that the whole property was going to be sold, and that I was to be involved in wrapping it up, ceasing services, sort of closing down bits and pieces of the consulate, and helping the Department close up this post, and I would come back and they would give me another assignment in Iran. And that was fine, except that when I got there the land deal collapsed. The Iranian entrepreneur with whom the embassy had been dealing could not get his act together or his money together, and the big exchange, where he was going to take the land in Tabriz and give the embassy something in Teheran and put up a building for a new embassy or a new consulate, all this, it just never happened.

The revolution period started fairly quickly. I arrived in let's say September of '77, and the first major rioting broke out in February of '78, pretty close on.

Q: As you went there, talk a bit about getting settled in. Did you do the- (end of tape)

METRINKO: There was a very good FSN (Foreign Service National) staff at the consulate, both the support staff - the people who did the gardening (We had two full-time gardeners plus three part-time), a good guard staff of local employees, a good maid, a good cook, a very good driver, a very good admin person, a superb guy, who ran the whole compound as it if were his own house, and he'd been brought up on the compound because his father before him had worked there - and a very good, what we called then "provincial advisor." This was a senior FSN whose job was to give advice and guidance to the American officers. This one was great. He knew everybody in the area; he knew all the governors general; he knew all the police officials and everyone else; and basically he helped me go out to meet and brief people, introduced me to people. We had a small visa section that I also handled, which processed just enough visas in a normal workday - 15, 20, 30 visas a day - that it kept me in touch with a lot of people who needed visas. People would come to me because they had to. And also there was a strong feeling that the United States was Iran's biggest ally; therefore, the local officials, local business people who had a lot of back-and-forth with the United States would come through.

Q: Were you having a problem with refusing people there?

METRINKO: We had a refusal rate, but we never had the lines or the sort of pressure that came up. It was literally enough for one person to handle.

Now I had a good Iranian social life, because there were the normal people who always had the American consul to their homes, to their receptions. The officials were basically friendly. I was also correct in my dealings with them. I mean I met them. I would pay calls on them, introduce myself. I was responsible for the seven states of western Iran, so I had a huge consular district, which I visited fairly frequently. I would go off for a week at a time with a car and a driver, and when I would go off like that, normally somebody from the embassy would come and sit in my place for a week or so. It worked out well. I got to most of the provinces, many of the cities. In fact I started a regular routine of certain cities at certain times of the year, and I would also do visa work when I went to those cities, instead of having the applicants travel two or three days to get to Teheran. It worked out. I had a very pleasant time. People were receptive. I also had probably better contact with the normal people of the city than most of my predecessors. I spoke Persian and Turkish, and as far as I know I was the only one ever assigned there who spoke both languages.

Q: Well, did you receive any directions or instructions about what to do. I'm talking about other than political. I mean on reporting. Did you find the embassy said, "We want to know what's going on up there"?

METRINKO: Instruction from the embassy and contact with the embassy was minimal. No one in the course of my entire posting - well, how many years there - from September of '77 until February of '79 - I never had a visit from the Political Section. No one cared. The political section did not visit the western part of Iran. I had visits occasionally from other sections of the embassy. USIA, for example, came out quite often because they had professional duties out there. I'll tell you an incident about a phone call I had. I'd been out there for several months. It was early one morning. I was passing through the front hallway of the house. The phone rang. I walked over to pick it up. When the phone would ring at night or on holidays or before we turned the switchboard number over, it would ring in the house, and then it would become part of the switchboard over in the office building. But if I was there alone I would answer the phone. I picked up the phone, and on the other side was someone who introduced himself as the new DCM. And I was struck dumb because in my several months there I had never had a call from the front office of the embassy. So I almost didn't know how to react. But neither Mr. Miklos nor the ambassador ever thought there was a reason to call or contact one of their constituent posts. Never.

Now I had a short brief list from the Political Section of things they wanted me to... You know, the grand reporting plan. Prominent on that was evidence of Turkish nationalism, a couple of other things like that. How do the people in the western provinces feel about this or that? There was nothing significant, and it would all be considered minor reporting today.

Q: I'm probably belaboring the point because it does become very important, obviously. Was there anything, So how's the shah doing out there?

METRINKO: They weren't interested, and "how's the shah doing out there" did not become a subject for reporting until after the rioting in the city in February of '78. Then it became a subject for reporting. Up until then they would not have welcomed, nor did they ask for, nor did they want anything about local feeling toward the shah.

Q: Well, going back a bit, I don't remember where you... We talked about the effects of the "white revolution," or not...

METRINKO: We haven't talked about that.

Q: Okay - well, I mean, you'd been there before. Were you seeing an impact of what the shah was trying to do that was highly touted in the United States?

METRINKO: Yes and no. I can give you two stories about the white revolution from Iranians whom I knew well. One was from an old friend of mine who had been one of the Shah's tutors when the Shah was a young kid. Talking about the white revolution with this guy once, he looked at me and said, "Michael, you don't think that we really lost anything in the white revolution, do you? What happened was that we knew what was going to be happening, that the Shah was going to be confiscating or picking up large estates. In our case, we turned everything over to Imam Reza." This means the religious shrine in Mashad. He said, "We turned it all over to them, and then we rented it back in perpetuity from them for a small fee every year so that when the white revolution came, we owned nothing, lost nothing, kept everything." That was his example. He was a major landowner, too. The White Revolution hit the middle class of landowner and the sort of top rung of the peasant class who had bought land. It hit the village landlords, who maybe had one village or half a village. They lost. Their land was divided up. What you would see - and I saw this over and over... I have lots of pictures of this. What I used to see in the Peace Corps in the villages, were large homes which had been abandoned and had fallen into ruin, because they had been the village landlord's house. And a lot of resentment in that class of people... I can't think of what the right term. "Village landlord," I guess, would be the only thing I could say. That class deeply resented the white revolution. They had lost. And I remember a friend, an Iranian friend who was the president of one of the banks in my Peace Corps site, taking me out once to show me where he had been brought up, and we went into his old home in the village. His father had been the local landlord, and his grandfather. The home that they had had there had been a very large village home, but apparently a quite nice, spread-out villa. It was in a state of total ruin. The roof had collapsed, the windows were all gone. They'd abandoned the home because they no longer had the land to support it, and instead of becoming a landlord himself he had had to get a job in a bank. His father was sitting on the floor of his house in the town. People like that deeply resented the Shah and what he had done because they knew the Shah had not lost. The Shah himself did not lose money during the white revolution. He did not give up what he owned.

Q: It was not only the Shah, but the -

METRINKO: - the upper, upper crust.

Q: The upper class around him.

METRINKO: Iranians knew this. So what he had done was sacrificed a lot of support in the solid middle class at the time, the landowners, in order to pacify the United States and a couple of other Western countries.

Q: Well, when you arrived, prior to the riots and all that, was this... One always hears about, one talks about the Iranians and the bazaaris. Was the merchant class an important factor? They would strike me as being a junction of all sorts of things going through there.

METRINKO: Well, people talk about the bazaris as if they come in a strange color or can be identified because they have bubbles around their heads. It's probably a misnomer. Bazari means someone who is associated with the bazaar, the market. In some cities you had big covered markets - Isfahan, for example, that makes it a very good one. Khorramshahr had a small one. Teheran, or course, had an immense one. But these were the merchants and traders; they weren't necessarily the businessmen. Businessmen, the big entrepreneurs, had offices in office buildings. Now, communications were changing. The bazaars were nexi of old communications routes. That's where the camel trains went. That meant near a bazaar it was impossible to find parking along the narrow, winding roads, a sort of mass, a labyrinth of small alcoves and shops and little houses and little buildings all tied together under tin roofs. A lot of bazaar merchants were very, very wealthy, yes. A lot of people who were not in the bazaar, who were businessmen with offices in regular office buildings, with their fax machines and their telephones and their TVs, were also very wealthy and prominent. They both existed. They were often the same people as well. One brother might have his place in the bazaar, sit on the floor there in his stall and sell carpets, and the other brother might be sitting behind a big Louis Quatorze desk his office building two miles away using a fax and telephone. The one in the bazaar also had a fax and telephone, but it was probably a little bit dusty and behind a bunch of carpets. But they both existed and they were both part of the business scene.

The bazaris were concentrated more and they tended to be more involved in guilds and associations, which gave them discipline and, therefore, power. For example, you would have the rug merchants in one section of the bazaar and copper merchants in another section of the bazaar, people who dealt in towels in another section, people who dealt in wood furniture in another section. Because they were grouped in sections and because they had communication, because they tended to go to the same places to pray and because they could be reached as a group fairly quickly, they had discipline, and therefore the perception of power. Businessmen who were off in secluded offices could be reached by telephone, but there had been a breakdown of that visible type of unity.

Q: Well, now, who were sort of the power brokers in the area where you were? The military? The Shah's governor?

METRINKO: The government administration ran like this. There were in Azerbaijan Province, or in this case in East Azerbaijan Province, there were a fair number of military bases, each of which had a commander. There were a fair number of generals in the area. I knew several of them. In Tabriz there was an army base. There was also an armory in Tabriz. There was an air force base out near the airport. We had an American military attachï¿½, an Army guy, assigned to the military base in the city. We had several Air Force guys assigned to the air force base. There was a governor general appointed by the Shah. There was the equivalent of a county commissioner, farmandar, also appointed. There would be a city mayor, also appointed. There weren't too many elected positions - in fact, I can't think of any offhand. Members of parliament were elected. But there was only one political party, so the political party headquarters also, of course, had a head, also appointed. That was the power structure. Of course, the national police would have a general in charge of the police force there. SAVAK would have someone in charge of the SAVAK office. These were appointed career positions.

The interesting thing about the network of appointed government positions is that they weren't aloud to talk to each other very much. The Shah had a phobia about his generals meeting each other, and if you were assigned as a general to an army base or air force base, etc., you were not allowed to leave the base without the permission of the Shah's office. Now this is strange. This means that if you are a general and you are in charge of the base at, for example, Ajabshir, you couldn't leave it without getting permission directly from Teheran. I had a case once where a general from that particular base called me up, very pleasant, very apologetic, said that his son's school in America and the school required another affidavit of support from the father. The father had this all ready, the proper documentation, but he was supposed to sign it in front of me to get my notarial seal on it. Would I allow him to sign it in his own office and to send it to me with a driver? I said, well, why? Why don't you just drop it off some day when you're in Tabriz? And he said, "I'm not allowed to leave my base unless I get permission from the Shah, and I don't want to call his office up to get permission just for this. It's awkward, and they would have too many questions." So I said sure. I signed it that way. Consular officers are not supposed to do this, but in this case, I knew who he was.

Q: But this must have given the generals a great feeling of lack of trust.

METRINKO: Oh, absolutely. I'll give you another example. The governor general, a civilian, of the West Azerbaijan Province, based in Rezayeh, told me this story. Part of his province, the road through his province that connected all the cities of his province ran very briefly, just for a few kilometers, through another province. It ran through the Kurdish province, and in order to go to one of the cities in his province, he had to go, for a couple of kilometers, into another governor general's area and just continue on the asphalt highway. He did not have permission to do this. He could not leave his province, even if he were doing it in order to get to another part of his province. And he told me that in his time as government general he had never succeeded in getting permission to use that road to get to the last city in his province. Therefore, he had never seen that city. Same reason. The Shah...

Q: What were you getting at this point in your own mind? What were you picking up about the Shah as far as... Was it the Shah? Was it the group around him? Was he a weak man? Was he megalomaniac?

METRINKO: Well, I was picking up that Iran was a house of cards, that there were a great many people, including people high up in the system, who did not like it, did not know what to do about it, but that the whole thing might come tumbling down - certainly that the Shah himself was no longer competent, that he did not have the training or the ability to run such a large country in the autocratic way he wanted to run it. Business people would tell me about having to bribe the Shah's brothers and sisters if you want to get permission for any major development plan. There were a lot of major factories in Tabriz. You were required to turn over a portion of the shares of the company or part of the deal, a slice of that pie, to a member of the Shah's family in order to get permission to get it done. The mayor of the city of Tabriz, brand new mayor, appointed by the Shah, in the early spring of 1978, when there still was not really... I was introduced to him in a military setting. There was a large lunch being hosted by the Iranian military officers of the city. It think it was in honor of the participants in an international weight-lifting championship or something like that. I'd been invited as one of the foreign diplomats, but most of the whole crowd of about 100 people at the lunch were in military uniform, and I was seated at a table with the few civilians. I was there. I think the Turkish consul was there, the Turkish consul being the only other diplomat. And I was seated directly across from the new mayor, who had just arrived and whom I had not yet met. We started to talk, and... Oh, no, I have to pinpoint this more directly - it was at the time that the Shah was going to be visiting the United States. And I don't recall when that was now exactly, but he was coming to visit Carter in the United States. But before the visit. And the new mayor, who did not yet know me, and surrounded at a table with military officials and other officials, looked at me and said, "Well, how are Mr. Carter and Mr. Shah doing together?" He said it like that. And I just looked at him because I thought he was making maybe a mistake in English, and I said, "Well, they seem to be doing quite well, and I understand the Shah's going to be visiting the United States soon." And the mayor looked up and said, "Good, then he'll have a place to escape to when he has to leave Iran." He was the mayor of Iran's number two or three city!

Q: Were you getting any information at this point of the mullahs? I mean, one hears about the tapes of Khomeini and all that. I mean was this a name that was being bandied about?

METRINKO: The first time, I think, that anyone in the 1970s reported the name of Khomeini in open telegram reporting was me. The name was used during the rioting in Tabriz in February of 1978. I could hear crowds screaming Khomeini, long live Khomeini! I had never seen his name in print. I didn't know who it was. I asked. I was told. I reported it in a long memo. In fact, it was an aerogram, I think, on the subject of what happened in Tabriz.

Q: Well, could you talk about that. I think we've come to that point now.

METRINKO: What had happened?

Q: Yes. I mean from your perspective.

METRINKO: I'll talk about it from my perspective then, and I'll tell you a story that I heard from an ayatollah many, many years later about the same incident. What happened was that in February of 1978, as we found out, 40 days after demonstrations and rioting had swept the city of Qom, the religious center, Tabriz started to riot. The rioting was unexpected. Buildings started to burn. Crowds were running in the street. I had a lot of protection around the consulate, but we didn't know why it was happening or what was happening. We just knew there was rioting going on in the city. I had a security guard force, a personal security guard provided by the Iranian police of three Iranian sergeants. I sent them home because they had gotten so tense and worried looking that I didn't want to be responsible to them. And I figured if something was going to happen to the consulate, I'd have a better chance of getting away if I didn't have them getting in my way, so I suggested that they just go back to their own homes, that it was better for them not to be there. They left. The rioting went on for the next two or three days. I was reporting, of course, all the time by phone to the embassy from what I could see. It was not conducive to wandering around the city. You don't go out into riots. And nobody seemed to really know what was happening. But I was just hearing things from my friends. Why are they rioting? Well, it's against the Shah. Why? It was all very unclear then. But the rioting took 70 or 80 buildings. They burned them out. The political party headquarters was attacked, gutted, ransacked, looted. They got into the governor's palace and apparently surprised the governor in his pajamas. He ran out the back door. A large number of banks were burned, and the contents, the paper contents, the files of the banks, the desks, were thrown out into the street so that for several days you could see bank documents sort of blowing around the streets of the city. Why it had happened - ostensibly because they were honoring the anniversary of people who had been killed in Qom 40 days previously. The people who had been killed in Qom were being mourned. The demonstrations in Qom had been kept very quiet. There was nothing in the press about it. No one knew about this. Certainly I don't think the embassy knew about it. If they knew, it was only in the most... But Tabriz was too big to hide. It lasted too long, too many foreigners witnessed it, too many people had photographs, and the newspapers ran pictures of it, ascribing all the problems to hooligans in the city. I wrote a long report on the subject claiming that there were social reasons, economic reasons, and dissatisfaction reasons, mentioning the name of Khomeini, that he was a religious leader whose name the people were using when they were rioting. I talked about the population, the unemployment, other reasons that would lead to rioting like this. The embassy sent my report out, but the Political Section added a line to the bottom of it saying they did not agree with my analysis and that basically this was not portent of anything to come; it was just a sort of one-time deal. I've always treasured that comment by the Political Section of the embassy. I only saw it much later.

Q: You said you talked to a religious man, an ayatollah, many years later.

METRINKO: Well, back in the year, I think, 1986, I was on the Iran-Iraq Desk. I was the deputy director of Northern Gulf affairs, and we were talking to odd ayatollahs who would come to the United States and various other religious figures from Iran. A surprising number of people who portrayed themselves as representatives of Khomeini would come in. In this particular case, a very close associate of Khomeini's came in, Ayatollah Haeri. He was an ayatollah, who came here for medical reasons. I had asked before I pushed the visa through the system if he would be willing to meet with us when he arrived in the States. He agreed. This was a man who had spent 17 years of his life living in the same house as Khomeini. His father had been Khomeini's mentor. Khomeini had studied in the house with this man's father, who was one of the grand, grand ayatollahs. This man himself had become Khomeini's companion. His niece was married to Khomeini's son, Khomeini's son Mustafa. Now, there's a reason for mentioning the name. Khomeini had two sons, Mustafa and Ahmad, Mustafa being the older. Mustafa died unexpectedly. He died very unexpectedly and in such an unusual way that the story immediately spread that he had been assassinated by the secret police, by SAVAK. This sparked rioting. The rioting ended up eventually sparking rioting in Tabriz which then was followed by the 40 day cycle. Many 40 days followed one another, so that soon you had constant rioting and the revolution. When this ayatollah was in Washington, we were having lunch at the Tivoli Restaurant in Rosslyn and we were talking about people I had known during the days of the revolution whom he also knew. I made a reference to one and the unusual way in which he had died, another ayatollah, and he said, "No, no, no, Michael, that's a story just like the story about Mustafa's death." And I said, "What do you mean, the 'story about Mustafa's death'? Mustafa, Khomeini's son, was killed by SAVAK, wasn't he?" And he said, "No, I was in the room when he died. Of course he wasn't killed by SAVAK." He said, "Michael, Mustafa was very fat man," and he stretched his arms out. "He was very, very fat, and when Mustafa ate, he would eat with both hands." And he pantomimed at the lunch table in the Tivoli Restaurant somebody pushing food into their mouth with both hands, and he said, "Mustafa was sitting there, we were eating together, and suddenly he clutched his heart and fell right into the food. He had a heart attack, and he died of gluttony." He said, "We were afraid to tell his father what happened, so we said SAVAK killed him. And then people started to protest, and they started to demonstrate, and suddenly we had a revolution." He said, "Michael, you don't think we planned the revolution, do you?" And was that the reason for it? No. Was it a spark? Yes.

Q: Was the consulate threatened at all during all this?

METRINKO: Oh, yes, sure, very often. During the initial period in February, no. We had enough police guards around, and the army was very unsure of itself, but they were all standing. The revolution had not yet spread to the army. This was brand new. This was the start of it. This was a full year before Khomeini returned, so the army was intact. The army stood guard; other people stood guard. And basically nothing happened to the consulate. During the course of the next year, of course, the consulate was hit, under attack severely once. Other times we'd be hit by demonstrators who sort of walked by or demonstrated in front. But severe attack - once, with one of the small buildings getting burned, too. And then finally in February of '79, the second attack that ended up with my going to prison in Tabriz.

Q: After the February '78 riots and all, streets are finally cleared and all, what were you doing? Going around finding out what happened, why?

METRINKO: That, but also business as usual. It was a very unusual aberration, we thought, initially. I believe that I was right that it was a reflection of many deep causes, economic, political, etc. etc., but as an incident it seemed to be over. It's just that it wasn't. It started happening again, and it happened more and more often in different cities of the country, and Tabriz was especially prone to this. But it did not stop normal life. I mean I had my parents visiting for three months in the year 1978, when shortly after they arrived martial law was imposed on the city. But I had other visitors all through the year. I had an inspection in the spring of 1978, when everything was bright and sunny and the garden was beautiful and all the roses were out. The inspectors had a good time in Tabriz. But at the same time, things were popping up all over the country; it's just that the embassy didn't realize it because it was happening in places where we had no diplomatic presence, but it was happening and starting to happen more and more in towns and cities where we had people that witnessed it.

Q: Well, sort of business as usual... Tell me what you were doing, how things developed.

METRINKO: What was I doing? Well, I was getting to know my area, my consular district. I was traveling up and down the whole length and breadth of it. I had routine consular business every day. I had a very large number of Americans scattered around the consular district. I had a big contingent in the city of Khorramshahr; I had Americans in Rezayeh. I had Americans in Hamadan, Americans all over Tabriz.

Q: What were they doing?

METRINKO: A lot of them were there on contract. I had some American wives married to Iranian husbands. I think I got to know every single couple in my whole district like that.

Q: How were they doing? Because this is not confined... When I was in Saudi Arabia we've had this trouble of Americans marrying foreigners, particularly - well, almost anywhere - and having children, and breaking up with the husband, can't take the children. Were you having any of those problems?

METRINKO: I myself did not see that. What I had were perhaps 20, 30 couples, but in general they appeared quite happy. In general, the women spoke good Persian, the American girls, and they were from a surprisingly educated and well-off class of American girl, the ones that I knew. In fact, I'm still in touch with some of them, some of the couples who are still married. But as an example, we had an American woman doctor in Tabriz married to an Iranian doctor - people like that. It was quite a decent, sort of an impressive group of women. I know all the stories about American girls that go off and marry the oily foreigner and get treated badly and get beaten up and lose their babies, etc. There wasn't very much of that that I saw myself. Iranian law was heavily weighted against women even then, and we did almost nothing in weighing in against these laws. Not only the Shah could do no wrong, but if you were a woman in Iran and married, your husband had full control over your ability to travel. You could not apply for an exit permit or a passport without your husband's permission. If you were married to an Iranian man, you were de facto an Iranian citizen. It was conferred automatically, so the American girl from Oklahoma who married Ali and came to Tabriz, as soon as she entered Iran, she was an Iranian citizen and was subject to the rules about getting written permission from her husband to travel. Women were discriminated against in divorce, certainly, discriminated against in inheritance certainly. The idea of Iranian women at the time - even Iranian women - if there were a divorce did not gain custody of the children. They went to the man's family. If there was a death, if the husband died, the children would also go to the man's family, not to the wife's. But I don't recall any cases that we had where this was an issue.

Q: How about the other American who were on contract? Because one hears about in other places like, was it Isfahan or whatever... Well, the Bell Helicopter mechanics and that sort of thing. Did you have any problems of that nature?

METRINKO: I had Bell Helicopter. There were a few problems. I would say today they were minor, and I don't really recall any. Nothing as exciting as some of the things in Isfahan. I had a fair number of American military personnel, one of whom had his spouse with him, but they were, again, a fairly good group, well tuned into the local society, with Iranian friends, spoke a little bit of Persian, no problem [communicating] at all - just the opposite, pretty responsible and respectable. And that included a network of what we called "team houses," houses that were occupied by American military personnel spread around various towns and cities of the country. We had several of those, but again pretty much settled into local society. Other American presence? Basically that was it. We had people assigned to the refinery, a number of American teachers. In fact, another Foreign Service colleague of mine is someone who started out being a teacher in Tabriz for the Iran-America Society. But no great difficulty with the American community at all. That was a pretty sharp group of people that were there for good reasons.

Q: How did things develop, then?

METRINKO: In what sense?

Q: Well, I mean you were going to have a revolution and you were going to end up in jail in a while, and I mean how did things -

METRINKO: Why did it go from the rosy rose garden to -

Q: Yes.

METRINKO: I keep asking myself. I was promised a... The demonstrations spread. There was extreme dissatisfaction with the Shah. People thought initially that Carter was opposed to the Shah. People in Iran who disliked the Shah saw this as an opportunity. I think if you were a revolutionary it was basically serendipity. The Shah was losing it. He was feeling uneasy because he knew he had cancer - maybe. His family's ability to be corrupt had reached a saturation point. His brothers and sisters were scraping every dollar they could get out of everybody. The channels of communication were improving, which meant that, I think, a lot of people were getting information that they hadn't had access to. And there must be a certain point at which, when you've sent a lot of your country's students overseas, point of return at which what they've learned there has started to have a real effect on them and on their peers back in Iran. Enough thousands of students have left Iran and had returned with very different feelings about the Shah's government, perhaps, than when they had left Iran, that it was all reaching a bubbling point. And you had this very charismatic, very strong religious figure in Iraq, the Ayatollah Khomeini, who was there to pick up the reins. So it was all coming together.

Q: Well, were you seeing a change?

METRINKO: Oh, sure, yes. More and more open comments by people, a lot of open comments. People starting to talk openly about their dissatisfaction. If the Shah would change, or if he would allow a constitution, if he would allow a free parliament, if he would allow this or that. And then, slowly, people were talking about life without a Shah, which had been unthinkable for a long time, and scraping up old grievances.

Q: Was there any thought of, talking about life without a Shah, what would replace it?

METRINKO: No one that I remember talked about replacing the Shah with a theocracy. But then again, I wasn't involved in religious circles. I was involved in secular circles and people who were religious even, the ones I knew, would never have thought of replacing the Shah with a religious Shah, a religious autocrat. It just wasn't part of their thinking - as it was not part of the thinking of many of the other religious leaders in Iran.

Q: Well, then, sort of step by step, when do we sort of come to the next development?

METRINKO: Developments, well, you had this pervasive spreading of anti-Shah discontent, anti-government discontent, even among members of the government. That was happening. As more and more people started to speak, others found their courage to speak or to think about alternative forms of government. That was happening. There had been a very big breakdown of Iranian society, Iranian culture, that had taken place in the earlier '70s because of the oil money. An awful lot of people had become rootless. They no longer had connections with the villages or the small towns because they had left to find jobs in the bigger cities. If you were on the streets of Teheran, if you walked down the streets, you could see hundreds and hundreds of people who were milling aimlessly around the streets. They had nothing to do. They were probably job hunting, but in the meantime they were walking, walking slowly, just sort of staring around them. A lot of these were young guys who'd go out into the streets like that. But you had the fuel to immediately set off a demonstration in any city on any city street. It was always there, sort of like people smoking around gasoline tanks. Eventually it's going to catch. These guys who were walking around, they were the gasoline. All you needed was a spark.

Q: What?

METRINKO: They were there, that was the fuel. And once you'd start a little wildfire, it's very hard to control.

At the same time, there were other interesting things happening. One of the old SAVAK leaders, the guy who was in charge of the United States, Rafi-Zadeh, but who was involved in SAVAK during this period, in his book, wrote about how SAVAK itself would create incidents during this period and spark demonstrations so that they could get the Shah to give them more power and more money. And he talked about SAVAK people going out and smashing car windows and starting little fires so that the Shah would think he really needed SAVAK. That was happening. It wasn't all just unplanned on the streets. There were people who planned demonstrations.

I talked to - this is going to sound... It's good street tactics. After the revolution - the revolution's still going on, but after Khomeini came in and we were starting to cozy up to the new revolutionary government - I had a lot of talks with people who had fought on the streets, fought in the revolution as members of various groups. I remember one long conversation one night in Teheran with a guy who had been part of a leftist sort of guerilla group. What his group would do when they wanted to set off an incident, they would infiltrate the soldiers. I mean, Iranians all served in the military, so Iranians knew how to be a soldier. It was easy to buy uniforms. You could go to a tailor and have one made. You could buy them. A lot of Iranians had their uniforms tailored for themselves rather than take the stock issue, so this was not a problem. And all you had to do was shave your head, put on a uniform that you got from the tailor, and you were a soldier again. Well, these guys from this particular group would infiltrate groups of soldiers, especially during periods of confrontation with crowds, and they would set off the first spark. They would shoot. So the crowd would respond, and then the soldiers would respond against the crowd. But a lot of that was set off by revolutionary infiltrators.

Q: How about in Tabriz? What was happening in Tabriz?

METRINKO: More and more chaos in the streets, factory closings, strikes, universities and schools are being closed. And a whole series of 40 day events followed one on the other but more than every 40 days, where there would be a little flare-up, something would get burned, something would get smashed, a car would be overturned, tires would be burned in the streets, marital law would come in.

Q: Well, now, you're a young man speaking Farsi and Turkish, and I would think you would have had a bunch of other young men, young women, who would - you know, you're a foreigner, but you can talk to us, so you would have a group.

METRINKO: Yes, I was out every night. Or they were over at my house every night.

Q: Yes, it's natural. They want to see what you're doing, and they exchange things. I would think you would be sort of a center, a beehive of activity, at least -

METRINKO: I think I was either out or had people over like that to my house every single night of the next year and a half.

Q: Well, what were you getting from that?

METRINKO: Just as I've said, increasing anti-Shah sentiment, including from people who had every reason to support the Shah's government, but they wanted something else. They wanted the Shah out of their lives, or they wanted him castrated so that he couldn't affect them any more. They were tired of all the hand-clapping, tired of all the "long live the Shah-" (end of tape)

What I did in order to meet a lot of younger people, I started meeting them at sports activities, I started meeting them because they came to the consulate, or I'd meet one who would introduce me to others; but what I also did, the consulate had a huge swimming pool, an Olympic-size swimming pool, dressing room, bathrooms, etc. Now my predecessors had always used it either for themselves or they had used it for the foreign community. There was a small British community especially that used to love coming over to the consulate and using the pool and the tennis courts. I thought this was a bit silly. I saw no reason at all to run the American consulate for the benefit of the British expatriate community. So what I did was to get in touch with two swimming coaches from the local high schools, and I turned over the whole section of the consulate recreation facilities, the swimming pool, the wading pool for children, the tennis court, which was separate from the house - I turned that over to these guys and opened it up to people in the community. We passed out word in the immediate geographic area of the consulate that anyone who wanted to use the pool, the tennis court, could do so on certain days of the week. I think it was on four days of the week. And we had family days and we had bachelor days because Iranian families, married women, etc., young women could not mix with Iranian bachelors. So I had it set up differently, and basically turned it over to the coaches to run, with a lot of help, of course, from the FSN staff, who were aghast that I had done this. And the British community was not only aghast but desolated and incensed that I had done this. But because of this I had a constant stream of young, old, every type of Iranian coming into the consulate grounds and using the recreational facilities. I figured I couldn't use the pool at all - I was always in the office - so why have it filled with all those cubic tons of water. It worked out well. It was used for a long summer, a very, very long summer, a beautiful summer, and 50 or 60 young kids from the area, according to the coaches, learned how to swim in that period.

Q: Well, we're going to stop in a minute, but I just thought I'd fill in this. What would you reply - now here you are, you're the American representative in this area, people are getting more and more... as more and more discontent, our official policy was strong support of the Shah and all, and the Shah and the embassy were far away - what were you saying?

METRINKO: And I was getting precious little guidance. Basically, I was trying to play it cool. I would sit and listen. If they were very, very close friends - and this means if they were friends I had had from Peace Corps days, because my Peace Corps site had been in that district, too, and they were people I really liked and trusted - then I would tell them how I felt about the Shah. But if I gave American policy it was support for the government and people of Iran. It got to be a bit embarrassing towards the middle of the year, but that was the American policy.

Q: Well, Mike, we'll stop at this point, and just to put where we are, you've taken us up to really through well certainly through almost through '78, would you say? Or when did Khomeini come back?

METRINKO: Khomeini came back in February of 1979. We want to talk about a couple of things that went before then.

Q: Okay, would you put down what you want to talk about?

METRINKO: I want to talk about Jaleh Square, and the impact that had in Tabriz. I want to talk about the Cinema Rex fire in Abadan and the impact that had in Tabriz, what they meant for the revolution, and some of the strange circumstances that surrounded both incidents. And then I want to talk about the report that I had of mass defection at the Tabriz Air Force Base and how the embassy responded when I passed on the news.

Q: All right. Well, we'll do that, then, and continue this. Great.

***

Today is the 23rd of June, 2000. Mike, we're going to talk a little about some of the things that you were involved in, reporting, observing on, in Iran really before Khomeini came back. So that was the air force defection, the Cinema Rex, and there was a demonstration in a square, I think.

METRINKO: The first is an easy one, Jaleh Square. Jaleh Square is a large public square in Teheran. There was a confrontation there in 1978, and during the confrontation a large number of people were killed by soldiers. Soldiers opened fire, shot into the crowd, and I've heard all sorts of varying estimates. I don't know the number now, but the estimates were significant. Because of what happened at Jaleh Square, the country shifted very perceptibly against the Shah, against the Shah's army, and towards Khomeini. Among the rumors that started immediately because of Jaleh Square, was one that the Shah had brought in Israeli soldiers and they had done the actual shooting. This rumor spread through the country, and this kind of marked a real watershed in the way people looked at the Shah. What they would say was, he couldn't get Iranian soldiers to shoot Iranians, so he brought in soldiers from Israel. A couple of weeks, maybe a month later, in Tabriz, I had a new guard detachment assigned to protect the perimeter of the consulate. And these guys used to come and sit in the house, and we'd play cards etc. They'd use the washing machine, the dryer, and basically they were always around. I've noted that the consulate was a large area. They had to patrol the whole inside, outside perimeter while they were staying in the guest house at the consulate. Well, I was sitting playing cards one night, and I noticed that two of them sitting there, there were patches on their fatigues that had been taken off. I could see where there had been something on their shoulders, and it had been removed. And just out of curiosity, I said, "What's missing from your uniforms? What did you remove?" And one of them laughed, and he said, "Oh, we had a lot of trouble with this. We had a custom in the army where each platoon would adopt the colors of a foreign country and use it as a patch on their uniforms." For example, there were soldiers whose platoons used the American flag or the Norwegian flag or the Italian Flag, and he said, "Our platoon had the Israeli flag, and we were assigned to Jaleh Square. We weren't allowed to talk to people, and when the shooting started and we got involved in the shooting, everyone thought we were Israelis because they could see the symbols on our uniforms. So afterwards, when we got out of that trouble and we were reassigned to this province, to Azerbaijan Province, our commander told us to remove those colors from our uniforms." But that was the reason that that rumor started, and just the fact that somebody was wearing the flag of another country or a symbol of another country proved important in switching public opinion against the Shah.

Q: Oh, boy!

METRINKO: Simple things. That was one. Cinema Rex. The Rex Cinema was a movie theater in the town of Abadan.

Q: This is a big refinery town.

METRINKO: It's a big refinery town in Khuzestan Province, a southern Province. Khuzestan Province had been rather uninvolved in the revolution. It had been quite quiet there, possible because people were well employed, there was lots of work, the economies were going full-tilt, it was an Arab ethnic province, not particularly Persian, more Arab. So even the religious leaders there were not as tied to Qom and other places and to Khomeini as they might have been. It was also a rather secular city because of all the oil workers who were there. One evening, the Rex Cinema caught fire when there was a movie going on. When people tried to get out, they discovered the doors had been locked on the outside. Everyone in the theater burned to death. A couple of hundred people died. There was an immediate outcry that the fire had been set by the Shah's secret police. Now using logic, there was no reason for them to have done so, but hysteria, the story went all around the country that the Shah's SAVAK had done this. They were responsible for the death of all these people, and various explanations were given - that there was an anti-Shah rally going on, the film being shown was anti-Shah, etc., etc. But the fact was that a great number of people burned to death, and had been locked inside the theater. Now, immediately, of course, the theater manager said that the reason the doors had been locked on the outside was to prevent people from sneaking in and seeing the movie for free, but they running from the lynch mobs and they didn't have too much time to talk. When Khomeini came back, he sent down, of course, a very pro-revolutionary governor general to Khuzestan Province, and a good friend of mine became the new mayor of Abadan. He went down with the general. His first priority, he was told by the new governor general of the province, was to completely investigate what had happened in the Cinema Rex fire. His conclusion when he completed the study was that the fire had been set by revolutionaries, members of the clergy, or people acting under the direction of members of the clergy as an attempt to stir people up against the Shah. When he presented the study to the revolutionary governor general, he was told to keep the report sealed, never to refer to it again, and to forget that it had been done - period. But that too, that particular fire, really caused a lot of bloodshed. And I guess people understand now that it had probably been set by the revolutionaries themselves.

Q: Were they setting it all as a protest against secular things like movies?

METRINKO: Who knows? Against the idea of the movie - they were trying to burn down cinemas all over the country. The fact that there were a couple of hundred people locked inside and that they turned out to be the brothers, cousins, uncles of the people who were setting the fire, that was something else again. It was unfortunate.

The last incident, the report of a defection at the air force base in late 1978. A friend of mine who was an Iranian assigned to the office of the commander of the air force base in Tabriz called me up one day on a Friday and he said he had to see me immediately. He had something he wanted to tell me. I invited him over to the house, and he came over. He was in the inner-circle staff of the base commander, and he told me that something very unusual had happened - it was the local Sabbath, so [part of] the base had been closed for normal business - and that a large number of pilots had walked in, stood in line, and one by one handed in their resignations, saying they could no longer support the present government. He said the base commander had received all these resignations and asked the pilots to wait. He had then called up a friend of his who was the base commander at Shiraz, where the same thing was occurring. Pilots were handing in their resignations saying they couldn't support the Shah's regime anymore. And my friend told me that these two generals had decided to go along with the pilots. The commander in Shiraz and the commander in Tabriz asked the pilots to withdraw the resignations and just hold tight until they could take over the base, until they could really switch, when it became critical at the time. The pilots had agreed. They had withdrawn their resignations, and the whole thing was being kept very, very quiet.

Well, I had to report this to the embassy. There was only one way I could do it. There was an old way of communicating information called one-time pads. I don't know if you-

Q: Oh, yes.

METRINKO: I used a one-time pad and sent a message, called it in by phone. I had never done one of these before, so it took me a long time to write it. The person on the other end who had to decipher it had never deciphered one before, and it took him an equally long time to decipher it. But they got the message. He called up the DCM and took the message to the DCM's house. The DCM was playing cards with a group of other people. They contacted the ambassador. The ambassador read the message and turned to the U.S. military commander there and asked him if he could get corroboration of the message. They called the base at Tabriz. The one who answered the phone was the American bartender at the base bar, and the base bar - this was the bar in the U.S. Air Force team house at the base, where they ran an open bar, even in the middle of the revolution, in the middle of all the anti-American uproar that was going on in the country, they had an open bar to serve alcohol at the American tea house on the base, a base which, of course, had just seen a massive resignation of people opposed to the government. The Air Force guy told me this story later. General Gast said, "Sergeant, the American consul in Tabriz just sent a message in to the embassy here saying there's been a mass resignation of air force personnel. Do you know anything about this?" The guy said, "No, Sir, I haven't seen anything like that, Sir." He turned to the guys in the bar and said, "Does anybody here know anything about a lot of pilots resigning today?" And the people at the bar, of course, all said, "Man, what are you talking about?" Of course, the pilots who had resigned that day were highly unlikely to be sitting at a bar drinking alcohol. So he went back to the phone and said, "No, general, nothing at all like that here." The general went back to the ambassador and said, "My people in Tabriz totally deny that any such thing happened." And I got summoned to Teheran a couple of days later by the ambassador. I assumed he wanted to discuss the message and what to do about it. Instead, I was threatened with being thrown out of the country if I ever started a rumor like that again - period. I went back to Tabriz.

Q: The ambassador at that time was -

METRINKO: - Sullivan. And I was accused of starting rumors, being anti-Pahlavi government etc., and reporting lies, and of being unprofessional. Of course, about a month and a half later, when the commander of the air force base arrested the army commander and a couple of other major military figures in Tabriz and sent them off to die in Teheran, and when that air force commander became the first Minister of Defense under Khomeini, people chose not to remember that I had already written a month and a half ago that he had turned coat. I later asked, by the way, because I met other officers who had taken part in that, who had been involved in Tabriz, and I asked them what had happened that day (this was way after Khomeini came back and the government had changed), and I was told that everything I had reported was absolutely accurate, and they couldn't understand how I had known about it because it was being kept secret.

Q: Did you feel there that our army people in Tabriz, the ones that you knew, were on good enough terms to... Were there people who might have known about this? Or were they pretty well isolated?

METRINKO: I would think they were pretty well isolated. To the best of my knowledge, not one of them spoke Persian or Turkish, and so they could only communicate in English. Some of them were pretty good guys. I'm not saying that they weren't - especially the Army attachï¿½ was a great guy, and pretty much clued in - but they were not supposed to do reporting and they were not trained reporting officers. They were there for their technical skills, not as political reporters. And they really did not have a great sense of what was happening in the country.

Q: There was a politico-military officer, wasn't there, at the embassy?

METRINKO: In Teheran? I've no idea. In the entire time that I was in Tabriz, for the whole two years, the whole period leading up to the revolution, no one from the... The DCM came once or twice to Tabriz, but no member of the Political Section ever came to Tabriz. No member of the Pol-Mil Section every came to Tabriz. No member of the Economic Section ever came to Tabriz. Or to western Iran as far as I know.

Q: Why not?

METRINKO: They weren't very good officers, and they didn't speak Persian, and they didn't like to travel. And they thought that everything was happening in the capital in Teheran or at the Imperial Tennis Club. It's quite simple. How's that for being harsh? It's, I still think, true.

Q: Shall we move to Khomeini coming in, or is there anything else we should talk about? Was Khomeini a name? We may be repeating ourselves a little bit. I heard later that this sort of thing was really part of the revolution. I was waving an audiocassette, I heard that tapes were sent of Khomeini's sermons and all that. What are we talking about? Early '79?

METRINKO: Khomeini returned to Iran in February of 1979. The revolution really started approximately a year before that.

Q: Were Khomeini's words out there by this time?

METRINKO: In a report that I wrote in February of 1978, I referred to Khomeini and said that was the name that people on the streets were chanting - "Khomeini return" and "Long live Khomeini." And so his name was very well known. Even I had heard it. Very well known at least a year before that to the public. And I'd say to just everybody in the public, whether pro or con.

Q: Well, what happened when he came back February of '79? What was the reaction in Tabriz?

METRINKO: It's a bit complicated. First, when he returned, the armed forces did an official surrender of all their powers to the new revolutionary government and to Khomeini.

Q: When did the Shah leave? Had the Shah left some time -

METRINKO: Sure, the Shah left several weeks before that.

Q: Let's talk about the Shah leaving. How did this play out in Tabriz?

METRINKO: When the Shah left, there was a fair amount of euphoria expressed by the people on the street. When we say the people of Tabriz, Tabriz is a city of a million people. There was a public reaction in the streets by the pro-revolutionaries. What people felt in their hearts, of course, is impossible to know. I think a lot of people were still afraid of this sort of unrest and the loss of power, loss of security. Tabriz had undergone an occupation by anti-Shah forces following World War II. Right after World War II, when the Soviets were still refusing to leave Iran, Tabriz had been taken over by a Turkish nationalist movement, and the Shah's army had had to recapture Tabriz. It took quite a while, too. It wasn't a one-day or one-month thing. A lot had happened in the city during that takeover, and a lot of the people did not want to repeat it. A lot of people had been executed, and a lot of people had been killed. There had been a certain amount of destruction. So older people, anyone who remembered World War II, was sort of unwilling to go through that again. They may have felt very queasy about the change in government. Younger people, pro-Khomeini kids, pretty much of a generational split, pro- and anti-Khomeini. Older ones tended to not approve.

Q: How about the younger ones who weren't very religious?

METRINKO: It didn't matter if you were religious or not. If you were young, then you were a revolutionary. I can't think of anyone who was young and not revolutionary. It just went without saying. It was part of the mystique of the man. And he had appeared to be a man for all seasons and all political thoughts. He had not said he was coming back as a religious leader and as ruler of Iran. He was coming back to retreat to Qom and to give spiritual advice to people. He wasn't coming back to be a government. He did, in fact, return and take over the government, but no one could know that. Even his followers may not have realized he was going to take over. It took him many, many months to consolidate his political power, and that started to turn many younger people off, Mujaheddin, Fedayeen, other groups like that. But in the beginning, when he was still being brought back, and when he was just arriving in Teheran or Iran, he was not... all the younger people were for him.

Q: What happened in Tabriz when the Shah left and Khomeini came in?

METRINKO: The Shah left, and there were small parades and demonstrations on the street, lots of people going around and shooting guns up in the air saying, you know, "Long live Khomeini!" "Death to the Shah!" - that sort of thing. And lots of people passed by the consulate during that. My own guards at the time were Kurdish who were very upset and angry. But it passed.

Q: They were upset and angry at the -

METRINKO: They were very pro-Shah, personally pro-Shah. And they couldn't understand why he had left. In fact, they had a confrontation at the gate with a group of demonstrators who were there to say "Death to the Shah." They had a confrontation at the gate and were about to open fire. I stopped it.

Q: Well, were you getting anything from the embassy as this developed?

METRINKO: Oh, there was nothing. The embassy was caught up in its own problems. I had been given a choice. Long since, I had been told by our DCM that I could leave there whenever I wanted, and that I should head for the Turkish border and not come back to Teheran. I had told him that I would stay in Tabriz until I could get my prisoners out of the Tabriz prison. And he understood that. I just felt responsible for these American prisoners.

Q: How many were there then?

METRINKO: I had four Americans, two West Germans, an Austrian, and an Australian.

Q: These were business people?

METRINKO: They were students, basically, from Europe who had smuggled cars into Iran in order to sell the cars to a car gang there. And it was easier for foreign students with foreign passports to bring them in than for Iranian students. So they used foreign students to bring in the cars. And they were in prison for close to a year at the time, getting on to a year.

Q: What were you doing for the prisoners?

METRINKO: What was I doing for the prisoners? I'm not sure if we talked about the prisoners before or not, why they were in prison and the fact that it was the police that were actually doing the car smuggling.

Q: No, I don't think so. Why don't we talk about it?

METRINKO: What happened was on one day in the spring of 1978, I had the inspectors arrive in Tabriz to do the inspection of the consulate. My mother and father had just arrived on a visit the day before. My cousin and her fiancï¿½ were arriving that day, the same day as the inspectors, and I also had house guests from the embassy. The whole group got together. We were sitting in the living room of the consulate having lunch, and I had a phone call from the police saying they had just arrested two Americans. I went down with the... You know, one of the inspectors wanted to accompany me. We went down to the police station, and indeed, there were two American boys who had been arrested. They had been picked up because their passports looked strange. We looked at the passports, and it was quite clear that something had been scraped or deleted from the passport. And I started to talk, and they immediately started talking about the whole story, how they had answered an ad in the paper in West Germany, and had agreed to drive cars in a convoy back to Iran. They were paid, I think, $200 apiece plus their road expenses, and they were going to be given tickets to leave Iran at the end of their trip there. They got to Iran; they turned over their passports and the German cars they had brought in to a dealer at the Teheran airport, and then instead of getting on a plane and leaving quickly, they decided to cash in the tickets and they were going to go back slowly by train. Well, unfortunately for them, the customs people at the border of Iran and Turkey weren't clued in to this little gambit and had stopped them when they were doing a customs check because the passports looked funny and sent them back to be questioned by the police authorities in Tabriz, the nearest big city. And they ended up in my lap. And it was clear what was happening. They had brought in cars, smuggled them in. Even though they would not have called it smuggling, every else did, including their lawyers. I went back, got rid of the inspectors the next day - that was fine - and sent the letter, actually, the draft of an article, to the Stars and Stripes newspaper in Germany suggesting they run it to stop other Americans from getting involved in this scam. I was, of course, in touch with the embassy. The Stars and Stripes ran the article, said it was a warning from the American consul. It did not stop a couple of other Americans from getting involved and getting arrested the same way. And the other Europeans and the Australian I mentioned. They were in jail, unfortunately, during the very time that the revolution was brewing. And there wasn't enough interest in the prosecutors to really investigate this crime. Also, things were starting to collapse, and bits and chunks of the justice system were falling down, falling apart. It was like pieces of an old building. There were so many people being arrested in the demonstrations that the fact that there were a couple of foreigners, a couple of Americans, in prison meant nothing. There were massive political problems going on in the country, and also, as I found out later in the year from my police officer friends in Teheran, the real reason the police weren't investigating this was that it was the police that were behind the crime.

Q: These would have been the Shah's police.

METRINKO: The Shah's police. It was a great way to make money. And my friend, who was not involved, knew some of the people who were. It was like an open secret in the police force. What was happening was that if you bought a foreign car in Iran, the customs and duties levied on the car were extremely high. You'd pay 100 or 200 per cent more than the value of the car. So if you bought a Mercedes-Benz that cost $15,000 in Germany at the time, then you would pay at least that amount. Thus, a $10,000 or $15,000European car came to $20,000 or $30,000 or even more in Iran. This made cars extraordinarily prohibitive, but Iranians, who were status-conscious, wanted foreign cars. The police in the traffic division had access, of course, to records about which cars had entered the country and had customs duties paid on them. They also had access to the records which showed which cars had been destroyed in automobile accidents. Now, they put two and two together fairly quickly and realized that once a car was destroyed, it was wiped off the books. Customs was no longer due on that car, since the customs had already been paid. So they got lists together of high-end cars which had been destroyed but which the customs duties had been paid on by the owners, and they started ordering similar cars - make, model, year - from Germany. For example, white Mercedes-Benz from 1974, four-door sedan, Mercedes-Benz 2000 - whatever. They would order these cars from car dealers in Germany, had them brought in. The had front men, of course, who would take the cars from the students who brought them in. If a foreigner used his passport to get a car in, the fact that he had the car would be stamped on his passport and then he was given a certain number of days or weeks to take it out of the country or to pay customs on it. Now they were bringing these cars in as tourists so they wouldn't have to pay customs. They would turn them over in the airport parking lot to a front man, who would also take their passports and with varying degrees of skill, remove the marks in the passport which indicated the person had a car. You could do this skillfully, or you could botch the job. By the time my four Americans and the four Europeans were arriving, Australian and three Europeans, the person who was cleaning the passports for the gang was botching the job, just sort of scraping things out of the passport and erasing it, not doing a skillful job at all. So the eight people got picked up. The police, on the other hand, weren't eager to investigate the ring because the ring was them. Therefore, these guys were going to sit in prison, uninvestigated, for the rest of their lives, and the police...

Well, the revolution was also occurring. I was visiting them regularly, sending my FSNs in to visit them, providing them letters, this that and the other thing. One of them had a relative who was in the House of Representatives, who was a congressman from Texas. One of them had a father who was an Army colonel in Germany. The Army colonel's response, by the way, when I informed him that his son had been arrested, was, "I showed my son the article you had written that was in the Stars and Stripes, and he told me he was going to Iran to take a car there and he told me not to worry about it - everything was taken care of. Let him learn his lesson."

Q: Sometimes in a fluid situation, foreigners... the consuls' best ploy is that after everything has died down is to say, "Let's get these guys out of there. They're a pain in the neck for you, a pain in the neck for me. Why don't we just let them drift away?"

METRINKO: I tried that.

Q: When I was in Saigon, I was letting people... I mean, I worked with the prison authorities, they would send them to me, I would send them on ships to work their way to the United States and tell them to be sure to show up when the South Vietnamese authorities would call them for their trial.

METRINKO: I got one of them out like that. He was up in the prison in Baku, and that worked. He got out on bail and was told to show up again for trial. He never returned. The others were a problem. The jail in Baku, no one ever paid attention to it, nobody even knew it was up there. It was a small town. One could deal with the authorities there. The prison in Tabriz was a different situation. It was very closely watched. It was filled with political prisoners at this point. Everybody was looking at it and observing everything in it. The prison authorities could not have released Americans and Europeans without a hell of a lot of trouble ensuing for them. And also, the justice system, like I said, was disintegrating around us. I realized nothing was going to get them out when I went in to prison one day and... They were all, by the way, assigned to the hospital part. I had gotten them into the hospital wing of the prison instead of the main area. It was far more comfortable. But when they told me that an old man had said to say hello to me, that he knew me and was in prison with them in the hospital wing, and I said what's his name, they told me the name, and I realized it was the uncle of the empress of Iran who was sitting in prison, and the Shah was still in Teheran! When the Shah's wife's uncle is in prison, you know things are really going bad for the authorities.

Q: By the way, were you looking after the other Europeans?

METRINKO: Oh, sure. I had contacted their embassies immediately, had told them what was happening. And sometimes the Australian would come in or the Austrian consul, but basically I was looking after them too. I would go and visit them and I'd call up the Austrian, I'd call up their embassies and tell them what was happening. As the revolution got very hot and heavy, the prisoners got themselves into a real quandary. Their rooms in the hospital wing were being used by the Iranian prisoners as a place to store weapons. Yeah. And I knew this, and all I could tell them was, "Don't tell the authorities. If you get caught by the authorities, say you had no idea what was happening, that you didn't know the stuff was there. They won't do anything much to you all," and I said, "If I turn this information over to the authorities, everybody in the prison will know it was you who told me, and you'll get killed by the prisoners. Just play it cool, live with it, there's nothing you can do about it, and this government is dead anyway, it's going." I also by this point - this is January of '79, roughly - I knew the prison was going to be broken into. My revolutionary friends told me they had plans to break into the prison. I had done everything I could to ensure the safety of the Americans in the prison. I knew that in times of revolution and prison breaks you can often get your Americans out. It happened in Lebanon. It happened in other places. So I went to the prison on what turned to be one of my last visits and said, "Look, guys." I gave them all small maps to my house that I had done. Each one had his own map. I just said, "I will stay in Tabriz until you get out of prison. Once you get out, don't join in the fighting, just get out the door as fast as you can and get to my place, and then we'll get you all out of Iran." Well, within a short amount of time, the prison indeed was broken into. Four of them showed up at my house that day. In their prison uniforms, uniforms that said "Tabriz Prison." And the other four showed up the next day, and I signed a receipt for them. They were delivered by one of the local mullahs, who had found them wandering in the streets and had kept them for one night and then arranged to deliver them to me. Unfortunately, by that point it was impossible to leave the city of Tabriz, because when the prison had been broken into, the city had gone totally crazy. The armory had also gotten broken into. Everybody was running in different directions. City officials were getting arrested. There was absolutely no law and order. So we could not get on the highway in an official car with diplomatic plates and try and get to the Turkish border. They simply stayed there with me in Tabriz.

Q: To finish off that part, how did that play out?

METRINKO: How did that play out? I had guards for couple of days from one of the local mullahs, and then it got really bad because there was so much gunfire going over the city. The compound adjoining the consulate compound was the property of a family associated with SAVAK, the secret police. They were holed up in that compound, a number of them, and they had a running gun battle going with members of the revolutionary forces. So we had running gun battles going over the compound for that day or two. We just basically kept our heads low, stayed inside the house. We were stuck in the basement during this period. There was fighting going on all around the city. The army had dissolved. The air force, or course, had gone over to the side of the revolution, really over to the side of the revolution, and so they arrested everyone else in uniform. People were being arrested all throughout the city. Phone service was spotty. I could not get through to the embassy. This is the time when the embassy had been taken also, February 14th. And the only people I was in contact with - I had a radio that allowed me to get in contact with the U.S. armed forces net in Kuwait. I could talk to a military attachï¿½ in Kuwait. He was the only person I was really in touch with for about two days or so. I knew that I was supposed to leave and get up towards the border; I just couldn't do it. There was no physical way to do it. And I think it was either February 14th or 15th, the consulate was attacked by a group of guys in air force uniforms. They used their G-3s, a sort of Uzi-type automatic, on all the windows in the consulate, so all the windows went down. They arrested me and the eight former prisoners and took us off to a new revolutionary prison.

Q: So what happened then?

METRINKO: In the revolutionary prison we were put into a large common room with a fair number of Iranian former officials. In fact, one of them I had known. He'd been a contact of mine. He was a police official. And they were running kangaroo court trials, trying people, and finding them guilty, and hanging them outside the door. They would come in, call someone to trial, and hang him outside. It was rather interesting.

What I had done, just as the windows came crashing down, I had been in the office building, and I had seen these people jumping over the walls. As soon as they jumped over the wall, I made a dash for a phone, got down behind the desk since bullets were going over, dialed the phone and got the mother of a friend of mine. This was probably the first time in the history of the phone system of Tabriz that dialing once actually connected with something. I got this woman on the phone, told her the consulate was under attack and to tell her son and her son-in-law. I put the phone down, and the military guys got in, the new revolutionary guys, got in at that point and arrested me and took me off to prison with the other Americans and other Iranian prisoners. We were in that room and watched people being hauled off for trial and hanging for pretty much a day. Then my friends showed up and got us out. My friends had gotten to the prison even before I had got there. They had searched it and not found us. They had gone on searching because they knew what was happening. They were doing the same thing to other people themselves. So they had a very good idea what of was happening to me. They had then done a search of the hospitals, a search of all the other holding areas, detention centers - and there were lots of them. People were being hauled off and arrested all over the place. They had gone to the city morgue. They had looked at the bodies. And then they tried it a second time around, and the second time around, towards the end of the day, they found us at the first prison and had a big argument with, of course, the new prison authorities. These were all guys who knew each other. They had all been in these street gangs during the fighting. It didn't mean they liked each other, but they all knew each other and they all had their own revolutionary credentials. And my friend got permission for me to leave. I refused to leave without the other eight, so eventually he got us all and escorted us out. He took us first to his family home and then back to the consulate, which he had been assured was in safe hands and under protection. And I chose to go back to the consulate as well.

Well, unfortunately, we were delivered to the consulate, they left, and the safe hands rapidly became unsafe hands again. When they left the Air Force showed up once more and basically put us under house arrest. We were under house arrest there for about a day, basically kept in chairs in the living room, not allowed to talk to each other, not allowed to move. The guards who were holding us did not know that I spoke Turkish. They thought I might speak Farsi, but I was communicating only in English because I didn't want them to know I could speak their languages. And a couple of them started to talk in Turkish about how they would have to kill us but they would wait until all these various inspection teams- (end of tape)

I held that piece of information to myself. I didn't want to tell my other prisoners because they were in a state, at this point, of jars of pudding, or at least little bags of pudding. And by chance, someone who was obviously of officer rank came in to do a walk-through quick inspection. As soon as he walked in, I just took a chance. I stood up, said I wanted to show him something in the back room, and before any of the other guards could say anything, I took him to a back room and told him very quickly what was happening. I had to trust somebody. And he looked at me and said, "Make a phone call." First he said, "Wait, I can't do anything right now." He said, "Just play it cool for a little while; I'll be back very shortly." And he took me back, put me in a seat, and he turned to the guards and he said, "I have to come back because he has to show me something about the communications system here." And he came back about 15 minutes later, took me into a room where there was a telephone, and said, "Call your embassy." I called the embassy. The embassy I also got in touch with very quickly, again, surprisingly, because communications had been so bad before. I got the ambassador's staff aide on the phone because the embassy was in the middle of a massive evacuation at the time, told him very quickly what was happening, that we were in trouble and needed help from the central government, and they got somebody from the embassy to the prime minister immediately. In the meantime, the officer who had allowed me to use the phone, took me back again and had told me, "I can't do anything. We have to change the guard force. I have to get guards that we can trust. It may take a little while. I can't do anything until then because if I try to take you out now, they'll kill me." So he went and got in touch with a university professor who was one of the revolutionary leaders. They came in and changed the guard force, just calmly, with guards that they knew. Things got a bit more relaxed, and then I'd say that same day we got the news that the plane was on its way, that the new prime minister's office was sending a plane to pick us up, and they did send in a cargo plane for us.

Q: Where did they take you?

METRINKO: Back to Teheran. It's quite funny, by the way, the professor who came in and saved us, when I did the report on this I used the first part of his name - you know, "Professor So-and-so," Professor Rajai - and that was how I knew him at the time. He later became far better known in the United States as Rajai Khorassani. He was the Iranian ambassador to the United Nations for a number of years. I don't think he's ever mentioned the incident in Tabriz. In the report nobody would have traced it to him when they found it because I'd used a different version of his name. But there he was, saving American lives. Of course, he had a lot trouble here from our authorities.

Q: Oh, yes. Well, then, what happened?

METRINKO: What happened? I was not allowed to take any of the consular seals or anything else. They had been in the house with me. That was taken from me. Although I had the bag because I thought I was going to be leaving to go off to the Turkish border, so I was taking the consulate seal. I had destroyed most things - plates, seals, ribbons, etc. - but I had the one seal, and I think the cold seal, too, from the consulate, that I was going to take with me. I don't know why. A lot of good they were going to do me. One doesn't think. I had this little bag with a wad of money and a gun, for example, though I didn't know how to use a gun. That was taken from me before we got on the plane. Some of the items eventually showed up here, by the way, in the United States, years and years later - not the gun, but the consular seal. Somebody's mother, years later, called up the Swiss Embassy in Teheran and said, "When my son left Iran he left a box of things here in his room, and I've just gone through it, and I realize there are some things that belong to the American Government. I don't want them in the house. I just want to turn them back over to the authorities." And so they turned over the Tabriz consulate seals. Of course, all visas from Tabriz were canceled immediately from that day, because the seal was no longer in our hands.

Q: What happened?

METRINKO: The air force cargo plane took us back to Teheran. We were delivered into an ambulance at Teheran at the airport, taken by ambulance to the American Embassy. We arrived at the embassy, which was in the throes of a massive evacuation. It had finally sunk in to the embassy staff that a revolution was occurring in the country, and they had decided to order an evacuation. It took a while. That evacuation was going on. I turned over my four American prisoners immediately to the evacuation staff, and they were whisked out, and they left Iran that day. They were given new passports, and that was it. They left Iran and were taken back to Germany and processed out. That was those four. I got the Australian, the Austrian, and the two West Germans back to their embassies. I know the Austrian and the Australian left the next day on evacuation flights. That was fine. I had always assumed the others had gone, too, the West Germans. Months passed, and in the late summer... the embassy, of course, was open. I stayed on at the embassy and started to work. Late summer, an Iranian friend of mine, whose name was Shokrai, told me another story. He was from Tabriz and had a German wife, and he had been in jail in Tabriz, too. He was the CEO of a major factory there. He'd been put in jail by the revolutionary authorities and then bribed his way out. Anyway, he called me and said he was in Teheran and could we have lunch, and I went out and had lunch with him. He said, "I met two of your friends in prison when I was in Tabriz." And I said, "Who?" And he said the West Germans. And I said, "Oh, they've been gone for months and months." He said, "No, they just left about a week ago." I said, "What do you mean, 'about a week ago'? I brought them here and took them down to their embassy and they were going to leave the next day." He said, "No, what happened was that they went to their embassy, and they got in front of the consul general there and told them what had happened to them, and he said, 'Where are your passports?' And they said, 'We don't have passports. Our passports were taken from us when we were arrested.' 'But you must have passports.' And they said, 'We don't have passports. They're in the prison back in Tabriz. We've escaped from there. We want to go back to Germany now.' And the German consul said, 'But I can't do this. You must have passports. I can't just send anybody out of the country. I want to see your passports. Go back and get your passports.' So they went back to get their passports. They got re-arrested in Tabriz and ended up spending that summer also in prison. Then they were finally released. My friend Shokrai had met them because he spoke German. He was called in to translate for them whenever there was a problem because, of course, they spoke no Persian, no Turkish, only German and some English. And he said, "When they left Tabriz, they told me they were going to go back to Germany and they were going to kill their consul." Personally, I hope they did.

Q: Well, now, okay, so we're moving into March or so by this time?

METRINKO: That was February when I got back to the embassy. Moving into March...

Q: March 1979.

METRINKO: March of '79.

Q: What was the situation at the embassy, and what were you up to?

METRINKO: The situation was this. Khomeini was in Iran. The Bazargan government was trying to pull its act together. The embassy had drawn down to a very, very small number of people. I think at this point we were about 15 or 16 Americans, and that included the Marine guards. There was almost nobody there. I had stayed on, and I was now a political officer again, you see. I was having a great time, actually. I had a nice office, a good job. I was supposed to be reporting on military and police trends, various other things like the response out in the provinces to the ongoing revolution. I went back to Tabriz and officially received our consulate properties back to the American Government. It was an interesting trip back. I went in there and was met by Iranian friends, and they took me to the consulate, and the authorities there officially handed over the keys - well, they didn't have keys as such, but officially handed over the property. And I actually stayed in the consulate with the Iranian Revolutionary Soldiers force. I slept on the floor with them for a couple of nights in my old living room, since my old bedroom had become a stable. You know, just slept on the floor with the guys in the guard unit. It was an interesting time. And eventually, they also left, and we restored the FSNs, but we never reopened the consulate. The FSNs would go there, and they cleaned the place up, but the signs were down, and there was a big question about what we were going to do. We had no idea, but it seemed unlikely we were going to reopen it as a consulate. That was fine.

Q: From what you got, what was the temperament in Tabriz when you were there?

METRINKO: Everything was up in the air. At this point, of course, there was a bit of coldness between the Azerbaijani Ayatollah, the Grand Ayatollah Shariat Madari, and Khomeini. This was a period of everybody sort of not knowing what they wanted to do. There were a thousand political groups in the country. There were religious groups fighting with religious groups. Khomeini was in charge, but he was in charge of sort of a political kindergarten where everybody had scissors. There were constant demonstrations everywhere. There were constant kangaroo courts. Various ayatollahs were going around the country having people hanged. There were firing squads. There was trouble in the Kurdish area. There was an uprising there. We were afraid there would be an uprising in the Azerbaijan with the Turks. There was a lot of trouble down in the oil fields. There was a strike going on down there. The Arab ayatollah in Khuzestan had been arrested and sent back to Qom, where he died, as many clergy died that year. Khomeini did a really great job with his religious rivals. He went through their ranks with a sword. They died, of course, in the privacy of their own bedrooms, of poison or other things.

The embassy was slowly rebuilding. What we were doing in late February and March was trying to find out where we were. We were getting property back. We were going around hot-wiring cars and bringing them back to the embassy.

Q: You might explain what "hot-wiring" is.

METRINKO: Oh, because people assigned to the embassy and people assigned to the military mission had innumerable cars there, and they had been abandoned all over the place, abandoned up at the military parking lot, abandoned in the embassy parking lot, abandoned here and there, the school parking lot or in front of their houses. So we didn't have the keys. The keys were all sort of in a mess. So one of the guys from the attachï¿½'s office proved to be very adept at just lifting the hoods of these cars and being able to start the motors by putting wires together. And they hot-wired cars all over that part of the city, brought them back, and we sold them. We had a used car lot in the parking lot of the embassy and would call in car dealers. We would sell cars by the dozens, and it got to be pretty interesting. We were getting rid of embassy property, closing up the property. We closed up the consulates in Isfahan and Shiraz. We got rid of the lease on the consulate in Isfahan. In Shiraz the property was ours, but that was also going to go up for sale. Tabriz was still on hold because it was such a massive property. But we were putting out feelers to the new government and being received very warmly, I might add, by most members of the new government. One of the jobs I did quite a bit of was to try and go up to the old military properties and see about getting access to them or getting them back. I got into the U.S. military hospital, for example. I was the first American to go in there, with friends of mine from one of the revolutionary committees. I went up to the old American school and helped get access there. The funniest one, perhaps, was going up to the old base at Lavisan, which had been taken from us. That's where the APO was, the commissary was, the food stores, and many of the military offices were up there. That's also where the household effects was for a large number of military who had packed out in the year 1978. Their lift vans were up there in storage, because nobody had been able to ship things out of the country in the latter part of 1978. The whole compound had been seized. And actually a rather funny incident happened when I went up there to get access. The guy who was in charge of the Revolutionary Guard group on that base was the younger brother of a good friend of mine, so I had talked to my friend, the brother of the commander, and he and the prime minister's office had told them that we were going to come up there, that somebody from the American Embassy was coming up to inspect the premises. Now, there was a philosophical problem here because the revolutionaries felt that all agreements signed by the Shah with foreign governments or with anybody were null and void. They were not binding because they had been signed by an illegal government. That's the way they felt. On the other hand, they specifically did not want Americans to take over things like military bases or large institutions again. At the same time, their own military was telling them, "We need American assistance. All of our weapons, all of our helicopters, all of our planes are provided by the Americans. We need American cooperation in getting repairs done and getting more supplies down the road." So there were different philosophies at war here. But to make a long story short, we had gotten permission from the prime minister's office to enter the Lavisan military base. I went up with one of the army tech people from the embassy and two visitors from Germany who had come in from... I want to say Ramstein... to inspect the commissary, the APO, things like that, to see what damage there was because we were talking U.S. military facilities. All the arrangements were made. We were supposed to get up there around one o'clock in the afternoon. Fine. We drove up to the base, and in front of the driveway, going into the military base, there was a long chain, and there were revolutionary guards standing outside. I got out of the car, walked up to them, explained who we were. I was being very polite. They told me to get screwed. I explained again who I was and that this had all been set up by the prime minister's office and by Mohammed Reza, who was the commander of the military group inside, and I knew he was waiting for me. Again, they basically told me to get screwed and to leave. I went through the whole thing again. I was getting a bit angry at this point, of course, but they had guns, and I wanted to get inside. Finally, one of them - I guess he was their commander - agreed he would go in. What I had said was, "I don't care if I ever see the inside of this place. I really don't care about it at all, but your commander is waiting to see me. If he knows, and he'll find out, that I have been here and wasn't allowed to see him, he's going to be angry with you, not with me." So what happened is that the young commander went inside, came back about 10 minutes later - and all this time I was standing out under a very hot Teheran sun - told me that I could come in myself but that the others could not. I explained that I wasn't the spokesperson, I was just the translator that day, they were the ones that knew about this stuff. He said it didn't matter, that Mohamed Reza would only see me. I went back to the car, explained it to them, they said fine, see if you can get us access. I walked up to the chain across the driveway. The chain was hung at a height which was exactly too high for me to put my foot over - I couldn't have done that - and too low for me to crawl under. I wasn't about to crawl on my hands and knees in front of the Iranian Guard. And I was standing on the outside of the chain. He was standing on the inside, and in a very crude way he said, "Hurry up," but using the tone of voice and the grammatical expression that you would use for a child or a dog or someone very much your inferior, in Persian. My anger hit boiling point. I walked over to the end of the chain where it was looped around a hook, took the chain off the hook, walked back along the length of the chain so that I had the long length of a chain hanging in my hand, took the chain, and whipped it across his face. He fell on the ground, dropped his weapon, and I walked over him towards the building that I knew the commander was in. I think probably at that point the other Americans in the car had heart attacks. I had just had it. I don't know why I did that. But I did it, and I heard him scrambling up, and I heard the gun scraping on the asphalt, and then he ran up right behind me and started in Persian saying, "I'm really sorry, Sir, excuse me, Sir, please forgive me, Sir," and I just looked at him and said, "Hurry up, I want to see Mohamed Reza," and just walked in. And for the rest of the day the guard whose face I had whacked with the chain just kept saying, "I'm really sorry, I was showing bad behavior," etc., "Would you like to come to my house for dinner?" and "Please, I'd like to show you hospitality." But I guess I was reacting... I'd been a schoolteacher in Iran for three years. He was acting like the worst of my students who were looking for a beating, and I always knew that... Unfortunately, in Iran, if you're dealing with young guys and you want them to show respect, you often have to physically hit them. It's a sort of a sick society in that sense. So I just used a chain instead of my fist. It was more effective, and it worked. Today I would not do that.

Q: No!

METRINKO: In fact, if I had had 30 seconds of thinking and the sun had not been so hot and I had not built up my anger to that pitch, I wouldn't have done it. But I did it, and it worked. And we got into the building and established a working relationship, and from then on the military was allowed to go in and start removing things like money and their records and the medical records and other things that they had to get out of there.

Q: Was there a beginning of developing a cooperation with the military, showing them how to run the helicopters?

METRINKO: There was very much a beginning of a relationship with the military. The relationship with the military never quite stopped. Soon there was a winnowing out of the military. Some of the old generals had been secret revolutionaries and now were in good graces with the revolutionary government. There were also colonels who had dealt with Americans in the past, and a lot of them spoke English. Maybe they didn't like dealing with the United States, but we sort of had the monopoly, and they had to deal with us. And a lot of the relationships were not bad at all. I can think of all sorts of military officials I knew who had stayed on, usually at the colonel rank. The generals went pretty quickly, and the generals who were not actually arrested found it in their best interest to leave the country because so much was happening that you could not predict the future. As an example of that, what was happening in the country, my former landlord from Teheran, when I had been in the embassy for about six months before going to Tabriz, was one of the general directors of the Teheran electricity department, and somebody had issued a warrant, and the name on the warrant was "general director of the agency for electricity." Now it could have been used against any of the former general directors. He found out about it, immediately contacted a good friend of his who was the new revolutionary prosecutor general and said, "Hey, what's going on? You know that I'm okay." And his friend told him this. He said, "Look, I know you're okay, but I can't do anything about that warrant until you and the others get arrested and your file gets to me with your name on it. Given the number of people we've arrested already, it might take several months before your name and your file comes across my desk. Then I can dismiss the charges. Until then, anything could happen. If they catch you and put you in prison, you could be executed and I would never even know about it. So I suggest that you not allow yourself to be arrested." So my friend, like many others, simply disappeared, went into hiding. They went to stay with distant relatives no one knew. They went to stay in smaller towns, other places, or left the country.

Q: Well, then, at your level, were you making contacts with revolutionary committees?

METRINKO: Of course, all the time. I became quite friendly with the family of the Friday prayer leader of Teheran. I knew them. The Imam Jumeh - that was the title - the Imam Jumeh of Teheran was the highest ranking religious figure in the city of Teheran. He was the one who led the people of Teheran in the Friday prayer, a sort of mass public prayer, and he would lead two million, three million people in prayer down at the university campus. His office was right around the corner from my house. His sons and other members of his family would visit my house at night. I dealt with that committee all the time. I got to know them very well, did a lot of social stuff with them, let them come to my house. My old Iranian friends would show up from Tabriz and Khorramshahr and other cities. They would stay with me in Teheran. I was out, I think, socially, every single night for the whole time that I was there, I mean from February until November, when the embassy was taken. I was out every night or had friends over at night, and the spectrum of contacts was all up and down, everywhere, every direction - clergy, this, that, police officials, army officials, this official, that official, merchants, friends, teachers, doctors, anything you could mention.

Q: Well, what were you reporting on? I mean, what sort of a revolution was this, as the time developed? I mean, we're moving up to the summer and the early fall.

METRINKO: Up to the summer and the early fall. Well, the spring hit. They called it the first spring of freedom. They continued to execute large numbers of people. The prisons were crammed. So former Shah officials, other people, police officials especially, army officials who had taken part in the martial law regime were being arrested. Many of them were being executed. Khomeini went big-time in for revenge. He had people arrested who had figured in his life going all the way back to when he was young, people he hadn't liked. Other people were doing the same thing. It was a time for taking economic revenge, for getting more property, for making a grab for your neighbor's house if you wanted to. So if you had clout with revolutionary authorities, you could enrich yourself pretty quickly.

Q: Was this a reflection of sort of Iranian society?

METRINKO: Very much. I can give all sorts of examples. The mother of a friend of mine was arrested and because of a neighbor's complaint. The complaint had nothing at all to do with anything political. She was arrested because the neighbors had revolutionary credentials and my friend's mother did not - she was a housewife - the punishment was that she lost a large amount of money and all the carpets from her house to her neighbors. They just wanted that. I read in the newspapers that a particular village... There was a lot of fighting going on in the small towns and cities still. And by no means did the revolutionary authorities have full control of the country, especially in the border areas. There was a small article in the paper about a particular village up near Ilam, in the western part of the country, where revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces were still fighting. Now by chance, I had a house guest for about a month, an American woman and her Iranian husband. Her Iranian husband was from that particular town. I turned to him and said, "What's going on? What does it mean, 'revolutionaries and anti-revolutionaries fighting in your town'?" He said, "Oh, it has nothing to do with the revolution, Michael. My oldest brother's wife has been jealous of one of our neighbors for the last several years because our neighbor spent a large amount of money and built a beautiful house. It's almost a villa. My brother's wife has been after my brother for years to build a similar house for her. He's refused. He thought it was a waste of money. Now that we've had a revolution, she finally got my brother to attack the neighbor so that we could grab that house. It has nothing to do with the politics of the revolution. It's my sister-in-law who wants the neighbor's house, and she's going to try and get it." Multiply that by a thousand, ten thousand, or fifty thousand incidents. And I could go on and on and on talking about things like this. The Pepsi-Cola factory in Tabriz was attacked by marauders who set it on fire. It turns out that the people who set it on fire were the workers from the Coca-Cola plant. They were both franchises. Apparently the franchise holder of Coca-Cola decided he wanted to monopolize his marketing in Tabriz. Multiply that. And this goes on and on and on like that. It was a big power and property grab.

Q: Did you find, when you were at the embassy, was it sort of a new era of looking at this? Were they -

METRINKO: Well, initially it was a bit strange. Yes, there was a new era, but there were still the old minds looking at it. Ambassador Sullivan became very approachable, very pleasant, and very receptive to thinking - I mean, very receptive to new ideas. He had had a shock, and actually, I have always thought he was a good. He is a good ambassador. He was a good ambassador. He was just the wrong person at the time, which wasn't his fault, and he was dealt a very bad hand of cards by the White House. I think you could probably say that the White House, the NSC, various people in Congress were playing fast and loose with dealing with the revolutionaries. There were conflicting orders coming out. I don't think the Secretary of State really was all that clued into the White House at this point. I'm not sure what was happening, but certainly there were conflicts going on between the military, private American oil interests, the White House, some Americans on the various intelligence and other committees in the Congress, the Senate and the House - they did not see, they didn't have any sense of loyalty to our ambassador. They were dealing around him, behind him. He tried to be a loyal soldier to the State Department. It didn't work then. He became very approachable, very pleasant, etc., and very reflective once all the panoply of our diplomatic presence disappeared around him. He was also confined to the compound because he was so well known in the country that he couldn't leave to go out in the streets. He had a group of local guards assigned to his house, which made him almost a prisoner in his own house. It was an intolerable situation. He put up with it with a great deal of dignity and grace, and in fact put up with it for far longer than I think anyone else would have. He was smuggled out of the embassy and sent out, left the country in secret. He went to the airport in disguise, in an ambulance. Ambulances were the preferred method of travel for security reasons. If you had to get out and about... ambulances have no windows to look at the inside, number one. They can use sirens and go quickly, number two. And no policeman is going to pull over an ambulance for speeding, so you can speed and get out inconspicuously - not inconspicuously, but there's a case where being conspicuous is your best way of keeping the matter concealed.

He got out of the country. Our DCM, who became the chargï¿½, Charlie Nass, went back and forth with the idea of should he go down and present himself to Khomeini or not. As it turned out he never did, but that was the advice he was being given by the revolutionary government, "not yet." But we were dealing very closely with all the members of the new cabinet, with the prime minister. We were dealing with a number of important religious leaders, and we visited the religious leaders. We dealt with everybody except Khomeini himself and were dealing quite closely, both socially and professionally, and things were looking more and more up.

Q: What were you getting from your contacts about Khomeini?

METRINKO: I don't know if I can answer that question any more. As the summer wore on, he had started the policy of women having to go covered. So the women were having demonstrations. A lot of women were turning against him for that, but not a lot of women in small towns, by no means, and not a lot of women compared to the number of women in Teheran. Most Iranian women are quite happy and used to dealing with that, and the issue was really sort of an American women's issue. It's not particularly an Iranian issue. We made it a big human rights issue here out of pure stupidity, gender stupidity here, basically. It's not that important in Iran. But a certain type of woman was coming to stand against Khomeini. The Mujaheddin, the other groups, were slowly losing faith in Khomeini. They weren't being given what they thought they had been promised. They were starting to fall away, too. The Tudeh Party he went after big-time. He went after the Communists, and they were getting arrested and executed. So there was a problem there, but of course he continued to execute people who had been very close to the United States. There was, of course, a tremendous amount of hypocrisy in all of this, and the people we were dealing with in the revolutionary cabinet were by anyone's standards fairly dirty people. We were dealing with thugs, murderers themselves. We liked them because they spoke English and were educated in the United States and fought with us, and we were quite prepared to overlook all their crimes, their ongoing crimes. It always struck me as a bit funny that we could look in the newspapers and see on the front page the pictures of the bodies of our former contacts - they would run photographs of the people who had been shot by the courts - and that evening go off to some event where you were meeting the killers and deal quite closely with them.

Q: Well, one of the things that came up was that the revolution was turning anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish.

METRINKO: It was not anti-Jewish at all. It never had been. It was anti-Israeli, yes, because people in Iran, for lots of good reasons, thoroughly disliked Israel. I mean, the Iranians are Muslims, the Iranian people. What they were watching was an Israel that was committing horrible human rights crimes against fellow Muslims. An Iranian religious person, if you were a Muslim, and you saw that Muslims in Israel were having their land confiscated, were being sent to prison, were being denied all sorts of basic human rights, why should you be pro-Israel?

Q: I know because I got involved a little bit later in granting refugee status, and one of the... It was really, of course, a domestic political priority, but any Jew from Iran was going to be persecuted, and they used the case of one Jewish businessman, I think, quite - METRINKO: Oh, that case. I knew the family well, still know the family well. As far as I recall, in the entire early part of the revolution there were exactly two Jews who were executed, both of them for what the Iranians saw as good reason. They were major business people who had been long-term supporters of Israel, financial supporters. They were picked up and arrested. They tried to bribe their way out. They might have gotten out except so many people were being executed that they were also taken off and executed along with a huge tranche of others.

Q: Well, they were considered "people of the book," weren't they?

METRINKO: People of the book, and the Jews had been living in Iran for 2500 years. I didn't feel any deep sense of anti-Semitism in Iran, at least not then. But what happened was that it became... The Israeli Embassy, of course, it wasn't designated as an embassy; it was called an interest section. The revolution had been very pro-Palestinian. A lot of revolutionaries had received training in Palestinian camps, so they were anti-Israel, definitely. There was no reason for any religious Muslim to be pro-Israeli. In fact, there was every reason to be anti-Israeli, if you were religious - every reason in the world. On the other hand, there was no attempt made to go after the Jewish community in Iran. The Jewish business people who were very prominent business people who were involved in all sorts of projects with the government, big-time financiers, supporters of Israel as such, yes, they got arrested, but so did thousands of other people. And as a percentage, when you compare the two of them to the number of Jews in the community there, I don't think it was particularly significant.

And one last thing I might mention, we had the case of one American senator, Jacob Javits, who was the spokesperson against the revolution in the American Congress. He went on and on and on, always taking the floor, talking about the barbarians and the this and the that and "these murderers." He was doing it for a good reason. I understand that his wife was an employee of the Shah. She had a contract with the Pahlavi Foundation and so basically the family was sort of paid to do this by the Pahlavis. So he was acting as a shill for the Pahlavi family as opposed to expressing what was accurate.

Now, were they anti-Bahai? Yes. If you were Bahai, you were dead meat. But if you were Jewish, no. Jewish per se, no; Bahai per se, yes.

Q: Could you explain why the Bahai were targets?

METRINKO: The Bahai religion started as a reform movement in the 1800s in Iran of Shiite Islam. The problem with it was that it didn't stop at being a reform movement; it claims that its major spokesperson was actually the last of the Imams. Now, the Bahais accepted everything that had happened in Islam up until the reform movement, and then they veered off. Traditional orthodox Iranian Shiites and Muslims in general regard them as heretics because what they said was, Yes, we have Muhammad, yes, the Shiites had and all the other imams, but we have had a more recent one, who is the gateway, the path to God, etc. This made them heretics. Their founders were sent off to exile and turned over to the Turkish Empire, which sent them all to this most distant hell-hole for exile, Acco and Haifa, on the Palestinian Coast. Now Acco is a delightful, beautiful little town today. Then it was pestilential, malarial, etc., etc., and not a place you would want to go. But the heads of the Bahai movement went there, settled down there, and started to attract people from the region. There are absolutely beautiful shrines. And the movement spread. It spread through the clergy initially. The Shiite clergy have always had seeds for reform within them. They do tend to reform themselves - that is, sweep out dead wood. This was one of the movements that slowly developed into a real battle in which blood was drawn between the orthodox Shiite clergy and the ones who had gone over to the Bahai movement. That having been said, over the next hundred years, it went back and forth, back and forth. Initially, the Shah had allowed pogroms against the Bahais. There was a very famous picture of one of the Shah's generals, back in the mid-'50s - standing on top of the dome of the major Bahai shrine in Teheran using an axe to break in the tiles of the dome. It's a picture that was infamous, of course, in Iran, but that general forgot his role, eventually retired to the United States, and died quite peacefully here in an old-age home about a year ago. And no one ever went after him for human rights violations.

Q: Well, now, what was happening with the embassy now?

METRINKO: What was happening with the embassy? Slowly we were building up. We had gotten down to about 14 or 15 people. The Marine guards were all changed. New ones came in, and each officer- (end of tape)

Q: Mike, I was asking about how was the embassy changing.

METRINKO: We had gotten rid of a lot of the embassy property. We had consolidated. We had gotten rid of the old embassy-leased property. We were really coming down to what was the meaning of an embassy, just a small group of people performing services, doing reporting, and answering to the government. When you say, "What was the embassy at this point," I have to say, up until late 1978, the embassy compound had been a travesty. We had 25 acres of land. As far as I remember it was 25, walled in, in the middle of the city of Teheran. We had an American post office on the compound, a huge one. We had a commissary on the compound, where people could do grocery shopping. We had a PX there so that people could buy things like stereos and televisions, bedsheets, washing machines, anything you wanted. And the number of people who could shop and use the post office facilities was up in the high thousands. I understand that it was 7,000 people. So imagine an embassy, which is really like a major shopping mall, and if you will, imagine a place where many of the people using the commissary and the PX were helping supply the Teheran black market. I was standing once in line at the commissary, and the woman in front of me had just purchased 85 sets of bed sheets. Now you can use 85 sets of bed sheets if you own a motel, but not if you own a private house. She was going straight down to the black market with them. She just walked in, and 85 pairs! And nobody even blinked an eye. Many times when I'd be at my Iranian friends' homes in north Teheran, and they'd pull out alcohol to serve, it would have one of the embassy stamps on it because so much of the alcohol from the embassy was going right into the black market, too. And people knew it. It was sort of a running joke in the city that if you want something from the black market, it had to have been imported into the country through the American Embassy. I completely fault the leadership of the embassy at the time, certainly the military authorities there, our military authorities. They knew this was happening. They didn't care, and they made no efforts all, as far as I could see, to stop it. Now imagine the presence of several thousand people walking in, shopping, coming out with bags of alcohol in the middle of an Islamic revolution. Shoppers would come up from Isfahan, from other places, by bus, and the buses, the women on it would be wearing shorts, halter tops, they'd step out right at the embassy compound, do their shopping, load up with alcohol, with beer, with all the other things they were buying, and they could be seen doing this. As a presence, it was disgusting, and to this day, I'd say that the people who took the embassy, well, maybe we deserved it, because it was no longer an embassy. It was not the den of snakes and the den of spies that the Iranians say it was. What we had turned it into was some sort of a cheap shopping mall, and for that alone, that place deserved to be shut down.

Q: By this time we're talking about summer or early fall. This had gone.

METRINKO: All this had gone. This had been removed, gone. The staff was far, far lower, but slowly starting to build up. Now, what we had, this was the real public face of the embassy. The Consular Section of the embassy had always been located in a building about two blocks away from the main compound, a separate building to which the public had full access. As the revolution got hotter and heavier in the year 1978, this building had to close down. It was simply under too much threat. The landlord had also told the embassy that he wanted to cancel the lease. He no longer wanted to lease to the American Consular Section. Fine. The embassy was in the process of locating a new place to put up a Consular Section. And they had located a place right across the main street from the embassy. In the meantime it's getting to be November, December. The revolution is really getting hot and heavy. Most offices are closed anyway. The Consular Section was closed down. It had to, except for emergency cases. It was not like anybody was able to leave the country anyway. It was pretty restrictive at that point for any Iranians to leave. Khomeini came back in January. People were not traveling. The airports were closed. Iranians could not leave. The Consular Section is still not open. Across the street the people who had given the new lease to the embassy suddenly announced they were backing out of the lease. They did not want the American Consular Section there. I think they were being warned by revolutionary groups not to let the embassy lease that property. There were a strip of buildings at the back of the embassy compound that had once been staff apartments. They were something like townhouses. The embassy took those and converted those into a consular section, but this took time. You can't do this immediately. There were lots of people looking for workers and contractors, and the middle of a revolution is not really the time to be able to do this well. We were continuing to process emergency cases, and any of us who had any contact with Iranian officials were getting deluged with passport visa requests from the new revolutionary officials. What happened is that the Iranian Government started to put pressure on us too to reopen. They were getting similar pressure to reopen the passport office. The passport office in Teheran had closed down for issuing Iranian passports. The passport office was reopened. The big announcement went into the newspapers that on such and such a day the national passport office around the country would be reopened. In Teheran, the office hours are such-and-such. The reopened it, and so many people rushed the building trying to get new passports that the building started to collapse. The floor cracked. The support beams in the floor. And they had to close the building down; it was condemned. They opened up a few days later at the international fair grounds in an area which was all on the ground floor, sort of open pavilion style, for the passport office. But apparently an astounding number applied for new passports to leave the country. The embassy Consular Section reopened, and within a very, very short time, we had similar lines around the embassy. I think, if I remember correctly, that if you were coming into apply for an appointment, if you wanted to see somebody about a tourist visa, to apply for one, the waiting time to come in was about a year long. Now, the American Government has a limited number of consular officers. We had a very limited number who could speak Farsi, an even more limited number who were willing to come to Teheran. There were a couple there, of course. They were doing their best. But what they were being asked to do was impossible. The pent-up demand was so high, in the millions, for visas that there was no way the Consular Section could face this. So you had lines of people around the embassy that stretched for two or three blocks, and a cross-section of society in the line. You had mullahs, people in military uniforms, police officers, this, that, people very well dressed, people in not such nice clothing, young or old, all standing in line to get visas to go to America. And the revolutionary authorities were pushing us all the time to give visas to their friends. Because I had so many contacts in the revolutionary government, I was always getting visa requests. As I found out, revolutionary authorities were making the requests to help out former officials who had lost their jobs because of the revolution. There were a lot of intermarriages, a lot of friendships, and a lot of very strange visa requests were made.

I think I've always said that the sight of that line around the embassy may have been one of the driving forces in getting the embassy attacked in November of 1979, just because it was so huge and it was always there as a sign that many Iranians had not accepted the revolution.

Q: What were you as a political officer... You would get these requests. Who would you talk to?

METRINKO: What I did, because I'd been a visa officer there before, I made an arrangement with the head of the Visa Section.

Q: Who was that?

METRINKO: Dick Moorfield. It was Lou Goeltz originally. He was replaced by Dick Moorfield. But I made an arrangement that I would go over and help out one or two morning a week and just do interviews on the line. And when I went over there, I would take over a stack of passports that I had been given by political contacts and have them checked and issue visas then if they were good cases.

Q: This is often one of the currencies of an embassy, being able to respond to visa requests.

METRINKO: It's sometimes the only currency. In most countries of the world, there's absolutely no reason to talk to an American political officer. It doesn't do you any good. What can you possibly get from an American political officer except a request for information? And the consular officer is the one who will get you your visa or does your paperwork.

Q: I know, I was consul general in Seoul, Korea, and I hated to go to cocktail parties because I would be backed into a corner by Korean officials.

METRINKO: In Iran, if you went to a dinner party anywhere at any time, its amazing how many people by a wild chance had their passports in their pockets. You were not the guest of honor, you were the main course.

Q: Were people, as we're moving up towards November, were any of your friend saying, "You'd better watch out, this isn't going well," or something. I mean, were the signs good or bad? How were we reading the entrails of these developments at that time?

METRINKO: There's a problem with reading entrails. If you're surrounded by entrails all the time, you begin to take entrails for granted. If you only see them once, you think, "My God, these are bloody!" We had gotten used to Iran. It was normal to hear gunshots. We would hear guns going off all the time, demonstrations going on all the time, puffs of smoke all the time, sirens all the time, crowds of people running all the time. The newspapers were filled with gore. Not the Gore that's running for President but the other kind of gore, gore and reports of battles and reports of this and reports of that. There was tension brewing with Iraq, and there was tension brewing with everybody, wild speculation, wild rumor. We'd get stopped at night by Revolutionary Guards, by the Komitehs. People had blockaded whole sections of the city, so as you went from section to section you'd get stopped and checked. Nothing was normal, but the abnormal became routine. In a war zone, especially those of us who had been there through martial law from the year before, it was just sort of normal. We were no longer fair judges of what was normal and what wasn't. So is the embassy going to be attacked? Were we getting information? We were always getting information that there was a threat, be careful, don't go there, etc. But at the same time, I'd been hearing this for two years.

Q: Now you must be getting new people coming in. I've interviewed - it's been a long time - Anne Swift and some others who came in, and sometimes the new boy or the new girl on the block sees things better than the person who's used to the bloodiness around.

METRINKO: They ask questions. But it depended on who you were listening to. If you were listening to Iranian business people, they wanted American business companies back. The banks wanted American businesses back. The franchise holders wanted to reopen. The American military wanted to get back in. The Iranian military wanted portions of the American military back, at least the supply and logistic portions. It depended on who you talked to. Revolutionary officials would talk about warming up the relationship, getting more support, getting this or getting that assistance from the United States. This was going on. There were people who hated us, yes, and they wanted us out, and they said so, yes, and there were people who wanted us to stay, yes. It went back and forth.

By that point I was no longer a fair judge of what was routine and what was normal. I was so thoroughly involved in the really weird, bizarre daily life that I didn't know any more. There was nothing routine. Strange things happened all the time. You know, we just got used to it.

Q: Also, one of the things that I think, and correct me if I'm wrong, but I've talked to other people who've been involved in revolutionary situations, particularly if they're a language officer and particularly if they don't have responsibility for the whole bloody community or something. I mean, they're having a lot of fun.

METRINKO: I had a great deal of fun.

Q: Yes, you're running around, and you speak the language, and you talk to people. Stuff's exciting, the adrenaline gets going, and all this, and yet the person who's acting ambassador or whatever it is, he's got responsibility for lives and everything else. So it's a different world, isn't it?

METRINKO: I was in the world of the language officer who was having a great deal of fun because I was out with a lot of friends. A lot of my friends were revolutionaries. They were in good jobs; they were moving up the ladder. I was able to help a lot of people out. That made me feel good. The ones who had to leave the country. And it was exciting. If you have political instincts, for a political officer a revolution is like being in paradise.

Q: Oh, absolutely!

METRINKO: It's better than any... It's a real rush, and it goes on 24 hours a day.

Q: Were you able to help any people get out, sort of sub rosa, in any way?

METRINKO: We issued a lot of visas using what used to be called the "Beirut Philosophy." Give them a visa now, even though they're running because since they have property and ties to the country, they will probably come back when things quiet down. And that was the logic I used.

Q: Well, this has been used again and again and again, including by some of these officers way back during the late '30s, of Jews and others who were leaving Germany and all. Let's give visas now, and then things will settle down.

METRINKO: Exactly, and I think it's the way a consular officer has of sort of melding the American law and our own sense of morality. You can use this in the law and say, "Give them the visas, yes, and they'll come back." The times are temporarily difficult, but they do have ties here.

Q: I did this after we had a bad earthquake in Naples when I was consul general. I said, "Oh, issue them visas," because you really didn't have much... The Italians weren't leaving Italy in those days particularly, but they had to get the hell out for a while. Mike, I think this might be a good place to stop because we're really moving up to the hostage taking thing, aren't we? So I'll put as usual at the end here that we've really talked about what you were doing, so let's talk about sort of the endgame, shall we?

METRINKO: The "endgame?"

Q: Well, I don't know, the endgame or something. But anyway, we're talking about moving up towards the November taking over of the embassy.

METRINKO: Yes.

Q: And we haven't talked much about some of the personalities on our side. I think it would be interesting at the end to see some of the officers you were working with. Were there any debates within the embassy? How were we seeing things.

METRINKO: Can I give one example that ties in here?

Q: Yes, sure, why don't we do that, yes.

METRINKO: When you asked about what we thought was happening, the situation at the time, I remember we used to write a weekly wrap-up of various incidents and events that were happening in the city that didn't merit a telegram in themselves but merited being reported in a large telegram - security problems, this problem, that problem, what's happening with the military, etc. And I'd do these every week, and one week the economics counselor had written his grand thought piece on why the American companies should start to think about coming back to Teheran, that things were really calming down, the business community was all set, and it was time for the Americans to come back. We got a telegram from the Department. The question was very simple. It said, the Department refers to this, this, this, this, reporting on, you know, all of the disruption in the daily life in the city and what's happening and compares it to such and such a telegram. They are incompatible. Which is correct? And if you think, if the post thinks that things are normal and calming down, and yet it's also reporting the series of incidents that you've been reporting, it's not possible. Please respond! They were right. We were in a schizophrenic world.

Q: Well, I'll put once again here, we'll pick this up, really, would you say we've gotten about to the fall of 1979, and we'll talk about what happened then, and also a bit about how you saw some of the attitudes within the embassy from different people about what was happening and all the debates within the embassy and all. And I also haven't asked about what were we picking up from the field, since we had closed Isfahan and -

METRINKO: Our consulates in Isfahan, Tabriz, and Shiraz were closed.

Q: They were closed. Were we getting anything from that? We'll pick that up next time.

***

Today is the 30th of June, 2000. Mike, we're really coming up to the early fall of 1979. As the takeover of the embassy approached, in the first place, what were we getting from the field? All of our consulates had been closed down, hadn't they?

METRINKO: All of the consulates had been closed down. We had FSNs still in Tabriz. As far as I remember, we no longer had FSNs in either Shiraz or Isfahan. What we were getting from the field was almost zero, consisting mainly of people coming up who had been friends of the consulate principal officers. There were only two principal officers left, I mean two former principal officers - myself and Vic Tomseth - and so what we were getting from the field was very, very slim, almost nothing. My friends would come and see me and tell me what was happening in various towns and cities of Iran. I think some of Vic's friends came up, too. That was it. We had no contacts outside of that. We had no substantial military presence, we had no American presence to speak of, and we had a few coming in from the field, so it was a vast unknown area out there, except for newspaper reports, which were, as always, very unreliable in Iran.

Q: Well, now, looking over some of the people who were players in the thing, like Bruce Laingen, some people in the Political Section, Economic Section, and the Consular Section, were people sitting down at the embassy, you officers sitting around and saying, "Hey, what the hell is going on?"

METRINKO: Yes and no. You have to divide the embassy in to two groups: the very small group who spoke Persian and who went out and around the city, out and around the country, and the vast majority of embassy officers who had no Persian whatsoever or who only spoke Persian to get in and out of taxis and do a little bit of shopping. The latter group, the ones who spoke no Farsi, or Persian, were limited completely by what English-speaking Iranians would tell them. This is not only true in Iran at the time; it's been true throughout diplomatic history. If you don't speak the language, you're blind, or you're deaf, a combination of the two. I can't speak for anyone else there at all. I know that people did attend social events. I think I was out every single night of the spring, summer, and fall. Right up until the day the embassy was taking on November 4th, I was out all the time. I had a lot of Iranian friends. I made a lot of new Iranian friends. I had good contacts in the revolutionary circles and good contacts in the anti-revolutionary circles, and I would simply go out and often stay out all night long sleeping in someone's house instead of coming back to my own house.

Q: Well, now, what I gather was that during this period - and sometimes there's a revolution and the revolution happens and the new group of people take over - but this was rolling revolution, wasn't it?

METRINKO: It was rolling because, number one, we reported it as rolling but it was rolling because people kept getting assassinated or kept falling off the bandwagon or falling off the rushing train, if you will. Khomeini had come into power promising not to come into power. He had come back to Iran and had promised that he would go down to Qom and be sort of a spiritual mentor and that would be that. Instead, very quickly, within a short time after his arrival, he left Qom and came up to live in Teheran and effectively was in control of the country. Various government members, government ministers, well, the bureaucracy of Iran...

Governments run by their bureaucracy. Armies, armed forces, police forces run not because of the general or the commander at the top or the senior executive. They run because of the bureaucracies or the normal people who actually carry out and implement bureaucratic actions. The bureaucracy, by and large, stayed in place, but began to be purged. So people who had been well known as royalists, people who were well known as having been corrupt or bribe-taking or whatever, or too pro-American or too pro-Western, were quite rapidly purged from the system, but this took weeks and weeks and sometimes months. A lot of higher officials, of course, were under arrest, and the arrests spread. More and more people were picked up. One would be arrested or confess or would certainly give a statement, and that would lead to the arrest of other people. So this was happening too, but it meant that the government offices were changing all the time. If a new minister came into power, he of course would bring in his friends. They would also bring in their friends. It was sort of a running crapshoot. And people did get assassinated. There were a fair number of assassinations of revolutionary government officials at the time.

Q: Was it sort of ecumenical assassination?

METRINKO: They were ecumenical, the assassinations. I can think of one or two ministers who were assassinated at the time. We had a group - not we, but Iran had a group - called Forghan or Forqan, which was apparently a far-right Islamic clerical group bent on assassinating people it didn't approve of in the clergy. There were various high-ranking Shiite clergymen coming out and either trying to be moderate or complaining about the excesses of the revolution - not about the revolution per se, but about various directions in which it was going. You had people like Bazargan, the insipid, silly prime minister, complaining that he couldn't even run his office because the Revolutionary Guards were arresting people from his staff while they were sitting in their offices. It was true. But this was happening all over the country, too. You might be the governor of a province, but you didn't know if you own staff was going to be there necessarily the next day. The guy could be under arrest, or your brother-in-law might be under arrest, or your sister or your wife. And so the country was lurching along like this.

Q: What was the pattern of the arrests? Was it ideological, or was it getting kind of personal and who owed who money and -

METRINKO: It was a combination of the two, but the personal played as much or more of a role than the ideological did. Lots of people were arrested because someone felt that they could be milked like cows for their money. And it had nothing to do with their devotion to Islam, their revolutionary credentials, or whether or not they had been pro-Shah. They were often arrested because of a property grab. In Tabriz, for example, I think I mentioned that the Pepsi-Cola plant was attacked. It turned out the people who did it were the Coca-Cola plant employees. Fine. I had a friend whose mother was arrested in a spurious property dispute because the next-door neighbor claimed that the wall or something had been put in the wrong spot 20 years in the past. And it only ended when my friend's mother, to get out of prison, had to give up a significant amount of money, all of her carpets, and a lot of the household furnishings to the next-door neighbor. I had an Iranian friend staying with me who was from a small village in Ilam Province, way out in the west on the Iraqi border, and while he and his wife were staying with me (they stayed with me for about a month because they were getting green cards to go to the states), I noticed an article in the newspaper about his village, saying that revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces were having a fight there and that the battle was ongoing. I showed it to him and asked him what was going on, and he just laughed and said, "It has nothing to do with the revolution or religion. This is my sister-in-law." His father had been the headman of the village. His brother had inherited the position, as sort of clan leader for the area. And he said, "My brother's wife has been staring at a neighbor's house for the last 10 or 15 years. She's jealous of it because it's a much better house than she has, so she's finally convinced my brother to try and get the neighbors' house away from them. It's really just a grab at a person's house. It has nothing to do with the revolution."

Q: Well, now, I would have thought that you would be a little bit like Typhoid Mary, going out every night as an American.

METRINKO: No, a lot of the Iranian revolutionaries wanted to become close to the United States or to Americans. I'll give you an example. We had a car full of American diplomats, some of the younger officers who had just arrived at the post after February. It was one day in the spring. They were out going someplace. Their car got stopped by a Revolutionary Committee group, and they were all taken to the station house. Well, they called me because I spoke Persian. They got in touch with me, the Iranian guys who had arrested them. T talked to them. They eventually all got out. They were released, and it was all done very quickly, but the commander of the group said that he wanted to talk to me. And fine, I thought it was going to be a protest about, you know, American anti-Islamic activity or something. I agreed to see him the next day. He came and was absolutely delightful, pleasant, invited me to dinner at his house. I ended up going to his house about two days later, and when I was there, I asked him why he had harassed the Americans? And I said it was simple. He said, "I saw a group of Americans in a car, and I wanted to get to know some Americans at the embassy. I didn't know how else to do it."

Q: Let's move up. You know, there's often a divide. I've witnessed it myself. I served in Saigon, and certainly in these oral history I've done and all and just knowing nature. You have relatively junior officers in an embassy or in a fluid situation, who in a way are having a great time - they're speaking the language, they're going out, they're fooling around - and then you have the more senior officers who've got Washington on their neck telling them what they should do, how to do it, they're trying to deal with the government. And pretty soon you see a divide opening up between the younger officers and the officers with - I hate to use the term, but it's correct - more responsibility for American relations with the country there. And the officers who've got the responsibility begin to look like clods, while the young officers, like yourself, are out running around having a great time, seeing what's really happening. But was there any connect between these two groups?

METRINKO: I don't think we had that much of a divide there. We had a divide between certain individuals who saw the revolution in different ways. The senior leadership for quite a while was Charlie Nass. Charlie Nass was the DCM and the chargï¿½. He had the most open mind of any Foreign Service officer I've seen. He would entertain any suggestion, any recommendation, any new ideas, think about it, come back with an answer that was almost invariably correct. It might be unpleasant, but it was correct. He had been there for - good gosh - at least a year before. He had gotten there, I think, in 1977, late '77. And he had seen both governments. He was great. There was no divide there. He had the most responsibility. Because we're talking about this period, I'm already saying Ambassador Sullivan was gone and thinking in those terms, Sullivan's role for the time that he stayed after Khomeini came back was quite limited. He never left the compound. He couldn't go out. He was too well known. And so he was there, but quite a bit in retreat, trying to patch things together, tie the few loose ends and then leave. Charlie Naas was there for a much longer period. The political counselor would have been Vic Tomseth. There, too, you had somebody who had been t here for both Irans, both pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary. He was not slow, but he made decisions carefully.

Q: Methodically.

METRINKO: Methodically, thank you. And well. And he had the experience to back it up. He was neither pro- nor anti-revolution, or if he was, he never displayed it, very measured, very methodical and precise and good. The political officers who came in, Anne Swift and John Limbert - Anne brought a tremendous amount of experience from other posts, absolutely excellent, great sense of humor about what was going on, which really made a lot of difference in the office. John Limbert had lived in Iran for years and years before. He spoke excellent Persian. Again, a very measured, sort of almost humorous approach to all this, and no problems there either. There was no great raging debate in the Political Section. In the Economic Section you had some differences of opinion. The economic counselor thought that things were getting better all the time, as opposed to the Political Section, which was saying this is a day by day thing, you don't know what's going to happen, we hope it's going to turn out. But the Economic Section really thought that every thing was getting nice and rosy and American businesses could come back. That led to a number of problems inside the embassy because the reporting was a bit contradictory.

Q: How about Bruce Laingen? I mean he was sort of parachuted in sort of on an interim thing.

METRINKO: He came in because Walt Cutler was supposed to become ambassador, and Walt Cutler's name had been submitted for agrï¿½ment, but they turned him down. They either turned him down or refused to accept him. I don't know why. I no longer remember. It may have been a reaction to Javits. It may have been a reaction to something like that.

Q: They used things. He'd been in Saigon, but as a young officer. I knew him there.

METRINKO: And he was coming out of Zaire.

Q: Zaire, yes. How did you all feel? Was this felt just to be "We're going to show you?"

METRINKO: I think it basically was that, because they didn't know... The government in Iran, while its various members, the various cabinet members, the various top people in the government, were playing footsie with us and trying to things for their ministries, trying to get visas for their friends, trying to get services, trying to deal with the United States to get American business back or to deal with American businesses - the government as a whole had not yet come to a decision. And it may have also been much like today's Iranian government, where the individual components want to deal with America, but they're all afraid to say it out loud, in public.

We had that. We also had a very large and very vocal anti-American group of revolutionaries out there who wanted the relationship broken, who were afraid of an American-Iranian relationship, so they weren't about to allow or to tolerate any warming up.

Q: Were Iranians who had been students in the United States in this group?

METRINKO: Of course. To come to the United States as a student doesn't mean you will like us.

Q: Right.

METRINKO: In fact, just the opposite, oftentimes. You have to remember that a fair number of revolutionary government ministers had also been students in the United States. It did not make them good people or learned people or intelligent people. It was just a fact in their lives. One or two of them at least had American citizenship. That's not much of a source of honor for the United States.

Q: When Bruce Laingen came in, he was supposed to just hold the fort for a while until another ambassador was named.

METRINKO: Right.

Q: Was there a feeling that everything was kind of on hold?

METRINKO: It was on hold, but it was also still day-to-day. I don't know if we had in the State Department or in the White House a clear view of where we wanted to go with Iran at this point. I really don't know about that. I can't answer that.

Q: I think the general feeling - obviously speaking for myself - was, Okay, let's get on with it. I mean, the Shah was gone, and in most diplomacy it's a practical measure. You get on with it, but you obviously are looking askance at some of the things that are happening.

METRINKO: That's true, and it may have been true at a certain level in the State Department, but on the other hand, we had certain number of Americans who, whether or not we like to admit it, were also speaking for the American Government. I'm thinking of people like Kissinger and Rockefeller, Jacob Javits, a variety of other congressmen and senators, who were either on the take or had gotten such large amounts of money in their lives from the Shah that they were trying to get us to remain loyal to the Shah.

Q: Yes, it's hard to turn that -

METRINKO: And they spoke for the American Government as well. It's curious. A former Secretary of State, he'll still have the title of Secretary of State, whether or not it says ex- in front of it. And if you're avaricious and only thinking of your own pockets, as many of them were -

Q: But was there still, I mean, was there a feeling that there was still Shah money floating around the United States?

METRINKO: There was a huge amount of Shah money floating around the United States, immense amounts of it. The Shah had gotten out, reputedly, a couple of billion dollars. I don't know when Mrs. Javits finally left working for the Shah, but she was working for him during that summer, certainly. We had one former ambassador who had set up a consulting firm called Safir, which means 'ambassador' in Persian. There's a good book, Paved with Good Intentions, by Barry Rubin, about the Iranian-American relationship.

Q: He was the -

METRINKO: No, this is Barry Rubin, who has never been to Iran. He writes on the Middle East. But his first chapter in the book he lists all the former high-ranking American officials who worked for the Shah after they left retirement. That included a number of military, former generals, etc., former ambassadors, former Secretaries of State. And he was absolutely correct.

Q: How about our Public Affairs Section there? How were they working at that time? What was their approach?

METRINKO: I don't think I have the answer to that. They were active, that I know. Certainly the Iran-America Society in Teheran was very active. They had an office there. English was still important. It was still operating. I'm trying to think. It was not the time or the place to give your exhibits or to publicize the United States. You just hoped that you wouldn't do anything too wrong.

Q: Well, the Consular Section - who was the head of it, and what were you getting, as a political officer at the embassy, from the Consular Section?

METRINKO: The Consular Section, even when it was closed, was extraordinarily active and very, very hardworking. Lou Goeltz had been the consul general throughout the revolution. Ward Christiansen had been the consul general up until the early summer of 1977. He was replaced by Lou Goeltz. Lou Goeltz was there until the middle of 1979. Lou was replace by Dick Moorfield, all three of them excellent officers, all very hardworking in the classic sense of the hardworking consul general who comes to work at eight o'clock in the morning and doesn't lift his head up from the desk or from the crowds of people until six or seven at night, and that's it. Their staffs were also good, and I could think of so many of the consular officers who were really stand-out consular officers - people like Barbara Scheil, who was killed in Iraq a couple of years ago, Tom Dowling, for much of the revolution, people like that, just some really sharp -

Q: Who?

METRINKO: Tom Dowling. Really sharp, good officers - hardworking officers, too. And what were we getting from them? Well, the entire consular staff had changed by very, very early in 1979. Khomeini came back, and almost the entire embassy staff had changed. In fact, there were only a couple of holdovers. There was myself, Vic Tomseth, Charlie Naas, who'd come in the middle of the summer, two of the military guys - that was it. Most of them had not been there beforehand, so everyone was changing new. All of the vice-consuls were brand new. The consul general was new. His deputies were new. And they did not yet have, that early on in the game, after a month or two months of being in Iran, the breadth of experience or the command of the language to really become useful reporting officers. (End of tape)

Q: You were saying you couldn't answer for the others.

METRINKO: By the middle of 1979, I had already been living in Iran for five and a half years. My friends were Iranian. My social life was Iranian. My eating habits, my sleeping habits, my daily routine were totally Persian. There was absolutely no reason why I should have or would have simply hung around the embassy or had, other than work life, any sort of life with the people who were coming into Iran now.

Q: Well, I'm thinking, though, you know, when you're looking at this, this is sometimes a problem.

METRINKO: Oh, yes.

Q: And I'm not using this as a disparaging term, but an officer "gone native" -

METRINKO: Not native.

Q: - because you're not there in the Peace Corps; you're there to report and convey, to present the American side of things, particularly at the junior level, or relatively - you're not that junior - to report about what's going on, particularly to those who are then making decisions, particularly including at the top of the embassy and to the Department of State. And so I'm just trying to figure out how this was -

METRINKO: No, I was making a distinction. I did a lot of reporting. My contributions were in the reporting, in the perceptions that I brought back, in what I reported from the street, from my contacts. And I had no social life with most of the Americans there because, basically, they had nothing to offer. They were brand new to the country, and they were feeling hunkered down. They didn't speak Persian, in general, and basically it would have been a waste of my time.

Q: Well, a waste of time at one point, but also - and the other point is - at least those coming from Washington would be letting you know more about what's happening in your own country.

METRINKO: No, no, I don't accept that. The had no more concept of what was happening in my own country than anyone else did. I kept pretty close touch with that. I always take my vacations in the United States and in Europe, and in later years, every year make sure that, when I wasn't actually living here, I'd come back every year. I came back to the United States for about a month, a month and a half, in 1979.

Q: Were you getting any -

METRINKO: And by the way, on my trip back to the United States, I was so thoroughly disgusted by the Department of State, that I only stayed there for a day or two.

Q: Why?

METRINKO: Nobody was interested, when I came back, in really talking. They all knew "the Truth," in the Washington sense. When I came back, the first day I arrived, I was supposed to spend a couple of days TDY in Washington, go home, and come back again a couple of weeks later. And when I arrived, I was asked to go to a meeting that INR was sponsoring, and that was fine, but the meeting was to discuss reporting, much of which I had done, on the security forces of Iran - police reporting, what was happening with the old army, things like that. The office director of the Iran Desk asked me to be certain to come to the meeting. I went to the meeting, and as the meeting started, I was asked to leave because I didn't have the proper clearances. This was the attitude of INR and CIA. It didn't matter if you had just been there for two years, had come back fresh from the field, and had done the reporting they were discussing. Since you didn't have the clearances they thought you needed to sit in the meeting, they weren't interested in hearing what you had to say. Probably Washington has always been a bit like that.

Q: I think all of us who have served in the field, when you go back to Washington, you're full of knowledge and information, nobody gives a damn.

METRINKO: Nobody gives a damn, exactly. They know the Truth, so why bother asking?

Q: This is why I'm dwelling on this, about the passing of information and knowledge - personal knowledge - on: it's very difficult.

METRINKO: It's very difficult. In fact, it may be impossible. All you can do in passing information and knowledge on is to train other people. You can't really... We don't learn from other people's mistakes. We can learn from their anecdotes, perhaps, but not from their mistakes.

Q: Well, this is, in part, my little crusade with this oral history program, at least to document some of this so people who come after can read case studies back and forth and at least get an idea and have little warning bells go off.

METRINKO: I'm willing to bet the one great lesson that we should have learned - one of the great lessons - from the whole Iran experience was that religion plays a major role in the lives of many other nations, much more than it does here. If you really want to understand the political and economic and social life of another country, you also have to thoroughly understand the religious beliefs they have, how they see themselves, and the institutions that their religious beliefs have brought into being. We ignored that almost completely in Iran, for lots of reasons, but we thoroughly ignored it. We ran around scrimmaging to try to find some cleric we could talk to when the revolution finally dawned on us. And yet, having done that, having paid the price for that complete lack of understanding of another country's religion, I'm willing to bet that in most other countries we are still doing the same thing. We're certainly doing it in Israel.

Q: Well, I think one of the things, too, but on the other hand, we come from really a highly religious country. I mean, the United States has... Israeli policy is driven by the Jewish lobby plus others, which is religious-based. Our stand on a lot of things comes out of what we would call Bible-Belt fundamentalism.

METRINKO: And yet I'm willing to bet that the embassy in Israel today has absolutely zero contact with the religious establishment there.

Q: I suspect they'd have much more, because it's -

METRINKO: They never did before.

Q: But I suspect now they have or they had because -

METRINKO: Well, anyway -

Q: We're moving. Well, we get really sort of into November, and was this a tidal wave that was predictable, or did this just sort of happen?

METRINKO: Was I just an increasingly high tide that kept getting higher and higher and higher?

Q: Yes.

METRINKO: It was more of a high tide. What was happening by September, October, November was more and more street trouble, more and more demonstrations, a feeling that, okay, we've had a revolution, now what? Why aren't things improving? Why are things going from bad to worse? Why aren't companies reopening? More and more people getting arrested, long show trials continuing, a pent-up desire by Iranians to leave, the feeling that maybe the schools weren't going to open after they'd been closed for so long. A lot of sort of aimless wandering around by a couple of million school kids who didn't know if their schools were going to be open on time or not, because they'd certainly been not open for much of the preceding year, and revolutions are fine, but you still had to get on with your life, and every one else in the world has gone on for another year of schooling and they are one year closer to their degrees. You had purges that were continuing. You had - I want to say insurgencies, but just a lot of nationalist foment out in the provinces. Kurds, Turks, Baluchis, the Arab provinces were all getting a little bit noisy - in fact, very noisy. You had religious leaders and ethnic leaders in the provinces being attacked. The Arab Ayatollah of Khuzestan had been put under house arrest at this point. One of the Kurdish religious leaders, a Sunni leader, had been put under... no, they were looking for him to arrest him. They arrested most of the members of his family. You had this sort of thing going on. You had increasing dissension in the clerical ranks in Iran itself - you know, the standard Shiite ranks - with at one point, for example, Ayatollah Taleghani, the Friday prayer leader of Teheran, disappearing in a state of indignation over something or other that had happened. I think one of his sons or two of his sons were kidnaped at one point. You had the Mujaheddin becoming noisier, people making demands and counter-demands, and the press was a free-for-all. The press was attacking everybody, all sorts of allegations, other people being arrested. It was really very, very shaky. The social fabric of the country had been really blasted, and it hadn't yet settled down again. People didn't know what to do or who to turn to in the country.

Now that being said, you had us trying to redo a relationship with Iran. We wanted to send an ambassador there. All of this stuff about America not having recognized the revolution is absolute trash. We had never closed our embassy. We continued to provide services. We dealt with the new government on a very matter-of-fact day-to-day basis. We had never actually gone down and paid obeisance to Khomeini. The Russians had. Everyone else had. They would all go down, hat in hand, sort of bow and pay obeisance and get blasted by him, and then come back and - fine. We never had. We had been advised not to by the ministers of his cabinet whom we trusted. (And God knows why we should have trusted them.) We had reopened the Consular Section. It was under incredible pressure, with long lines, thousands and thousands of people waiting to get visas and other services. At the same time that our FSN staff was getting more and more queasy, people wanting to leave, just to sort of take off, to leave the country, to leave employment, to move to America, or to move somewhere else - because they, of course, were under the same sorts of attacks that the American diplomats were, under the same sorts of pressure, but they had no protection. We had diplomatic status. They had nothing, and they could be hauled in and questioned and threatened with impunity. In fact, more than one of our FSNs was arrested at this point, and we had one senior FSN who spent quite a while -

Q: When you talk about arrests, are these sort of official arrests, or are these arrests by vigilante committees or whatever?

METRINKO: You can't distinguish between the two at this time because "official" meant vigilante communities. It was not yet a government, the Government of Iran, in the classic sense. It was composed as much of vigilante committees and communities and groups -

Q: Komitehs weren't they called?

METRINKO: They were called komitehs, yes, as a matter of fact - composed as much of collections of these and of gangs as of ayatollahs at their offices - anybody with a beard who claimed to be religious, as it was a government in the regular bureaucratic sense. There was no sort of merit examination that made you a member of a particular ministry. It was just that you had a gang of people and had been attached to a particular ministry or were using the authority of a local Friday prayer leader in your home town to go out and arrest people, but a rival ayatollah might also have his own people going out to arrest people. It was really chaotic.

Q: Was there any thought of saying, Okay, now, let's just get out of here, and let's just close down the mission - it's too chaotic - and wait? Did that really come up?

METRINKO: We had the staff to about 10 or 12 people at one point, and very soon we built it up again. I don't recall anything special along those lines. It may have happened, or it may have been considered, but I don't think it ever gained any sort of acceptable.

Q: In other words, you weren't all looking over your shoulder and saying, Boy, what are they keeping us here for? I mean, you weren't picking up this...

METRINKO: Everybody was there as a volunteer, so there wasn't that. And I've been in other groups. I have been in groups of people in different places that sat down and said, "We should not be here." This was not one of those places. What was happening was too important. There were too many possibilities; there were too many opportunities. And no embassy that I can think of pulled out later. Everybody had somebody there, and most ambassadors were there, too. It was a major political event, but it was also a fully covered political event among the press. You had newspaper reporters, journalists, magazine writers, and travel writers, and this and that and various activists from all around the world flying to Iran. It was sort of like a St. Patrick's Day parade every day of the year. Everybody was there. So there was no real sense that we should pull out.

Q: Did you find because you were out and around that journalists - not just American but European journalists, maybe others - were coming to you and saying, "Hey, Mike, take me out and let me find the real people."

METRINKO: I would never have taken a journalist out with me. I talked to a lot of journalists. Yes, there were journalists around, but I don't take journalists out like that.

Q: Did Iraq hover on the horizon as a mass, or not? I mean, was this something that was coming up on our radar at the time?

METRINKO: It was certainly coming up on the Iranian radar, because in the classic sense of the revolution, the Iranian revolutionaries were proclaiming a revolution in Iraq as well. They were trying to foment one. The comments, the speeches, that Khomeini made about Iraq and that other revolutionary leaders in Iran were making about Iraq were extraordinarily inflammatory, and I would assume eventually precipitated the Iraqi attack on Iran. There was good cause in Iraq to believe that Iran was acting seditiously inside the country. Now, whether or not there was anything military going on, there was so much border stuff going on that it wasn't necessarily Iraq versus Iran; it was the people on the border, who had always been border people - especially the Kurds along that border causing trouble - not causing trouble, just wanting a piece of the pie that everyone else was grabbing.

Q: How did the Kurds - because you had served in a Kurdish area - how did the Kurds fit into the religious setup that was developing in Iran?

METRINKO: Kurds in Iran can generally be three different religions. You have Kurds who are Sunni, Kurds who are Shia, and Kurds who are Ahli - ali-haqq, ali-el-lahi. It's a sect that's very strong in Kurdish areas that regards Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, as being superior to the Prophet Muhammad. Kurds might identify themselves religiously, or they might identify themselves first nationalistically as Kurds. It depends on the Kurd you're talking to and what his own background is. There were Kurds who were high up in the government. I'm thinking of the first foreign minister, Sanjabi, who was from the Kurdish Sanjab tribe. He didn't last long. He was never allowed to enter his office building by the demonstrators who were outside of it. It was quite funny, actually. He was proclaimed foreign minister, but he could never get into his own office. He developed the very typical heart problems that officials there developed, and he scooted off to the United States. But they tried.

The Kurdish religious leader - I want to say Sheikh Hossein Ghassemlu, but the name is escaping me - was under attack by the clergy of Qom. He had disappeared. There were Kurdish uprisings, if you will, or gang warfare. You know, when a newspaper describes an "uprising," I'm never sure whether it's a gang fight, a clan fight, a clash between rival groups of smugglers, or just a lot of angry young guys on the street. You never really know, but there was a lot of noise in the Kurdish area, to the point where the Iranians Air Force was ordered to bomb some Kurdish towns. The were ordered to bomb the city of Mahabad, if I remember correctly, right in the middle of 1979. And there was fighting in that area. Now a lot of the fighting may have been simply because people who had gotten stuff from the Shah wanted to keep it and people who didn't have it wanted to grab it. I'm assuming that was a lot of the problem. It often wasn't ideological, but basic money and property, and armed guards fighting over it.

Q: Were we getting anything from the south? This might have been Victor Tomseth's area more, but the Arabs, down in what I would call the delta?

METRINKO: I was getting some stuff because I had good friends in the new revolutionary government of Khuzestan Province. The mayor of Abadan was a good friend of mine and I saw him fairly frequently. The new governor general of Khuzestan Province was somebody with whom I dealt. I think we may have gone down. I didn't, but other people may have gone down on trips to Khuzestan... Were we getting anything from them? Not in a real sense, no. But we had never really had good contacts in that province, Abadan, Khuzestan, the general oil area. The National Iranian Oil Company had always been in close touch with the United States, but a lot of the old people had gone.

Q: What about the other embassies? Was there, from your perspective, much sharing of information, or was everybody off on their own?

METRINKO: There were generally attempts on their part to find out what we knew, because most of them were too small to really be serious. For good or bad, the United States tends to have monster embassies, supermarket-type embassies. Most governments have "boutique" embassies, and if you are one of two officers at another embassy, there's not much you can really offer to the United States. Most of the embassies there were smaller embassies. We dealt quite a bit with the British, I know. The British were not bad. They tended to speak the language, and I certainly had fairly good contacts with the British Embassy in 1979. But most other embassies were small and insignificant; the Russians, of course, we never dealt with.

Q: I was wondering. At that time, of course, they would have been Soviets. Were we concerned about what they were up to?

METRINKO: In 1979, there was a great deal of concern about what was happening with the old Tudeh Party, the old Iranian Communist Party. What the Russians were doing in Teheran, the Russian ambassador had gone down to see Khomeini, and as a matter of fact, the Russian ambassador was also the last person to meet with the Friday prayer leader of Teheran, Ayatollah Taleghani, before the Friday prayer leader died unexpectedly (and probably through assassination). But he had had a long meeting with the Russian ambassador. The Russian ambassador left, and he died shortly thereafter. The Russians were in contact with the clergy. They were in contact with a lot of the people in the country. Of course, they have a very long joint border with Iran. There's a lot of reasons for them to be in contact. They have always had a very strong presence in Iran. The Russian trade mission in Tabriz had, I think, something like 200 people in it, which was pretty big for a trade mission. And they had rail connections and other connections with Iran.

Q: Well, now, let's go to the events. What happened?

METRINKO: I might add, by the way, just one more thing about Russia. I'm saying Russia, now -

Q: You keep saying Russia, and I come back with we really have to talk about the USSR, the Soviets, yes.

METRINKO: Because we can no longer say USSR, of course, we're talking about times past. There was also something that was quite significant for the Russians. And this was very much a part of Iranian revolutionary policy. The Iranian revolutionaries want to spread a revolution, of course. There was a strong group of revolutionaries who saw the revolution as starting in Iran but extending throughout the world. I've heard them talk about the "Islamic Revolution in South America," which I always thought would be a neat trick. But many, many revolutionaries felt that they could start a similar revolution in the Soviet Union. All of today's republics are filled with Muslims. There are Muslims all over the USSR, and I know that officers were assigned by the revolutionary government to Moscow in order to foment the Islamic revolution there, to start getting in touch with - if they could find them - Muslim leaders, Muslim clergy, just to start a revolutionary process going in the old Soviet Union. The Soviets, of course, knew this as well, and I don't think... You'd have to talk to a real Soviet expert about how the Russians felt at that time about the Iranian Revolution. They may have been quite fearful of it.

Q: Well, in a way, I mean, this is a turnabout. I mean, they have been playing the Communist card around the world, and all of a sudden somebody was going into what was considered their back door in Central Asia, which was quite vulnerable - at least they felt it was vulnerable.

METRINKO: And the Russians, of course, had marched big-time into Afghanistan.

Q: Yes - well, not yet.

METRINKO: Or were marching into Afghanistan.

Q: This was really after. They were there, but that came in December. But what about the events of November, now?

METRINKO: Well, we had something that happened just before the events of November. We had the prayer leader of Teheran getting assassinated. That caused major problems in the city. It happened in October.

Q: A prayer leader being -

METRINKO: Well, the equivalent of a cardinal of a city if you were a Roman Catholic. The Friday prayer leader is the person officially designated to lead the faithful in prayer on Friday. Ayatollah Taleghani was a very respected revolutionary ayatollah. He was the patron saint of the Mujaheddin. He was probably as popular in Teheran as Khomeini was. He also had something else. He had a group of eight or nine very, very revolutionary children. Khomeini had one fat son who basically shadowed his father everywhere and didn't do much else except to get involved in business deals. Taleghani had lots of lean, mean children who were out doing revolutionary activity, as heads of guard groups, other things. They were involved in the Mujaheddin. They were activists. They went out speaking. Eventually, one of his daughters became a member of Parliament. But it was a revolutionary family, as opposed to Khomeini's family. The prayer leader - I say this based on what his own family told me, because I knew them quite well - he came home from having had meetings at Parliament one day - it must have been October of 1979. In his home he had one private meeting with the Soviet ambassador, who left. The electricity around his house and the phone lines went dead, and he shortly thereafter died. His security guard had been involved in an accident just a day or two before and gotten himself a broken leg. He wasn't there. His doctor wasn't there, wasn't allowed to get there; they couldn't contact him. This was in the days before cell phones, of course. And so the phone lines and electric lines were cut. The house was basically sealed off. The guy died. The family told me that it was poison. They were told not to have an autopsy. So one of the most powerful Muslim clergy in Islam at the time, in the Islamic world, died unexpectedly and was buried in a few hours, and the family was threatened with serious problems if they tried to have an autopsy.

Q: By whom?

METRINKO: By the other clergy. The reason given, at least by the family, was that their father had been opposed to the concept of "valiat-e-fagih," the rule of the jurisprudent. That's the name given to the type of the government that Khomeini was setting up, where a clergyman would be in final ultimate control of the government. And Taleghani was going to come out against this in public, and so he died. That started a lot of problems because Mujaheddin and others who really revered him - he had been their spiritual mentor - started getting extremely nervous at this point. It sort of threw things up in the air again as far as the clergy were concerned. It made it quite clear that no matter who you were, what your rank was, what your revolutionary credentials were, you could be done away with very quickly and nothing would happen.

Q: Was the finger pointed at Khomeini? I mean, was this -

METRINKO: Not at Khomeini. People talked about Beheshti and others, other members of the clergy. Khomeini was still sacrosanct. Even though many people considered him just a murderer, they weren't going to say it out loud, certainly not in public, because if they had tried, his followers would have destroyed them.

Q: You mentioned the Mujaheddin. At this point, what did that mean?

METRINKO: At this point they were a revolutionary group with a great deal of discipline. They were supporting Khomeini, supporting the government. You could always tell the difference between a Mujaheddin-held building or a Fedayeen-held building, as opposed to a standard old Revolutionary Guard-held building, because the Mujaheddin and the Fedayeen were extremely disciplined, tough, soldier-looking, military-martial-looking, as opposed to the Revolutionary Guards and all the Komiteh people. And Anti-American? Yes. Pro-revolutionary? Yes. And for the time being working with Khomeini.

Q: Well, the slogans and things that are going back and forth all of this time, was anti-Americanism a major theme, or was this developed later on?

METRINKO: It had been a major theme all through the revolutionary process, beginning in '78. "Death to America," "Down with America," "America, Go Home," you know, "Carter does this and does that," was constant - so constant that it had lost all meaning to us. It sort of had the same resonance as a bumper-sticker here does. You don't even read it. If you read it, you read it for amusement value, not because it has any meaning to you.

Q: Did you find, in going around, that the people who were shouting "Death to Americans," and your being an American, was there a connect there?

METRINKO: I found some hostility, occasionally, but in general I found more of an interest in making my acquaintance very often so that they could get a visa. The amount of hostility against Americans was often tinted with jealousy of America or a desire to go to America. It was always mixed and never quite logical. Iranians blamed America for a lot because they were unwilling to accept blame themselves. They were unwilling also to accept responsibility. It all went hand in hand. America was a convenient scapegoat for everything that was wrong with the country.

Q: Welcome to Greece!

METRINKO: Greece, lots of countries.

Q: Well, now, let's talk about what happened.

METRINKO: What happened November 4, 1979. I generally got into the embassy late because I would go out every night. And when I went out every night, I would not get home until 12 or one o'clock in the morning. There was an understanding that I was going to be out every night. I was one of the few people that was going out, but I was also seeing a whole wide range of people who were useful to the embassy, for reporting or to get things done. The afternoon before the 4th - it must have been the 3rd - I had been contacted by two of Ayatollah Taleghani's sons saying they wanted to meet me the next morning at the embassy, would I please be there. And I told them that I wouldn't be able to get there until quite a bit later, around 11 o'clock or so, and they were insistent they had to see me earlier in the morning because they were leaving the next day or the day after to see Yasser Arafat and they wanted to talk to me before they went there. And this was logical, knowing these two people, so I agreed to be there early in the morning. I had a lunch set up with somebody who had just come in from one of the Kurdish provinces, who had called me, an old friend, and I also had a dinner set up with somebody else, dinner with the former mayor of Tabriz. I also had... This is an aside into the Persian personality. The Taleghani son that wanted to see me that morning, about two weeks before this, had gotten me to help with a visa for a former university rector who was trying to leave the country for several months so he wouldn't get arrested. And he had brought the university rector to my house. I had talked to him. I had decided to issue the visas. I had issued visas to the rector and his wife and their kids. And the rector had come back with his wife to thank me in person and handed me a package, saying, "This is from Isfahan." The way the package was wrapped was in the same paper exactly as a box of awful Persian candy I had gotten a couple of days before. In fact, I had so many boxes of this... It's a Persian candy called gaz that's a very hard nougat which will pull the fillings right out of your teeth, and it's covered with cornstarch, which makes it both difficult to eat and sloppy. And I used to pile it up on my kitchen table, give it to the maid, give it to the neighbors, etc. Sometimes even to guests. It was sort of a torture food. You'd put it out, and people would have to take a piece. Everyone knew they wished they didn't have to. Anyway, it was one of those type candies. He had handed me this large box. I put it on the kitchen table, thanked him. We chatted. I gave him his passports, etc. He left. And a few days later, I had more guests in the house, went to get some candy to put out on the table, ripped the paper off this and discovered it was a beautiful sterling silver bowl. So I got very annoyed, called him up (he hadn't left yet), explained that I could not accept the bowl, thanked him for it, but that I had to give it back, and would he please send somebody to pick it up. He was going to send somebody to pick it up at the embassy, where I had left it wrapped up at the gatehouse, on November 4th. So he or a member of his family was coming to pick up the sterling bowl. I was set up for a meeting in the morning, a lunch in the afternoon, dinner in the evening, etc. - all with either bona fide officials or former officials or wanna-be officials. And I was in my office waiting for my friends to call. I noticed that there was a tremendous amount of activity around the embassy. And that's when the embassy started to notice it too, in general. The noise level had just picked up considerably, and when we looked out we could see lots of heads. And suddenly the heads were coming over the walls. And that was that. We grouped people who were in the chancery building or could get to the chancery building. When I got to the main floor, people were at the doors. I was already up on the ambassador's floor, up to my office floor, people got up to that floor. And then, it was a matter of battening down the hatches. We did not start to destroy files. It was far too much to destroy anyway. I do not know what time the communicators started, but I was part of the group in the ambassador's office, a large group, some discipline, not a tremendous amount. The chargï¿½, his deputy, Vic Tomseth, the RSO, Mike Howland, were gone, so there was some confusion over who was in charge. More and more noise outside. I picked up the phone at one point because the phone lines were still working. We were on the phone with Bruce Laingen, who was trying to give orders from the foreign minister's office, saying Khomeini had ordered that the protest be broken up immediately and that there were people on the way to help us, just to hang tight. We were hanging tight, and it became clearer that they were going to have trouble getting through because the crowds were really getting noisy and things were breaking outside. I picked up the phone, dialed the number of my revolutionary friend who had asked me to be at the meeting, and got his security guard, whom I also knew quite well, on the phone. I told him I just wanted to speak to Mehdi, and he was silent for a moment, and then he said, "Michael, Mehdi won't come to the telephone." And I said, "You know what's happening here at the embassy, where I've been waiting for Mehdi to come." He said, "Yes, we know." And I realized then that they had set me up to be there. So I just said, "Okay, I guess this is goodbye." And then he said, "Michael, I'm really sorry" (this is the security guard), and that was that.

Q: And then what happened?

METRINKO: What happened then, one of our RSOs went outside, despite recommendations that he not do so, and then shortly thereafter he wanted us to open the doors and let them in because they said they were going to kill him if we didn't. He had gone out thinking he could talk to the mob of a couple of thousand people, using mid-American English and no sense at all of Iran, Iranians, or anything that was happening. He was going to go out there and, "I am the American diplomat. You are breaking the Geneva Convention."

Q: He didn't have a swagger stick.

METRINKO: No, he didn't have a swagger stick.

Q: You tap them on the shoulder and speak loudly and slowly and they'll part.

METRINKO: Like the Red Sea.

Q: Well, what was the reaction within your group?

METRINKO: "Oh, shit."

Q: Yes.

METRINKO: It's like, what can you say?

Q: Actually, you'd been through this... Well, maybe not you, but -

METRINKO: No, I'd had seen it before.

Q: And you'd had it before -

METRINKO: I had had it before. No one else in the embassy had had it before.

Q: Because I thought there had been that time.

METRINKO: Yes, February 14. That group was gone, with the exception of one or two of the military, Colonel Lee Holland, and that was it. I think -

Q: Was the general feeling of "we'll be taken, and then this will be taken care of eventually?"

METRINKO: Yes, taken, and it will be taken care of because the government is going to come back in and break this up again. And in fact, the captors, the "students" - so-called - that had arranged all this, also believed it was going to be a one-day event. They told us that at the time, some of the more pleasant ones. They said, "Don't worry. You'll be in your own home by midnight tonight." And in later years, as they talked about it, giving interviews about it, they still say that, that they had planned that this was going to be a quickie, just to show the world that they could do it. And instead, so much solidarity cropped up for them, then Khomeini suddenly supported them, that they stayed, and that was that.

Q: Well, then, let's talk about how you were treated and all that.

METRINKO: How was I treated? Well, I got singled out fairly quickly. I did not tell anyone in the group, and they had no reason to know, at least initially, that I could speak Persian. I had learned my lesson in Tabriz. You do not tell captors your entire life story and what languages you speak as soon as you meet them. In fact, you hope you can never tell them. We were taken to the ambassador's residence first, held for a while there, kept tied up. Eventually, as it came time for the... I guess the first evening I spent there. By the second day, I was taken over to the cafeteria area, where they had mattresses spread out on the floor. We were placed on mattresses, sort of forced to sit and sleep on the mattress, and at one point the group of students walked in and went up to somebody and started speaking to him in Persian. They were going from bed to bed. One of my embassy colleagues blurted out, "I don't speak Farsi. Ask Metrinko. He speaks Farsi really well." And they came over and hauled me away, and I never saw anybody again for many months. The fact that you're a Foreign Service officer doesn't stop you from being an idiot necessarily. That guy was an idiot, and I could cheerfully have killed him.

Q: Yes.

METRINKO: But... Then that was it. I went to solitary, and they purposely tried to separate the ones who spoke Persian and also the ones who were the heads of offices in the embassy. That was that. I went to solitary on November 6th and came out sometime in May for the first time, briefly.

Q: While you were in solitary, you mentioned, what were they doing with you?

METRINKO: Initially, for the first month or two, a lot of interrogation. Who do you know? What did you do? Who did you talk to? Who said what to who? I had to give them information about figures that were public revolutionary figures. I knew this or that minister. I knew the deputy prime minister. I knew the head of this office. I knew the head of that office. And I could talk about things like that. But that was about it. And we'd just go on repeating and repeating and repeating those questions. They weren't very professional.

Q: I was wondering, did you feel they had a dossier- (end of tape)

You were saying they would ask you -

METRINKO: Well, first they ordered me to open up my safe in my office, and I did that. If someone's pointing a gun at you and telling you to open up an office safe -

Q: It encourages one.

METRINKO: It encourages you. Besides, the break-in time for one of these safes is approximately three minutes anyway, so... I just saved them the trouble. Luckily, I had very little in my safe, per se, but of course had a lot of stuff written in other people's safes. They had my list of phone numbers from the office, but luckily, the ones in the office were very, very standard professional contacts - Ministry of Foreign Affairs people, other people, the ministry's office numbers. And the ones in the house they had not gotten. I found out much, much later, several years later, that a friend of mine, hearing over the radio the news about what was happening at the embassy, had immediately rushed to my house, gone inside, and removed every piece of paper to be found in my apartment. It was somebody who knew my apartment well. All the paper that was in the house, including lists of friends, not lists, but telephone numbers, things like that, was removed from my house and destroyed. And that probably saved a number of people's lives. It certainly saved a fair amount of discomfort for people.

Q: Well, it certainly also shows by this time that the people who knew what was happening were well trained. This was not the normal response of somebody who has not been involved in a revolutionary society for some time.

METRINKO: They were becoming very politically savvy. The friend who went there, I think, went there assuming, as was correct, that his name was in the house and wanted to make sure that he didn't get into trouble.

Q: Well, what was your impression of your interrogators?

METRINKO: Oh, very idealistic, not too bright, not bright in the sense of having had practical experience - just sort of know-it-all students, people who were sure that their point of view was the only point of view in the world and that everything you may have done was wrong. But by this point I was used to that attitude on the part of Iranians. I had already gone through the year and a half of listening to similar people - and not well rounded, not well educated by anyone's standards, and fanatic. That's a dangerous combination.

Q: It is a dangerous combination. While you were in solitary confinement and these things were happening, were you sort of preparing yourself, mentally, how you would respond, sort of working out a game plan?

Well, now, were they trying to extract information or were they trying to indoctrinate you?

METRINKO: No indoctrination, no. They knew I was a lost cause. They were trying to extract information, especially about revolutionary officials who they think might have been collaborating with us in the embassy. So I think I must have mentioned the name of every revolutionary official I could think of. "Oh, yes, he was educated in the United States. Ha, ha."

Q: Well, in a way, I guess this is sort of compensation. You thought you were throwing, as the British say, a spanner in the works.

METRINKO: I was throwing them as many bones from their own ranks as I could possibly throw up, and each of them had I met with. "Oh, I know the deputy prime minister, yes... Khomeini's son-in-law, yes."

Q: Well, we're still talking about early days, and I guess this went through several phases, didn't it?

METRINKO: It went through several phases. I was initially kept inside the embassy, taken from room to room depending on what they were doing with the rooms. I ended up spending quite a bit of time in small, semi-closet area in the basement of the embassy. Initially, when they had larger rooms, I would have a guard who would sit there with a gun trained on me. I always thought that was a bit stupid. Of course, they were also very careful. Gradually they stopped doing that and just kept us locked in the rooms with guards outside in the hallways, which was, of course, a lot more sensible. To leave the rooms to go to the bathroom you had to blindfolded. The first time I got out of the embassy was springtime, so from the period of November until roughly March or April I was locked up in a room with no windows.

Q: How did you get by? I'm talking more about the mental process and all.

METRINKO: I got by by doing a tremendous amount of physical exercise. When I say that, I mean a really tremendous amount of physical exercise. I was doing a thousand sit-ups a day. I'd run in place for two or three hours. And I would do this all day long every day because I had to get tired enough to fall asleep. Otherwise you don't sleep. Food was no problem. They always fed us, even when it was only bread and cheese, the people were always fed. Hygiene was a problem in the sense that, well, we had the embassy bathrooms to use. They were kept clean because we cleaned them. I would volunteer for bathroom-cleaning duty just to get myself out of my room. I never saw anybody else all that time. Occasionally we'd hear a voice, and that would be that. Other than that, I could, much of the time, probably three-quarters of the time that I was there, have books. And that was fine. I would read, exercise, read for an hour, stand up, run in place for an hour, or some sort of exercise.

Q: What sort of books did you get?

METRINKO: Well, we had a small embassy library. They distributed that. Then they had seized the old American High School, and they brought the contents of the library down and dumped it, and they would give us books to read from that. In fact, I still have two of those books.

Q: Did you have any feeling that this organization that was going on was either changing in its composition or they were getting bored with the whole thing?

METRINKO: They were changing their composition because people would disappear from the guard group. I know from the history that I read later, that they purged members of the takeover group, that the Mujaheddin, for example, that were involved in it, were rapidly thrown out of it or rapidly dropped out of it. I don't think it was ever a Mujaheddin plot to take the embassy. There were a couple of people who were in the Mujaheddin who were involved with it or took part in it as activists, but I don't think it was a Mujaheddin plot to do this at all. We know the leaders of this takeover group, and none of them have Mujaheddin connections.

Q: Who were they?

METRINKO: Well, they're in power right now. Khatami, the great liberal hope of the United States, has them all as his trusted advisers, which is something the State Department refuses to think about, that his first vice-president was the spokeswoman for the group - Mary Ebtekar - who likes not to think about it or talk about it much today, but there was this great touting by human rights groups and women's groups that said, "Oh, he's appointed a woman as his vice-president." Yes, she is. She was also one of the ringleaders of this group.

Other people closely tied to Khatami - in fact, the ringleaders of the student group are all closely tied to Khatami today, which has always led me to question what he was doing back then, and that's something that people simply refuse to think about.

Q: Well, of course, there's always the thing that, you know, when you get right down to it, religion is religion, but politics is politics.

METRINKO: And you hope that this is -

Q: Yes, and where you stand is where you sit, and where you sit changes from time to time. All you have to do is look at our political leaders.

METRINKO: Yes, some of them are scumbags that make the Iranians look absolutely pristine.

Q: Well, when they got you, did you have to fight bitterness? I mean, how the hell did the US Government get me into this?

METRINKO: No, I never blamed the US Government. You can't blame the US Government.

Q: Oh, sure you can.

METRINKO: I wouldn't. The US Government was us. I was the US Government. I could blame myself for lack of prescience. I could look back and say, Gee, if I'd only stayed in Germany longer on my vacation, I wouldn't be here. Gee, if I had only gone off to such-and-such a place, I wouldn't be here. But you know, a revolution is an act of nature. In fact, it would be the "perfect storm." You can't fight nature. A revolution is natural; it occurs in politics - not all the time, but as a cataclysmic event which, when you're involved in it, you cannot reflect. It was there. It's happening. You can lay back and enjoy it; you can go with it, hope to survive it, but you can't stop it, and you can't sit back and say, "Gee, if only I had done this," or "Why doesn't my government do that?" I knew my government. And I also knew all the various conflicting trends of thought about how to deal with the revolution that we were going through in Washington. I also had and continue to have very little faith in my government, in the sense of protecting me. So I had no expectations that it would. I remembered very, very clearly from junior officer training, we had been told that if we were taken hostage, the government would not deal with the hostage takers. It would do what it could, but basically we were going to be on our own. And there would be no attempt to buy us out or to deal with hostage-takers, no bargaining with them. Therefore, I was in that situation. I did not expect the government to do anything.

Q: In a way, it was probably a relief in that it allowed you to -

METRINKO: That I didn't have to sit around and keep hoping. In fact, I kind of expected - I mean I really did - that some day some American consul would walk in and say he was the consular officer from the American embassy and was paying a consular visit. I had that little faith.

Q: Well, what happened in May, when they let you out - I mean, not let you out, but they moved you around?

METRINKO: What happened in May? May was when the incident in Tabas occurred, when Americans were killed trying to rescue us in one of the most stupidly planned, botched up military-political escapades of the season - unworkable, unwinnable, and if they had succeeded, we would have been dead. So I'm really glad that it ended in Tabas. It could not have gotten us out. But having said that... What happened is that they came into my cell one day and said, pack your things, you're being moved. Eventually I packed my things, and that consisted of putting things into a little, tiny bag. I think I had an extra shirt, an extra pair of underpants. I put them into a bag, and they came back to my room a while later, blindfolded me, put sort of these heavy plastic restraints on my hands, led me out, and put me in the back of a van, lying on the floor of the van. And there were other people lying there next to me. We were not allowed to talk. And we started to move. I was on the floor of the van, bouncing around for a couple of hours. We got to a different place, and they led me out, blindfolded again, from the van, took me into a building. Various doors slammed and shut and opened and closed. You'd hear voices. And eventually, they sat me down, took off my blindfold, took off my restraints, I looked around, and I was with two other people in the room, neither of whom I recognized. We were, as it turned out, in a former SAVAK prison in the city of Qom, and we had no idea who they were at first, and it was the first time that I had talked to an American since November. So it took a while to start speaking English again, which I hadn't spoken since November, either. But when I found out who they were, fine. In fact, I had met one of them a couple of times. The other one I had met, I think, just when he was introduced at a country team meeting and never seen again. But we lived together for the next month or two. I'm not sure how long I stayed in Qom. I knew it was Qom. They didn't want to tell us where we were, but I figured it out because I could hear a train in the distance the first evening, and I knew that Qom was on a railroad track, and when I tasted the water I knew that we weren't in Teheran any more. Water in Iran has very distinct tastes depending on the city you're in. The water of Qom is infamous because it tastes like salt water. It's very brackish. Tea and coffee made in Qom are almost undrinkable because the water is so salty. When I had some water I knew immediately that we had to be in Qom or somewhere near there.

Q: So what did you all do?

METRINKO: Talked. I hadn't spoken English in so long I could hardly get the words out.

Q: What were their experiences?

METRINKO: They had been in group rooms. They had each had a couple of roommates. The told me about what had happened to various people they knew, various incidents that had occurred, things like that, how various people were doing that they knew of or had seen as roommates were changed, as cellmates were changed. There were some people with whom we had no contact at all, nobody knew. For example, at that point we did not know that Bruce Laingen and the others were being held in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Nor did we at that point yet know that... I'm trying to think when I actually found out that people at the embassy had escaped. I'm not sure how I found that out. I know how I found it out; I never knew who they were. I found it out when I was reading the sports page once, and they had given me the sporting news because it had nothing at all to do with politics (and at that point I would read anything), and in one of the articles it just mentioned, sort of way down in the middle of a thousand words of text that guests of honor at the stadium in New York had been the Canadian ambassador and the six or seven Americans he had helped escape from the embassy in Teheran. And the crowd had cheered them etc. That was how I found out. I always assumed, up until the very end when we got out of prison, that that had been Bruce Laingen and Vic Tomseth, Mike Howland, and some of the others. I had no idea who it was. I just assumed that they had gotten out of the Foreign Ministry somehow.

Q: Well, then, what happened beyond this? Were the interrogations pretty well over by this?

METRINKO: The interrogations were over, yes, except for one that I had later. When was it? I guess I had one last interrogation a couple of months after the others when they had gone through one of my reports and I had reported on a conversation with someone who was a pilot for revolutionary officials, and they had arrested him. They brought him in, and they had us in for a joint interrogation in front of the hostage-takers' mullah, Khoeiniha. Khoeiniha was the spiritual leader of the student group, and he was also a little bit crazy then. He has become sort of a spiritual mentor for Khatami now. Now, of course, he's a laid-back liberal. At the time, he was more obviously a total bastard. Today it's no longer politic to be one.

Q: Now how did that go?

METRINKO: Well... I tried insulting him, which I guess worked, and they eventually led me away. He was a little bit crazy. He sat there the whole time digging a fork into the palm of his hand. He had a sharp fork, and he was just digging his hand down on the fork. This was bizarre.

Q: Well, then, sort of what was the endgame of this whole thing?

METRINKO: The endgame was lots of sitting around. And my roommates got changed once in Qom, so I got to talk to somebody else. I heard about other people, fine. We were then taken away from Qom - this was the time people were spread out all across the country - brought back to Teheran, and originally to what was called the Ghasr Prison or also was known by the name of the Komiteh Prison, although it had nothing to do with the komitehs that were formed after the Revolution. The Komiteh Prison was the name given to it a long time before. It was a prison that had been built by Germans in the reign of Shah Reza. It was a rather unpleasant prison, built as a real prison, the first time I was in a real, real prison with prison cells and little apertures and no windows, just apertures for air, which were always open. And you could hear screaming and things like that at night where people were being tortured, because there were lots of Iranians in prison with us at the same time. I met the former commander of the prison, actually, whose son-in-law owns a grocery store here. I met him a couple of years ago. He was visiting his son-in-law. Lots of Iranians come to the United States.

Q: Well, then, how did it work out?

METRINKO: I was there, had a cellmate there. I was taken away from there up to Evin Prison, went back into solitary. That was in Evin. I have no idea today how many weeks or months I spent in each place. I once calculated that out of the entire time I was, 14 months, I spent approximately 10 months in solitary. But I went from there to Evin, got thrown out of Evin once and sent back to solitary to a punishment cell there.

Q: Why?

METRINKO: It was wintertime in Evin. Evin is in the northern part of the city of Teheran. It's very cold. My cell was excruciatingly cold. If you were just sitting or standing, you can't warm up. I could sit there with a blanket around me, but it was cold. It was below freezing, especially at night. We had no heat. This was already after the Iraq War had started. But one day I was really, really cold. I had been told that the guards also had no heat, that they didn't have any way to stay warm either and there was nothing that anybody could do about this. Conditions were harsh all over the country. Fine, I could accept that, except one day when I was going out to the bathroom, they were leading me out blindfolded, I brushed up against a stove that was on, a heater. And I immediately knew it was a heater, and I just started to go on and on about Islam and the bastards they were - they knew nothing about religion, and they were liars, and what they could do with their imam, and everything else. They threw me back in my cell, and a little while later a couple of the leaders of the group came in - they were called in from the outside - and they said the guards were refusing to deal with me any more because of my attitude, and they took me back down to Komiteh Prison, at night in a car, blindfolded, and put me in a cell, just on a concrete floor with nothing else for about two weeks. And I was on bread and water for about two weeks. It was quite interesting. Then they brought me back later to Evin.

Q: How did it end?

METRINKO: How did it end? It ended when the United States, I guess, finally got its act together. We had an election in the United States, which allowed the Iranians an out. Do I believe that the release of us was delayed on purpose so that the election would take place? Yes, I do. I also believe that some Americans conspired in this. Yes, I do. I heard about it fairly early on, back in '81, shortly after I got out.

Q: Oh, yes. Well, now, let's talk about the last days, or -

METRINKO: The last days? Let's see, it must have been... when was that... I'm trying to think now. Where was I by Christmas? I guess in December... Yes, it would have been December. I was still in solitary up in Evin. I was taken from Evin to a building which... Oh, I might say, in Evin for the first time I got see other prisoners. I was allowed to talk occasionally to Colonel Holland, Lee Holland, who was in a cell next to mine. The would take me in there to sit with him for a while. He had a slightly larger cell than I did. And that was fine. We could sit and chat. And also they would take us out for exercise in the yard, and we could see each other. They would let us walk in a circle in the yard just to get fresh air, and I could see several of the people who were in the same prison block that I was in. And it's funny, a friend - I think it was Anne Swift, who was up in that prison block, too, as one of the two women left - her reaction was exactly the same as mine. She was really, really glad to be able to get the exercise finally, until she realized the group she was in with - and I looked around and had the same reaction - I looked out and saw, hmm, the military attachï¿½, hmm, the head of Station - oops.

Q: So they had pegged you as being -

METRINKO: Why aren't I with the lower-ranking ones somewhere? I'd rather not be in this select crowd. But yes...

Q: Did any of these groups that kept going over to Teheran, various clergymen and the liberal do-gooders and all this? Did they -

METRINKO: The only one that I was allowed to see was Archbishop Capucci, the Greek Catholic archbishop who had been the archbishop in Jerusalem for the Greek Catholic Church, the Melkite Church, and had been put in prison by the Israelis for gun smuggling and then been released to Vatican custody and was running around dealing with a lot of revolutionary groups in the Middle East. I met him. It was the second time I met with him because I had once stayed with him for a full week when I was visiting Jerusalem back in the year 1970. I recognized him, and he recognized me. He and I used to have dinner together every night for a week in Jerusalem. When I was there as a tourist, I stayed in his small monastery there. But he came. Other than that I wasn't really allowed to see most of them. I was taken in for, I guess, the second Christmas, not with the others. I was taken in privately, and I insulted the two clergymen who were there, so they took me out again. I was being filmed, so I immediately started with how could they deal with animals like this, and why were they pretending to be Christians and the clergy, etc., when they obviously had nothing to with Christianity. The got offended. I did my best to offend them. I was offensive on purpose. And they took me away.

Q: These were clergymen from where?

METRINKO: You know, I'm not sure where they were from. The Baltimore Roman Catholic priest who came I never saw. He was met with universally bad vibes like everybody who was there. And the only fitting reference I heard for him was scatological, so not worth repeating. But other than that, the do-gooders - no, I didn't see them.

Q: Well, then, how did the release come about?

METRINKO: Well, we were removed, I was removed from Evin, taken to a building which, as I found out later, was the former guest house of the prime minister. They had put bars and sort of iron grates, not planks, large pieces of flat iron or steel, over the windows, but the furnishings were all the original rococo sort of "Louis-the-Bastard"-type French stuff that had been there while the prime minister's guests were using it. It had an absolutely beautiful bathroom - I'll never forget it - lined floor to ceiling with dark red marble. It was like bathing in Caligula's tomb. But I was there with Dave Roeder, the Air Force attachï¿½, who had been my cellmate off and on. Dave's a good guy. And then we started getting visits - Algerian diplomats, for example, and others. Il remember correctly, the Swiss also came in. I could be wrong about that.

Q: They were the protecting power.

METRINKO: You know, not saying very much, and they weren't supposed to talk to us very much, other than to inquire about our health. And then we were all led, one by one, over for a final televised interview with Mary Ebtekar, who is now a vice-president of Iran. We didn't get along either. They never showed me on TV because whenever a TV camera got trained on me during one of these meetings, I would say things to make it impossible to show me. And she wanted me to say that I'd been treated very well, we'd had a good time there, etc., etc. I told her in un-nice terms to "buzz off." But other than that, more and more visits. And the guards were becoming "friendlier," as in, "Gee, hasn't this been swell," and "Aren't you glad you're going home?" and "You'll be going home very shortly" - that type of thing. I will say that one of the guards even gave me a copy of Time Magazine or parts of Time Magazine, and that's when I discovered that Ronald Reagan was now the President of the United States. He had been elected President. And I immediately assumed it was Soviet disinformation. I did not believe it. It just has to be disinformation - sort of a Mad Magazine version of Time. And then, well, it was almost over. I had trouble over actually leaving the guest house. And so I missed the ride out to the airplane. When we were being put on the bus, I was led back to my seat, and I was trying very hard to be correct because it was an important time. I knew I was in a bus because I could tell I was walking down a bus aisle - you know, the sides of the chairs. And I was put in a seat in the bus, and I could sense the bus was filling up. I could hear them coming, bodies moving around. Two of the Americans behind me started to whisper to each other. One of them said, "Where do you think they're taking us? Are we really going?" Something like that. And the other one started to reply, and one of the guards yelled out, "American, shut up!" And then he said, in Persian, an insulting reference to Americans. And so in Persian, I simply replied in a loud voice, "Shut up yourself, you son of a Persian prostitute!" And they pulled me off the bus, and the bus left. And they beat me up a little bit, and that was fine, except then they realized that they had me, and I realized the bus had gone, too. It had been very stupid of me. I had just been pushed. I reacted. And eventually they sent me out to the airport in a Mercedes-Benz, which is actually the only way to leave Iran.

Q: Oh, absolutely. Well, look, I thought we might stop at this point because the next time we'll pick up, you've gotten to the plane to take off to go back, and we'll pick it up then - January 20th, was it?

METRINKO: I don't know.

Q: I can't remember. 1981.

***

Today is the 19th of September, 2000. Mike, all of a sudden you were seeing all of your colleagues, weren't you?

METRINKO: I was indeed.

Q: How did this go?

METRINKO: It was fine, except I didn't know about half of them on the plane. I had no idea who they were because I had never seen most of them, or never seen a number of them. I was very surprised when I learned that Bruce Laingen was on the plane. I thought he had been one of the several who had gotten freed by the Canadians. I never knew that he was there, or the people with him. Other than that it went fine. We went through Algiers back to Wiesbaden.

Q: In talking was there a sense of exaltation, or was there a mood of bitterness - our government put us in this and they should have gotten us out earlier? How would you characterize it?

METRINKO: I can't characterize the mood of other people. I have no idea what they were really feeling. I felt no bitterness at all. I'd never felt my government would do anything. I had no expectations of it.

Q: Was there also the feeling that if they tried to do something it wouldn't work, that it could get very dangerous?

METRINKO: I really don't know what other people were feeling. We didn't talk about it. Everybody was caught up with saying hello, looking at each other, sort of getting pummeled by the press, by the flashbulbs going off, the camera lights, and then once we got to Wiesbaden getting in touch with family and friends.

Q: As far as you were concerned, did the Algerians play any particular role, or was that at a higher level?

METRINKO: We saw the Algerians a couple of times. Algerian doctors came in and gave us medical examinations. That's when I first really started to believe there was a possibility of getting out of there, because the Algerians explained who they were and why they were there. Other than that, to the best of my knowledge, they played a crucial role. We could not talk to the Iranians directly; we needed the Algerians, and the Algerians played a good role. They had the credentials, and they had the trust of both sides.

Q: How did they treat you when you got to Wiesbaden?

METRINKO: Wiesbaden was sort of interesting. They were trying to keep us under wraps. The State Department was very good. They had a lot of security. They really did not want us to do anything except to go through a battery of psychological tests, because I guess there was a lot of fear that we were all bonkers. And they wanted us to take tests, which, of course, I naturally refused to do.

Q: I would have thought you would play it the other way.

METRINKO: I looked and I walked out. We don't have to do this. But other than that, they treated us quite well. They herded us around. They took us here, took us there, took us to the commissary for new clothes, got us our medical tests, our dental tests. And I took off for about a day. I left Wiesbaden and went off touring with friends. The State Department didn't want me to.

Q: What was the reason?

METRINKO: Why did I go off?

Q: No, what was the reason the State Department wanted to keep you?

METRINKO: A bit of background. When I got to Wiesbaden, I had messages from a couple of hundred people - telegrams, phone messages, everything else - piled up under my name, and there were some rather strange messages there. But one message was from two American friends who were working in Germany. In fact, in October of '79, I had spent a week with them on a vacation, and they just said they were still in Germany, welcome home - all of this - and could I give them a call. So I called them up to say hello, and they asked me if I'd like to go out for dinner and do some touring. And I thought this was a great idea because otherwise I was going to have to sit in the hospital for a couple of days, and I didn't want to do that. So I went and told the head of security there, whom I knew, the American from the State Department, that I wanted to leave the hospital and I'd be gone for a day or so. And he said, "You can't do it. It's not allowed." "What do you mean, it's not allowed?" He said, "You can't do it. You can't leave the hospital." So I just looked at him and said, "I am leaving the hospital. You can help me or you can try to stop me, but if you try to stop me, I'm going outside and telling the press that you're keeping me in prison." And he decided he would help me. And so my friends came and picked me up in the basement, and we went off and I had a great time for a day. It was wonderful.

Q: How was your reception when you came back to Washington?

METRINKO: Do you mean the official reception by the Department of State, or do you mean people of the United States?

Q: I mean both.

METRINKO: People in the State Department were very, very careful of us. They didn't quite know how to handle us. They wanted to make sure that nobody did anything or said anything strange or that would reflect badly on the State Department - which was fine, it's the standard old, you know... They had done their best in a miserable situation for which they were not really prepared, and they had really done a lot of work. And a lot of people had put their hearts and souls into this. In fact, they had done too much of that. Too many people had become emotionally involved, and perhaps the most difficult part of all this was dealing with other people's emotion.

Q: I suppose on your part there was a certain amount of, well, let's get on with it.

METRINKO: Exactly. I mean, I was, Okay, I'm back now. You didn't pay me for weekends. You didn't pay me for overtime. I'm back. But the State Department was very antsy. I was asked once more if I would do the psychiatric exams, and I refused. I saw no reason to do this. That was fine. I took some time off. In fact, I took quite a bit of time off.

Oh, debriefings. I found this fascinating. The State Department never really gave a damn about debriefing us. They never did. They simply did not care. I don't know if it was that they didn't care or that they didn't have the intellectual interest or they had already gone forward in policy matters and they decided they did not want to know. I think it was that.

Q: Well, I don't know. I talked to people who have been in difficult times - not, obviously, what happened to you, but other times - you know, people in embassies under fire or very difficult times or just very "interesting" times, and I have a sort of standard question. Where were you debriefed? And the answer I get this sort of incredulous, What, are you kidding? It's almost as though, okay, let's move on. This is what I'm doing. This is what I've dedicated the rest of my life for is essentially to debrief people and to find out what they did and to make a record of it so it will be useful for historians and for interest - but also for training and all that - because the State Department... I don't know what the problem is. I know I was consul general in a place, and I met my successor, and we talked for about five minutes, and it's almost, well, I don't want to know too much about it because it might contaminate me when I go on to do something. It's funny, so I wouldn't say this is atypical. I mean, I think this is very typical.

METRINKO: I found it strange. The CIA asked me to come down to Washington. I was back home. I was still on leave. I had been back for about two or three weeks, and the CIA got in touch with me, and they asked me if I'd be willing to come and talk to them, spend a day with them, and just to answer questions and to talk about what happened - people, events, things that had happened in the embassy. And I thought this was fine. And they paid my way to Washington. They gave me per diem for a day, and I sat and they spent the whole day taping me. I thought that was fine, but State never bothered.

Now, the State Department did do one thing which, in a way, was... maybe it was the State Department approach to a debriefing. They called several of us together, the old Political Section - myself, John Limbert, Vic Tomseth - and they had a couple of other people there from State. John Limbert is probably the best of the Persian speakers in the State Department. In fact, his wife [Parvaneh] is here at FSI, or she has been for a long time.

Q: What's he doing now?

METRINKO: He has been named but not approved yet to go off as ambassador to Sudan. I don't think he's gotten congressional approval. But anyway, they called us in and sat us down in a nice room with a couple of people from the Middle East bureau, NEA, and then the proceeded to try and explain how what had happened had not been conscious government policy on the part of Iran, that this had all been sort of a wildcat move by students who were not in any way associated with the government. It's as though they wanted us to adopt that line. I broke up the meeting, I'm afraid, by reminding them that we had been in government prisons, in government facilities, surrounded by government guards, etc. etc., etc., and I thought that they were just being stupid if they thought that there was not government involvement. And the meeting just simply broke up. They couldn't continue. (End of tape)

That's understandable. Later it became understandable to me. At the beginning I was a bit annoyed by it because I felt that my own life had been taken over by other people, and I found that, in theory, I had a "spokesperson" waiting for me in Pennsylvania. He lasted about one day, when I told him I could speak for myself, thank you very much, and went on like that. There were several of us who got to West Point and did not want to take part in the "Hollywood Squares"-type interviews that were being given on TV. They had all sorts of people being interviewed. When I say "Hollywood Squares," they had some sort of deal with the networks where -

Q: You might explain what "Hollywood Squares" is.

METRINKO: Yes, okay.

Q: It's a quiz show with celebrities. It's more for entertainment than for information.

METRINKO: And on the screen of the television - I'd forgotten how old that quiz show was - you had a grid of people, usually three, three, and three, so that they were like a tic-tac-toe grid. And they had hostages arranged like that, too, with the cameras picking them up and transposing the figures so that there were, I think, nine or 12 on the screen at the same time. I did not want to do this because I had just no desire to be interviewed, especially with everyone else, and I refused - a number of us refused - and on TV they said that "several of the former hostages have refused to take part in any interviews. This appears to be the same as the number of people who we believe have had serious psychological problems."

Q: That was very nice.

METRINKO: Yes, that was very nice. Reporters are bastards. They always have been. Reporters and prostitutes vie for the oldest profession. But then I had to give an interview, and I did. I gave an in-depth interview to a reporter who wrote a note to me in Persian. I figured, if the reporter can write a note in Persian, he was damn well worthy of getting an interview. He'd been a Peace Corps volunteer in Iran and remembered enough Persian. He was also from my home town newspaper, which made it perfect. So I gave him an exclusive.

Q: What about the official reception in Washington?

METRINKO: What about the official reception in Washington? I'm trying to remember the official reception in Washington. The day that we arrived in Washington from West Point, we were taken to the White House in Metro buses and paraded past the State Department. We got to meet President Reagan, and we all had our handshake and a photograph with him. It was a very nice ceremony at the White House. The State Department was kind of excluded. It wasn't a State Department ceremony at all; it was very much a "White House has brought you this victory" ceremony - which is fine, it was politics. The State Department ceremony came much, much later, and it was as tacky as you can possibly imagine the State Department can be, which is pretty tacky. The State Department ceremony was about a month and a half later, and it consisted of Alexander Haig... Well, I got a call from the liaison officer who had been handling it, saying that the State Department was going to hold a ceremony, and we were going to be presented with medals, the medals were gold, and we would have to be there to receive the medal. Fine. I agreed to come down to this ceremony with my parents, and the ceremony consisted of a big presentation in one of those meeting rooms on the main floor of State. Alexander Haig did not bother to read out our names or anything else, just gave a small speech about service, God, honor - well, I guess not God, but honor, country and the whole bit. And on our behalf, I think, Bruce Laingen accepted a plaque or accepted a piece of paper from Alexander Haig, and then we were told individually to proceed to a particular room of the State Department, where we would be presented with the actual medal. I went to the room, and it turned out to be a cubbyhole in Personnel, and when I walked in, there was a GS-8 or someone sitting there, and I kind of looked around because I really had expected maybe, you know, a cup of coffee or something like that. And I told her that I had been told to come there to pick up a medal. And she said, what ceremony was it? What's the award for? And I told her, and without batting an eye she went to a stack of medals on a shelf, and there were lots of stacks of medals on the shelf. She asked me my name, pulled out a box, had me sign a receipt, and that was that.

Q: One other thing I just happened to remember. As I recall, Jimmy Carter flew out to Wiesbaden. Was he there when you arrived?

METRINKO: Yes, sure.

Q: And how did that work, because there would be... things were sort of ambivalent, I would imagine?

METRINKO: Jimmy Carter came to Wiesbaden. I talked to my parents. I called my parents as soon as I got there, of course. And my mother said, "President Carter is going to come to see you all in Germany. Please be nice to him." And I couldn't imagine why she would even say that. I couldn't imagine not being respectful to the President. It still hadn't sunk in that Reagan was President, of course. But why wouldn't I be? And I had no idea why people would be angry. None of this was Carter's fault. He was the President, but what happened was not his fault. He did his best to get us out of there alive, and I think he did, all in all, given the circumstances, a pretty good job of it. There were some people there, I gather, who were angry or who walked out. They're just - what can I say? - sort of idiots. There was no reason to do that. And one respects the office of the President always.

Q: That's the way Carter probably lost the presidency because of this.

METRINKO: Yes, that's fine, too.

Q: Things happen.

METRINKO: The Presidency is as much luck as it is merit.

Q: Well, then, how about whither Mike Metrinko? You had a job to do and -

METRINKO: Well, what I did was do a little bit of traveling. I had been given an assignment. They had sat us down and talked about assignments and basically said, "What is your dream assignment? Where do you want to go? What do you want to do?" What I had wanted to do for a long time, in fact I had put in for it even when I was still in Teheran but, of course, had never gotten an answer, thanks to events - I wanted to go and get a master's degree at Harvard. And I told them that's what I want to do. I want to go off and get a master's degree. And that was great, but what do you want to do after that? That's only a year. And I said, "What about Poland? I'd like to get an assignment to Poland." And they arranged all that. It was all done, like, immediately.

Okay, when I talked about the State Department reception - on ceremonies, the State Department always sucks, but every once in a while it really pulls through and rewards people. And I felt perfectly well compensated because I got to not only go off and get a year of university training, but then I had a year of Polish following that, and then I went off as principal officer in Krakow, which was a great assignment, and it's had more effect on my life, probably, than any of my other assignments.

Q: Okay, well, let's just touch on Harvard. You went to Harvard, right?

METRINKO: Yes.

Q: What were you taking? What were you getting your master's in?

METRINKO: I got a master's in public administration.

Q: Was this going to the Kennedy School?

METRINKO: The Kennedy School, which has a very sort of free-wheeling curriculum. You can take anything you want. I took some history course, Middle East history. I took a fair number of administrative courses. I had excellent teachers. The quality of the academic world of Harvard was superb. That's all I can say. It was just absolutely great. One of my teachers for both semesters was Governor Dukakis - a great teacher. I don't know what sort of President he would have made. He was an excellent teacher, very personable, always questioning - excellent. I had Richard Neustadt for two semesters, too - absolutely superb professors.

Q: Did he hit you with that book, Thinking in Time?

METRINKO: He was writing the book based on our class. We were partly guinea pigs for it.

Q: I must say I was profoundly impressed by it. This is a book called Thinking in Time, by Neustadt and somebody else.

METRINKO: Yes, Ernie May.

Q: Ernie May.

METRINKO: He was actually my advisor there.

Q: In which they give a step-by-step way of, look, before you make decisions, find out what happened before, which is certainly not the State Department way.

METRINKO: No. We react first and think about it later.

Q: In a way, what we're doing here is somewhat of a positive result of reading the book. Excellent.

METRINKO: Ernie May was my student advisor. Neustadt and I became good friends. I used to go to his house for dinner. He's wonderful, and just incredibly intelligent. He knew everybody in American politics. A wonderful guy. It was a good experience. The Harvard experience was -

Q: You took Polish for a year.

METRINKO: I came back here to FSI, or to the old FSI building, took Polish for a year.

Q: Had you had any Ukrainian or Polish?

METRINKO: No. My grandmother did not speak English, but I did not speak Ukrainian. My parents spoke Ukrainian. I didn't speak it, though.

Q: You know one of the things... I spent a year studying Serbian, and I learned more about what's happening in present-day Serbia from my teachers, and I understand Milosevic and all mainly because of my teachers. So often when you take a language, you pick up quite a bit from your teachers, and not necessarily in an official course, just by talking with them. Were you picking up things about Poland?

METRINKO: Oh, absolutely. You know, in the strictest sense, you got to FSI not only to learn the language but to learn to react to people, too. You can't study a language in a vacuum. The teachers were all different. I learned a great deal about Poland from watching them. Their Poland was a Poland that did not exist any more. That was fine, too, in the sense that FSI seems all to often to hire language teachers who represent long-disappeared regimes - instead of hiring people -

Q: Yes, it's in the nature of -

METRINKO: - who's in America.

Q: Yes. But you were in Krakow from when to when?

METRINKO: I was in Krakow from July of 1983 until July of 1986. I got there at the very tail-end of martial law. The Solidarity people were all in prison. Jaruzelski was the head of Poland. There were student demonstrations off and on the whole time I was there. It was a period when the United States had sanctions against Poland. It was also a period in which the Pope was Polish, and it was a rather strange time to be in Poland. A lot of what I heard about Poland from here was simply not true. And at the same time... How do I explain this? Poland is a strange country, very, very strange country. It's Europe, and yet somehow it's not quite Europe, either. There's still a lot of the East there. And it's certainly not Western Europe. It's Eastern Europe, which is different. That's not very profound, is it?

Q: Yes, but I mean, attitudes and all that -

METRINKO: The people in Poland traveled. They came to the United States in large numbers. The United States had a strong presence in Poland, not because of an American military presence, which had been true in other countries I'd lived in - Turkey and Iran, for example - but because we had so many American students there and so many tourists visiting. It was not a political relationship, but it was a people-to-people relationship. I had several hundred American students studying at the University of Krakow.

Q: Who were these students?

METRINKO: They were studying medicine - medical studies, dentistry, things of that sort.

Q: It would sound like a fall-back position.

METRINKO: Yes and no. At the time, American medical schools were very difficult to get into and extraordinarily expensive. In Poland, the school was superb - the University of Krakow, Jagiellonian University, is a fine old medieval university where the medical studies are tops. They had an English program for foreign students to study medicine in, and if you studied medicine for the whole four or five years there, it would only cost you what it cost you to study one year in the United States. And that meant living well, having a motorcycle, having an apartment, and all your studies, all your books, plus your travel. So this appeals to a lot of people.

Q: Could you translate that medical degree into a job in the United States?

METRINKO: Immediately, yes. On the trip that I was on two weeks ago in New England, I spent some time visiting one of the former students, who is a doctor up in New Hampshire. They got very, very decent jobs. They would come back here and they would do internships in the summer often, or they would come back... they did their residencies here, of course. And they got good residencies, too.

Q: First let's talk about the consulate in Krakow. What was it, and what was your main job there?

METRINKO: We had in the consulate a large consular section. We had three American officers in the Consular Section. We had an admin officer, an American; we had one politico-economic officer; we had one USIA officer, and myself. Most of the time, too, I had an American secretary. The main job was to keep the representation going, the cultural representation and the consular representation. We had a rather strange position in Krakow. In Warsaw, the embassy had very cold contact with the government. The embassy was one of those great Iron Curtain buildings set back behind high fences. Nobody could ever quite get into it. It was always heavily watched, and the people in the embassy had little or no contact with normal people outside the embassy. The Political Section, the Economic Section were up on the third or fourth floor, surrounded by the gates and the barriers and every thing else. Nobody went up there. They did not leave very often, either.

In Krakow, if we wanted to have lunch, we had to go outside. It was a great, old renaissance building, with almost no security to speak of. USIA had a very active program. People were always filling the library, which was right in the lobby of the building. They would come to watch films. We had students coming and going all the time. We would hire university students, local university students, Poles, to do all the GSO-type work in the building, and it was always filled with students from the universities. Several of us were taking Polish at the university. I was one of them. So our lives there were far more tuned into Polish society. We were received at very high levels, socially - in religious terms, too. The local Cardinal was a good friend of mine. We would meet, dine, etc., with all the local high-ranking clergy, the solidarity people, newspaper editors. The only people who did not talk to us, officially, were the governors of provinces and the heads of parties.

Q: Was this deliberate? Who was calling the tune on this, our government or their government?

METRINKO: No, everyone was supposed to try. However, we had sanctions in force against Poland, and they would not receive us at that level. Now that was true, and yet the Poles got around that, including the Polish officials. There was an organization called Dom Polski, "the Polish House," or "the House of Poland," which was a fine old commercial institution. It was sort of like a chamber of commerce, if you will. The head of Dom Polski had absolutely excellent ties, of course, with the Communist government. He had absolutely excellent ties with foreign governments as well, and with Americans and with the consulate in particular. And about once a month he would come over and invite me to a lunch at the top of Dom Polski, which was in a lovely renaissance building on the other side of the square, and I would go off to a private lunch, knowing it was going to take the whole afternoon, and at the private lunch there would be three or four of the top people in the province - never anyone who was purely government, but they would be people who were the heads of major industries, people who were the heads of major companies, some major cultural figures as well. And we would have a nice, pleasant lunch, spend the afternoon together, and then go back to kind of not talking to each other for the next month.

Q: What was the boundary of Krakow, and what were the major activities of that area?

METRINKO: Krakow is the former capital of the Austro-Hungarian province of Galicia. Southern Poland was the area from which most of the immigrants to the United States actually went. It had been the poorest of the Austro-Hungarian provinces, but because so many people had left from there to get to America, including three of my grandparents, it meant that as time passed it became the richest of the provinces -

Q: This is the money coming back?

METRINKO: - with the money coming back, and because of the ties people had with the United States and with the West in general. We had all over southern Poland houses called "dollar houses," which were being built by people who had gone to America as tourists and had worked for a year or two. Everyone there had ties in one way or another with the United States - not everyone, I'm exaggerating slightly, but a large number of people including officials had ties with the United States. It was always rather funny, when some high official who was not supposed to talk to us would have to get a visa for a son or daughter. But we accommodated that, and it was to Krakow, to the consulate, in fact, to me, that when one of the five members of the Polish Politburo, the head of the Polish Government, one of the five top people, wanted to go to the United States, he came and saw me in Krakow instead of going to the embassy, because he could approach me in Krakow.

Q: I've heard that somebody, I'm not sure where he was or exactly what time, but somewhat in this period, who said he was convinced that there were at least three dedicated Communists in Poland at the time he was there.

METRINKO: It was hard to know which three he would have meant. Poland was wonderful. Let me give you an example of the lengths that they would go to prove, I guess to the Soviets and themselves, that they were anti-capitalist and how they would get around things. There was an old guild - I mean a real bona fide medieval guild - in Krakow called the Chicken Sharpshooters, and it was a guild of restaurant owners, tavern owners, barkeepers, and a variety of other people who had over time joined this guild. They would parade around in great costumes with silver gilt chickens around their necks and wear their medieval clothes in all parades, and they were always, because it was the oldest of guilds and represented all the others, they were the ones who would always lay wreaths on official holidays. I got to know the guild heads because they were right behind me in laying wreaths. I used to lay wreaths all the time. I became the master of wreath ceremonies. People would come down from the embassy just to be included in laying the wreath at this ceremony or that ceremony. It was great. The guild invited me to dinner at their guild headquarters. This was great. And the head of the guild said, "But please, Mr. Consul, don't bring your own car. You understand, we don't want people to see your car in front of our building." Fine, I said. He said, "I'll send a car for you." Well, the time came, somebody came upstairs to my office and said the car is here from the guild. I went down and got into a car with a driver, and off we went to the guild headquarters. A late lunch, as they always did in Poland, became more and more a dinner. At around six or so, the driver knocked on the door and came in and said, "Excuse me, Mr. Consul, but I just wanted to know if you know how long you're going to be here because I have to go and pick up my boss. I could drive you home first and then go get him, or I could go and take him home and then come back for you later." The guild head said, "Oh, don't go yet. We're having fun. There's still plenty of time." So he told the driver, go back, take your boss home, and come back in about two hours. I had assumed he was the guild director's driver, and after he left I turned to the guild director and said, "Who does he work for?" And he said, "Oh, he's the Party First Secretary's driver." And I said, "That was the First Secretary's car, of Krakow Province?" He said, "Well, yes." And he didn't want me to drive my car!

Q: What were you getting of reflections of Jaruzelski?

METRINKO: The Polish view of the government was a bit strange. Not strange - there were several components, some of which were mutually exclusive, but all of which somehow meshed together to let the Poles ride out that whole period. One is this. The Poles were desperately attached to law and order. They had been smashed in World War II. They had lost whole cities, towns, villages. They had lost 20 per cent of their population. They did not want any more broken windows, any more shattered buildings, any more bombings, any arson or anything else. They wanted everything to be peaceful. This was all across the country. One reason being that if your window got broken, it was awfully hard to get glass to replace it, but still, nobody wanted disorder.

At the same time, the Poles were incredibly nationalist and did not want any hint... or they were simply tired of having the relationship with the Soviet Union. It was a boot on Poland, and they knew it and they wanted out of it. It offended their sense of Polishness. Fine. Solidarity was appealing to Poles, but at the same time not appealing to the upper class of Poles - and yes, there was an upper class of Poles. Call them the Schlachta, if you will, the old sort of landed class. They had lost most of their land, but many of them still had their big houses and apartments. They still had their names, which were famous in Polish history. They still had their ties to being this or that - Daddy was a professor and mommy was this - and while on the one hand they supported Solidarity because it was a finger in the face of the Soviets, on the other hand, they considered the Solidarity people sort of "worker trash." You had all that happening. Also, in the villages, they really did not care very much for Solidarity. The role of Solidarity never caught on. It was a worker thing from the big cities, but out in the villages and the farms, they didn't care much about this at all. They just wanted to go to church on Sunday, get drunk on Saturday, and do the field work and get a job in the United States or Germany or Austria once in a while to get some hard cash - and nothing else, thank you.

Now when I arrived there, all the Solidarity leaders were in prison. They were being allowed out of prison whenever they had an appointment at the American consulate or another western consulate to process their asylum cases, so we had a list of people coming in every week, straight from prison for the day, to process requests for asylum in the United States. This was a Polish official way of dealing with Solidarity. I might add that no one, as far as I know, died in prison. The Poles who were in Solidarity and were taken to prison came out looking fat. They did not come out looking beaten, emaciated, or anything else. They came out looking pudgy and soft and fat, and most of them - not the top top leaders, not Lech Walesa and a couple of the others, but many of the sort of mid-level ones simply went off to the United States or to other Western countries with asylum status.

Q: I'm not sure if it's at this time, but there was a case of a Polish priest -

METRINKO: Father Popietuzka.

Q: - who was beaten up. Was that during your time?

METRINKO: It was during my time.

Q: Can you talk a little about that?

METRINKO: A Polish priest who was giving anti-regime sermons in church, attracting a lot of attention. He was warned a couple of times to stop, did not. He was picked by a couple of Ministry of the Interior people and ended up dead. I think it was the only case in the three years I was there, and his church became a shrine then to him.

Q: What was the feeling, that this was not a crime but a mistake?

METRINKO: Yes, very great, a mistake. You know what's strange about all this was the position of the Church itself. The Church had a stake in security and stability. The Church was very Polish, very Polish, very nationalist. It had a lot of Church property. It had lost a great deal, but it still had a great deal. It had worked out a sort of life with the government. It worked together. You could get things done. Government officials would use the church for ceremonies. Government officials would attend ceremonies in the church. Party members attended mass. It was never like the Soviet Union. And churchmen traveled. They did not preach a lot of rebellion. And yet at the same time they were supportive of Solidarity. But the whole thing managed to work. When you look at what happened in Poland during that period - say, 1980 to the breakup of the Soviet Union -

Q: 1992.

METRINKO: Yes, which was not a short time - almost no one died. Very few people, for political reasons. There were never many real accusations of nasty crimes by the government. They would hose people down. If there was a strike or if there was a big demonstration, the police would come out with their hoses, and they would use colored water so that it would stain the clothes of the people who were taking part in the demonstration, so they couldn't use those clothes again. But that was it. They'd pick people up and then release them that day, and yes, they were rather unpleasant around the consulate - they did quite a bit of harassment of consulate people, and they also harassed people coming and going. They would follow my car, for example, and stay a few inches away from the car the whole way - literally, almost touching the car - things like that. But they didn't kill, they didn't hit - not really - at least not that we knew of.

Q: What were you reporting on within your consular district? This was a rightful rebellion that could go on for a long time?

METRINKO: No, it wasn't rightful rebellion. Poles aren't rebels. It wasn't going to happen there. There were too many strong forces that wanted things to go slowly. That included the education system; that included the Church (which was very strong); that included the business interests there; and that included the government. The whole way that Solidarity was treated by the government, I think, was indicative of this - that they weren't smashed. They were broken up, but not smashed. And I think you could see the results when Solidarity took over, when there was this, you know... the Communist Party one morning disappeared. Nothing really happened to the old high-ranking Communist officials. They all became part of the new government or simply took jobs in private industry. They didn't go to prison. Contrast that with, say, Romania or a couple of other places.

Q: East Germany, where -

METRINKO: - where there was a lot of blood.

Q: Well, in East Germany, Stasi had had such a pervasive influence, but there wasn't this in Poland?

METRINKO: No, I never felt that. I mean there was always a human face to it.

Q: How about the attitude towards the "great friendship" between Poland and the Soviet Union?

METRINKO: I think most people considered that a joke. It was a joke. If you were a party member and you worked in a factory, you would get vacations in the Soviet Union, which you would go to, but you'd far prefer going to Paris or London or the United States to visit your aunt in Chicago. The friendship just wasn't there.

Q: What about the Soviet Army?

METRINKO. The Soviet Army was there. I almost never saw it because it was not readily visible anywhere around Krakow. I'd had a lot of family in Poland, and when I discussed family visits with other people, I was told everywhere was fine except, "don't go to western Poland," to a couple of towns where I had family, because that's where the Soviet army is based. "It's just better for them and for you, for the family and for you, if you don't go there." But that was it. I remember once - this was one comment, driving on the road. You could go anywhere in Poland, or almost anywhere. Ninety-nine per cent of the country was open to you. I was driving to Germany once, and was going through that part of Poland, and I stopped to get gas, and the gas station attendant looked at the car, and he said, "You're a diplomat?" And I said, "Yes." And he said, "Where are you from?" And I said, "From America." And he asked a couple of questions about Poland, and that was fine, and then he looked at me, he said, "You know, when you go back to America, why don't you take all these Soviet soldiers with you. We're tired of them. Take them with you." That was the attitude.

Q: You mentioned the Poles were traveling. What was the sense of the Iron Curtain and all that?

METRINKO: They traveled all the time. They were free to travel.

Q: This was not -

METRINKO: This was not Bulgaria. It was not Ukraine. It was not the Soviet Union. It was not Romania. Poles traveled and could travel quite freely. University students always took off, disappeared, went all around Europe. Good gosh, people came to the United States easily. At the time, I think we were doing more than 50 visas a day in Krakow - something like that.

Q: Did you have a problem with non-immigrant visas?

METRINKO: Of course, there's always a problem with non-immigrant visas in Poland. It's not that Poles don't go back; they simply come here, or used to come here, and work and then go back after six months or a year. If you think about it, very, very few people in the world can afford an American vacation. If you are really coming to the United States and are going to spend time in a hotel touring, you had better be a Japanese millionaire. You can't afford it. Most consular officers know this. Your average tourist, the one who applies for a tourist visa, isn't really intending to spend $10,000 to go to Disneyland. They're going to either visit relatives they're not telling you about, or they're going to do some work when they get here. Students always work. American students work overseas; foreign students work here. They come here and work their way across the country for the summer, or go to somewhere for the summer, and work and then go back to their schools.

Q: Well, this, of course, is often the thing when you sort of learn to relax, but do they come back? And if they come back, how -

METRINKO: We kept doing studies on that, anecdotal, granted. We would also check with local tourism bureaus, people like that, people who sort of watched this; and the feeling was that most Poles came back. The ones who did not stayed for legitimate reasons. They would get married when they got here. No problem. Doesn't bother me. In general, they did come back. They would come back to build their houses and settle down in them.

Q: What about - let's put it - Chicago? I mean, did Chicago weigh heavily as a place to go, and connections, and all that?

METRINKO: The northeast coast in general - New Jersey, New York - rather few to the far West.

Q: Was there much of a problem - did American politics or Americans come and intrude at all? Did they come and sort of spout off, or was -

METRINKO: We had almost no American official visitors. In the entire time I was in Krakow we had exactly one CODEL. That was Senator Duremberger, and the main reason he came, he was then the head of the Senate Intelligence Committee - he came because his mother had been an immigrant from Poland, and she wanted to see the place where she had been born. She had immigrated when she was a young child. And he came with a couple of members of his staff and his mother. And it was one of the funniest trips I ever saw, but other than that-

He came at a time when we had not had an official American visitor in a couple of years. Nobody knew how to handle these any more. He arrived at the embassy, and the embassy quite properly assigned him a control officer from the Political Section - always a mistake (they never seem to know what they're doing) - and gave him a van from the embassy to use, and a driver of course, to take him from Warsaw to Czestochowa to Krakow. Well, after all the receptions in Warsaw were over, they took off and were heading down towards Krakow, and they simply did not arrive. And we waited and waited and waited, and things were getting later and later. Luckily the reception was going to be for the next day, but still, they hadn't arrived yet. And we got a call from the embassy explaining that the van had gotten about two hours outside the city of Warsaw, right in the middle of all the empty fields, and had run out of gas. They had forgotten to put gas in the van. Well, this was at a time when gas was rationed. It wasn't a matter of using dollars. You could not get it unless you had ration coupons. Neither the driver nor the political officer had thought to bring ration coupons for the gasoline. So the driver had to hitchhike back to the embassy. It didn't occur to either the officer or the driver to simply go and make a phone call. He hitchhiked back. So they had Duremberger, his mother, the staffers from the committee, and everyone else sitting in the middle of a field for about three or four hours waiting for the driver to come back with another embassy car, jerry cans of gasoline, and ration tickets. And the comment that I had from chargï¿½ was, "Michael, when they get there, tell the driver and tell [so-and-so, the political officer] to stay in the van and to keep driving south until they fall off the edge of the Carpathian Mountains." That was a good visit.

Q: Were there any problems with American citizens coming back and getting in trouble?

METRINKO: Not really. We would have American citizens coming back and being so overwhelmed by hospitality, by vodka and kielbasi and ham and pastry, that they would have heart attacks. That happened a couple of times, and we had a couple of deaths there. It think it was that. They were just overwhelmed by all the things they weren't supposed to be doing for their health - one American who came back and died in his girlfriend's arms, and we never quite told the wife or children back home how exactly he'd died. Things like that. But coming back and getting in trouble, no. We had a couple of Americans who got arrested once. We had a bad spate of relations following a Mayday demonstration when I had gone off to the central square of the city to take part in the official government Mayday celebrations, you know, to stand on the platform with all the generals and the other officials and the diplomatic community, such as it was, in the pouring rain to commemorate Mayday, while the head of the Consular Section and my USIA officer had gone off to the Solidarity demonstration in their old clothes, to report on what was happening. They got picked up by the police, and they were PNGed from Poland. They were given 48 hours to leave. Unfortunately, I also lost my secretary, who was married to the consular officer. And three or four American tourists were arrested that same day. They were taking pictures in the central square of Krakow. They were basically people on vacation, and they were young, but good cameras, taking pictures of all the decorations and everything else for Mayday, and the parade, and they got arrested and thrown in prison, and I had to go in and get them out because my consular officer was no longer able to function as a consular officer. After that, things slowly improved.

Now this also never meant that the people of the city were anti-American, because immediately after that when I thought the world had ended - you know, I've just lost half my American staff, things are awful, the government hates us, we have no idea where we're going to get other people in to fill their places - about three or four days after that, I had to go to attend a ceremony that was non-official. There was a ceremony where a wreath was laid at the Pilsudski Mound, which was just outside the city of Krakow. It was a huge commemorative mound that had been put up in 1900 or so in honor of Pilsudski. It looked like a pyramid, but it was all dirt. And people would go up there to put flowers on it, I think on his birthday, if I'm not mistaken. And there was a drive up there. It was on the other side of the city park. As my car approached, and there were thousands of people lining this thing... The people of Krakow would all walk up, and it was always a nice picnic day. As my car approached, the crowd just burst into applause, and we got applauded for the next 15 minutes, all the way up. The whole hill just was applauding us. They knew what was going on. It was great.

Q: Just administratively, how did you get replacements? I mean, were you tempted to cut off visas for a while?

METRINKO: No, no, no. I used to go out and sit in the Visa Section myself and make sure that we could get rid of the lines. No, never that, because cutting off the visas would have been great as far as the local government was concerned, and they could have said that we were stopping people from traveling. How did we do it? We just did it. We all worked longer. The political officer and the USIA officer would double on the visa line whenever they had to. We just did it. I got a replacement in fairly quickly. Oh, one of the wives was hired as an admin officer. Eventually she joined the Foreign Service. It was her first job like that, and she took over the admin function. Others of us helped in the Consular Section. It think the embassy sent us down people temporarily.

Q: Did you find visiting the cardinal, other members of the Church, a good source of information of what was going on?

METRINKO: Very good. Number one, to coin a pun, they put an imprimatur on our behavior. The cardinal in Krakow had been personally selected by the Pope. He had been the Pope's confessor and philosophy teacher when the Pope was in the seminary. He was chosen personally by the Pope. If I walked into a reception and he was there, he would walk over, pick up a glass of wine, and bring it over to me. He was a great guy. He made sure that I met all the leading clergy in the area. Now, did he sit there and give me reports? No, he was a renaissance cardinal. This was part of his function, to deal with the foreign diplomats, but he was also a great guy and made life a lot easier for me there because he approved of things, the work that I was doing. He also, by the way, arranged a private audience with the Pope, which I thought was quite nice.

Q: With the Pope being Polish, did he visit Krakow when you were there?

METRINKO: No, when I was there, no. He had visited just a few weeks before.

Q: How was this playing in Poland, having a Polish Pope? (End of tape)

METRINKO: There weren't any pictures of Lenin or Stalin. There were statutes around, official statues, but people... there was no cult the way you'd have in other countries. If there was a cult, it was a cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary. There wasn't this attachment to Communism.

Q: It was the Virgin of - what was it?

METRINKO: Of Czestochowa. I was the official consul to the monastery there, too.

Q: Was that in your consular district?

METRINKO: It wasn't, but they preferred coming to me rather than going to Warsaw, and so I handled all their visas, and I made a little bit of deal... I mean, not a deal, but when they came down, a representative of the monastery, I made a little ceremony out of it always because it was, indeed, a center of Polish life, and I was a friend of the bishop of Czestochowa. So I would go up there to visit him. I also had cousins in Czestochowa, so I would go up there to visit them. But we had a very good relationship with the monastery and with the bishop's office, too, up there. In fact, I was introduced to the bishop of Czestochowa by the Cardinal over breakfast. That's how I met the bishop of Czestochowa. So this played out. I don't think the embassy ever visited Cardinal Glemp. Maybe there were, I don't remember seeing any sort of messages or reporting about dealing with the clergy in that part of -

Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?

METRINKO: We didn't have an ambassador. We had a chargï¿½, John Davis, who was excellent and who was as attuned to life in Poland as you could possibly be.

Q: He later became ambassador.

METRINKO: He later became ambassador. I don't recall if that was on this tour. I think it was after I left, actually. But he was there the whole time I was. He had a predecessor whose name I don't remember, who was only there for a month or so when I got there. John Davis was excellent, certainly let me have a rather free hand, very supportive, a great guy - and knew his Poland.

Q: This is fairly early on in the Reagan Administration, and Ronald Reagan had come out of the right wing of the Republican Party, which had rather strong views on Communism and all. How did that play? I mean, were there concerns about Reagan?

METRINKO: Reagan was very much liked in Poland. The average Pole knew his name, talked about him, and strangely enough, I think certainly the Polish Church and the Solidarity people and a lot of other people in Poland supported the embargo and the sanctions that we had against Poland, which was always a bit strange to me.

Q: Was there sort of a "student mafia" that went to the United States, Poles that went to the university for a while and came back and brought, sort of, you know, "In America they do it this way. Why don't you do it this way?" and that sort of thing? Was there a -

METRINKO: I'm trying to think. Most of the Poles in the top levels of academia there weren't American-educated. And American education would simply have been too expensive of them at the time. When you think about salaries there, the rector of a university, his salary on the black market came up to about $25 a month. My maid got more than that from me. But teachers, professors, people like that, were getting large salaries by Polish standards, but out in the real world, the salaries were worthless.

Q: How about the cultural field?

METRINKO: One of the richest cultures I've ever been exposed to, an extremely extensive and intensive cultural life, and we were always included. In Krakow, there was a world-class composer, Penderecki. Penderecki is a very fine sort of modern composer. While I was in Poland, I think it was his 50th birthday, the commemoration was held at the Kennedy Center, and it was attended by Ronald Reagan. So if you could imagine, it was this local guy from Krakow, but Penderecki was also a good friend of the consulate. He invited us over all the time. He would have the whole staff to his home for dinner. When he had a major cultural even going on, and he hosted a lot of them, he would have us all attending. He was an absolutely pleasant person, as was his wife.

Q: Was there the equivalent of a cabaret?

METRINKO: Well, there was the underground, kind of underground, theater. We always all received free tickets to everything - for the concerts, for the plays, for the ballet, for this, for that. We would just get calls right from the theaters, right from wherever, the ballet, or from the conservatory, saying we're having an opening, an art gallery opening, this opening, that opening, first day of the play, first day of the ballet - you know, how many tickets does the consulate want? And we went all the time. Of course, you could walk to this. It was also cheap enough to buy. I mean, tickets were all heavily subsidized, and at the time... not like here. I never go to cultural events here because I'm not going to spend $100 or $200 to attend something. I can't afford to.

Q: In Yugoslavia I went to everything. Here, I'm wiped out.

METRINKO: Also here, it's too far to get to. There I could walk, and I did walk, to concerts, the ballet, to this or that. It was simply easy.

Q: Were American films playing there?

METRINKO: American films played there. In fact, I have a huge collection of Polish movie posters advertising American films. I made the mistake once of having a USIA film in my house, an American film, and I learned never to do that again.

Q: Why? What happened?

METRINKO: USIA called me and said, "We have Sophie's Choice, which has just arrived. Would you like to have an opening, a showing, in Krakow?" And, "What's it about?" Oh, it's about, you know, Meryl Streep is in it, this and that, etc., etc.

Q: It's about a concentration camp.

METRINKO: It's about a concentration camp, and that was fine, but because of who was in the film... and it was based upon a Styron book, and Styron was well known in Poland, too. In fact, he was a house guest of mine there at one point. And Kurt Vonnegut came and spent a couple of days. But I thought it was a great idea to have a film. The mistake I made was not looking at the film first, and no one in Warsaw had looked at the film, either. We just got this in canisters, set up the projector... I had about 25 of the top level of Polish society, or whatever you want to call it, sitting in my living room after a very nice dinner, and the movie started rolling. And the first scene is Meryl Streep getting thrown down the steps by her boyfriend, who screams at her, "Go back to Krakow, you Polish whore!"

Q: Oh, God.

METRINKO: And it went on from there. And of course, Sophie's father had been a collaborator with the Germans, who was also a professor at the University of Krakow. This was most unpleasant. My cook walked out because she couldn't take the... She had been in a concentration camp and just could not watch this. It was a total disaster. Never show films unless you see them first.

Q: How about getting around? You mentioned being sort of harassed by the police. Were there concerns about setting you up, you know the usual things that were going on, drugs, sex, a guy who says, "Please take this package" (with microfilms) - back - something like that?

METRINKO: Actually, the only time that ever came up with me was during the security briefing, when, I guess, DS just discovered that I was a bachelor going off to Poland and, worse than that, that I might have family there. And I didn't know any of my family there. I knew vaguely that I had some family there. They were distant cousins. I got to meet them later. But somebody from DS sat me down and started going over this, you know, about how DS doesn't want me to go there for the following reasons. And I just looked at him and said, "Look, if I should get trapped in bed with somebody and photographs taken, I would just ask for extra copies. Things have changed. Who's going to care? I don't have a wife to care. My parents would think it was normal. My brothers and my friends would think it was natural. Who cares about this?" I said, "Talk to the married guys, whose wives would care."

Q: Were there problems of the security organization trying to set you up, you or your people?

METRINKO: No, we had harassment, but no setup attempts. The French consul general had an incident happen to him, and it was sort of a classic 1950s black-and-white bad movie incident. The French consul general was a great guy, but an elderly man with an elderly wife, and they were as French bourgeois as you could possibly get. They went to daily mass. And elderly. He was coming back into his apartment building one day, and he turned the light on in the lobby, a blond girl jumped out, leaped at him, and the flashbulbs went off. The French lodged a protest about 20 minutes later in Warsaw, and that's where it stopped. They just never bothered trying that with me.

Q: Well, as you said, times have changed. These things may have worked at one point. One always thinks of the famous case of Scarbeck, I guess it was, who was GSO, general services officer, in the early '60s in Warsaw.

METRINKO: I didn't know about that.

Q: He was caught. He gave out some third-rate secrets, I think, because he had a girlfriend who needed an operation, you know. But how about other countries? Was Poland playing any role in getting people from other parts of the world and sending them to university there or trying to do anything?

METRINKO: There were a fair number of Arab students in Poland. I had no contact with them. Basically, no. It had played a role back after the Greek Civil War, for example. A lot of the Greek Communists came to Poland. That was no longer true. I'm trying to think of... No, the students that Poland had were basically the American students who wanted to get a cheap, good medical education.

Q: Did your Iranian experience come up at all while you were there?

METRINKO: Yes, in fact I lectured on the subject for the Dominican monastery. They had me in to talk to their novices about it, and they were all very interested in the role of the clergy in politics, I might say - very interested. I had Iranian house guests come quite often, from Iran. They could visit Europe, so they would come and see me, spend a week and go back to Teheran or go on to other parts of Europe. Other than that, not really. Poland and Iran never had any sort of connection. There was and Iranian embassy in Warsaw. Other than that, no real connection. I think Poland was a bit too Catholic to like what had happened in Iran. And also, the Polish people simply seemed to abhor violence. It's strange, but when you think about violence and countries that do it, the whole time that I was in Poland I think I saw one street fight in three years, and it was between a couple of drunks.

Q: Oh, sure. How about drinking? Was this -

METRINKO: Serious problem.

Q: I was wondering.

METRINKO: Very serious at the time. I understand that it no longer is, according to all my cousins, anyway. Their generation simply does not drink very much.

Q: Well, I think with jobs and the future, it's no longer...

METRINKO: At the time it was a serious problem. If you were driving a car out in the countryside on a Sunday morning, for example, you would see people staggering up and down streets, falling in the streets.

Q: Was there a Soviet consul there?

METRINKO: There was a Soviet consul general there. They had consul general status, which means they always took diplomatic precedence, protocol precedence, over the French and the Americans. They were - I don't want to say this: we had a "correct" relationship with them. I would go there for their national day, and I would go there to sign their books of mourning or the condolence books, because -

Q: You were right through the death of Brezhnev, Chernenko, and Andropov.

METRINKO: Yes, and I went and signed all the books, properly dressed in a dark suit, and they would come to the Fourth of July celebrations - not at the top level - they would send their number two, just as... I went to their national day celebrations and did not drink. Of course, they didn't drink by the second one, either. They were no longer supposed to serve alcohol, and a Soviet reception without alcohol is deadly, because nobody would be talking to anybody else, just a couple of hundred people standing there. It was just awful.

Q: Was Gorbachev appearing on the scene at this point?

METRINKO: I don't remember.

Q: He probably was just getting started, I think.

METRINKO: I just cannot remember.

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

METRINKO: I almost never saw it. I mean, I would only see army people on the important celebrations. Oh, I take that back. They'd be there doing a sort of goose-step up and down in front of the monuments, and also late at night, because it was still a Communist state at the time, security at night in the city was superb.

Q: Sounds pleasant.

METRINKO: It was pleasant. I had no problems with this. You could walk anywhere in the city at one or two or three in the morning to anywhere else, and you would see soldiers, and they would even say "Good evening." If you said "Good evening," they would say "Good evening" back. And they would be walking in pairs, and that would be it. Everything was absolutely fine.

Q: Did you get any feeling for the educational system?

METRINKO: It was a good one, a very good one.

Q: I was just wondering, though, whether the kids were taught to worship Lenin and so forth, that sort of stuff.

METRINKO: Not at all. Because they had Polish teachers. You know, people would pay lip-service to things. They all studied Russian. Very few of them learned it. Just like we don't learn Latin or Spanish or whatever in high school. But there was not even a pretense of affection by the people or even interest in the Soviet Union.

Q: Was there interest in the United States?

METRINKO: Tremendous. Very strong interests. I'll give you an example - US relations with the Soviet consulate. It wasn't the last - I think it was the second - I've forgotten which of them - the second, probably - of the July 4th celebrations that we gave. They were always hugely attended. I mean each time that we had one we had 400, 500 people come, and they had huge amounts of alcohol and huge amounts of food. At the last one, I had three different bands playing, a country-western band, a mountain band, and a jazz band, in different parts of the consulate, so people could dance or listen, depending on how they wanted to do it. And all the bands volunteered, by the way. They wanted to get the exposure. But the Soviet number-two guy had come to one of these July 4 receptions, and he showed up and parked his car, of course, the driver parked right in front of the door, because he was only going to spend 10 minutes there. He came in, and I greeted him in line. It was very pleasant and cool, and he disappeared into the maelstrom of people who were swirling around, the hundreds of people in there, and I promptly forgot about him. Well, about an hour later, when the receiving line finally ended, I went into the crowd myself, and I saw the consul standing there, and he saw me. He came over, and he said, "Oh, Mr. Consul, I'm embarrassed. I really only intended to spend a few minutes here, but it's very interesting. We can't get people to come to our receptions, and I'm meeting people here for the first time."

Q: It's embarrassing.

METRINKO: He said it quite frankly. "They won't come to our receptions." And he said, "You don't mind if I stay a little longer, do you?" And I said, "No, stay as long as you want. It's going to go on till one or two in the morning." And he disappeared again. What I did not know - we always hired Polish university students to staff these things. They would serve as the waiters, the bartenders, the this, the that. My maid and my cook would do the food preparation. It was just a huge effort. And these were the same students who'd been helping us out over a period of a couple of years. They had seen the Soviet car pull up in front, and one of them had gone out and asked the driver what he could bring him to drink, and the driver, of course, properly said, "Nothing." So the student had come back in and gotten a small plate of food and he had gotten a big Coca-Cola, which he had laced with Vodka, and he took it out to the driver. And the driver drank it and asked for another Coca-Cola. Well, by the time the Soviet consul got outside, his driver was unconscious behind the wheel of the car. I had no idea any of this was happening. All the Poles knew. The consul was also drunk by the time he left. He got out, he was drunk, he sat in the car. The driver was unconscious. Eventually somebody got the car out of there and back to the Soviet Consulate. The consul was not allowed to go out by himself from then on.

Q: How about USIA? What was it doing and how effective was it?

METRINKO: USIA, quite effective. Unfortunately, USIA had a problem in that the USIA officer... We had three very good officers there at one time. The first one was there for almost a year. He's still one of their top officers. He's a great guy. He spoke fluent Russian, Polish, English, Japanese, etc. - very, very fine. You know, sort of the quintessential USIA officer. He, by the way, had an interesting experience, which happened just before I got there. You asked about the Pope's visit and the feelings of the Poles toward Russians. This guy's name was Alexander Olmasov. He had immigrated from the Soviet Union as a child. I think he'd been born in a refugee camp. His father had been a Soviet citizen. He came to the United States, eventually joined the American Foreign Service. They sent him to Poland eventually. He spoke fluent Russian. His name was a Russian name. He looked Russian. He was the USIA officer who was in charge of USIA coverage of the Pope's visit a month or two before I got there. In the car that he was being driven in, the car had an accident. The driver was speeding and ran into a tree or something like that. He was badly hurt. His face was all bloodied up and he had broken teeth. They rushed him to a local clinic out there where the Pope was visiting. The police told the clinic people, "This is a foreign consul. Take care of him immediately. It's very important." They asked his name, and he said, "Aleksandr Olmasov." He lay there and lay there and lay there, and nurses and doctors kept passing him by, not coming over. Finally, he asked for help, and they said, "Yes, we'll get to you, we'll get to you. There are more important things happening." And finally someone said something about the American consul. The doctor said, "What do you mean, 'the American consul'? That's the Russian consul." "No, it's the American consul." They thought he was the Russian, and they were going to ignore him!

But anyway, he left and was replaced by Bill Harwood - excellent also. Bill lasted a very short time because he was PNGed. He was one of the two officers who had gone off on May 1 to the Solidarity demonstration. And then we had a long hiatus - months, about half a year or so - when I filled in. And eventually, John Brown came, who got there just a few months before I left. He also seemed to be doing quite fine. They were good officers.

Q: Did you find that the reading room played a role?

METRINKO: An important role.

Q: - the university and all that?

METRINKO: Yes, the library was always filled. There were always large groups of students there. The USIA ran films. They would show American films in the evenings, and it was always fully attended. We had a small theater. That was going on. They had a very active student counseling service. There was a Fulbright Program that worked in both directions, of course. Americans came to Krakow, came to Poland. A number of them came to Krakow. And Poles went to the United States from Krakow. That was quite active as well. There was a very busy, I'd say, cultural life. American artists, American musicians, other Americans came all the time or went to the United States all the time. I would say that the USIA office there was extremely active, extremely well qualified. They also knew every body in the city and the province.

Q: They often have the best connections, the cultural and the press side, that really lets you into a much wider world than the normal political officer.

METRINKO: That's absolutely true, and I benefitted from it certainly.

Q: Well, in 1986, whither?

METRINKO: In 1986, I was told by my career counselor that I had to come back to the United States because, much as I disliked the idea of returning to the State Department, I had to come back because it was important for my career. So having the choice of a couple of jobs, I took one as deputy director of Northern Gulf Affairs - Iran and Iraq. We had a war going on between the two countries, and it was an interesting two years.

Q: So you did this from '86 to 88.

METRINKO: The war ended just as I left. I cannot take credit for ending the war. '86 to '88 was marked by Ollie North and Irangate and all of the accusations that the United States was supporting Iraq. It was marked by our attempts, through "Operation Stanch," to stop people from supplying weapons to either side, which was absolutely great until the world discovered we had been supplying weapons to the Iranians, courtesy of Ollie North and the NSA.

Let's see, what else was going on? We were starting to get accusations of October surprise. We, of course, had off-again-on-again-will-we-ever-get-back-with-Iran? Everybody and his brother from Iran would claim to be representing everybody else and his brother from Iran trying to reestablish relations. Nothing has changed.

Q: You were doing the Iran-Iraq Desk '86 to '88. Could you describe what the situation was between Iran and Iraq at the beginning? You took it over, and what was our posture towards this?

METRINKO: The situation was that Iran and Iraq were in the middle of a bloody war. The war had started in the year 1980. It was already 1986 when I got there. It had been going on for six years, and both sides had lost hundreds of thousands of people to death and injury. They had both lost huge numbers of buildings, materiel, etc. to each other's bombs. Both countries were suffering greatly because of the war. Both countries, being equally stupid, were continuing the war. Iraq was having a problem with its Kurds in the north, who were opposed to the regime of Baghdad. Iran, of course, were having huge problems with people opposed to the regime of Khomeini. There were mass desertions, people running away from military service. Both sides were continuing the war. The United States, as it turned out later, had been supplying some sort of intelligence to the Iraqis. At the same time, it was supplying limited amounts of weapons to Iran.

Q: Was this going on when you took over the -

METRINKO: It was. We did not find out about it for a few months. I think a few people in the State Department knew about it. I believe that a few people at State knew about it, but they weren't talking. Instead, the public policy was Operation Stanch, where we give neither weapons nor assistance to either side, and we asked all other countries to join this so that they would stop fighting. And we, of course, were doing double deals.

Q: What was sort of the wiring diagram of your job? In other words, to whom did you report where you were?

METRINKO: I was deputy director for Iran and Iraq, Northern Gulf Affairs. The director for most of the time I was there was Peter Burleigh, who went on to become ambassador, I think, in Sri Lanka eventually and later on, for a long time, our ambassador to the United Nations until Holbrooke came in, and he's now retired. I was his deputy, and there were a Desk officer for Iran and a Desk officer for Iraq and two secretaries. It was a small office, but a very active office. We worked long hours. There was always something happening. I think I was probably the first person there in many, many years who spoke Persian, and I was certainly the only one in the office who had ever served in Iran. In fact, I was the only person, I think, in NEA in the Department who spoke Farsi.

Q: Well, when you got there, what was the attitude towards Iran and towards Iraq, would you say, that you were picking up?

METRINKO: We had relations with Iraq. We had a chargï¿½ in Iraq and an embassy, but the relationship was never a warm, bubbly one. It was sort of stiff and formal. But the embassy was trying. That's probably because of the nature of the Iraqis themselves. They're not warm, bubbly people. And Iraq had never generated much interest in the United States. There were no Iraqi experts out there in academia. The Iraqi opposition didn't live here; it was dead. If you wanted to get a conference about Iraq, I don't think you could have put together a full-fledged conference in America with anyone approaching any degree of expertise. It was sort of an unknown country. It should not have been, but the relationships had been rocking back and forth, up and down, for so long that it had never interested people a great deal, and there was not a corps of people who had served there and liked it.

Q: So you weren't dealing with an Iraqi mafia.

METRINKO: No, on the contrary. To even find somebody who knew anything about the country you had to really scrape academia - really scrape at it.

Q: We did have people within the Foreign Service who had served in Iran. Did you find that had time gone on and they'd moved elsewhere?

METRINKO: They'd moved elsewhere; they had retired; or they were professionally uninterested and did not want to be reminded they had served there. Iran had burned too many people, I think. There is a corps of people who are retired who were very interested and remain interested today, but at the time they were hard to find. There, of course, were a lot of academics who were interested. It's always attracted academia. At the time, people did not travel often to Iran. Americans almost never went there. They couldn't get visas. And so no one's knowledge was any good. In other words, there was no fresh knowledge. Either in academia or in the State Department no one, like I said, in NEA, besides myself, in the Department spoke Persian. I was the only one, except for Arnie Raphel, who was our deputy assistant secretary. He had served there. He certainly didn't speak it. He may have thought he did, but he did not. Other than that, he and I were it in NEA, which was kind of surprising, given the fact that it was a major country in the middle of a major war, which impacted on our oil interests. But still, when I got there, what I discovered was that the office had almost no contacts with anybody as far as Iran was concerned. They simply had not gone out and met anybody. They did not even know the academics involved with Iran. I got permission immediately to start dealing outreach with every possible political group I could find, and I did it. That included everything from the People's Mujaheddin, whom I met officially, up through the young Shah, and representatives of all the other parties. The CIA had good contacts at the time. The CIA had always kept their contacts going. They had activities going on. They had a large office. The State Department had simply given up that particular game.

Q: It's interesting how the State Department seems to move... If something doesn't work, it's just like we had this huge Vietnam office, and then all of a sudden it was dissolved, and I think it was one guy in a closet dealing with Vietnamese affairs after '75.

METRINKO: Well, the CIA had an operation in Germany and was training people in the language and everything else. Of course, it was the biggest open secret in Teheran, that this existed. The CIA always seemed to think that no one knew about it, but everyone did. State had literally nothing.

Q: Well, what was going on in, first, Iraq, as you saw it when you first took over?

METRINKO: Iraq had the war going. It had a total totalitarian system. The embassy seemed to have little or no entrï¿½e into Iraqi society or the politics. They were allowed to meet with certain officials at certain times. Other than that there was no great social whirl or friends with Iraqis or anything else.

Q: What was the view of Saddam Hussein at that time?

METRINKO: Actually, I think - I can't remember whether it was Kissinger or who said something about that particular war, that Saddam Hussein and Khomeini having a war with each other was basically for everyone else a win-win situation. I think if you take away the veneer of, you know, tongue-clicking about the evils of war, most people at State simply didn't give a damn and thought that the Iraqis and the Iranis deserved each other. That expresses, I think, what many people in the West felt - who cares?

Q: At the time you were doing this, was there concern? As one was looking at this in longer terms than day by day, what happens if Iraq wins, what happens if Iran wins? I mean was this -

METRINKO: There wasn't very much going on in the way of grand thinking. The war seemed to... it had been going on forever.

Q: Were there any efforts made to say, Gee, even though you don't like us, maybe we could mediate, or did we feel that because of Iran we couldn't play a role at all?

METRINKO: No, what we had going on there, things that would not have allowed us to mediate - we had a convoy policy for our oiWe had reflagged a lot of Kuwaiti oil tankers to make them American flag carriers to convoy oil in and out of the Gulf. We were chiefly concerned about the flow of oil. Also, this was the time when we shot down an Iranian airliner by mistake, so there was not even a remote possibility that we could have served as a sort of disinterested, impartial purveyor of good will. It wasn't going to happen. Almost nobody could. Between the Iranians and the Iraqis, there weren't very many people that the two of them trusted. The Iraqis are perpetually suspicious of everyone. The Iranians are just about the same.

Q: Did we feel at that time that the Soviets might be of any value or not?

METRINKO: If you're talking about the war, no, because we always wanted the Soviets to stay out, not to get any positions of authority or any sort of renown for being peacekeepers. If you go into the other subject of trying to get back into the Iranian bedroom, there were countries that we felt could help us do this. But that was different than trying to stop the war. We weren't trying to stop the war. We had been supplying weapons to one side and intelligence to the other side, and nobody really cared about the war.

Q: Well, let's talk about your experience at the time. How did you learn about what became known as the Iran-Contra affair, the supplying of arms? How did that -

METRINKO: From the newspapers. And I only believed it because... Okay, let me put it this way. I heard about it from Iranian friends, that the United States was supplying weapons to Iran, and I would deny this all the time because I believed they were laboring under delusions.

Q: And you knew.

METRINKO: And I knew - because I saw all the reports. And I had done talking points incessantly on Operation Staunch. I had even gone to Europe, and I had lectured the British and the Turks on Operation Staunch. A trip sanctioned by Mr. Armacost himself. I knew the Truth. And when I saw the story - it first cropped up in a Lebanese newspaper - and then I saw to whom it was attributed, and I knew the people to whom it was attributed, and I knew that they would know... and then I saw -

Q: And this was attributed to -

METRINKO: To -

Q: Within the Iran -

METRINKO: Yes, they attributed it to the son-in-law of Ayatollah Mohtazadi, who was then an enemy of the regime of Iran. He had been displaced as successor to Khomeini. When I saw that it was the son-in-law who was being accused of spreading this story, I knew that this son-in-law would know. And then when the story came out - it came out almost immediately, the sort of continuation of the tale - of a chocolate cake in the shape of a key, that's when I believed it, just because there was nothing at all in Iranian folklore, myth, or culture that would allow them to create this story of a chocolate cake shaped like a key.

Q: This was when McFarland went to -

METRINKO: McFarland and -

Q: He was national security advisor.

METRINKO: The national security advisor went with a representative of the Israeli Government with a representative of the CIA. It was great for the CIA. Avram Nir, I think, from the Israeli side - and Ollie North! It was just bizarre.

Q: Had you had any contact with the NSC prior to this?

METRINKO: No, not really. I'd never heard of Ollie North until I came to that job. He didn't figure in Polish politics at all.

Q: Well, what about when you came to the job? Did Ollie North -

METRINKO: No.

Q: His basic focus was on the hostages in Lebanon, wasn't it? And picking up some money for -

METRINKO: For Nicaragua. And that seemed to work. It got them out. There was just enough in it. He had the connections there. And that's one of the reasons, I think, that the October Surprise allegations against the Reagan regime were probably correct. There seemed to be a connection. There seemed to be a conduit for dealing with each other.

Q: Could you explain what the October Surprise was?

METRINKO: The October Surprise is an allegation that the Reagan campaign people worked with representatives of the government of Khomeini to keep the American hostages longer in Iran, past the election time, so that the election would go against Carter. The allegations have never been proven. There is a logical chain that points to it, but it's not quite clear whether it's bitter grapes on the part of former Carter officials or whether it's true. And it probably won't be known until the Iranians themselves start to talk, and they have not yet.

Q: Once this came out, that Ollie North and company had had this connection and we were supplying things including Tow missiles, which are anti-tank missiles, and airplane spare parts -

METRINKO: Airplane spare parts, yes.

Q: - because the Iranian Air Force was an American -

METRINKO: American-built and American-supplied up until the revolution, and they were slowly running out of all the great stuff they had in the warehouses.

Q: For your job, what happened then? I mean, did that change anything?

METRINKO: Well, it meant that we had absolutely no credibility at all anywhere in the world, so that if we were dealing with Europeans and wanted to talk about policy toward Iran, they would simply snigger at us - and with good reason. It also meant that the State Department was suddenly seen as not a player in the Iran game.

Q: So what were you -

METRINKO: Well, "hope springs eternal..." We kept hoping that people would forget that we had been so thoroughly ignored by the White House and the NSC. It was kind of funny, because I remember at one point getting called up to the Secretary's office.

Q: This would be Secretary Kissinger at that time.

METRINKO: Oh, no. Kissinger had long since gone.

Q: Oh, no, excuse me - it would be Shultz.

METRINKO: Yes, but I was asked to write a draft of the testimony of the Secretary as to what he had known and had not known in terms of Irangate. I said, "I was in Poland. We have nothing in our files. The office did not know. Why doesn't the Secretary write what he knew and did not know?" But no one thought this was a good idea. They asked me to write it instead, so I basically did a standard chronology. It was a bizarre time.

Q: Well, apparently, Shultz had been at meetings, and certainly Weinberger was.

METRINKO: Yes. And they were dealing with Reagan, who never quite knew what he knew and didn't know.

Q: Yes, and he could deny things with a great deal of credibility.

METRINKO: Yes, he could.

Q: Because he used to get pretty vague at times.

METRINKO: Around this same time I was sent off to actually talk to somebody we thought was an emissary from the Government of Iran. I was supposed to go to Europe and talk to him.

I wrote a two- or three-page memo explaining in detail who the person was and what we hoped to accomplish by this. That went up to the Assistant Secretary's office. From the front office to the Under Secretary's office, it was pared down to one page. Armacost got it, gave it to the Secretary in about two paragraphs, and it was presented by the Secretary to the President at a Cabinet meeting. I was called up by one of the staffers in the Under Secretary's office, who said, "Do you want to see what the Secretary actually said to the President about this?" It was an index card with three or four words on it and, you know, a little initial scrawled on it that Reagan had okayed it.

Q: Yes. How did this meeting come off?

METRINKO: I decided the person didn't represent anything except his own interest.

Q: Well, there were an awful lot of these entrepreneurs, weren't there?

METRINKO: Yes, there were, all the time. There still are. In fact, the same person surfaced just a couple of months ago, because I was asked about him, if I knew him, again.

Q: Who was this?

METRINKO: Oh, just an Iranian businessman who would like very much to be one of the people who profits by bringing peace to the two countries. The woods are filled with them, including a fair number of former American officials at this point.

Q: At this point, were the French or even the British playing a role because there was oil and they wanted to sort of be the first to get an opening? Were they playing their own game, in a way, of trying to get into this market?

METRINKO: Everybody was playing their own game. Dealing with Iran is a continuation of what we used to call "the Great Game," between the Russians and the British and others, the Japanese. The Japanese are our allies, for example, in theory, and yet they depend for their life blood on oil that comes out of the Persian Gulf. They had excellent economic relations with the Iranians. They had in general good political relations with the Iranians. They didn't want that jeopardized by us. We understood that, too. So they had their game to play, which was far more important to them than many of the games we were playing there. The British would have loved to sell defense equipment and other things to the Iranians. We got involved in that, and they would keep making presentations about how this or that does not really impact on Iran's war capability, it's "just radar" - you know, things like that. The Germans also - everybody was doing this. Everybody wanted to sell stuff to the two countries that were at war. They did.

Q: Were we getting pretty good coverage of how the war was going?

METRINKO: Yes and no. Everything that came out of Iran through the Iranian ï¿½migrï¿½ community was twisted. If you were an ï¿½migrï¿½ in the United States or Europe, then you had your own interpretation of Iran. None of the foreign embassies in Iran were really good at reporting, or if they were, we weren't getting the stuff really straight. We'd get visits, you know, from this British diplomat or that West German diplomat or someone else who'd come in and talk to us and tell us what he had just seen in Teheran. Much of it was puerile. Did we have a really good sense of what was happening in Iran? Not really, no. Iraq? Certainly not.

Q: Well, we did have spy-in-the-sky photo stuff and intercept traffic and all this. Were our military or our CIA giving you how the battle was falling, more or less?

METRINKO: We'd get a lot of reports on the number of people killed in this foray or that front, nothing that would really tell us what the people were doing, how they were feeling. You simply didn't get it in Iraq. It never came out. And in Iran, you'd have contradictory reports all the time. Iranians are difficult to pin down. Was the reporting good? There was a lot of it - NSA stuff, other stuff, CIA stuff, this stuff, that stuff, stuff from foreign governments. Did I ever really feel that I knew what was happening in Iran? No.

Q: Iraq had an embassy. Did you have much contact with them?

METRINKO: Oh, sure. I went there on national day, and they would come to the office and see us occasionally, but meetings... They are not, warm, fuzzy, and outgoing people. They are not about to start being buddies. They were cool, correct. The ambassador, Hamdoun, was fine. He was a professional ambassador who went on to become Ambassador to the United Nations, and he was correct in meetings, but that was it. Iraq does not have a good history of treating its officials well if they're suspected of being too warm towards other countries.

Q: While you were there, did you have the feeling that the NSC, under Ollie North, really goofed, I mean, very badly, in this whole thing and all of a sudden said, "Oh, it's yours now," and tossed it to the State Department and said, "We're not going to do this any more?"

METRINKO: You know, I don't know how to answer that. The person at the NSC was Bob Oakley, who was not one to sort of toss things away. It became... I don't know what was going on secretly. I think they all felt they were badly burned. I'm assuming they pulled out, because they were badly burned. The newspapers had a field day. Congress had a field day. I don't think they would have dared to do anything more anymore. Ollie North was fighting all sorts of lawsuits and everything else at that point, investigations on investigations. I think they got burned and stayed away. The only thing they ever seemed to do after that was to put incessant numbers of qualifiers on any message we wanted to send to Iran. We did a lot of back-and-forth messages, and every message, they would hang all the Christmas tree ornaments on about eschewing terrorism and things like that.

Q: Covering their ass.

METRINKO: Covering their ass, yes. There would be a whole list of things that they would put in.

Q: You were saying these were messages that were going through, what, the Swiss representation?

METRINKO: Messages went through all sorts of people. The Swiss did some things for us, and other people volunteered to take messages that various people wrote without really clearing them. It was a real mess.

Q: What about the revolution in Iran? Was the war sort of putting the revolution on hold, or how were we seeing it in this '86-88 period?

METRINKO: The revolution was continuing. A major opposition group to the Khomeini regime had gone to Iraq and had settled down there to fight against Iran. This caused major problems for them, of course, because they were considered traitors to Iran as well as anti-revolutionaries. They're still in Iraq now. It was sort of the same thing that happened in the Soviet Union when World War II started, where the Bolsheviks, the revolutionaries had to appeal to the old symbols in order to get support. The Iranians had to start appealing to the flag, to the concept of Iran as a country, to the concept of Iranian history. It had to pull out a fair number of old symbols. It also had to resurrect a fair number of old officers and bring them back. That emptied a lot of prisons to go and fight. All of that was happening. Khomeini didn't much like this, of course. The clergy didn't much like it, but they did have to resurrect a fair amount of the old stuff because otherwise they might have lost.

Q: Who was running the war? Was it Khomeini, or was it put in the hands of the military, or what?

METRINKO: No, the clergy had a very prominent role in it. They got involved, but the clergy have always been, in Iran, good administrators. They always have been.

Q: My understanding was - maybe it was earlier on - that at least there were stories out there that they were turning the equivalent to a lightly armed militia, they were going up against just sort of like the Battle of the Somme in 1915.

METRINKO: The Iranian Army had had huge problems, of course, in '78, '79, and '80 because of the revolution. A lot of the top echelon of officers had disappeared, either run away or were in prison. In fact, everything from the basic junior officers all the way up had been decimated. That included the air force, the army, etc. But they pulled through somehow. In fact, losing a lot of the top rank of officers may have been the best thing for the Iranian armed forces. A lot of the top rank were worthless. They were buddies of the Shah. They were buddies of the Shah's buddies. They were not chosen for merit; they were chosen because it was a family system or a friendship system. People who gained their expertise on the field in the first year of war gained it through merit and managed to do a pretty good job. A lot of the war also was your standard old stand-in-the-trenches-and-slug-it-out. It wasn't grand strategy.

Q: Well, while you were there - you left NGA in '88 - was the collapse of the Iranian military effort... did it happen on your watch?

METRINKO: There were discussions about it and constant reporting that it was about to collapse, that it had collapsed. It never really did collapse. A peace happened. It's hard to say that one side or the other won. It was more a matter of simple exhaustion and too many losses on both sides. I guess you could say that... Did Iraq win the war? Not really.

Q: Well, I mean, when you look at it, they launched an attack. It didn't work, and they spent eight years trying to make up for it, and when it ended up, they all ended up in the same borders.

METRINKO: With close to a million people less and war injuries and problems that will go on for the next full generation. Sure. So nobody won it.

Q: How about the Kurds? Did they play any role in this?

METRINKO: Yes, they lost it.

Q: Did we get involved in that, or were we following it?

METRINKO: Were we following it? No. We usually do not follow the Kurds in Turkey, because that would offend our allies if we got interested. Therefore we ignore everything the Turks are doing to their Kurds. In Iraq, the Iraqis went after their Kurds big-time, used poison gas on their own Kurds. We knew about that. We expressed the proper amount of outrage, which was at least oral, if not heartfelt. Actually if I had to be a Kurd, I guess I'd prefer to be an Iranian Kurd; you're less likely to be killed by the government. I would least like to be a Turkish Kurd.

Q: For our point, this was just a struggle that was going on, and it wasn't our business.

METRINKO: We ignored it all the time. We used the Kurds, as we always have, as we have for many, many years -

Q: Kissinger did at one time, and others have done it.

METRINKO: We certainly used them after Kuwait, and other times.

Q: How about Kuwait? Did that enter into your province at that time?

METRINKO: No, Kuwait wasn't handled in my office -

Q: But you must have been -

METRINKO: - but it was part of the war.

Q: - keeping an eye on this.

METRINKO: I had to, just about daily, because we had a policy of convoying Kuwaiti oil tankers that were given American registration.

Q: Here you were, they brought you kicking and screaming back to a Washington assignment - here you had probably the biggest war that had gone on, a lot bigger than the Vietnamese War or anything else, but did you feel that -

METRINKO: There wasn't a great deal of interest in it.

Q: - in the Near Eastern Bureau, I mean, this just wasn't on our radar?

METRINKO: It was on our radar only because we had so many defense forces assigned to the Gulf to protect the oil flow, but it wasn't on our radar as being interested in either country. It was as I said before, kind of a win-win situation. Nobody cared that Iranians and Iraqis were slaughtering each other. There was a general feeling that they probably deserved it.

Q: Well, then, what was the motivation in supplying intelligence, mainly overhead intelligence, to the Iraqis?

METRINKO: Well, the Iranians would say it was to keep the war going on longer, because that was a point when the Iraqis seemed to be losing. Ditto for supplying weapons to the Iranians. And the Iranians, people in the Middle East who have plenty of conspiracy theories, look at all of this as the American way of prolonging the war.

Q: And really understanding what they were doing.

METRINKO: Yes, which is a terrible misunderstanding of America. I oughtn't to be cynical. I don't know why, when the decision was actually made to provide intelligence, what exactly was provided to the Iranians, or exactly why the decision was made. I think the timing is just probably serendipitous or misfortunate.

Q: Well, now, talking about - the cruiser's name escapes me -

METRINKO: The Vincennes.

Q: The Vincennes. When we shot down an Iranian passenger plane with terrible loss of life - everybody was killed, a couple of hundred - how did the news come to you? How did we deal with that?

METRINKO: We dealt with it by basically admitting that we had made a mistake, and it was. I think for the first hour or so we all wanted to think we could get away with this somehow, they way you have when there is an unfortunate incident, what's the best spin? But at State people were, like, "You can't do this." And it was put to us very clearly immediately by the various organizations that deal with airlines, "This is what happened. There is a legal process now, aside from all the political process, for compensation, for other things, and this is how it has to get done." And people didn't try to escape what had happened. They admitted what happened.

Q: I can't remember - somehow I can't recall our ever coming up with a compensation package.

METRINKO: Oh, no, we certainly did, a major compensation package. Now I think the Iranian Government has refused to accept it. It was fairly major - we're talking multi-multi-millions of dollars, based on each person getting so much. And the Iranian Government would like to say, has tried to say, that we haven't, but it was out there very quickly. And negotiations for it went on.

Q: Were you there when the peace or truce or whatever you want to call it between Iran and Iraq happened, or did that happen afterward?

METRINKO: No, the actual cease-fire, I was there. We did the reporting on that, or the talking points and everything else. And then I left to go off to the War College. I went off to the War College in the late summer of 1988.

Q: Did you see, when you left, if you were to predict whither American-Iranian relations?

METRINKO: They're about the same level now they were then. Lots of people on both sides trying to reestablish something.

Q: I mean, were you optimistic, pessimistic, or neutral?

METRINKO: I think optimistic. The people back then felt there was a chance we would be back together with Iran a lot more quickly. There were good reasons for it. We had pretty good contacts with a lot of Iranians, a lot of Iranian groups. We had a couple of ayatollahs visit Washington during this period. There was reason to believe at one point that Khamenei, who's now known as the bad old man, the spiritual advisor - he came to address the United Nations - we had good reason to believe that he was going to believe he was going to give a sort of "open hand" speech, or extend the possibility of the olive branch. I think we had very good reason to believe that, and what happened is that as he arrived in New York, an Iranian group of Revolutionary Guards took a launch boat and tried to attack an American patrol boat with it.

Q: This was in the Persian Gulf.

METRINKO: Yes - which a lot of people saw as a way to stop him from extending an olive branch.

Q: And of course we retaliated by blowing up a couple of drilling platforms.

METRINKO: Yes, stuff like that.

Q: Okay, well, I think we'll stop at this point. So we're talking about 1988, and you went off to the War College. And we'll talk about the War College at that point. Great.

METRINKO: Everyone should do it.

***

Q: Today is the 4th of October, 2000. Mike, I'd like you to expand a bit on the patrol boat incident. Could you explain why it looked as if there was a rather promising window of opportunity for something to happen and this squashed it?

METRINKO: What had been going on up until this visit was that we had dealt with innumerable attempts by innumerable Iranians claiming to represent the Iranian Government who wanted to start talking to the American Government - the State Department, the CIA, etc. - about the possibility of renewing relations or just having serious discussions. This had been going on and on. Iranians came through all the time claiming to be the doctor of this person, the best friend of that person, that Khamenei or Khomeini or someone else had sent them to talk, much like it is today, of course. When the General Assembly was about to convene, we had indications that Khomeini was going to -

Q: What was his position at that point?

METRINKO: Oh, gosh. I want to say head of the parliament, speaker of the parliament. I could be wrong though because he's had several positions.

Q: But anyway, he was certainly at that time -

METRINKO: - number two in Iran.

Q: Number two, yes.

METRINKO: Yes. We had indications that Khamenei, who was heading the delegation to the United Nations, was going to give a very moderate, almost warm and fuzzy speech about Iran and the United States. We believed this enough, or our indications were strong enough, that we actually tried to help his visit. For example, when the Iranian delegation arrived in London, by arrangement, we sent an American consular official on board the Iranian plane with the visa machine to actually issue the visas right there on the plane. As far as I remember, he was treated quite warmly on the plane by the Iranian officials. The Iranians arrived. The speech was set for the next day or two days later, and an incident occurred in the Gulf where a group of Iranian Revolutionary Guards, to the best of my recollection, seized a patrol boat, launched it into the Gulf, and tried to attack an American vessel.

Q: In other words, these people had taken from the Iranian Navy -

METRINKO: Yes, they were not normal Iranian Navy - it was some other group. And that started an incident that escalated immediately, and when Khamenei walked in to give his speech, he was walking into an atmosphere of screaming from Iran that we had attacked Iranians and screaming from here that Iranians had attacked us. It was no longer possible, if he had ever wanted to, it was no longer possible to give a moderate speech.

Q: It shows how often a group of hard-liners of one sort or another have the potential to upset a warming trend. I mean, we've seen this as of today in Israel and Palestine. And it's not unknown in other... it happens.

METRINKO: It's very easy to upset the...

Q: Well, now, Mike, 1988-89 you went, what, to the National War College?

METRINKO: National War College, and I spent a year there. It was one of the best years of my Foreign Service career.

Q: Can you talk a bit about what you got out of it and your feeling about how the military was training its leaders and all? This was 1988-89.

METRINKO: The War College class that I was in had approximately 120 people in it representing all the services, plus a fairly large contingent of civilians, about 20 or so, a couple from AID, FBI, CIA. First, the War College itself is an absolutely beautiful place, unlike most of the Department of State facilities. It was beautifully set up and beautifully run, and like everyone else in the State Department, I suddenly had the feeling that the personnel system and the administrative staff at the War College actually cared about me. People were polite, receptive, and helpful, very much unlike the personnel system, very much unlike the support services from the State Department. People smiled; they said "thank you"; they said "please"; they said "You're welcome;" they responded. The courses were excellent. It was done seminar-style, six, seven, or 10 students per course, and absolutely top quality. My fellow students were all lieutenant colonels or the equivalent, colonels or equivalent, many of whom have gone on to quite high ranks in the armed forces. What I enjoyed most about it was the chance to finally learn something about the American Government other than the Department of State. Because of the services that were represented, the agencies represented, we had a lot of excellent discussions in a seminar setting. We also toured different facilities in Washington and all around the United States. I traveled with people from the military, went to bases all around the United States and overseas. It was an absolutely wonderful eye-opening experience. It's a shame that Foreign Service officers all can't go and all can't go at a much earlier time in their careers. It's completely, absolutely positive. And I've stayed in touch with people from that class since then, too, some of my military friends.

Q: Well, then, in '89, where to?

METRINKO: In '89, what happened was that I was assigned as chargï¿½ to Kabul. We did not have an ambassador there at the time. We had a chargï¿½. The post had been reduced in size, but it was still a functioning post. In the early spring my assignment was close enough so that I had started to take Dari classes at the Foreign Service Institute.

Q: Dari is how close to Farsi?

METRINKO: Dari is this close to Farsi. When I went over to FSI, I was introduced to the Dari teacher in Farsi by the Farsi teacher, and I continued to speak Farsi, and the Dari teacher and I went into a classroom and we sat and we continued to talk for about an hour, and everything was fine, except that I looked at my watch and thought, Gee, it's getting late, we'd better start. I want to find out what I have to do to get started with Dari. So I asked the teacher, in Farsi, I said, "When are we going to start Dari?" And he looked at me and said, "I've been speaking Dari for the past hour. You've been speaking Farsi." I hadn't realized it. I thought he was speaking Farsi with an accent. But it's very close. There are expressions, there's vocabulary that changes, words, but in general it's very close.

Now, I was assigned to Afghanistan. I was assigned part-time to FSI, going over from the War College in the afternoons. Two things happened at this point. The Secretary of State decided to close, temporarily, our mission in Kabul. My understanding was that he had a choice of either closing Beirut or Kabul. He did not want to close both. He wanted to close only one, lest it give the wrong impression about our foreign policy in the Middle East, and he flipped a coin or did the equivalent, and closed Kabul instead of Beirut.

Q: What was the situation that would call for closing?

METRINKO: Fighting, lots of tension, lots of sort of loud noises, you know, guns and smoke in both places. The Dari Desk and the people in NEA said, "You're still going to Kabul; we'll just wait until the Mujaheddin take the city, and then you can go there immediately." I knew what the Mujaheddin's chances of taking the city were - zero at that point - and I couldn't believe that they were so silly as to actually believe this was going to happen. The CIA was pushing the Mujaheddin's impending victory as a-

Q: The Mujaheddin were different from the Taliban, is that right?

METRINKO: Yes, completely different. The Taliban did not exist at that point. The Mujaheddin were the old people whom we helped drive the Soviets out.

Q: And who was holding Kabul at that point?

METRINKO: Kabul at that point was a mixture. The Soviets were leaving, and the Mujaheddin were almost in there.

Q: But anyway, what happened?

METRINKO: That happened, and almost exactly at that time, too, in February of 1989, my father passed away very suddenly. He had a stroke, died about a week later. I realized fairly soon, that I would have to take my mother with me wherever I went overseas. My mother went into an immediate fit of depression. My brothers were not assisting at all. And I was left with full responsibility for an aging invalid mother. So I came back to the Department. The Kabul position had been put on hold temporarily. I was starting to seriously wonder whether I could go to Kabul with my mother, when I got a call from Consular Affairs, and the assistant secretary wanted to talk to me. I went up to see her, and she asked me - she not knowing that I had been assigned to Kabul - if I might be interested in going to Tel Aviv, which had just opened up. The incumbent in Tel Aviv as consul general had asked to leave post early after one year.

Q: Well, then, so you went with your mother.

METRINKO: I took my mother to Tel Aviv, yes.

Q: And you went to Tel Aviv. You were there from when to when?

METRINKO: I was there from the summer of 1989 until the late summer of 1993. I extended at post. I did a four-year assignment.

Q: Just to sort of round out the thing, did we open up our embassy again in Kabul?

METRINKO: It's still not open.

Q: Yes.

METRINKO: And that's been from 1989 until now, and the Mujaheddin have still not taken over the city. And I'm sure all the CIA people who kept insisting it was going to happen imminently, have now conveniently forgotten what they were saying.

Q: Well, let's go to Tel Aviv. First let's talk a bit about the embassy, the ambassador, and here is a very high-powered embassy - it always has been - what was sort of the atmospherics and the people who were involved on the ground? Then we'll talk about the situation there and what you did.

METRINKO: Our embassy in Tel Aviv, at least in those years, '89 to '93, was a tortured place. How do I want to say this? It was four years of people with raw nerves who were there for a variety... very few people were there for straight old professional reasons, as in "I want a Middle East assignment; this looks interesting." We had American Jews who were there to rediscover what they thought might be their homeland. We had American - how do I want to say this word? - I don't want to say "fanatic" Christians, but American Christians who were there to find Christ.

Q: Yes.

METRINKO: We had a rather large number of Mormons there, because the Mormons think of Israel as a fairly important place. It was a place where people went for lots of reasons that had nothing to do with professionalism - religious, psychological reasons. And it was a place where the word happy did not exist.

Q: Who was the ambassador - Bill Brown?

METRINKO: Bill Brown was the ambassador when I arrived. And he was the ambassador there for approximately two and a half years after I got there. The DCM was Mark Parris. He had just arrived at post about a month or so before I did. And of course, what we had happening in the country was a full-blown Intifada. The uprising was going on all around the West Bank and Gaza. This was at a time when our relations with the Palestinians were not good and at a time when our relations with Israel were not conducted by the embassy but conducted directly out of Washington and New York, so the embassy was very often shunted aside when it came to dealing with the Government of Israel.

Q: Well, now, how did sort of this religious mix of people, particularly those who wanted to be in Israel to find their soul or their roots or whatever the hell you want to call it, translate itself into a... It sound like it could be a touchy situation, because almost anything you said could be taken the wrong way.

METRINKO: I'll put it this way. The embassy in Israel, the American staff, was one of the most bigoted, prejudiced, racist, completely non-impartial groups of people I had ever worked with, and that went in every direction. We had some who were so pro-Arab they couldn't see straight, others who were so pro-Jewish that anything the Government of Israel did was holy writ. That went all the way up to and included the ambassador. It was an embassy of people who were basically not very professional, and it was a depressing, unhappy place to be for many people.

Q: Well, let's talk about your work there. No, let's talk about the situation there. You say Intifada. What were you all seeing, and how were you dealing with this, really, revolt of Palestinian rock-throwing youth and military attempts to repress this?

METRINKO: Well, it was an uprising by the Palestinian people, who were very, very tired and weary of living in an area that could only be defined as apartheid in full bloom and living as not even second-class citizens, but living as non-people in an area controlled by a very oppressive, very heavy-handed Jewish military presence. How did the embassy, how did this impact on my work? The Consular Section was a big and busy one. I had more than 30 FSNs and, oh, I think seven or eight FSOs. We were responsible for all consular affairs in Gaza, which had more than a million Arabs, Palestinians, and to which we were not supposed to go. We were responsible for all consular affairs, of course, in the State of Israel. We were responsible for a fair amount of consular work in the West Bank, and we were also responsible for much of the consular work in southern Lebanon.

Southern Lebanon is the easiest. I'll start there. Southern Lebanon was occupied by the Israeli Army. Lebanese who lived in the so-called "security zone" could not go to Beirut for consular services, and in fact in Beirut we did not have a functioning consular section most of the time that provided consular services. So if you were Lebanese, you went for consular services to Damascus or Cyprus. If you were from south Lebanon, you came down to Israel and to the embassy. This meant that if you were from south Lebanon, you did not speak, of course, Hebrew; you spoke Arabic. Why was I dealing with the West Bank? In theory, the consulate general in Jerusalem was responsible for consular services in the West Bank, but the consulate general in Jerusalem was not accredited to the Israeli Government. Therefore, whenever they had to deal with the Central Government of Israel, even though that government was located by and large locally in Jerusalem, they would have to contact the embassy for us to arrange appointments, for us to arrange access or entrï¿½e. If someone had problems - a Palestinian American, for example, was put in prison in the West Bank - it was the embassy that had to arrange for access by somebody from the consulate to go and visit, at least initially. We had to arrange for appointments with the police. It went on and on like this. It meant that I worked on a daily basis with the consular people from Jerusalem, every day on the phone, constant visits there or their coming down to see us. We did a lot of consular business together, as a matter of fact, just to make sure that we kept the consular relationship going, despite the bad relations between the embassy and the consulate. That coldness was never true of the Consular Sections. We worked together constantly.

The Gaza problem. Gaza is the Gaza Strip and the city of Gaza. We were responsible, my section, for all consular affairs or all consular matters related to the Gaza strip. There was an embassy ruling that said "No embassy officer, unless he or she has an explicit permission on a case-by-case basis from the ambassador or the DCM, can enter the Gaza Strip or the West Bank. So this meant...

Q: What was the rationale behind that?

METRINKO: What was the rationale? The rationale was supposed to be "security concerns." This played very nicely into Israeli hands, because the Israelis thus made sure that people from the American Embassy never went to the West Bank and very rarely to Gaza, so that we did not have a good idea of what was happening there. The consulate people from Jerusalem were allowed to go, of course, to the West Bank. They did not go to Gaza at that point. This meant that even though there were cities in the West Bank that were fine, easy, we could get there very easily, we simply never went there - cities like Tulkarm, Jenin, and Nablus. They were close. I could have been there in a 30-minute drive. I went there once at night, for example. And I did more traveling than most of the people in the embassy. In fact, I did far more than almost anyone else in the embassy. I was always traveling around the State of Israel. I was frequently in Gaza, frequently into the West Bank, but that was because I was doing consular work and I was accompanying either consular people in Jerusalem or I got permission. Soon I realized no one from the Consular Section had been to Gaza for a couple of years before I got there... The head of USIA, for example, in the embassy in Tel Aviv, whose name I have (thank goodness) forgotten, used to brag that he had never been to Gaza and saw no reason to go there. He was fanatically pro-Israel. I could not imagine anyone being that unprofessional and serving the United States, that he refused to go into a whole area that was part of his responsibility. But he was incredibly Zionist, to the point where it was embarrassing to talk to him. And he later partially retired in Israel to a kibbutz there. This was what was going on. It was a time for four years when there were constant street problems. What's going on this week, for example, in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza with the uprising reinvigorated? What's going on all the time there? We had shootings, we had bombings, we had large numbers of people being hauled into prison. We had a lot of Americans getting caught up in this. American protest groups came to Israel. They got arrested.

Q: They were protesting on what?

METRINKO: Well, in Israel itself - Israel, West Bank, and Gaza - we had at that point something over 100,000 American citizens residing there. They were Jewish Americans, they were Palestinian Americans, and there were a fair number of religious-based Americans, Christians especially who were there as missionaries or priests or nuns assigned to the various churches, monasteries, what have you, hospitals, schools. We had groups coming in. For example, I remember at one point when the Intifada was especially heavy, probably '92, I would guess, we had a group of something like 30 or 40 Americans arrive. It was one of your solid middle-class group of aging liberals who were going to...

Q: Children of the '60s.

METRINKO: Who had gotten a little bit older. It included a few priests, nuns, etc., that group, absolutely fine people who decided that they were going to enter the West Bank despite the efforts of the Israeli police to stop them. So they went up to the northern border of the West Bank and tried walking across, near the Golan Heights, if I remember correctly. They all got arrested. We had about 30 arrest cases in one night. What I did for that was... I knew that they were going to have problems if they went up there. I had already assigned consular officers, pairing them with FSNs, got them all set to go up and conduct a whole series of prison visits that same night. They were arrested in the evening; they all had prison visits from us that same evening. We sent out approximately 30 arrest cables to the State Department that same evening, and by the next day or so they were all released. This was going on.

Q: Something like this, I would imagine that... you know, normally if you have an arrest case you've got to take care of it, and something like this, I would assume that the ambassador would go up to somebody in the Ministry of the Interior and say, "Are you out of your mind?"

METRINKO: Bill Brown didn't give a damn, quite basically. He was extremely pro-Israel. He hated Arabs, and he would say so. He only used the word Arab when he hyphenated it with terrorist. He would say "Arab-terrorist" often in conversation. He had little or no contact with Arabs in the area. (End of tape)

Now what we had were constant arrests of American citizens, Palestinian Americans, basically, by the Israeli armed forces, and a constant refusal by the Israelis to inform us that Americans had been arrested. Approximately a month after I arrived in Israel, two young Americans, aged 15 and 16 years old, were arrested. Their arrests were reported to us by their family. They were first cousins. And the Israelis denied, as they always denied, they had ever heard of these two guys, the two young kids. They denied it, denied it, denied it. We kept insisting. We knew that they had been picked up. The Israelis kept saying, No, we don't have them. And then about a week later, the body of one of the young boys was discovered, shot in the back, lying dead in a wadi - with Israeli bullets, I might add. He'd been killed by the Israeli soldiers. There was a bit of a brouhaha. Even the ambassador had to get a little bit involved, despite his inclinations. What I did at that point was to go up to Ramallah, where the Israeli army had a sort of command headquarters, with the mother and the young sister of the other missing boy and basically sat in the office of the commander. I was accompanied also by the head of the Consular Section from Jerusalem, and we sat there until he finally told us that they had located the other boy. And then we insisted on seeing the other boy and went up to the prison that night to see him. But it was that sort of thing.

Q: Did the boy tell you what happened to the other?

METRINKO: He had been picked up stone-throwing, and they had been separated after they got picked up.

Q: In other words, he -

METRINKO: He didn't know what happened to his cousin.

Q: But they were both in Israeli custody, so it wasn't a matter of his getting shot while throwing rocks.

METRINKO: No, both in Israeli custody. The Israelis killed two American while I was there. That was one. They also killed an old man, an American Palestinian who had retired to the West Bank. He was in his home one evening, and Israeli soldiers broke into the house, insisted that he clean graffiti off some walls on the street. This man had a serious heart condition. He and his wife explained that he had a serious heart condition, that he couldn't do any physical activity. The Israeli soldiers made him drag a ladder out, made him ascend the ladder. He died of a heart attack. Reaction from the American Congress: zero, zero.

Q: Did you have a feeling that - in the consular regulations, all of this stuff normally arouses all sorts of reporting on it - there were sort of "world rules" and "Israeli rules," and Israeli rules were different than treating anywhere else?

METRINKO: I had the impression throughout my four years serving as consul general in Tel Aviv, that the Department of State, NEA, and the Department of State, Consular Affairs, did not give a damn about American citizens who were Palestinian in Israel, the West Bank, or Gaza - that if they could keep it out of the news that was fine, that they weren't going to do anything to rile the Israelis. That was my feeling throughout the time.

Q: Did you have a feeling, too, that you were being monitored, in a way, both by the Israeli intelligence service and by friends of Israel in the United States to see whether you were politically correct on Israel all the time?

METRINKO: Absolutely, completely. Monitored isn't the word - watched constantly. And - how do I want to say this? - threatened, professionally.

Q: How would this go?

METRINKO: I'll give you an example. There was a point when... When did this happen? We were between ambassadors at the time. We had a DCM who was very good, Kent Wiedeman. The Israelis had arrested an American Palestinian, and the Israeli military spokesman declared him guilty of all sorts of terrorist activities, claimed that he had been bringing money and using money for terrorist activities in Israel. I complained to the Israeli Government that the person had been arrested, he had not been tried and found guilty, and said that I considered it inflammatory and unprofessional, etc., for Israeli Government officials to be acting as though he were a tried and convicted criminal, that he was still pretrial status. The Israeli lobby got in touch with Ed Djerejian.

Q: We're talking about APAC, I guess.

METRINKO: Somebody from APAC called up Ed Djerejian, who was then the Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs and complained to him that I had gone beyond, that I was going too far. I was warned by the State Department to back down. That was fine. Now about three or four days later, there was a small piece in the Israeli press about what was the Israeli Government's... Oh, Ed first had told Consular Affairs and told the embassy that he would raise this issue. Ed told Consular affairs that he would take care of the issue because we were trying to get access to this man and everything else, and here the Israelis had declared him guilty of terrorism. Ed had said that he would take care of it, that he would raise the issue and that he would treat it very seriously. In the Israeli press a few days later, there was a small article about someone who had just met with Ed Djerejian, and the reporter asked him, did he raise the issue of I think the man's name was Saleh, if I'm not mistaken - of Saleh, the American terrorist, whatever, and the Israeli official laughed and said, "Yes, he did. He brought it up at lunch, but it's not very serious. We just laughed about it." And I wanted to send that newspaper article to the Department. Our front office stopped me, and they said it would just annoy Ed. That's the way it was handled.

Q: I would have thought working under these conditions... You say you extended. Why?

METRINKO: Israel's a fascinating place. Israel is four or five million individuals, not one of whom is boring. I never had what I would say was a happy day in Israel, but I never had a boring day. I would rather be interested and have interesting work than just sit back and be content. Individuals in Israel, whether they are Jewish, Christian, Muslim, whatever - the individuals there were fantastic. I had a huge number of what I consider friends. I knew most of the grand rabbis in Israel. I knew them well. I used to go to their homes. I had access to an incredible array of Israelis, both the religious, the ultra orthodox, the non-religious, the military, and I have no problems with individual Israelis. It was our way of dealing with them, with the State Department, that gave me problems.

Q: Did you have a feeling that here was essentially the United States being represented in a country that could reach out and jerk us around any way that they wanted because of their political clout in the United States?

METRINKO: Absolutely. It was more than a feeling; it was an absolute certainty. And people there knew, too, or we strongly suspected, that if you did anything that was too out of line it would affect your career. NEA was not going to back you up - never. Consular Affairs was certainly not going to back up anybody. Consular Affairs at that point was headed by - Oh, gosh, what was her name?

Q: Joan Clark?

METRINKO: No, Joan Clark had left. Joan Clark was fantastic. She's the one who sent me to Tel Aviv. She left shortly afterwards. The political appointee from New England, whose name I -

Q: Oh, yes. And she got into deep kimchi, as they say.

METRINKO: The suspected Clinton passport application. What was her name?

Q: It'll come. But she's from New Hampshire.

METRINKO: New Hampshire. She came to Israel when I was there. It was an amazing trip. This gave me an indication of the sort of leadership we had from the Department of State and Consular Affairs. Let me go back a moment. I am talking about a time when we did not have, at least initially, for the first two years I was there, daily contact with Consular Affairs. Today, everybody is on e-mail. Today, you can communicate all day long, very easily leave messages. At the time I'm talking about, you had to send telegrams. Therefore, anything you sent had to be cleared unless it was a standard visa cable or a standard congressional. It had to be cleared by the front office. You couldn't go back with questions about policy, questions about support, questions about how far can I go, how far can you go, will you help me on this? Because it would have to go through the front office. Therefore there wasn't that good a support system in place yet.

I extended in Israel. I did it for personal reasons as well as professional reasons. My mother was living with me. She was diagnosed in Israel with cancer. I had a choice. I could either leave Israel immediately - this was my second year there - to get her back to the United States for treatment, or I could start treatment in Israel. She and I decided after talking to doctors there to let her go through the treatment there. We paid for it out of our own money, instead of using her insurance in the United States, but the doctors were excellent. Her chief doctor had been at Sloan-Kettering in New York. He went over the potential expenses of medical care. He said, "Look, by the time you finish the entire series of cobalt radiation treatments, it will cost you as much to pay for everything here as you would pay in incidentals if you were in the United States." So we decided to stay. Because we were going to stay, we had to stay for a longer period of time than my original assignment would have lasted. I asked for an extension to give us four years and thus to be able to take a long R&R right in the middle. So it worked out.

To go back to the assistant secretary of state. The day I came back from R&R... It was home leave, one of the first times in the State Department that I was actually able to get home leave from a post. It was great. I had a month off. About two weeks before I was due to go back, the assistant secretary announced that she was going to Israel on a visit. Fine. She arrived in Israel the day after I did from home leave, but my assistant had done everything, and everything was fine. The Assistant Secretary was Betty Tamposi, Elizabeth Tamposi. She wasn't interested in going to the Consular Section. She wasn't interested in seeing it, and she wasn't interested in meeting any of the FSNs. She was interested enough to meet the American officers at someone's home over a brunch, and then I drove her and her special assistant up to Jerusalem, where she was going to meet with the people from the consular section there. In the car going up, she turned to me and said, "Michael, you've been in the Holy Land for a long time now. Have you ever met the Blessed Virgin Mary?" I know, I can see the expression on your face. I looked at her, and I thought first that I was still going through jet lag, because I had just arrived the day before from a 24-hour trip back. And I said, "Excuse me?" And she said, "Well, have you ever met with the Blessed Virgin Mary?" And I said, "I'm not sure what you mean." She said, "Well, you know, she's been appearing so many places. She's been appearing in Yugoslavia, and she's been appearing at that apartment in Maryland" - that was news to me. She said, "I thought that since this was her home she might have appeared here and that you'd had a chance to talk to her." I looked at her special assistant, who averted his eyes immediately and stared out the window. And I just said, "No, I'm sorry, I never have." Fine, fine. We got up to Jerusalem. Before I could warn the head of the section up there about this, Donna got into the car, and Betty Tamposi -

Q: Donna - ?

METRINKO: Donna Sherman, an absolutely wonderful, superb officer who died later in Cairo, absolutely fantastic officer. Donna got in the car and Donna was a rather large woman and very expressive. She sat down, and Betty Tamposi turned toward her and said, "Donna, I'm so glad you're here. I'm glad to meet you." She said, "You know, I wanted to ask you, you're up here in Jerusalem. Have you had a chance to talk to the Mother of God?" And Donna looked at her, and then turned and looked at me, and her eyebrows went all the way up in the air, and I just shrugged, and Donna said, "Well, no, not really." Fine. We get out to the church in Bethlehem. The church in Bethlehem, by the way, was the whole reason Betty Tamposi was in Israel. She didn't seem to care about the consular sections in either place. She wanted to see the church in Bethlehem. We got up to the church in Bethlehem, and the priest whom Donna had arranged to give the tour of the church walked over, and the first question Betty Tamposi said was, "Father..."

Q: Ha, ha, ha, ha.

METRINKO: I asked her special assistant later, "What is going on here? Is she flipped, or what?" He said, "She's been under a lot of stress." She was indeed under a lot of stress. Not long afterward she went passport-application-hunting.

Q: Yes, and it became quite a political scandal in 1988 - no, it was the 1992 election. She was looking for dirt in the passport files against Bill Clinton.

METRINKO: To see whether or not he had actually ever gone to the Soviet Union on a visit when he was a student at Oxford.

Q: And also, I think even there was a rumor that he might have attempted to renounce his citizenship over the Vietnam War.

METRINKO: But that was the kind of support we got from the Department of State. Now, having said that, we did get support in one area. They were absolutely afraid to get involved with Arab-Americans. They were, however, very interested in the problem of the Black Hebrews, and the Black Hebrews are one of the most fascinating consular cases I've ever dealt with. The Black Hebrews, or the Hebrew Israelite Community, were a group of about 1200 black Americans who had migrated to Israel with a charismatic cult leader. His name was Ben Ami Carter. Ben Ami Carter had been a bus driver in Detroit, if I remember correctly, who had had a vision back in the time when black groups were becoming Muslim - Mohammed X, etc. Ben Ami had decided that he was really Jewish, and he had a series of visions and dreams that led him first to go to Liberia looking for the promised land, and then, when he decided that Liberia was not his place, he went to Israel, went in as a tourist, settled down in a small area not too far from the Negev Desert. His followers started to come. And his followers were a very strange group of people. We had, among others, the hairdresser from The Supremes there.

Q: The Supremes being a popular singing group.

METRINKO: I guess we do have to explain The Supremes, don't we?

Q: Well, you know, we're talking about history.

METRINKO: 1966-67. We had the daughter of a bishop. We had a lot of solid, middle-class black Americans who had migrated to Israel and claimed to be going in as tourists and had simply settled there around their leader. Now, the group was a strange group. They dressed in their version of ancient Hebrew/African clothing - long robes, turbans, beautifully embroidered, beautifully colored robes. They looked like what you would envision an Orientalist view of the Middle East circa the year zero. They were vegetarians. They were vegan vegetarians - no meat, no dairy products. They had come in without the Israeli Government really knowing what was going on. They had come in in dribs and drabs and ones and twos and threes and fours, and suddenly the Israelis turned around and realized there were more than a thousand of this community living in a town on the edge of the desert.

Q: Where was their money coming from?

METRINKO: Good question. Well, some of them were escaped felons from the United States. They had done bank robberies and things like that. There were a number of convictions outstanding for credit card fraud. They had a large... But those were the... Right now I want to say I've always thought those were the exceptions, a couple of people who had done financial crimes at a time when a lot of young black Americans thought that getting the man was okay. It goes back to a time in our history of ultra-ethnic nationalism, ultra-racial nationalism, in the '60s. The money they raised in the United States - they had a large number of followers in the United States - they raised the money. People who went to the community would sell their property and bring the proceeds with them. They also raised money in Israel. They worked illegally in Israel. They made jewelry. They took care of people's houses. They did other things, bits and pieces of work.

Now, what was the situation when I got there? When I had my long conversation with Joan Clark prior to going out to Tel Aviv, she explained about the group to me. She said, "Look, we don't want another Jonestown" - Jonestown being a settlement, a community of Americans who were living in Guyana under the leadership of a somewhat similar cult leader, Jim Jones. They committed suicide en masse, or were murdered, depending on the version. But several hundred or a thousand -

Q: I think we're talking of around 800. There was a mass suicide sort of coerced murder. They all drank poison.

METRINKO: And what was going on in Israel at this time, in 1989, was this. The Israeli Government wanted these people out. They were illegal in Israel. They had no residence permits. They could not work legally. They were existing on charity, handouts of money. They were suspected by the consular section of mistreatment of children, to the point of almost torture of children, of coercion, of forcing people to stay in the group, in the community, not allowing people to break out of the cult. There were requests from the United States. People couldn't locate family members who had joined the cult. They couldn't communicate with them. In order to avoid deportation, the entire community had renounced their American citizenship. Therefore, everyone from the leader on down to young children was stateless, and children who were being born - and there were lots of children being born down in the community - were all being born stateless. Israel does not grant citizenship based on birth on the land of Israel. And they no longer had American citizenship, either of the parents, so the children were being born stateless, which was something awful to contemplate down the road. They had highly annoyed the Israeli religious communities and the Israeli Government. They practiced polygamy, which was biblical, but not legal in Israel. And they just looked "other;" they looked different. They were black Americans wearing long robes and turbans who thought that they were the only true Jews and told the Israelis that they were the true Jews and not the Israelis and that the Israelis had gone astray, period. Okay.

Joan Clark said, "We don't want another Jonestown. Whatever you do, please go down there, get that straightened out. That's what we have to do." My predecessor, for reasons I don't understand, had cut off all relations with the group. He didn't want to see them. Once they renounced American citizenship he didn't want them in the Consular Section. There was a serious problem because they needed help. It took about three years, but working with the Israeli Government, the Ministry of the Interior especially, working with the Jewish-American Congress and a wonderful, intelligent, prescient rabbi who was the head of it in Jerusalem, who saw this as a bombshell for American-Israeli relations, working with the community itself, working with the State Department, we got it solved. It took forever.

Q: How did you come up -

METRINKO: Well, the final arrangement was this. The Black Caucus, number one, was threatening -

Q: This was in Congress.

METRINKO: Yes, the Black Caucus in Congress was threatening retribution against Israeli interests in Congress if the Israelis did anything to this group. That was fine. The Israelis, nonetheless, were trying to get the group out of Israel. They thought they were responsible for every crime that had occurred in the State of Israel. First, I made it a priority to establish relations with the community. I think the first of second day I was in Tel Aviv, I told my chief FSN, I said, "Please call them up, tell them I would like to come down and pay a courtesy call." And that news was greeted with absolute dead silence, and then after a couple of days, "Yes, we'll be happy to receive him." So I went down there and played it straight. "I don't care if you renounced your citizenship or not. I'm still the American Consul General, you still have ties to the United States, and I'm just here to see if there's anything I can do for you." I went over all the problems with them, welcomed them, established a relationship to the point where they started coming back to the consulate, to the embassy, when they needed help, especially for repatriation, especially the younger children, if they could get away from the community and wanted to go back - because very often they had a mother or a father in the United States. There were a lot of divided families in the community. Working with the Jewish-American Congress, convincing the Israeli Government that they had to go easy, and over the course of time, worked out a wonderful deal, where the State Department, Consular Affairs, looked at the whole questions of the renunciations and decided that, except for the top leadership, everyone else had been coerced into renunciation, therefore they were not valid renunciations. Therefore, they could be given their passports back. We even hired a PIT -

Q: A part-time intermittent employee.

METRINKO: We hired a part-time employee just to issue passports. We had to issue more than 1000 passports, and they all had to come in and go through the renunciation of the renunciation ceremony and make sure that everything was on the dotted line. Now we did all this working with the leadership, and the leadership were being excluded. At the same time, working with the Israeli Government and the Jewish-American Congress, we got the Israeli Government to agree to give them residence permits, which gave them permission to work in the country if they got their American passports back. The Israelis wanted to be able to deport them if they had to, but promised they would not unless in an individual case they had a serious reason to. So the Israelis gave them residence permits. We gave them their passports back, and we actually got the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration in the State Department to give a million-dollar grant through IOM, the International Organization for Migration, to this black American community. Now they were American refugees, American citizen refugees, but on the books all of this was absurd. In fact, it was wonderful. We used the million dollars to pay some of the community's debts to the municipality of Dimona. Dimona was the Negev town where they were living. They had not paid their electric bill or their water bill in lord knows how many years. They paid off their bill, made the municipality deliriously happy. We also used the rest of the money, through IOM, to build a school, and the Department of Education in Israel agreed to fund the teachers, hiring people from the community to be teachers in the school. There were a lot of certified teachers there. So what we had, as I approached my last couple of months at the embassy, were 1200 new black American citizens living in Dimona being rediscovered by the Israeli press as sort of an interesting ethnic composition down there, being rediscovered by the tour buses, so that tour buses would pass by and say, to American foreign tourists, "And there is a community of..." you know, da-da da-da.

Q: Did they sell trinkets?

METRINKO: And they would sell trinkets, and they would sell little pieces of silver jewelry, and they would walk around in their wonderful robes. And they started coming on Israeli TV. They were superb entertainers. They had used their methods of cultural expression, singing and dancing, in their services, and they could sing...

They had taken a sort of Christian Gospel approach to music and applied it to Judaism. It was sort of really "out there." And they were getting awards, and they were going to jazz festivals and everything else, and working out.

Now, this still left the leadership. The leadership were a different kettle of fish. Several of them had outstanding federal warrants. They had renounced their citizenship. Nobody liked the leadership. I did. They were fine. They were my kind of people. They had all been rebels, and they were okay. They were okay with me. They did not have their citizenship because they were the ones named by the other 1100 or whatever as the people responsible for forcing them to give up their citizenship. What we did was, I helped them write sort of mea culpa explanations about pressures of society, politics, fear of being deported, etc. that had made them do this. And once again, the State Department came through and sent us permission to reissue passports, and one of my last official acts there was to able to present his new American passport to the Messianic head of this community. It was great. He came up to the office, and we had a ceremony.

Q: Now, let's talk about another group of Americans I think would be much more difficult, and this would be the Jewish Americans, highly orthodox, maybe Hasidic, maybe not, but of that ilk, who went to Israel, who often seem to be the spearhead of extreme Israeli nationalism.

METRINKO: Orthodox Judaism covers a spectrum of religion. You have the ultra-orthodox, you have the orthodox, you have the Zionist orthodox, and you have the anti-Zionist orthodox, just to name a few. There were a couple of orthodox groups, highly ultra-orthodox groups, that did not accept the existence of a State of Israel, for example, the Satmer group. The Satmer grand rabbi lives in New York City. I had met the Satmer grand rabbi in my old days in Poland, when I hosted him on a visit there once. The Satmer grand rabbi dealt directly, as far as I remember, with the Palestinians. His belief, and the belief of his followers, was that the State of Israel can exist only when the Messiah comes; therefore, anything claiming to be a state, in the absence of the Messiah, is not real. It is an illegal organization. So we had lots of Satmers, and I was on very good terms with the Satmers. They would help me a great deal with other orthodox groups. You had the Vishnitzer and you had the Bostoner and you had the Lubavitcher. The Lubavitcher grand rabbi, the rebbe, as he was called, lived also in New York. In fact, he died when I was in Israel. I had a chance to meet him in New York. I paid a call on him, which was fairly highly publicized. The Lubavitchers were sort of like missionary ultra-orthodox. They felt it was their job to reconvert Jews to true Judaism. They were great. The Lubavitchers actually had an emissary to the embassy who would come in once a week to see me, and he and I would sit down for at least an hour every Friday morning and discuss Israel, Judaism, and various parts of Jewish law, Jewish dietary law, etc. I used to go to his home quite frequently, and I made sure that I took my whole consular staff out to visit their community. Every new group of people went out to visit them. I knew most of the grand rabbis in Israel, and I knew a number of those who were living in the United States because their groups have traditionally lived in the United States. They had an interest in knowing me because they had to deal with the Consular Section constantly. Many of them were American citizens, including some of the grand rabbis. They needed passports. They needed certificates for this, notarials, etc., etc. Their wives and children needed passports and needed documents. If, for example, the Satmers did not like the State of Israel or did not admit to its existence, they certainly had no problems about the government of the United States. That was their country. That was a legal government. Therefore, they always wanted to be sure their American documents were in order, because that's how they lived and traveled. If they weren't American citizens, the members of the ultra-orthodox groups, the ones who followed the grand rabbis, were interested in going to the United States to visit the grand rabbis. The Lubavitcher rebbe had a court in New York, in Brooklyn, to which hundreds and hundreds, if not thousands, of people went every week. Everyone in Israel who followed him - and there were many thousands - traveled to the United States to visit him, to ask questions, just to go and look at him. And so it was incumbent on the Lubavitcher community to have good relations with the embassy. We had excellent relations. And that went all up and down. There was a very ultra-orthodox group that ran a medical charity. I went down to Beni Brak, where they had their center, visited them there. They were very impressed. They ran a medical charity where they would match up people in Israel who needed emergency medical treatment and could not be treated in Israel with doctors in hospitals all around the world, but especially in the United States. And if you qualified for this program, if you were a child with a bad heart or something like that and could not be treated in Israel, this group would pay for everything. They would arrange for your passport, arrange for your visa, arrange for your medical transportation, arrange for a member of your family to accompany you, arrange for a place in the United States to stay, arrange for kosher food, arrange for a doctor and all the hospitalization in the United States.

Q: Admirable.

METRINKO: It was wonderful. They had a huge warehouse of free medical equipment. If you needed a wheelchair you could go there and get one and bring it back, or not bring it back, as the case might be. But I was on good terms with them, and because I knew so many of them, they introduced me to others, to the point where my Jewish staff, a lot of them were offended that I was on such good terms with the ultra-orthodox community. There are large gaps between the ultra-orthodox and regular secular Jews. Not only gaps, there's a great deal of enmity, hostility.

But you talked about American Jews who came there for nationalist reasons, Zionists. Yes, they existed. I did not have very much personal contact with them, because they were basically living up in the West Bank. They were settlers. The American Jews who lived in Tel Aviv or up and down the coastline were a bit laid back. They were there for family reasons, professional reasons. They had gotten citizenship one way or the other. They tended to be very well educated. There was a large contingent of retired Americans, and a lot of these people were my friends. I'd go to their houses for dinner; they'd come to my house. We'd see each other. We'd go on trips together. I'm still in touch with a lot of them. The last time I saw anyone like this was about a month ago here, when two of them came from Tel Aviv, were visiting Washington, I took them out to dinner. They tended to be more liberal, more live-and-let-live, than the type you're talking about on the West Bank.

Q: I would have thought that these people, the type I'm talking about, the extreme nationalists, were in a way sort of a cutting edge of the right wing of the Likud Party, weren't they?

METRINKO: No, they go beyond Likud. In my mind it's so far gone - I'm trying to think of the name of the party that was so famous. It's just slipped my mind right now.

Q: It's something Oshaz, or something.

METRINKO: Yes. No, not Shaz. I just can't think of it. It was declared illegal in Israel anyway. I would see these guys occasionally when they were arrested. And we did have American Jews who were arrested, a steady stream of American Jews, usually for murder, for murdering Arabs. They tended not to stay in jail long. If you were picked up... it's funny, if you were Arab and you killed a Jew, you would go to jail forever. If you were Jewish and you killed an Arab, it was a temporary stay.

Q: Did it remind you of what you'd heard about the deep South?

METRINKO: Oh, very much. It was worse than the deep South - the deep South in the United States, say 1920 or 1930, yes, very much, absolutely. But... Oh, good Lord, all the names are going, thousands of Hebrew names are going through my mind, and I just cannot think of the name of the Party.

Q: You can add this. You will get a -

METRINKO: But basically, my work brought me into contact with every type of person, everything, Christian, Muslim, Arab, Armenian.

Q: Did you get involved in extreme Christianity, people waiting for the Second Coming?

METRINKO: The Messiah complex.

Q: The Messiah thing or something.

METRINKO: Extreme Christianity, a lot of religion in Israel in that area is extreme. If you scratch anybody there you're likely to get a fanatic at one point or another. The extreme religious Christians tended to be up in Jerusalem, and they were specifically a Jerusalem problem. I didn't have to be bothered with them very much. In fact, I don't think I ever even met one. I dealt with a fair scattering of American clergy, your standard Roman Catholic monks and this and that and nuns who worked in Israel for good professional reasons. It dealt with visitors who were there for religious purposes, but none of the Christian fanatic types.

Q: Well, you were there '89-93. I mean, we're talking about the Gulf War and all of that. Can you talk about what your experiences were at that time?

METRINKO: The Gulf War was interesting. As we started to build up to the Gulf War, the United States had laid an ultimatum down: the Iraqi forces had to leave Kuwait or there was going to be trouble. I instituted a policy in the Consular Section of burn, of getting rid of documents, which nobody could understand, but I simply said it's from my experience in Iran. I don't know what's going to happen here, but we might as well go through old files. It's time for it anyway. The embassy had a series of meetings. It was handled pretty well by the ambassador, by the DCM. A series of meetings to go through the various emergency evacuation things and this and that - thank goodness, because it was amazing how ignorant many of the American officials are about emergency procedures. And we went through a series of who's essential to embassy operations, and it was rather funny, when consular sections are often looked down on as not being on the cutting edge of anyone's embassy, in one of the meetings I had the economic counselor say, "Well, nothing we do here is essential in the Economic Section. We could all leave tomorrow and nobody would notice. I can't really say that anything I've done as an economics officer has been essential to running an embassy." Well, as it turned out, by the time push came to shove, we ended up with the ambassador, the DCM, one person from USIA, one political officer, nobody from the Economic Section, and the entire Consular Section, including all the FSNs. And we ran a 24-hour shift in the Consular Section, for the first several days, anyway.

Q: For the first several days of what?

METRINKO: The first several days of when the Iraqis actually... we started to bomb the Iraqis and they started to retaliate and bomb Tel Aviv.

Q: These Scuds were coming in, these rather inaccurate missiles.

METRINKO: If you're going to get hit by a missile, it doesn't matter if you are targeted with finesse or by mistake.

Q: No, they just drop it.

METRINKO: And in effect, it's better if they're targeted well because then you can stay away from them.

Q: I've heard stories about when all of a sudden the going got rough, an awful lot of groups like both who had been posturing and all this all of a sudden decided it was time to get the hell out of Israel and head for back to the States. Did you find that?

METRINKO: This was a funny time, a very funny time. First, a lot of Israelis simply ran away. If there had ever been the old, you know, Leon Uris myth of Exodus and everything else.

Q: You're talking about the '48 War and all.

METRINKO: Yes, all Israelis are brave and heroes and all that. They took off like rabbits. They disappeared. They ran. I mean, it was almost funny to watch. To give you an example of how many people ran, the local newspaper decided to send a reporter to an old-age home in Tel Aviv to see how people who had gone through World War II in Europe were faring now. They got to the old-age home, and all the pensioners were still there, but there was no staff. All the doctors, all the nurses, all the administrators had taken off. The only people who were there taking care of the old people were the Arab char force. And this was reported in the newspapers, that the entire Jewish staff had deserted the hospital.

Q: Where did they go to?

METRINKO: They went to the United States, they went to Europe, they went off to various kibbutz's, they went up to Jerusalem. They just disappeared. Streets in Tel Aviv were empty. One of my consular officers, who lived about a block from me, one night there was a knock on his door, and a man looked at him and said, "You and I are the only two people who have stayed on this entire street. Would you like to come to dinner?" The mayor of Tel Aviv stood up early on, the first day or so or the second day of the Scuds, and started to talk about how all the people who are running away are cowards and traitors, and someone said, "Where is your son?" His son had run away, and he had to stop talking like that.

Q: I'm told the Israeli television sort of relished showing people dressed as orthodox Jews getting on the planes and so forth.

METRINKO: You know, it wasn't only that, it was everybody, and you know, a lot of people came to Israel at the same time, but they tended to be Americans who thought that they were somehow going to help Israel. It was a mixed bag. I had friends who stayed. A lot of my friends stayed. I can't say that it was the orthodox who left or the seculars who left or this group or that group. A lot of people stayed, but far more left.

Now, the State Department. The State Department was fairly supportive in a stupid way. Consular Affairs was not really geared up to assist us, I would say. We had done everything possible. We certainly had made it known... Well, in Israel it was never possible to have what consular officers refer to as the "warden system." In Israel and the surrounding areas, we had 120,000 American citizens residing there, and we had at any given day many, many thousands of tourists. In Israel there are English newspapers that are pretty good. There are English broadcasts on television, English news. You had access to English on the radio, and certainly, the Israeli Government was making every possible announcement about what's going on. Also CNN was making every possible announcement, and you could get CNN in Israel at that point. So there was no way that any American who was there could say that he or she was not notified of what was happening. The buildup had been international press for about two months. Everybody knew this was happening. In fact, the Israelis were so well organized that tourists had access to gas masks. Hotels passed them out to anyone who was staying for the night. The airport in Tel Aviv never closed. The American liners weren't coming in, but El Al was coming and going every day with direct flights to the United States, and we had a deal, an arrangement with travel agencies. We had set up a small consortium of travel agencies, five or six. Any American who called the Consular Section during this period, during the first week or two, who wanted to leave Israel, we could get them a regular seat on an outgoing flight. If they called up and they had had trouble getting through to the airport, we had the emergency numbers, the sort of unpublished numbers of our group of travel agents, and we could put them in direct touch. And we had absolutely no problem. The State Department never quite understood this. But anyway, that was happening.

Now, the problem with the State Department. Right in the middle of all this, when it's getting down to like two days before the rockets are going to start going up in the air, our defense attachï¿½ announced that a special plane was coming in to make deliveries and that the military wives, the dependents, were going to be leaving on it. The ambassador went ballistic, so to speak, saying, "You can't do this. If you go, the whole embassy has to go. You're not separate. You can't just call a plane in to take away your dependents, and we are not evacuating this post." It went back and forth. They backed down, but the plane did come in at the last moment, and while it was in the air we were told that there would be 100 or so seats on it for people who wanted to leave. Consular Affairs went a bit ballistic. All this was being done by the ambassador and the defense attachï¿½s. We only found out about it in the Consular Section quite late, as the consular section up in Jerusalem found out about it quite late. When I told CA about it, they said no one from the embassy should get on the plane unless there was a public announcement to allow American civilians from Israel to get on the plane. Well, as I told them, the airport was opened; planes were flying routinely; any American who wanted to fly out of Israel could go, get a ticket (and there were seats available on every flight), and leave Israel. It went back and forth, back and forth. The end result was that I think some of the American military dependents did go. A number of dependents from Jerusalem went, even though they were never in the problem, although they didn't know that at the time.

else was happening? Oh, this was when we finally had to do a sort of ordered departure of all dependents from the embassy, and they were sent down to the Red Sea area, to Elat to spend some time in a hotel. And eventually most of them left there and went back to the United States or to other places to sit out the war.

Q: Well, of course, one of the problems... I've interviewed both Bill Brown and Chas Freeman, who was ambassador to Saudi Arabia. You had this very peculiar situation where we wanted to keep Israel out of the war and keep Saudi Arabia in. Particularly in Saudi Arabia, it was absolutely essential that we not evacuate the American civilians, because they were essentially running the oil companies and you couldn't have done the war.

METRINKO: You could not have done the war. You would have impacted on American oil prices back here because nobody knew how long the thing was going to take.

Q: Yes, but I mean at the time, the oil was -

METRINKO: - the reason for the war.

Q: - and the planes were being fueled by Saudi oil. So you had this peculiar thing where you really didn't want to evacuate, tell all the Americans to get the hell out, and so anything we did anywhere in the neighborhood would impact and scare the people in Saudi Arabia, who were essentially at more risk.

METRINKO: My understanding was that the oil companies and the American companies in Saudi tied their evacuation policy to whatever the evacuation policy of the embassy was. Therefore, if American civilians were evacuated from the embassy, then the oil workers would also have to go with their families. That was sort of a trip-wire.

Q: And so you had essentially sitting there, in a way, using Americans - the term isn't quite right - as hostage to the political situation. But it was a very serious one. Were you aware of this dynamic where you were?

METRINKO: Oh, a little bit, yes. But you know, things were also happening fairly quickly, and as it turned out... Well, what I did, I don't trust the Department of State. I haven't for many, many years. I don't trust the Department of State to protect me. I had my mother with me. She was an invalid. She was also quite old. She also needed help. What I did, I had had a personal friend who was visiting and her vacation was over. She was going back to the States. So about a week before anything happened, I told my mother that I was buying her a ticket and that I wanted her to go back to the States for a month or two. I wasn't going to sit around and wait for our front office or the Secretary of State to make a decision about American dependents when I knew there were so many other factors in play. And I simply sent my invalid mother back to the United States on my own. Any American officer who whines about evacuation policy can do that with his or her family. We can afford plane tickets. We can send our own families anywhere we want to. We don't have to wait for somebody in the Personnel Office at State or a deputy assistant secretary to finally make a decision. We can make our own decisions, and I did it.

Q: As one looks at these things, always after a war, the claims are always much greater than the accomplishments, but what was the sort of the feeling around with American troops coming to Israel, with the Patriot missiles, at the time?

METRINKO: They were highly welcomed by the Israelis. They were fï¿½ted, in the sense of 'given feasts.' Israelis gave them gifts, visited them, invited them out to their homes. It was great. I made a number of new friends at the time, too, because there were several retired American Israelis living there who decided it was time to be nice to the people in the embassy and called up to see if they could invite us for dinners. And I went, and I had a great time. Of course, I was out almost every night during this time. It was great, some of the best parties I'd been to. Wars are good for that. Adrenaline runs.

Q: Were you involved at all in the distribution of gas masks and that sort of thing?

METRINKO: No, it wasn't a consular function; it was an admin function, to people in the embassy. But we did not provide gas masks to anybody who was not an official American or an official American dependent because the Israeli Government provided them to everyone in the country - except not on the West Bank.

Q: In the regular work and all, a Consular Section always gets stories, and people come in and our offices are open, and they talk. People talk, you know, getting visas or having problems, and say, "Oh, yes, did you hear that?" Did you find that information coming through the Consular Section... how was it received, say, by the Political and minorly the Economic Section?

METRINKO: In general or during this period?

Q: Well, in general.

METRINKO: In general, unfortunately it was fairly typical in the embassy in Tel Aviv, as it is in many embassies, where political sections and economic sections are not interested in consular sections or in anything they can provide or do. Our DCM was interested. I did long series of reports on visiting Arabs, doing this, doing that, various groups that I'd been involved with, some of my ultra-orthodox contacts, and he encouraged me to write as much as possible. He himself rarely went out, so he didn't have the contacts in the society. I encouraged the officers to write, but what happened there is what usually happens, that consular officers say, "I'm too busy. If I write this reporting telegram, I will never get the 25 visa telegrams out." On the other hand, did we get the interesting stories? It was too much of a mill in many ways. We had the interesting American Israeli stories. We certainly had access to anything in the country, but it wasn't quite the same as when I had been, for example, in Tabriz or in Teheran in the Consular Section.

Q: What about your dealing with the Israeli Government, particularly on the, I guess, Ministry of the Interior and the military, with people who were in trouble and all that? What was your -

METRINKO: As individuals, Israeli officials could be fine. They also lie a lot. They will look you straight in the face and lie about whether or not they have an American in custody. I had one Israeli official who complained about me, lied, made a direct complaint to the ambassador. All I could say was, "He was lying." But that was that. Israeli officials are no better or worse than any other officials. I had good relations with individual police officials and individual army officials, very good relations. It was my good relations with one Israeli military official that got us access, for the first time in the history of the Intifada, to one of the major detention centers. They hadn't been letting anyone at all visit a particular detention center, called Ansar 2, and I met an Israeli at a party, had a great time with him, and he invited me to come and visit him where he worked, and that's when I discovered he was the deputy commander of... all I can say, it was a major concentration camp. I told him I'd been trying to visit there for months and that his government had always refused to allow it. He said, "Call me tomorrow, and I'll arrange it." I did, and he did, and two or three days later, I was visiting American prisoners in a prison that we had never been allowed access to and no foreigner had ever been to.

Q: Well, on this American prisoner thing, I mean, sort of the creed of a consular officer of any country, but especially an American consular officer, you have to see American prisoners who are in jail.

METRINKO: Yes, all that has changed. Consular Affairs no longer does that, as far as I can see. But at the time, yes.

Q: But you did find yourself... I mean, if you couldn't see an American, you knew an American was in a prison - I don't want to overemphasize this point, but I think it's an important one - you didn't feel that back in Washington or the embassy itself, but I mean basically pressure from Washington was not pulling out all stops to make sure that you were able to fulfill your consular functions and your treaty functions?

METRINKO: Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha. That's putting it very diplomatically. Visiting prisoners for me is a personal thing. It's one of the things that I consider the most important of the consular functions. It was personal for me because I had spent so long in prison. I get incensed when I cannot get to Americans who are under my jurisdiction, part of my responsibility, and are in prisons in my area. When I arrived in Tel Aviv, I discovered that the prison visit program had largely been dropped. I don't know why, but my predecessor and the officer responsible for American citizens' services had decided it wasn't so important. They had stopped making visits, and they claimed it was an economy measure, to save money. I looked at the woman officer and said, "How does it save money not to visit prisoners?" She couldn't reply. She said, "Oh, it's an economy measure." I immediately had a total review done of all the prisoner files that we had and announced that effective immediately we would see every prisoner once a month. These in large part were political prisoners, and we were dealing with an Israeli system which tortured prisoners under interrogation and for punishment. You do not drop a prison visit program at a time like that. I put this into effect, and by and large we did it. I went myself on many of the prison visits because I wanted to show the Israelis how important I considered it, that I wasn't just going to send a junior vice-consul on his or her first tour, that the Consul General goes - the same guy whose picture is in the newspaper meeting with the grand rabbi or the chief rabbi of Jerusalem is also tomorrow morning at this prison meeting with an American Palestinian teenager or an American Jewish teenager who's in prison. And over the course of time, we did manage to get a good working relationship with the police, with the military who are responsible for running the prisons on the West Bank and also martial law prisons in Israel proper. And the relationship worked out. It worked out simply by pushing and pushing and pushing and pushing. Now, did we ever get quick notification from the Israelis that they had taken an American prisoner? No. Invariably, they would wait the two full weeks they thought was their due. During those two weeks they would interrogate. During those two weeks they would punish, and they would use methods that are called torture in most civilized countries. Once the visits started, by and large, mistreatment of prisoners stopped - at least for the American prisoners - and in general, once we had established a relationship with whoever was the warden of the time at a particular prison, it worked out okay. We could simply call him up, make arrangements to go. They were quite flexible about times. We would go, have coffee with the warden or have breakfast or something, be given privacy to see the prisoners, and they understood this concept. I'm sure we were being listened to because we were in standard waiting rooms and things like that, but still, given at least superficial privacy. We were allowed to receive letters, to take letters from the prisoners. We were allowed to give them letters. We were allowed to give them things like clothing, vitamins, anything else that their families would send. And it worked out. In fact, I could go on and on about visiting prisons there, because I probably made 40 to 50, at least, prison visits. I was doing this every other month myself - not every prison visit, because it's something also that FSNs do, it's something that junior officers do.

Q: Well, sure. I mean, this is part of their experience, training.

METRINKO: But it got to the point, when I was leaving Israel, the prison camp Ansar 2, where we had had so much trouble getting in... And I have to tell you the story about Bill Brown ï¿½ propos of that. My last visit there, the warden had become a friend. The deputy warden was a friend. I would see him socially with his wife back in Tel Aviv. On my last visit there - they knew it was my last visit - I had one prisoner there who still had several months to go on his sentence - and I arrived at the prison, went in, as always, you know, to sit and chat with the warden for a while, and he said he had a few gifts for me in honor of my last visit to the prisons since I was going back to America, and he gave me a little metal container to hold visiting cards, and it had the name of the prison and the date on it, and that was nice. And he said, "After you see Mohammed, the staff would like to have you come to lunch to our cafeteria." Fine, thank you, I'd like to. He said, "Oh, and as a the real gift that we want to give you in honor of your last visit, we're giving you your prisoner." What do you mean? He said, "You can take him with you today. We're going to set him free, but you have to take him." And I said, "You can do this?" He said, "Yes, I can." And he said, "We decided it was the most appropriate gift."

Q: How wonderful.

: Yes, so I went to see Mohammed, who was, like, a 16-year-old American Palestinian from the USA who had come to the West Bank the year before to stay with his grandmother, had gotten caught up in the stone-throwing. I went to see him. They brought him over to me. I used to go right into the barbed wire areas. And I looked at him and said, "We're not going to talk too long. I have some things from your family here," etc., etc., but basically, "Go back to your cell, say goodbye to your cellmates because you're going with me in about another hour. I'm going to a lunch and I'll be back and pick you up." He said, "What do you mean? I'm here for another three months." And I got him, just took him out. I signed the papers, the "receipt" for him and everything else, and came out with him. My FSN thought this was great. She was a wonderful lady. I got to the driver, who had not been part of any of this, because the driver was not allowed in with the embassy car, and we told him we were going to the West Bank, to a particular town, to take this boy home. And he said, "How do you get there? I've never been to the West Bank." I said, "Well, don't you have a map?" He said no. I turned to the kid, and I said, "You know how to get there don't you?" He said, "No, I've never been in this part. They brought me all the way from home in a van with no windows. I've never seen this part of Israel or the West Bank." But we found it. We got up there, and it was great. It took us a couple of hours to get to his house, of course, which was at the far end of the country, but we drove there in a couple of hours, got him there, and drove him through Jerusalem. He got to see Jerusalem for the first time in his life, got him up to his home. We parked the car outside. There was absolutely nobody. It was a pleasant enough looking village, but nobody around. We said, "Go inside and tell your family you're here. We'll wait until you're inside, and then we'll say goodbye after you come out again." He went inside the house, and about three minutes later there was an explosion of people running out, and it ended up with a big festival in the house and everything else and dinner and the whole bit.

Q: It's wonderful.

METRINKO: It was a good gift. Israelis could do that. They could be that charming, that sensitive, that intelligent. They could also be total bastards who didn't give a damn who they killed or tortured. They'd go flip-flopping back and forth. Cultured, intelligent, educated, well-traveled - you know, nice families, the soul of civilization, and they turn around and they will kill somebody in cold blood, and they don't seem to care. This is why I was never comfortable in the country. And then they'd threaten you if you protested.

Q: You were going to say something about -

METRINKO: Oh, yes, Bill Brown. In one of my prison visits I had come back, and I had written a fairly long report because I was really the first foreign diplomat who was getting into some of these places. And in the report on Ansar I had talked about how the camp was divided and how in one barbed-wire pen, open to the elements... The pens were large barbed-wire fenced areas about the size of a basketball court, for example, just barbed wire, and you might have some canvas over the top or a tent in the middle, but basically prisoners sat outside, sun, rain, snow sometimes. And I was passing one pen by with the guard who was escorting me to my meeting with the warden, I looked at it and it was filled with children. And I looked at it and I said, "Who are they?" And he said, "Oh, those are the ones who are under age." It was a barbed-wire pen filled with young kids, Palestinians, who were in prison. Well, I put this in the report. The ambassador came down. I was eating lunch in the cafeteria the next day, and the ambassador came down and he saw me and he walked over, and he said, "Mind if I sit down?" Sure. He said, "You know, I saw that report about the kids in the pen, and I talked to some of my Israeli friends in the government about it, and you know, Michael, that's done to protect these kids because their lives are so bad at home and they have such terrible living conditions. This is really the way they get trained. This is best for them." I just looked at him and said, "Mr. Ambassador, they were children in prison in a barbed-wire pen." And he finally just got up and left. He really believed that this was appropriate. That was the mindset I'm talking about.

Q: By the way, what was your feeling about... Did you have any relations, particularly on prisoners and all and treatment thereof, with the CIA people at our embassy?

METRINKO: Yes, the CIA people there were basically not interested in anything going on in prisons. Decent social relations, entertainment, etc., go to their homes for dinner and they would come to mine. To the best of my knowledge, we had no one from the Agency working in the consular section, at least no one that I knew of.

Q: Well, then, you left there in '93.

METRINKO: Yes.

Q: What happened?

METRINKO: I left there in '93, having survived two ambassadors and a couple of chargï¿½s. I should say, by the way, that our second ambassador, Bill Harrop, who was assigned to Israel, was perhaps the best person for whom I have ever worked - incredibly professional.

Q: And of course he was kicked out of there by -

METRINKO: - the Jewish lobby.

Q: - by the Jewish lobby, yes. Of course he was.

METRINKO: But incredibly professional, sensitive, intelligent. But, anyway... And a nice man. I left there and came back to the States with an assignment to Population, Refugees, and Migration - PRM - in the Refugee Bureau, where I was the office director for what they called ENSA, Europe, Near East, and South Asia. I was the office director for an area filled with hot spots. I had all of Europe, so we had Yugoslavia and a civil war, or whatever kind of war you want to call it.

Q: You were doing this from '93 to when?

METRINKO: '93 to '96, a three-year assignment. I had the collapsing Soviet Union and a whole variety of flashpoints there, everything from, good Lord... I mean, the whole Soviet Union was just -

Q: Yes, you had Georgia and you had Azerbaijan and Armenia.

METRINKO: Chechnya - I had that. I had the remnants of the Afghan situation. I had a civil war in Yemen. That was sort of brief, but I also had the Palestinians and the Jewish Agency. And a major part of our budget, or a huge chunk of my budget, which was about $350 million per year for refugee work in my area, went to the Jewish Agency to support Jewish refugees going to Israel, of which there are none (not by any standard definition of refugee, anyway), and also the Palestinians in the camps. This was at a time, '93, when everybody had decided it would be in our interests, because of Oslo, if we could -

Q: Oslo being the first meeting of the Israelis and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

METRINKO: Everyone had decided, or at least the State Department and the White House had decided it would behoove us to start throwing larger amounts of money at the Palestinians to make it seem that we were doing something to make their lives better. The State Department, through the Refugee Bureau, had been supporting UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine refugees ever since it was founded and had been the major donor throughout that time for UNRWA. This means that we were the ones providing a major percentage of all the money spent on Palestinian refugees by the United Nations. But both of those portfolios also were handed to me. And a decision sort of had been made in State that AID would take care of doing things for Gaza and the West Bank and that Refugee Bureau money would go to Palestinians in Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria - which was fine. It meant that I had a lot of travel to those areas and traveled to other parts, too. I got to Serbia; I got to Croatia; I got to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen; and also many times to Jordan and Syria, the West Bank and Gaza, Israel itself, and even into Lebanon once.

Q: Well, let's talk about the whole Palestinian thing. What was your impression of this '93-96 period about what was happening, effectiveness, non-effectiveness?

METRINKO: We had a problem dealing with the Palestinians, as we do dealing with Israel. There are no American political leaders who have the balls to speak frankly or the truth to either the Palestinians or the Israelis. The Palestinians - I'm going to use harsh terms now - have been whining about being refugees since 1947. Most of them are not refugees. All of the Palestinians who went to Jordan, for example, which is the bulk of Palestinians, a couple of million, were given full citizenship status by the Government of Jordan back in the early 1950s. They are citizens of Jordan. They do military service; they pay taxes; they carry Jordanian passports. The present king of Jordan is married to a Palestinian wife. They are fully involved in Jordanian society, and they are some of the richest people in Jordan.

They're up and down throughout the government, every part of the government. And yet when they want to, they continue claim refugee status. This is bullshit. And a couple of times we made - not we in the sense of me, but various administrations in the United States made - feeble attempts to sort of wipe the Jordanian Palestinians off the refugee rolls. The United Nations is trying to do this off and on, too. The Government of Jordan always said, "Please don't do it because if they get told they're no longer refugees, then they will have an uprising here and our government will have trouble." So for Jordanian internal political reasons we still consider the Palestinians in Jordan refugees. They are not. That's like total bullshit. The ones in Syria have full legal status except that they are not citizens. Fine. I guess, in theory, you could consider them refugees, but it's been three generations. That's a bit long to be a refugee. The ones in Lebanon are treated generally despicably by the Lebanese Government. Lebanese Governments are best known for their cupidity and corruption. They have been awful dealing with Palestinians. Early, early on the Christian parts of the Lebanese Government got the Christian Palestinians declared full citizens. They were given Lebanese citizenship back in the late '40s, early '50s. So the Christian Palestinians there are fine. They are full Lebanese citizens and vote - if anyone votes in Lebanon. I guess they get paid for their votes in Lebanon. Am I a bit acidic about the Middle East? But it's all those 16 or 17 years of living there. The Muslim Palestinians have been treated very, very harshly by everybody - by the Lebanese Government, by other Lebanese groups, by Syria, by the Israelis, by the United States. Every time they would stick their heads up and try and get some dignity, we'd call them terrorists and smash them down again. Or we let Israel go in and smash them down again. They are treated very poorly. Yes, they would qualify as refugees because they have never been accepted in Lebanon. Syria, not really, not any more. Jordan, not for a long time. The question used to come up of the Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank, areas under Palestinian control. If you have a Palestinian travel document, or if you have a Palestinian passport, are you still a refugee if you're living in a Palestinian area? Well, the legal answer would be no, and yet we've allowed the Palestinians for a long time to continue claiming this. For many it's because they're on the dole. They get education; they get medication; they get other things courtesy of the United Nations. It's a free ride.

Q: Did you feel while you were doing this that you were basically handing out a dole or involved in a -

METRINKO: It was done for political reasons, but I had great fun. I was given many, many millions of dollars. I was the only one in the refugee... I mean, this was my bailiwick, the Refugee Bureau, and I was told to select projects that would be public, look good, make the United States look good, and make it seem for the Palestinians as though there is movement and that they had not been forgotten by the world or by Arafat, who had indeed forgotten them. "We're building you a school. Now shut up!" - basically. "We're putting up this clinic. Now stop making noise."

Q: Well the situation there, but when you go look at it, one almost gets a feeling of a terribly squalid situation.

METRINKO: It depends. You know, the camps in Syria and Jordan are no worse than the Syrian and Jordan towns. I mean they're part of the towns. You really can't tell in most case when you're in the camp and when you're in a normal town. And the squalor is often the irresponsibility of the people living there. If someone doesn't clean the street, it doesn't matter if you're a refugee or a multimillionaire. It looks squalid. A lot of it is the "give me" mentality of the Middle East, just as in Israel. Give me, give me, give me.

Q: Before we move to the Yugoslav thing, what about central Asia and the Soviet Union? What were we doing there?

METRINKO: Logically we had some rather ridiculous programs in the former Soviet Union. And we had some very ridiculous programs in the former Yugoslavia. What were we doing in the former Soviet Union? We were helping in Azerbaijan. We were helping in the Armenian areas.

Q: We were feeding the heavy hand of the Armenian lobby, or not?

METRINKO: You couldn't give direct aid to the Azerbaijani Government or Azerbaijani organizations. You had to work with third parties, but you know, what we were doing, a lot of it was very basic stuff like supporting women, businesses, supporting doles of food. A lot of it was absurd, but we were supporting programs, for example, these mom-and-pop-type minor business enterprises in Russia proper. And I remember I used to bring this up at meetings. Every time we would get a proposal in, we were expected to give a certain amount of money. We couldn't just stop giving money. And I would say things like, "You know, Russia has billions of dollars worth of art that it has locked up in various basements. If they would just sell a painting, they could provide food for this area for the next ten years. Why are we giving them American taxpayer money for something that the Russian central government should handle?" I'm conservative fiscally. But we just continued to give. The refugee business is a business. There are a lot of organizations in Washington, in the United States, and internationally that exist sort of as businesses.

Q: And you have to have refugees.

METRINKO: And you have to have refugees. And if you can't find an active refugee who's running with a pack on her back from a burning town, then find somebody who's been there for the last 20 years but was wretched and is willing to take your money.

Q: I've talked to people who were, say, in places like Thailand looking at refugees from Cambodia and Vietnam who were saying that when they were saying, "You know, these really aren't your real refugees" - these were beginning to move into economic refugees - the NGO organizations would go howling because this was taking away their numbers.

METRINKO: You take away the numbers of refugees and you take away the budget from the organizations; therefore, Jim and Mary, who are nice people, lose their jobs.

Q: Yes, you were breaking their rice bowls.

METRINKO: Breaking their rice bowls, yes, breaking the rice bowls of a lot of middle-class American liberals who enjoy being overseas.

Q: Social welfare has always been considered middle-class welfare, in a way.

METRINKO: In a way it is.

Q: Well, let's go to Yugoslavia, which must have hit you like a ton of bricks about this time.

METRINKO: Yugoslavia - everybody in the world was dealing with Yugoslavia. I had an officer whose only job was to deal with Yugoslavia, or the remnants of Yugoslavia. He had served there at one point, so he knew quite a bit about Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was complicated. If you wanted to deal with Yugoslavia you could spend all day long going to meetings about Yugoslavia, all day, from early morning till late at night, incessant talking points, incessant preparation for this meeting, for that meeting, sort of total inability of the people at the time in the State Department to understand what was happening there. The head of PRM at that point was Warren Zimmerman, who had just come out of Belgrade as ambassador. He was upset with American policy. I have to confess I was never quite sure what American policy was because you had the State Department and you had the military and you had Congress and you had so many refugee groups in there and other groups in there that it was just a constant circus of policies. It was just a bit strange.

Q: Did this result in your office doing much for people who were in the former Yugoslavia?

METRINKO: Well, I guess we helped a lot of individuals to get over some bad times in their lives, and yes, if you were being thrown out of your town because you happened to be Catholic in the wrong place or Orthodox in the wrong place or Muslim in the wrong place, and you got to a camp, yes, we would get you food and teddy bears and good clothing and this and that, and maybe some job training, education - the kids would stay on in school.

Q: What was your impression of the NGO's that you were dealing with?

METRINKO: Hmm, basically, it was all sort of like Peace Corps with a salary. They were interesting people. I met a lot of them I liked. I thought some of them were into semi-scans. I'll give you one story. I went to Yemen right at the end of the civil war. We had set aside about a million dollars for Yemen because the International Red Cross claimed that it was necessary for programming there. I got to Yemen, and- (end of tape)

I got to Yemen. I paid a call on the Red Cross, of course, in their nice office - and they had a very nice office and a large staff, and they gave me a full briefing of everything they were doing there. And then I went to see the head of the Yemeni Red Crescent, the equivalent of the Red Cross, who gave me a totally different story about the Red Cross. It was eye-opening for me. What he said was this. He said, "You know, you just gave the International Red Cross a million dollars for Yemen. That's very interesting because didn't know that they had requested it, nor do I know or anyone on my staff what they want to use it for. They arrived here in the middle of the civil war" - it was a short civil war, only six weeks - "and we had already lost all of our ambulances; our offices in Aden and other places had been destroyed; we had lost staff; our offices had been looted; and we had basically no resources at all. They arrived here and spent the next few weeks looking for villas for each and every one of the Red Cross staff who was going to come here. They got large private homes. They went looking for office space, and they got a large beautiful office. Then they started bringing in cars for themselves. Now they all have their cars. I'm not quite sure what they're doing, other than really providing themselves a very nice place to live and work. They really haven't been out in the countryside much, nor do they ever consult with us."

Yes, there's a lot of that. In Yugoslavia, the former Yugoslavia, if you went to any good restaurant or any good hotel, it looked like an NGO parking lot. You could see a fleet of SUVs (sport utility vehicles) or RVs (recreation vehicles - the sort of big things, Ford Explorer type things) with lots of big antennas and lots of bright glistening colors and everything else. They were the vehicles brought in by the NGOs. Do NGOs fill a role? Yes, absolutely. Do all of them? No, some of them are worthless, and some of them are basically dewy eyed people who want to teach other people how to cut paper dolls and do embroidery, programs that I have laughed at when they have come to us for funding and that somehow were funded. A group from Washington received money to go to Mexico to study the causes of Mexican migration, out of Mexico into the United States. When this was proposed, I looked around the table, and I said, "We're going to spend money to send people to Mexico for this? People come out of Mexico because it's overpopulated and they have no jobs. They can get jobs with American dollar salaries up here easily. That's why they come here." You don't need to send a research team down there. The research team people, by the way, were getting paid $400 a day, and I said to the table, "All of you here, despite your ranks, there's not one of you earning $400 a day. Do you think a graduate student should be getting that for going to Mexico to tell us the country is overpopulated?" It was still approved.

remember in one Palestinian camp I had met a very, very bright woman, an absolutely superb Palestinian woman. We were talking about projects for the camp. We were talking about a school, specifically, and other projects, and she said, "Look, we're tired of people who come here and want to set up programs to teach us embroidery. We don't want to do any more embroidery. Can you get us a computer education class?" That's what I did. But you have lots of people in the international organizations who want to teach the widows and the wives of the refugees how to do embroidery and handicrafts, as if they're going to be able to do something with this. It's absurd. And you see this all over any area where there are refugee problems. There are real refugee problems. There were huge problems in Africa, which got comparatively little publicity because reporters don't like to go there. And there are miserable problems there - thousands and thousands of people getting slaughtered and killed. The American response to refugee problems has, in general, been very good. Doctors pick up their satchels and go off and do medical care, and this happens, and that happens, and people volunteer. Fire companies go over to fight fires. It goes on like that. There's also a tremendous amount of waste.

I have a friend whose job when he worked for an NGO was to take all of the incoming shipments of clothing from the United States, unopened - I mean don't open them, simply take them down to the beach somewhere in Croatia - and burn them on the beach because nobody wanted any more used American clothing, and they weren't going to spend the time and the trouble to unpack all these bales and figure out if it was worthwhile. So they would simply receive it and burn it.

Q: Yes, I went through this in 1980 with the bad earthquake in southern Italy where I was consul general. People were sending these clothes, including evening dresses and all this, and they would just put them in a pile, and people would come and take what they wanted, if anything, but basically people in Europe are well dressed and -

METRINKO: Exactly. That's the [way it was in] Yugoslavia.

Q: Yes, that wasn't the problem. They were thinking in World War II terms.

METRINKO: Chocolate bars and nylon stockings. I remember in the camps I would go into, barracks had been set up, and the one thing that there was no shortage of was teddy bears and stuffed animals. You could go into these little rooms and you would see 50 stuffed animals pinned to the walls because every schoolchild in America had sent his teddy bear or a little stuffed rabbit. Anyway - but in general, the bureau was a very good bureau because it did very good work, it was in general well run. There were a lot of people in the bureau who were very good. There were some who were not. It was overstaffed by civil servants and was suffering for that, because they had been there for too long doing their job, and it had become sacerdotal as opposed to functionary. They thought of themselves as the high priests and priestesses dispensing largesse. You can't have a civil servant doling out money for 10 or 15 years and not have it go to his or her head. They became totally basically obnoxious about it. The bureau still suffers from that. But then again, it was still all in all a very good bureau.

Q: Well, Mike, you left there in '96. What happened?

METRINKO: I had a problem. I retired. Not a problem... I did not cross the threshold, got wonderful reviews, wonderful -

Q: The "threshold" being the promotional threshold to Senior. Just from your account here, you obviously had not been a "team player."

METRINKO: No - a team player, but not a sheep. If I saw a problem, I would say, "I think this is a problem." I had a serious problem in PRM because of my refusal to sign off on a grant to the Jewish Agency. The annual $60 million-giveaway to people who are immigrating to Israel, which we gave as "refugee assistance." The inspector general had done an inspection of the Palestinian programs and the Jewish Agency programs that we had. They started the inspection about a month after I came to the office. The inspection lasted almost a year, off and on, before the final reports were in and everything else. They were highly critical of the types of things that we were supporting in Israel, the Jewish Agency. It said they were not refugee-related. I took this to heart because I agreed with them. I got into a lot of trouble with it. Basically, the idea in the bureau was to take the inspector general's report and stuff into the back of a very dark, lost file cabinet. The head of the inspection team was threatened by the Jewish lobby. He happened to be Jewish. His rabbi contacted him and asked him how he could possibly be doing what he was doing with this inspection report. I was threatened by the Jewish lobby.

Q: How, in what manner?

METRINKO: Because I was questioning the monies that were being spent with the Jewish Agency through the United Israel Appeal. We used to go up to the United Israel Appeal up in New York City. We had meetings there, and they would come down to see us and to discuss the programs that they could and could not do with this money. I had a call about two and a half years into the job from a close friend from Israel. I don't want to describe him because I don't want him to get into trouble, but a close friend, a rabbi in Israel who had just been in a closed-door meeting with a group of what they called "Jewish philanthropists." And he told me that the head of the United Israel Appeal, Shoshana Cardin, an American, very much a society type, you know, high living in New York City, had looked around the meeting room and said that there was an anti-Semite in the State Department who was giving them money trouble and efforts had to be made, something had to be done to silence him or get him out of the State Department. Period. She used my name, said I was the person. He called me when he got out of the meeting, and he said, "Michael, this isn't you. I know who you are. I've been working with you and we've been friends for years. What's going on?" And I told him about the Jewish Agency budget and what I'd been doing. And he said, "They're going to get you." He said, "You're right. You're absolutely right. It is a scam, but everyone goes along with it. Why can't you?" I said, "No." That was that.

Now, when I heard that, I went over to the Assistant Secretary, told her what had happened, and said that it would probably not be in the interests of the office or the bureau if I continued to deal with this portfolio, but I would do whatever she wanted. And we had a short -

Q: This is who?

METRINKO: Phyllis Oakley. And Phyllis was the ultimate team player on her own team. I was never quite sure what her team was. Her response was to go up to the United Israel Appeal dinner about a month later and to receive a personal award for herself, which she hung on the office wall.

Q: So in 1996 you were told -

METRINKO: In 1996 I received a letter saying, "You have not gone over the threshold." I'm not sure, because I never bothered looking at the statistics, to what extent this was a result of the decision to give positions and preference to so many hundreds of women, who'd had a lawsuit against the Department. I don't really care. I was 49 ï¿½ years old. I had been in the federal government for 29 ï¿½ years, just about 30 years of service. I was tired of it at the time. I was told I was basically out of the Foreign Service with a full pension, which is fine.

Q: Well, we'll basically end it here, but just very briefly, what have you been doing since?

METRINKO: I've been working constantly since the day I left the Foreign Service. I had a job for a year and a half working with a company building a website on the Internet dealing with stock exchanges overseas. I found it fascinating and learned a hell of a lot about computers and the financial world. I went from there (because they were moving to New Jersey - they have since disappeared, by the way; they were one of the Internet companies that simply disappeared) to a private contractor that contracted me to the Immigration and Naturalization Service, where I was a project director for a year and a half. I left INS because I could no longer... well, two reasons. The general incompetence of the organization was so abysmal.

Q: It's a real problem. I was a liaison officer there some years earlier, and they've got a real problem.

METRINKO: They have. The head of the section, when I started to work there told me that "Production is not a value at INS." And I saw things there that... I don't want to start. INS is abysmally bad, and no one cared. INS is just an organization with incredible problems. I lasted a year and a half. My mother got very, very ill. I left INS. I had been asked by the State Department to come back as an annuitant at this point. I had agreed to this. My mother became even more ill at this point, and died about two months later. So I worked with the Department as a Desk officer for the Eastern Caribbean for six months, until June of this year, 2000, the 26th. I'm still on the rolls as an annuitant. On June 26th I took off and went on an 11,000-mile trip around the United States. I'd just gotten back a couple of days ago from the last part of my trip, and I will continue to travel until I go back to work again. I do not know yet where or when I will go back to work. I'm only not quite 54, so I intend working about another 10 to 15 years.

Q: Great. Well, I want to thank you very much.

***

[Addition to previous interview]

Q: Today is the 6th of October, 2003. This is an interview with Michael Metrinko and this is an addendum to the one which we did because after we did the first oral history he got himself off to Afghanistan. This is being done on behalf of the Association of Diplomatic Studies and Training and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Well, Mike, can you sort of pick up what happened to you and we'll move on to Afghanistan? What were you up to after you retired and all?

METRINKO: Well, we have to go back to the year, let's see now, this is 2003, to the year 2001 when I received a phone call from the State Department asking me if I would be interested to going to Yemen briefly.

Q: This is before 9/11?

: Before 9/11. To take over the office in Aden that had been set up by the Department of State and by the embassy in Sanaa, Yemen to handle the investigation into the bombing of the U.S.S. Cole. I was asked to do this and I left in March in the year 2001. I was there for three months. I worked over there for three months. I was not in charge of the investigation. That was being done by the FBI, but I was in charge of the office that gave all the support for the investigators.

Q: Well, let's talk about this. Could you explain, what caused, what was the U.S.S. Cole situation and what were we doing?

METRINKO: The U.S.S. Cole was a naval ship that came into the harbor in Aden, Yemen in late 2001 and was attacked by I'm not going to use the word terrorists, because even the U.S. navy does not say it was an act of terrorism. It was attacked by people who had explosives in a small boat, which pulled up alongside the navy ship and blew up. It caused a large number of deaths. It caused a larger number of injured and the immediate reaction in the United States was panic followed by a huge outpouring of FBI and CIA, but mainly FBI and also U.S. marines into the city of Aden which is down on the southern coast of Yemen. They did not know the extent of the original incident and they got there while the boat was still in the harbor and it looked like it might be about to sink. This was in December of the year 2000. I arrived there in March.

Q: Well, in the first place, what were you impressions of Yemen at that time? What you were seeing was Aden and how the people from Yemen worked and didn't work with our people. I mean, you throw a lot of investigators in and you've got problems.

METRINKO: What happened in Yemen and specifically in Aden during that investigation was a huge clash of cultures. By that let's say we had three different cultures. One was the culture of the Yemenis themselves who at first did not want to admit that there had been any Yemeni involvement or that this was a problem. Specifically the authorities down in Aden who did not want either interference in the capital in Sanaa and certainly did not want a large group of foreigners rushing in trying to do an investigation. Aden is a very conservative, somewhat laid back, but extremely city. The second culture was the FBI macho we're here to get this all straightened up right now culture combined with the U.S. marines who rushed in in full force and acted at the very beginning from what I've been told almost like they were attacking Aden rather than coming to do an investigation. Of course they were coming at a time when nobody knew exactly what had happened and they didn't know if they were going to be met by violence or an arms struggle. So, when they actually arrived in the airport without permission from anybody as far as I know, anybody in the Yemeni government, they arrived in full attack mode. The third culture was the State Department culture. The State Department culture which recognized that there was a serious problem of course, but also, did not want to destroy its relationship with the government of Yemen by letting the FBI take full charge of the investigation in that part of the country or the way we dealt with Yemeni officials.

Q: Our ambassador there was?

METRINKO: Our ambassador in Yemen at the time was Barbara Bodine, a professional career diplomat, who spoke good Arabic and had been ambassador there for at least a year by this point, I think more. More like two or three years.

Q: Yemen, also, at one point there had been a south Yemen, hadn't there? I mean, which had been very close to.

METRINKO: It was a Marxist republic.

Q: A Marxist republic so that added to, I mean you had your traditional regime, but you also must have had some prickly Marxists running around, too.

METRINKO: Well, Aden was rather a strange city. Aden had been a crown colony of the British government or the British Empire. It was called the pearl of the Orient for a long time and the port of Aden for commercial shipping was number two in the world, second only to New York City up until the British empire started to disintegrate and there was a communist coo, a communist takeover. Aden, the Republic of Aden became staunchly communist and commercial life went to hell. The port basically disappeared into nothingness during that period. Under the British we'd even had an embassy there and the embassy building was still there right on the water, a pleasant old sort of hacienda type building overlooking the harbor. There was a civil war, I'm sorry, there was a unification of the two countries, the Republic of the Yemeni, sorry the Republic of Aden and the country of Yemen itself became one country. Then in the year and I want to say 1995, I could be wrong by the date, but there was a civil war, a civil war which only lasted a few weeks and the country became unified again. Aden was strange. Aden itself was unlike the rest of Yemen. It was on the far side of a very steep mountains. It was coastal and Aden looked out. It looked out towards India. It looked out towards Ethiopia. It looked out towards the Red Sea, the Arabic Sea, the Arabian Sea rather. The people there tended to be a racial mixture of those places. A lot of very visibly Chinese and Indian and Ethiopian blood, Somalian blood in the people. You could see this quite easily.

Q: Indian?

METRINKO: Yes, Indian, too because right across the water was India. So, there were Indians living there who had always stayed there. They ran some businesses still. There were some, I'm thinking in the old British consulate there which still existed and which was a throwback to the British Empire. There was an Indian in charge, but a very strange little city.

Q: You arrived at sort of what point?

METRINKO: I arrived in March of the year 2001. Yes, I'm mixing up my years here. March in the year 2001. I had had two predecessors in my job and our job was as the ambassador said to provide adult supervision to the investigators.

Q: Well, now two predecessors in a time of about three months?

METRINKO: Yes, but they were there a short time because this was all patched together very quickly.

Q: I mean this wasn't because they were kicked out or something like that?

METRINKO: No, no.

Q: Just short term.

METRINKO: Short term to set up and run an office so that the embassy could have liaison with the whole group down there because the group in Aden was a sort of mish mash of various investigative authorities. We had the FBI in large numbers. We had the marine fast team, the counter terrorism people. We had diplomatic security. We had NCIS, the naval investigators. We had DIA and we had CIA. So, there was a large amount.

Q: It sounds like, talk about a can of worms.

METRINKO: A can of armed worms.

Q: Yes. What did you find when you got there? In the first place, what did the ambassador talk to you, how was the ambassador dealing with this?

METRINKO: The ambassador had had a bad run in with the FBI well prior to my arrival. In fact she had thrown the head of the FBI investigators out of the country. There was a personality conflict and again a conflict in cultures. The FBI thought that they could make demands and sort of carry on a very aggressive investigation without paying too much to Yemeni sensibilities or Yemeni law. They were going all out and aggravating people there constantly, aggravating the Yemenis. On the other hand the Yemeni authorities were recalcitrant. They weren't interested very much in providing information because some of the people who were being investigated were being linked to the Yemeni government. This was a difficult situation. The ambassador felt that the best way to proceed with the investigation was to keep peace between the investigators and the government. In order for the investigation to run smoothly to keep peace between the officials in Yemen, I'm sorry, the officials in Aden with their superiors in Sanaa with the embassy and with the State Department and with the various offices, the CIA, DIA, NCIS, FBI, marines, etc. and with the operation as a whole.

Q: How did you operate with these disparate groups?

METRINKO: It was an interesting exercise. I was there to help them get their work done in many ways to try and explain local culture or morays to them, also to report to the ambassador, to make sure that they were reporting not the nitty gritty of their investigation because we weren't supposed to know that. I mean their investigation was a secure investigation, but to report the mechanics, the relationships, the way local officials were either being cooperative or non-cooperative. It led a number of cases to the ambassador going in to the president of Yemen or the minister of foreign affairs or the minister of the interior up in Sanaa just to smooth things over or to sort of get the officials in Aden to move more quickly or to move.

Q: Well, I can't imagine anything worse than putting the CIA, the FBI and the naval investigators all into the small same town.

METRINKO: Small town nothing, we were in the same, we lived together, worked together, ate together, exercised together and many of them were locked into the two floors of the hotel that we had rented for our stay there.

Q: How did this work?

METRINKO: With difficulty.

Q: Well, you know, I mean, normally if you're having an investigation you try to have one entity investigate.

METRINKO: Normally, yes, but this was abnormal.

Q: Was the name of Osama Bin Laden thrown out by the time you got there?

METRINKO: Oh yes, of course, his name was all over. His family was also building the new airport in Aden and it was the Bin Laden Construction Company signs that we could see whenever we went to the airport.

Q: I lived in a Bin Laden house in Dhahran back in the '50s, so I mean...

METRINKO: Of course the Bin Ladens were originally a family from Yemen. They had a lot of family not in that area, but in other parts of the country.

Q: What were you, you know, I mean these people were running around, what were you coming away with? I realize you weren't in the middle part, you know in the secret part of the investigation, but I mean it must have all been pretty clear what was coming out.

METRINKO: What I came away with from Aden was what I also came away with, a lesson from Afghanistan and it's this. We have several agencies in the United States government. By this I include the Department of Defense, we also had Defense Department army attache there, too. We have the Department of Defense; we have investigative agencies or law enforcement agencies, part of the Department of Justice like the FBI. We have the CIA. We have others, the marines, etc. who can be and often are very intelligent, very capable people who know their field quite well, but who don't know a damned thing about other regions of the world. They try to apply their skill and expertise in foreign environments where it simply does not work. It's sort of like cooking at a very high altitude. You may know the recipe, but when you go to a very different altitude, all of the temperatures get skewed and you can make a mess of your cooking. That's what they were often doing.

Q: Did you find yourself in the way of sort of a lecturer on?

METRINKO: A lecturer, but a lecturer to adults and adults don't' like to be lectured at. I also found that many of the people who are sent overseas including by the Department of State were culturally and intellectually incapable of conducting a normal life overseas. They were people who should not have been let out of the United States by any agency. They were either stupid or unwilling to look around and realize they were in a foreign environment. Because of this attitude, sort of caused a great many problems which impacted on the efficiency of the investigation.

Q: Well, can you describe how some of these things went?

METRINKO: Sure, one good example. Diplomatic security went all out to hire a huge number of new people to fill lots of vacancies. Someone taught all these brand new people who were straight out of police forces and straight out of the military and straight out of college. The whole concept of defensive, aggressive defensive driving. This is the type of security driving by zigzagging, by having cars going in tandem as opposed to one behind the other. For example, if two U.S. government cars are approaching an intersection or approaching a circle, one hangs off to the side a little bit, not quite fully behind the first car. If the principle person is in the first car, then the second car is going to be slightly off to the back not too far away and they completely fill up any circle that they're trying to go around. They do this at high rates of speed. They roar down streets zigzagging back and forth together at very high rates of speed, sometimes with sirens, sometimes not. Aden was a nice quiet city. This looked stupid, idiotic and incompetent.

Q: Well, why were they doing this? Did they feel they were targets?

METRINKO: They were attracting attention that was actually. Did they feel they were targets? Well, somebody had told them, some guru back in DS training had told them this was the way they were supposed to drive in a high threat environment. I kept trying to explain that it's only high threat if someone is actively after you, but they had their orders. It was one of the most ridiculous things I ever saw. To give you an example of how bad it was, when I say high rates of speed, they would go 50 miles an hour down city streets zigzagging, you know, causing people to jump out of the way, causing other cars to swerve out of the way. We were supposed to be having a dinner once to introduce or to sort of a dinner in honor of the head of security of the city of Aden. He was coming to the hotel and everything was all arranged. Some of our cars had just returned from driving this way in the city. The security chief came in and he was livid and he said, "My men and I were standing on a street corner trying to cross and your two cars" and he used some other words besides two, "sprayed us with gravel when they swerved around the corner. Don't you realize this is stupid? This is not the way to drive in a crowded city?" Our diplomatic security people were unfortunately quite often inept. Many of them were very good. Many of them were inept and there was no way to talk to them.

Q: When you start bringing in people who don't understand the culture and all, I've watched this with the military and with other groups overseas. There's a tendency to get, to lock oneself into a bunker, in other words, to go to the hotel and sit around at night and drink and talk about the rag heads or something like that which makes it even worse.

METRINKO: Which makes it even worse. There is another problem with security. We had marines for example. I don't want to talk too much about this because it gets into operations, but we had a fast team of marines there who were very bright young guys. I came out of this with a very healthy deep respect for the U.S. Marine Corps, which I'd always had, but this just sort of enforced it. I think I had 16 or 18 marines with an officer in charge. They never left the hotel. There were two different teams there when I was there. They never left the hotel grounds. I shouldn't say never. Very, very rarely. With the first of the marine officers who was in charge when I realized the marines weren't going out at all, now they would go out to the beach. The hotel was on a beach. They would play volleyball. They would go swimming. They would do things like that, that was fine, but they never in general left the hotel environs. When I told the marine commander, I was going into the city, what about putting marines into the car occasionally and letting them get out and see what's out there. He could not understand why that would "help their mission." I tried explaining that the more they knew about the city the more they more they knew about the culture the more it would help them to defend us in case there was an attack. It would by seeing the culture outside, by seeing the city streets; they would be able to determine more easily whether somebody was friendly or hostile approaching them. I did occasionally get someone out, but only very occasionally. The marines sort of SOP is if you're assigned to a place, you stay there, you do not leave it. I saw this also at the embassy in Kabul later.

Q: How about the FBI? Did they get out and around?

METRINKO: Oh, yes, they got out and around. They were actually quite funny about it. The FBI would go out in full force. The FBI had swat teams there. I should say this first. At various times we had between 70 and 80 people there. Seventy to 80 let's say, 95% men. Too much testosterone.

Q: This is essentially to investigate.

METRINKO: To investigate. Well, you have the support staff for the investigators, too. Let me give you an example. The FBI had a rule that no FBI agent was allowed to go out alone. They had to go out with a swat team. The swat team consisted of four people, including a doctor or a medic with full medical gear. Full medical gear was the size of a suitcase or more. Now, the FBI had to go out with fully armed, they carried long arms. So, if Joe was going down to pick up his dry cleaning or to get some cereal at one of the little grocery stores he had to go with a swat team of four people. Now the diplomatic security rule was that when the FBI went out there had to be an American driver and an American diplomatic security guard in the car because the FBI had their mission, DS had their mission. This meant that if Joe wanted to go and pick up his laundry, he had four from the swat team and he had the two diplomatic security people. You had Joe plus four plus two that comes out to seven, right? Well, you also had to have a local along who could speak Arabic, that turned out to eight. At this point you're doubling the size of your car. Eight guys with long guns do not fit into one car. So, if Joe went out you had to take two cars. This means that you need another diplomatic security agent to drive the car because only Americans were supposed to drive plus a companion for him, try ten. You were really sitting in high speeds.

Q: Was there the feeling of coming from the embassy or someplace, you know, perhaps if you people get going the quicker you'd get the hell out of here.

METRINKO: Yes, there was very much that feeling, but you couldn't say it because the FBI was very sensitive.

Q: Did you have the feeling that they were able to operate in this sort of thing? How did they, you know, interface with the local people in order to find out what happened?

METRINKO: They interfaced with an attitude of hostility, an attitude that the local authorities were screwing up the investigation. It's quite possibly true. The local authorities had no great desire to have this drag on, but they had no great desire to bring it to an end either. The local authorities' answer would have been to take the people they had grabbed and to have them executed after a quick trial. They wanted it over and done with. The FBI didn't want a quick trial. They wanted to go on and on investigating forever hoping that leads would lead them to other leads, to other leads, to terrorism as a world network. Yemen wanted this to be over and done with. They saw it as a specific problem, a specific incident. They wanted the incident to be wiped out, the perpetrators punished and let's go on from there. The FBI wanted to find out more that might impact on other investigations and other problems. They were both right in their own ways.

Q: Did you find yourself sort of the oil between the two systems or something? Was that you felt your role?

METRINKO: A bit of that. It was also oil between the various gears inside of the investigator who came as well because we had agencies who not only did not talk to each other, we were all sort of sitting there having to talk to each other.

Q: You know, with that many people around, let's say you turned up a promising informant, what would happen? I could see a former [official] sort of sitting at a coffee table and whispering out to somebody and all of a sudden you have to face a barrage of...

METRINKO: You are now being brought before 80 people for your oral exam each of whom is going to have several questions. I never went to any of the sessions. I wasn't supposed to, so I don't know the answer to that, but I do know that in general they only spoke to people who were presented to them by the local authorities. They had a list of people they wanted to talk to. The local authorities would produce these people or not produce these people. It was unclear who some of these people really were. Some of them were unproduceable or were not going to be produced. Possibly because they were being protected. Possibly because we didn't have the right names. Possibly because no such people existed. Possibly because they hadn't been found.

Q: Was there at all the feeling that there were training camps off in sort of a hydramoot? You know, things were happening now over the horizon in Yemen that were not designed to be beneficial to the United States.

METRINKO: Yes, there was very much that feeling. There was a feeling that some of the officials were in conclusion with the people who had attacked the Cole or with people who had supported the ones who had attacked the Cole. Again, this was very difficult to penetrate. Yemen can be a very, very close; it is a very closed society. Fifty percent of the country, the women are closed off completely, you never see women. The men themselves are just different. I learned very little about Yemen my first time. This was actually my second time. I learned very little about Yemen. I learned about the streets of Aden. I learned a lot about a couple of officials. I learned a lot about things that didn't really touch on Yemen very much. I learned a lot about interagency fighting, interagency sort of rivalry, interagency lack of cooperation. I didn't learn a great deal about Yemen. I learned more about Yemen when I went back last year.

Q: You were there for how long?

METRINKO: I was there for almost exactly three months, from March until June of the year 2000.

Q: How was it, was it still the same situation?

METRINKO: No. What happened was in late May, I don't remember the exact date, either late May or early June of the year 2000. I received a phone call telling us to pack up and leave immediately. There was indication that we were being targeted and the NSC wanted us out of there immediately. They told us to abandon the hotel and get out and move out. What we did was we stayed, well, I got most of the people out that day. I got the FBI and the marines out on a C130 we called them. The other State person, myself and, I'm sorry, the other diplomatic security people, my deputy in the State Department, myself and several others left the next day taking all the cars, the vehicles and records with us. We had a great trip going back to Sanaa.

Q: So, what did you do, just go up to Sanaa?

METRINKO: Went up to Sanaa and everybody went home. I left after four or five days. My tour was up anyway. It was close to being up anyway because of my status. I'd already worked 90 days straight.

Q: Do you have any idea of what this threat was or did you ever find out?

METRINKO: I did, but I can't talk about it. It may have been overstated.

Q: Well, I mean these things often are, but one can't, everybody gets very. While you were there had the Cole left?

METRINKO: Oh, yes, the Cole had long since gone.

Q: What was your impression, how, did Barbara Bodine our ambassador sort of win or lose or how did this come out?

METRINKO: Ambassador Bodine won, but it was a psychic victory. Yes, she established the primacy of the Department of State as the foreign affairs agency in charge of our operations in Yemen. She maintained that. Yes, she maintained herself as the lead U.S. government official and she kept that in Yemen dealing with the Yemeni government. What she did, however, by having a battle with the FBI was lose or let herself open to a lot of attacks on her reputation back here in the United States. In that sense it was a psychic victory. I have a great deal of respect for her. I thought she was a pretty good ambassador. She had a very tough role to play there. It was a tough job. It wasn't fair that the FBI attacked her or tried to attack her. They saw her as a problem. They saw her as somebody who was [in collusion] with the Yemeni government and it went back and forth. FBI people changed all the time. In fact, one of the problems of the investigation was that most people were there on a 30 day rotation. I was supposed to stay for as long as possible. My deputy was supposed to stay for as long as possible, but the other Department of State people, diplomatic security rotated out every 30 days. The FBI rotated out every 30 days. Others rotated out. So, in the course of three months there, when you keep an average of 60 to 80 people at any one time and they are rotating out every month, you have a huge number of people who come and go. I got to meet 18 to 20 different diplomatic security people there. It went on like that. It just kept switching and rotating out. Some very, very good, some great in fact. Some very, not so good.

Q: Question.

METRINKO: Yes?

Q: You came back from that, do you think that, I mean did anybody, was anybody other than what we're doing right now talk to you who was in an official capacity, lessons learned on this sort of thing?

METRINKO: Nobody ever asked me a question about it. In fact when I came back and called up the Department and said I'm here, would you like me to come in and do a debrief? They did not think it was necessary. That was the desk.

Q: This of course is the thing that people who come out of extremely trying circumstances or something and when they come back, nobody asks.

METRINKO: I know. I know.

Q: I mean it's one reason why this oral history program is going. It's very late, but there are lots of lessons to be learned if somebody wants to look at it. All right, then, you came back.

METRINKO: Well, one thing, one lesson I did learn there, I always point this out to people who are involved in security. We had several different armed groups. We had a fasting of marines who were there to combat the other; the teams set up to do anti-terrorism work and they were bright gung ho marines, real jarheads.

Q: But these were here to protect you?

METRINKO: They were there to protect me and to protect the premises. They were bright young guys and really, really good. Like I say, I came out of there with a very healthy respect for marines. We had the FBI, which was fully armed. The swat teams were heavily armed. We had the CIA, which was armed. We had DIA that was armed. We had NCIS that was armed and we had of course the FBI in general that was armed. We had diplomatic security that was armed. When I got there I asked the question of what their rules of engagement were. It turned out they had never talked to each other about this and they had at least three if not more totally different rules of engagement. So, if there ever had been an incident it would have been very interesting as different armed people responded in totally different ways. This is a lesson for anyone going off to manage diplomatic, an organization where there are different types of armed people.

Q: Yes, that's one of those things you don't really think about except.

METRINKO: That was my old War College training though. I learned that there. I tell you something, if you're in a car driven by the Department of State Diplomatic Security and you have the FBI with you and someone attacks the car, you have totally different responses. What I would do would be every time there was a turnover of the head of any of those groups, bring them in immediately, let them sit down in a closed room with the heads of the other armed groups and say, guys, straighten this out now. You're the ones who determine what the rules are, straighten out and make sure you're all playing from the same amount of deck of cards and they did. It worked out, but it would take a while. Anyway.

Q: Yes. Well, okay, you came back. At the time you were on a temporary assignment being retired. You could only work so many hours and all and you'd kind of run that to the ground.

METRINKO: I came back in June of I guess it was the year 2001 and basically relaxed and took it easy for a while. I did some work in the house. I did a major house renovation project that took about two months. Lots of painting, ripping up floors, putting in a bathroom, that whole bit. The stuff that we do with money that we earn. I was doing a bit of traveling. 2001 on 9/11 I happened to be in my home watching TV. I had a Palestinian housemaid who was doing some work in the family room, too and the TV was on and at the time we had a Turkish mullah living with us as well who was doing graduate work at Catholic University in philosophy. The news was on and we saw the plane going into Twin Tower, the first of them. I just assumed like the others watching that it was a movie clip and then shortly thereafter the other one and shortly thereafter the Pentagon and everyone's life changed. The Turkish mullah, the Palestinian, my own life, my Iranian roommate wasn't home at the time, but his life has certainly changed because of that. I called up the Department not long after and volunteered to go to Afghanistan. I did some traveling anyway. I went to Poland for two weeks. I went to Holland for a week, private travel, just to go to Europe for vacation. The Department called me up I guess it was early December and asked if I'd be interested in going to Kabul and I said yes. They didn't know exactly when I'd be gong, but they said I'd be going quite shortly. I made what I thought was a correct assumption. I said, "Well, if I'm going to be going maybe I should join whatever group you have doing orientation in NFATC to go off to Kabul. This is to reopen the embassy." There was this pause. NEA/SA/EX said, "Well, we don't have anybody going to orientation. We're just sending people." I said, "You're opening up a new embassy in a place we haven't been since 1989 and you don't have people to speak the language and you're not going to give them orientation on how to open an embassy up?" "No." Sorry for the laughter.

Q: Well, so what happened?

METRINKO: What happened is that I was scheduled for some foot surgery. I went in for foot surgery and approximately, three or four days after I was back home with my foot in a full cast and limping around with a cane and everything else and a walker, I got a call from the Department asking if I could come in that day that my passport was ready. So, I made an appointment for late in the afternoon. I called up my foot doctor. I went out there and told him to break the cast off. I put my foot in a regular black dress shoe, went into the Department smiling, did the paperwork, did everything else. I wanted to make sure that they didn't know that my foot had been in a cast or they might have stopped me from going. I came home and almost died with the pain. Luckily there was a break for about another week or ten days and my foot had a chance to heal. The doctor of course told me I was crazy.

Q: Oh, yes.

METRINKO: But I mean doctors do that. I went to Afghanistan; I went off to Kabul.

Q: What was your impression before you went? I have an interview with Ann Williams who went. Did Ann Wright go with you?

METRINKO: Ann got there with a group of four or five others late in December, mid-December. I got there in mid-January. I replaced Ann.

Q: Well, the reason I asked was that when they put together this crew, here you had a very important thing, opening up an embassy in a country which was under sort of siege in the middle of a war, but very important to make it.

METRINKO: Under everyone's microscope.

Q: Under everyone's microscope. I mean here is the Department of State with all its expertise and particularly you have a bureau who in theory should be able to reach in and come from active duty people and all of a sudden I mean I have you and I have Ann Wright. I don't know about the others who were retirees, they're not part of the active process.

METRINKO: Ann was actually not retired at the time. She resigned later.

Q: But she had no experience in the area.

METRINKO: No experience in the area. I had experience in the area and I also have the language. I don't know if they even knew that.

Q: This is the thing, you know, it doesn't sound like, was it that the well was empty when they reached in the South Asian cadre of people to go to Afghanistan I mean as far as personnel?

METRINKO: I'm not sure. I can't answer that question. I don't know what sort of planning process went on. I was sort of amazed myself when I got there and discovered that the people there, one or two had had experience in the area. They had been to Pakistan for example. They'd been the Afghan watchers, but in general very few of the Americans assigned there knew a damn thing about Afghanistan or the region. We got there, when I got there it was an embassy under siege. I lived in a bomb shelter for awhile because there was no place else to live. I shoveled out my own office before I could get in my own office.

Q: Okay, let's talk about it. How did you, you went there when? In the first place you were there from when to when?

METRINKO: I was there altogether from mid-January of the year 2002 until mid-August of 2002. I went originally on what was supposed to be a one or two month assignment. It got extended.

Q: Well, what, when they assigned you there, what were you to do?

METRINKO: I went there as chief of the political section replacing Ann.

Q: Yes. She said her time in Afghanistan had been as a hippie back in the '60s I think going there in a pickup truck with a bunch of other kids you know having a good time.

METRINKO: Well, she had had less experience in the area than I had. I had had my seven years in Iran so I spoke the language. I had been to Afghanistan in 1970 on a drug trail. I was in the Peace Corps. I spent a week in Herat basically getting stoned at the time as a hippie. I got back there in 1995 briefly just for one day to do an inspection of a refugee camp down near Dowlatabad, but I had been responsible for Afghanistan when I was an office director in the population refugees and migration. The Afghan refugee problem had been part of my responsibilities. So, I had followed it more or less.

Q: You were bringing in something. What did you see when you arrived there?

METRINKO: I have to disassociate my memory from my last couple of months there from what was there a year ago or a year and a half ago. When I arrived in January of the year 2002, Kabul was a city that was it seemed empty and dark. Dark because there was no electricity, empty because much of the population had abandoned it. There were whole huge parts of the city where no one lived. It was a city filled with wreckage, not from our war, but from previous wars. The whole western quarter of the city was in ruins from the wars. A whole third of the city or so, a quarter of the city, had been leveled by Afghans fighting Afghans. Every building that we saw was damaged. Window glass was missing from every public building. Most of the wiring had been ripped out of buildings and sold to get the copper. Telephone lines didn't exist. Telephone poles didn't exist. Electric light bulbs didn't exist. They'd all been taken down and sold. There was very little traffic. People who had cars... The number of shops that were open was minimal. It looked grim, depressing. Smoke always hung over the city because the only way to get heat was to burn wood or charcoal. Therefore, anyone who had heat was doing it from a wood burning stove. It had always been a city with pollution problems. Pollution was very, very heavy.

Q: It's in a bowl.

METRINKO: In a bowl sort of, yes and sort of not a mist, but clouds and dust hung out over everything. There had been a drought for five years straight so it was all very, very dry. Lots of feces around because there were animals in the streets and the streets were never cleaned. The embassy compound when we arrived was surprisingly in good shape when we arrived. We proceeded to wreck it afterwards, but it was a very large many acred compound in the grand style of the '50s and filled with trees and gardens which had been kept in very good shape by the Afghans who had continued to work there. The embassy itself never closed completely. FSNs continued to staff it, not the chancery. The chancery was closed and sealed, but the Taliban never entered the chancery so it was closed, sealed and every office was fully furnished. There was paper on the desks, things like that. They had just simply locked up the building and walked out after parking all the cars in the basement.

The gardens were quite lovely. Flowers were in bloom. Roses, other flowers. The embassy gardeners continued to work at it. When I arrived there were already about 100 U.S. marines there, again combat marines. They blocked off the main entrance to the embassy and were using a small entranceway out to the side. The marines. When I arrived the embassy had a high stone wall around it, pathways, gardens, lots of trees; it was fairly green because it was irrigated. The number of people keep rising only exponentially. It was just bursting at the seams within another month or two. When I arrived it wasn't so bad yet. We had marines who had occupied basically the entire main floor of the embassy. It was their floor and their job was to lay endless miles of concertina wire all around the embassy compound blocking off pathways, blocking off buildings, putting it on top of the stone wall. Then between the marines and diplomatic security, they cut down almost all the trees in the compound to get a line of sight in case they were attacked. Someone said the line of sight also means that you're exposing yourself because now the enemy can see you, but this was not marine or diplomatic security logic at the time. They just cut down all the trees. The gardens went, too under the bulldozers and under the trucks and under the cars and everything else, they simply disappeared. It was a mess.

When I first arrived the marines had the entire main floor of the embassy, the chancery. The chargï¿½, Brian Crocker, and his wife were using what had at once been the ambassador's office at their home or their residence. A number of us were sleeping in what had been built as a bomb shelter on the embassy compound. It was at least 10 or 12 of us in this small sort of underground rooms. Some of the people were staying in areas that had been cleaned up inside the chancery, the communicators, the diplomatic security ref there. Slowly over the next several weeks we cleaned office by office. Every office had to be sort of checked by a bomb squad of course and other things. We started to clean offices out one by one and started to function from the offices. We also cleaned out some of the larger rooms in the embassy and moved our living quarters up there. The reason I say that. In this bomb shelter there was a common room where we ate and we could watch a little bit of TV and we had one e-mail or one Internet screen, the only one on the compound. There were two other bedrooms, one for men, one for women and there was a bathroom. In the hallway the cooks did the cooking. So, all the dishes, well, the marines always ate by themselves in the chancery. All the civilians ate down there and we were eating from dishes that were washed next to the toilet everybody was using and next to the shower. In fact you'd have to stand in line waiting, it was either wash dishes or take a shower. Wash dishes, go to the toilet. It was unhygienic to say the least and all the food was piled up right next to where you were sleeping, too. I got to know the sleeping habits or at least the sleeping clothing of too many Foreign Service officers. It wasn't a pretty sight.

It was interesting. There was a great deal of camaraderie because we were down to essentials. You didn't have to dress well. There was no attempt to dress up. You couldn't in fact. We wore very casual clothes because everything was filthy. We were doing as much physical labor as [anything]. I'm trying to think of the other conditions there. The number of usable bathrooms for the people there was minimal. A hundred marines I think shared one toilet. When we moved out of that bomb shelter which was maintained as a residence for a very long time... In fact it was just ripped down a few months ago so it was maintained as a residence for about a year and a half. When we moved into the chancery building, there were about 40 or 50 of us using two toilets and one shower. It was an old men's room that was just converted. They took out one of the toilets and turned it into a shower stall and they kept the other toilets and there was a sink in there, too. This meant that if you wanted to take a shower you had to get up very early in the morning - and I'd get up around 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning to get my shower - because there would be a line very quickly afterwards. I slept in a room that had been the room where the ambassador's and DCM's secretaries had slept and that was our dormitory room for about five months until July as a matter of fact.

Q: All right, let's talk about your work.

METRINKO: My work was self-invented. I was political counselor. I was also head of the economic section. I was also as it turned out by default chief of the consular section so I had three jobs. When they discovered that I knew consular work, CA sent me a commission in the mail. Gary Ryan signed a letter saying I had a consular commission for Kabul, for Afghanistan and so I was blessed with a very, very good FSN who had remained in the consular section. He had been hired during the Taliban period. His father had been the chief FSN in the consular section for about 30 years and in the true Afghan way when he retired he recommended his son and his son had taken over his job. He was a godsend. He was really great.

Q: On the consular side, what were you doing?

METRINKO: What was I doing? We had innumerable lost passports. We had innumerable inquiries about adoption. Everyone wanted to adopt an Afghan child. We had several arrest cases involving Americans actually.

Q: Who were the Americans? I mean other than.

METRINKO: Afghan Americans.

Q: Afghan Americans.

METRINKO: Yes. Afghan Americans would come back after being away for years and years and years. We had one repatriation case of a woman who had mental problems, an Afghan, American. I was also trying, CA had sent in a very experienced consular officer for about two weeks at the very beginning to look at what was there, to open up the files, to destroy old files, to ship things back that required shipping back because everything had simply been left there including a lot of fairly sensitive consular case files. He had worked it out; he and I got along very well when he realized that I knew consular work. He knew who I was and we talked about it. He suggested to CA that instead of his coming back because he was also a rover and it made a lot of sense just to give me the commission and to let me stay there and do the job part time along with my political work. There was certainly a relationship between the work symbiotic relationship if you will. Consular work is very closely related to political, political to consular. Using my consular hat I could get into see the police, I could get into the president, I could get into hospitals. I could things like that and using my political work, I could do things that impacted on consular work. In fact it was the ideal consular political relationship.

Q: Well, arrest cases. One had the feeling that there really wasn't much law there.

METRINKO: One has the feeling there still isn't very much law there. Law is a personal thing there. If you're rich or if you're powerful, law has a different meaning than if you're a normal Joe Schmo on the street. There was law. One potentially thorny arrest case got resolved because the people involved in it all had money and they straightened it out for themselves. They told us about it afterwards. I didn't have to go to see any prisoners. We didn't have any that were in prison. Although I did an inspection of the local prison. The repatriation case involved local police officials, but, no that was different, too.

Q: How did you, with the mental case, how did you get him or her on the plane?

METRINKO: With difficulty. A departing Foreign Service officer agreed to escort the person down to Islamabad. Much of our consular caseload was handled by Islamabad. You couldn't get a visa for example in Kabul. You had to go to Islamabad, although we could send visa cases, of the VIPs, we could send the package down to Islamabad to be processed. That's where we would send the passport applications and things of that sort. We would do the paperwork and then send it down to Islamabad since we didn't really have the other necessary things. In the case of repatriation, I had her escorted down to Islamabad and then escorted from Islamabad all the way to the United States, but by FSOs who happened to be traveling and agreed to do it, in fact, volunteered to do it and a good thing, too because it was a person who needed help and shouldn't begin a case, the person should not have been traveling overseas.

Q: Well, then, tell me about this time between January and August, the political situation and what you were doing.

METRINKO: January to August saw the Afghan government had only been in office for about three weeks at this point, three weeks to a month. Among other things that I saw was the raising of the new Afghan flag over the presidential palace, the opening of several new embassies, one assassination, followed later on by another assassination of government ministers. The first one I knew, the minister of transportation. I saw the government starting to form come to grips with its own problems to realize that it didn't even have a grasp on what the country was like anymore. I was very much a part of the first grand council that was summoned to sort of talk about, discuss and formalize what the transition government would look like. In fact, I was seconded to the United Nations for a couple of weeks in the middle of the summer so that I could go off and do some election work in the provinces with groups of Afghans.

Q: Was the United Nations supervising this?

METRINKO: Yes. The United Nations agency for Afghanistan. It was supervising setting up the elections and I volunteered. Well, I should explain this. I wasn't the only political officer. I was the political consular, a title that we designated for me, the DCM and the chargï¿½ and I. I was there as the person who was going to stay. I stayed January to August. In the meantime we had a full series of TDY people who had come in for three weeks, a month, and come and go and come and go. Sometimes we had three or four officers. Sometimes we had just me. It depended. Most of the time I had deputies. It was difficult because it meant that portfolios kept changing. There was no consistency, no continuity. The DCM also handled a lot of the political work. Everyone did. Throughout this period we had innumerable visits by Zalmay Khalilzad. You spell that ZALMAY, first name, KHALILZAD, the president's special envoy for Afghanistan. He came in and would spend any time from a couple of days up to several weeks in Kabul dealing directly with the Afghan government.

Q: How effective did you find him?

METRINKO: That's a question that would fill an entire tape. Zalmay Khalilzad was an Afghan American who had been born and brought up in Afghanistan. He certainly knew most of the new government cabinet members - I mean knew most of the warlords - because he had been dealing with Afghanistan off and on for most of his life. He'd been involved in the Department of Defense and State Department before as a political appointee. He had dealt with Afghanistan then. He knew people from his own studies, his academic work. He also has followed it his whole life. He was of course surely interested in what happened there. He spoke [two languages] along with English. He had gone to school with some of the leaders either in Afghanistan or later on in a university in Beirut. He certainly had the President's ear back in the White House and the head of the National Security Council, Condoleezza Rice. That having been said, I'm not sure how effective he was. He caused as many problems as he helped things there. He's been named as the new ambassador to Afghanistan. I found his approach, his personality and his work to counterproductive myself and the antipathies of what I think of as good diplomacy.

Q: In what way would you strive?

METRINKO: Well, there was a problem in Afghanistan that's continued up until quite recently where there were too many people who represented the United States government at a high level. We had a military occupation of the country. The general in charge of the U.S. military effort there whether it was General McNeil saw himself as the lead American in the country. If you had 8,000, 9,000, 10,000 soldiers under your command, a couple of large bases and U.S. military stationed all over the country in small towns and cities you are indeed in charge of a large portion of the country. He was conducting a military campaign there. We had a very large CIA presence there which had its own headquarters building in the middle of the city heavily protected, fortified and all the traffic walked off around it. We had the U.S. embassy there with Bryan Crocker as chargï¿½ and then Robert Finn who was the ambassador. We had as time went on this gets into my second assignment there already, but we had an ambassador who was in charge of coordination for development, Bill Taylor. We also had a political advisor out at the army headquarters who was also an ambassador and had ambassadorial rank as ambassador to the army operation there, the military operation. So, we had a general, two other ambassadors in addition to the State Department ambassador plus the head of the CIA all of them with entree with clout with some degree of power and not all of them necessarily talking to each other about what they were doing. To give you an anecdote that will best explain this. I heard this from President [Karzai]'s brother; he's a friend of mine, several months ago. This was at a time when President [Karzai] was thinking of getting rid of Ismail Kham, I-S-M-A-I-L, new word K-H-A-M, who was the warlord governor and military commander of Herat Province. President [Karzai] called in the British ambassador and these were the words he used in front of his brother-in-law. He said, "I've just spoken to three different American ambassadors about the American viewpoint on getting rid of Ismail Kham and I've gotten three conflicting viewpoints. Can you please tell me what the British view is?" Now adding to the mixture of American ambassadors I have to also had the President's special envoy who came and went came and went constantly and was on the phone when he wasn't there. So, you had [the envoy], you had Ambassador Taylor, you had Ambassador Finn, you had Ambassador Jackovitz, you had the CIA director and you had the head of the army operations. That's six. It was incredibly inept on the part of the State Department and Defense to do it that way.

Q: Well, did you see the, I mean was there the conflict that seems to be going on or has been going on for the last two years between the State Department and Colin Powell and the Department of Defense under Rumsfeld and I'm particularly talking when you get to the Department of Defense you're talking about the civilian leadership, the rotating leaderships is almost a different matter. Did you get that?

METRINKO: Yes, absolutely. Let me give you an example first before I address that question, an example of the sort of lack of cooperation or the lack of coordination between the various government entities. The second day that I was in Kabul I was taken to an impromptu with the President in his palace. It was myself, it was the chargï¿½, it was a visiting director of AID and we went out to see _____ in his office and it ended up being about a two hour meeting and we sat there and talked development. This was the introductory to the head of AID. _____'s brother was also in the meeting. In the middle of the meeting the phone rang or no a messenger came in and handed [him] a piece of paper and he said, "Gentleman, excuse me, I have a very phone call and I have to take it." He left. He was gone 15 or 20 minutes and he came back and he said, "Thank you for waiting. I'm sorry. That was Mr. _____." He sat down and we proceeded. He didn't tell us what [he] had said in his 15 or 20 minutes of conversation calling from the NSC nor did _____ ever tell anybody what he said to _____. That's an example of the sort of thing that was going on there when one presidential, you know, the president's special advisor calls the head of the country and the chargï¿½ doesn't know what's happening.

Q: You keep saying the chargï¿½...

METRINKO: Oh, because Brian Crocker was sent there in December of the year 2001 as chargï¿½. He was there until approximately I want to say March when he was replaced by Robert Finn who came as ambassador. He arrived there as chargï¿½ and he was in fact I swore him in as ambassador on the steps of the embassy because I was consular officer and I could take his oath.

Q: Go back to where, were you seeing the State civilian leadership of the Pentagon conflict played out?

METRINKO: A little bit, yes. I can't answer the personal relations of say the ambassador or Ambassador Taylor with the head of the military operation. I had the feeling it was pretty good. At least within limits, but the fact was that one had all the toys, all the money and did not have to explain or say anything at all to the other. So, we would find out about military operations afterwards for example. One example I can give is when what's the deputy, oh, the deputy over at at DOD.

Q: Wolfowitz?

METRINKO: Wolfowitz, thank you.

Q: Paul Wolfowitz.

METRINKO: Paul Wolfowitz came on a visit. Everybody came on a visit. Half of the U.S. congress, you know it was their various times on visits, everyone with any sort of grasp at all or anyone with any degree or title at all wanted to show up in Afghanistan during that first year to say he or she had done that. Paul Wolfowitz came on a visit just after we had had the problem of an attack on a wedding party. I was sent up with.

Q: You might explain what.

METRINKO: Okay. In very late June or early July, it was either the last day of June or the first day of July, 2001, 2002 now, yes 2002. There was a military operation near the town of Dehrawod, D-E-H-R-A-W-O-D, and in this particular operation a large group of people who were celebrating a wedding were apparently attacked by U.S. military forces. It happened to be women and children. It was the women and children's part of the wedding. A large number of women and children were killed. A larger number were injured. They were basically bombed. The U.S. military was acting on information that there may have been "terrorists" or Al Qaeda people present at the gathering. It claims it did not know it was a wedding. We heard about it the next day because it happened at the home of someone who happened to be close to one of his huge supporters and [he] was fighting to get back to Afghanistan. He was told that his friend and his friend's family had been killed in this attack. We set up an investigation team and went quickly. We heard about this late in the evening and by early the next morning I joined a special forces team and a group of Afghans including one minister and two deputy ministers to go up by helicopter and then by vehicle by land to visit Dehrawod to see what had really happened to begin the investigation. We conducted the investigation. We spent about two days up there and came back to Kabul to report to the president and to the ambassador together in a joint report. Two days later Wolfowitz showed up and I was asked at a country team to give a briefing about this operation and explained what we had see and Wolfowitz interrupted me and said, "You sound like you believe the Afghans' version." He said it in a very sort of peremptory way. I said, "Well, I'm only reporting what I saw" and he dismissed it and said, "No, it didn't happen that way." Click, his line shut down. He was in denial. I returned to that same village a while later, about a month later when a fuller investigation team with people on it who could actually do measurements and do forensics and things like that came through. I accompanied them up to the same area with the same special forces team, but it was interesting.

Q: We have a real problem I think, it's unfortunate it's gotten very political, but it's much more serious than that particularly with true believers, the civilian true believers in the Department of Defense. Well, now as a political officer what did you do? I mean what were the politics?

METRINKO: What were the politics? That's a good question. What did I do day to day? Afghanistan was a country with no internal communications. We had no idea what was happening in the rest of the country. You could not telephone across the street. Eventually the United Nations gave telephones to the various ministers and to the various ambassadors so that at least we could telephone to the various ministers, but not to the ministries. There were several different phone systems in the country, none of which worked. If you wanted to set up an appointment you had to leave a note or discuss it first and then set it up that way and then go back later for your appointment. We had no idea what was happening one minute's drive out of Kabul. The military had a better idea, but not much better as it turned out in many cases. I would say there was nobody in the embassy at all who had a grasp on what was happening in the country and I include myself in that because I know how big the country is. I know how disparate and how you know, sort of remote villages and towns can be.

Q: What about the CIA because they've been renowned for having operators all over the country?

METRINKO: Well, they had a lot of people who couldn't speak a word of the language and ran around in beards and funny clothes and thought they had a grasp of what was happening. I would dismiss all 99% of them as amateurs. They thought that carrying a gun, growing a beard and wearing a bandana around your hair qualified you as an expert. It doesn't. Very simply, it doesn't. What happened there was similar to what happened later in Iraq. Everybody had their little group, their little friends who would report to them what they wanted to report about this area, this town, this tribe, etc. You had the Afghans who had been out of the country for a whole generation, they had been out since the 1970s, 30 years almost who thought they were experts. You had Afghans who had never been there who were showing up. You had a whole series of people like that. The instant experts. Americans who had once been there 25 years ago coming in. Almost none of whom could speak the language. You had a lot of disassemblage, bits and pieces of information. What I did on a daily basis in the embassy was number one man the front gate of the embassy, which was a job in itself. We had an embassy compound that was heavily fortified and was getting more and more fortified everyday. There was no feasible way to bring most people into the chancery. Most of the visitors who would show up. It is the Afghan tradition as its a tradition I think in every country when a new government takes power, anybody who wants part of that power, anybody who wants to get anything done shows up and plays homage. Afghans started coming in in large numbers, tribal groups, city groups, town groups, professional groups, people who were looking for jobs, people who were looking for favors, people who were trying to get their nephews out of American prisons, etc. They started showing up at the gates. I was the political officer who spoke [the language]. I got called down to the gates constantly.

We had something else happening at the gate. We had a force protective unit from the U.S. marines, a group with which I had never worked and which I came to hold very quickly in the highest esteem. These were marines. Marine trained, but longer hair, beards, they were there to gather information that would protect the embassy compound and the American presence there. They weren't there to protect the American diplomats, they were there as sort of the outer reach of the marines there.

Q: These were Afghans?

METRINKO: No, no, these were Americans. These were American marines, but as it turned out some of them had mixed parentage or they were dual nationals. They had gone through very [training], some of which could speak [the language] quite [well]. They had Arabic training. They were also versed in the country. They had studied it. They were supposed to be regional experts and indeed they were. They were really a good group to work with. So, what would invariably happen, one of them would be assigned almost 24 hours down at the main gate, they did this in rotation. They would be the ones to sort out and sift out the people that came. If you had a leader who showed up saying, I have information about 25 stinger missiles and this and that and the other thing and I wanted to turn it over to you, then they would be diverted to the correct person. If somebody came in who wanted to talk about politics, they would call me and I spent a chunk of each day, sometimes several hours a day down at the gate dealing with the people to the extent where they set up a special meeting room. I had innumerable and this happened, when I saw innumerable, everyday, sometimes a couple of times a day tribal groups coming in where I would have five or ten or 20 or 30 men, what they called the white beards, the tribal elders, coming to see the ambassador. The ambassador never wanted to see them, coming to see me it meant. I shouldn't never wanted to see them, my job was to sift out the ones he was supposed to see. They would come to discuss problems, conditions, what was happening in their province, what was happening in their tribal area, the help they needed. In the true Afghan way, nobody knew who was in charge yet. Remember when I say there were no telephone communications, there was also no national TV system. The radio system was in shatters, you know, in shambles as well. There were no newspapers that reached the whole country, so the country had no communication with itself. Nobody knew. If you were living out in a small town, you really didn't know what was happening in Kabul and you didn't really know about the American presence or anything else. It was all new. People would come to the embassy sometimes mistaking it for the CIA or for a wide incredible variety of reasons, everything from hey I'm an American citizen, hey I want to get a visa, hey I wanted to go and study in the United States, I need help. My younger brother was captured by Americans in uniform who took him. We don't know where he is and nobody will tell us. We don't know if he is alive or dead and this happened four months ago. In many cases that happened. My job was to sort out all that. I found it rather refreshing. I was also supposed to be meeting and dealing with a number of officials in the country, dealing with the clergy, did that a great deal, both from meeting people by chance at the gate to just going out and paying calls. Full days. All of those who were there the first many months worked I would say 20 hours a day. It was a function of necessity because we had nothing else to do, but to work. The only place I could sit in a chair was in my office because there were no other chairs. I could go and sit outside. If I wanted to sit in a real chair, I had my office chair sitting in front of my desk in front of my screen on my computer. I didn't have a chair in the large room I was sharing with eight or ten other men.

Q: Did you have any time, what were you sending back?

METRINKO: A barrage of reports on everything possible because nobody had reported from inside of Afghanistan since the year 1989. Everything from biographic reporting on the new leaders on officials, condition reporting to who may have killed the minister of tourism, I mean everything, the whole spectrum. There was no, we didn't know the economy yet. We didn't know the commercial system yet. We were trying to sort out who the political players were as the Afghans were because politicians their representatives, their envoys were coming in drifting back to Afghanistan in dribs and drabs. They had all the anti-Taliban politicians, they had all left the country, and they were gone. They started coming back, one after the other as a matter of making contact with them, getting to know them.

Q: By the time you left, were you seeing a country that was in complete disarray or were you beginning to see it beginning to knit together?

METRINKO: I'll give you an example. One of the first or second month that I was there, we had a visitor come in from INR in the Department who wanted to do a study of the police, what the police were up to, who they were, what they were. This was important to me both for consular work and for political work. I was the control officer and he and I spent about a week together just visiting police stations all over Kabul, talking to police officials all up and down the line from the new chief of police to the minister of interior people to policemen on the beat so to speak, going out to the police academy. One of the questions I asked in one of the first meetings of a police official was, "Okay, you're here, do you have contact with police officials [there] and in other cities?" He said, "We know there must be police out there, but we don't know who they are because we have no way to reach them, we have no way to contact them. There are no phones." He said, "In theory do we have contact? In fact, no, I can't give you any names because I don't know any of these people or who they are." These are some of the top ranking police stations in Kabul. That was in the year 2002. 2003 there's a radio network that links the police. The police go from the provinces to training at the new police academy in Kabul. So, is the country coming together? Yes. Is it coming together fast? No. Is it coming together fast by Asian terms? Probably yes. I'm not pessimistic about it.

Q: Of course we have a problem with our time frame of reference. It's not their problem. What were you getting at that time during this particular period?

METRINKO: [Karzai] was quite popular, but nobody knew very much about him. There was not a great deal of biographic information about him. He was sort of picked and chosen by the foreigners to head the country. He was very presentable. He spoke excellent English. He spoke all the politically correct words. He could be charming. He is charming. He was recognized by warlords and by the various power brokers all around the country as the one person who could appease all the foreigners with money. I think that there are a great many people, warlords in any particular city or town there who would like to be president of Afghanistan, but they also all know that they don't have the ability to represent Afghanistan to the foreigners who give the money that keeps Afghanistan running. So, he is in power because he can do that. He's the ultimate fixer.

Q: What was your impression of the work of the NGOs, the non-governmental organizations, both American and foreign and international?

METRINKO: That's another question that would take a good hour of discussion. I'll put it this way. NGOs went to Afghanistan not asking what Afghanistan needed or what should be done, but they went there with their own specialties and then proceeded to ask monies that they could apply their specialties to Afghanistan. In general the development assistance work for Afghanistan was not well coordinated. I say this specifically about AID. I say this about the NGOs, the IOs, despite the meetings, the talk there is not a great deal of coordination and not a great deal of expertise. Huge amounts of money was thrown down rat holes.

Q: Mike, we're sort of running out of time for this time. Obviously we want to come back again, but again, I'd like to put at the end here, let's talk about your impressions during this first period in Kabul of some of the, why you didn't think the NGOs and the AID works were not, I mean, what rat holes you saw money going down or you know, misguided efforts there. Also, I'd like to ask you, you raised it before and I didn't pick it up then, but could you tell me about how adoptions because this is always a very sensitive thing on the consular side, how that was all working and then something about other armed forces which were picking up with armed forces being there. I think other groups have been doing this, the Germans, the British, and others who had sent troops there.

METRINKO: Even the various different American armed groups, which are very different.

Q: All right, let's talk about that during this specific period and also foreign influence. I mean, what you were seeing.

METRINKO: American?

Q: Yes, but also, I'm thinking of particularly Pakistan and also about the Taliban at this time. Then later you came back, you went to Herat and that was from when to when?

METRINKO: The first time I was in Afghanistan during this period I arrived in January. I left on a short break in July and then I, no I left on a short break in June, came back and left again in August to go to Yemen. I was in Yemen for four months as chief of the consular section. I left Yemen in January of 2003 with an onward assignment again to go back to Afghanistan and arrived back in Afghanistan in March of 2003 and I was there until August, six straight months.

Q: Okay, so we will talk, we'll do those questions I asked about the first time in Kabul and then I would like to talk to you about being a consular officer in Yemen again and then we'll go back, okay?

METRINKO: Okay, I can come back if you want. I can come back anytime.

***

Q: This is an addendum with Mike Metrinko done after our last series of tapes. Mike, let's do Kabul the first time. You went to Kabul when?

METRINKO: I went to Kabul in January of the year 2002.

Q: Okay, how did that come about and in the first place how long were you there in Afghanistan?

METRINKO: I was there in Afghanistan that first time from January 2002 up until August although I had a short break in June for about two weeks.

Q: How did you come about doing that?

METRINKO: Well, this all follows from the Twin Towers.

Q: You're talking about 9/11?

METRINKO: 9/11.

Q: The Trade Center.

METRINKO: The Trade Center and the realization that Afghanistan was involved, the Taliban had supported Osama Bin Laden, etc. and all that great history that we now have etched into our minds. What happened is that I heard that there might be an opening at the embassy? It was in the newspapers that the embassy was going to be reopened. I also heard the Department was looking for volunteers. I called up and volunteered. I was remembered in the Department because I had been in Yemen the preceding year. I had spent several months there. I got a call back from NEA/SA/EX asking me if I was really interested. Yes. Telling me they would definitely like me to be on the list of people going, but just weren't sure exactly when, whether it would be the first group to actually open up the embassy or slightly after that. Then there was silence and it went back and forth like that for a while. You know the State Department never follows up on anything. Eventually I got a call in December again saying they wanted me to go and finally got a date of the second week in January to depart the United States. Of course the Department being the Department I had to get my own visa to go to Pakistan and I had to do everything like that myself.

Q: When you went, you got there in January?

METRINKO: I arrived there in January. The embassy had been opened at that point for less than four weeks.

Q: What was the situation in Afghanistan and in Kabul when you got there?

METRINKO: When I arrived in Kabul in January of 2002 the city was still very quiet, rather grim, very dark. There was no electricity in the entire city. The weather was not cold thank goodness because, at least not freezing cold because people were still using wood and I think manure as well to burn for fires. There was no such thing as oil or gas deliveries or electricity for heating your home, so the entire city was overhung with a miasma of smoke, smoke, dust, grit in the air. There had been a drought for five years preceding this so the city was very, very dry and at least a third if not more of the city was in total ruin. No electricity, a huge ruined section of the city where no one lived, just block after block after block of demolished buildings. These were buildings that had been demolished in the war [against the Soviets and] was not part of the Soviets and not part of our bombing of the city.

The embassy compound itself was still recognizably the old embassy compound prior to its closure in 1989. It was a very large compound filled with trees, flowering plants, lots of roses, lots of other flowers. Even winter flowers were coming up because the gardens had been very well taken care of by the FSNs who stayed in the embassy.

Q: I think we covered part of this. Do you remember what we covered?

METRINKO: I don't remember, I'm sorry.

Q: Okay, well let's keep going.

METRINKO: Yes. Inside the embassy we had more than 100 combat marines and we had a fairly large staff although relatively few from the State Department. It was more military. The Office of Military Cooperation OMC, various other, AID was starting to come in force. When I arrived in January though it was still very small. Brian Crocker was chargï¿½. His wife was there as the sort of general housekeeper and she should have gotten a medal for her work. There was a very small political section, myself and Ann Wright. Ann Wright left quite shortly afterwards. Ellen Eyre, E-Y-R-E, came in shortly after that. There was no economic section per se. The consular section consisted of one FSN and originally [an officer] who came in for about two weeks just to look at the office to sort of shovel it out to see what files were there to see what could be salvaged from the old consular supplies. It was an embassy where the entire bottom floor was taken over by the marines. They used it as their living space. Most of us stayed in the bomb shelter. We slept in there. Bit by bit started to open up the offices. They had to be swept of course, in both ways. Both to look for traces of eavesdropping equipment as well as to sweep them out because they hadn't been touched by 1989. The building itself was in relatively good shape although it soon became apparent that there was not enough water and there was not enough sewage capacity for the people who are now living in it. It had never been designed as a residential building. It had only been a building for people to work in and for guards to stay occasionally at night. What happened is that suddenly there were upwards of 200 people, 160, 170, 200 living on the compound and there was no sewage capacity. So, things like that had to be taken care of. The trees started falling down one after the other. The marines diplomatic security decided that they need a line of sight in case there was an attack on the embassy so they started cutting down the trees and the shrubbery. Concertina wire started going up very quickly. It had already started all around the perimeter walls and then all around everywhere so that when one approached the gate that was the only egress from the embassy. It was an old gate used in the past by the motor pool as opposed to the visitors. The visitors' gate was permanently sealed off. The new gate was surrounded by a serpentine of concertina wire which made it very difficult to come and go and lots of little marine barricades and lots of barriers. It became part of our daily conversation. Huge, plastic heavy plastic containers, soft containers that could be shipped easily and that would then hold hundreds or thousands of pounds of soil; dirt, sand and you could build them anywhere. You could stack them so you had walls of [sand] barriers going up. They were easy to do. All you had to do was put one down and just like a trash bag start to fill it, except in a square container that had a framework around it. Easy to ship.

The embassy wall which had been a rather pleasant old stone wall became, was soon covered by heavy metal plates stretching all around the perimeter. Plates that went from the top of the wall down below the sidewalk because they dug a sort of trench to install the walls in. The walls were extraordinarily ugly. It looks like a huge metal box now when you look at the embassy. By huge I mean it's more than a block long and a block wide of a metal wall. There was some sort of amusement in all this because the children from the neighborhood soon discovered that if you threw one stone at the wall it sounded like Big Ben. The first time this happened the marines went crazy of course.

Q: Oh, God. You were what, the head of the political section?

METRINKO: I was in charge of the political section. The job kept changing in title. My actual visiting card and business card said political counselor. I was also in charge of what was supposed to be an economic section and there was the political military designation for a while, too, so I had all those titles, political counselor, POL/MIL officer, political economic counselor and because I had a consular background. As soon as Alan _____ left CA, Consular Affairs sent me a commission in the mail and made me the head of the consular section, too. From January until I think it was July when the consular officer finally arrived I was also the head of the consular section.

Q: What were the consular duties?

METRINKO: Embassy inquiries about visas, which we were not doing and I don't think, are still being done there. To get a visa if you were an Afghan, if you were a real VIP Afghan we would take your passport and send it down to Islamabad. In some cases we actually sent officers down as couriers to take these down when we had high ranking government delegations leaving Kabul to go to the United States for example. The average person could not get a visa simply could not get a visa. We had a fair number of lost passports or passports that simply expired because Americans, American journalists, business people were rushing into Afghanistan and their passports expired or had expired or they would suddenly realize they had no pages left and they wanted new pages. We would again take those and send them down to Pakistan. I had many inquiries about adoption including one family, an Afghan American family that I believe carried out an adoption although we could only tell them that we didn't know anything about the Afghan adoption laws, that they didn't really have any at that point. We had a couple of arrests, one solid arrest case and a couple of other possible arrest cases, possibly not. They were all settled fairly quickly and one repatriation of an American Afghan who had mental problems and came to Kabul.

Q: What was your solid arrest case?

METRINKO: The solid arrest case, well, solid in the sense of an Afghan solidity which is rather fluid. An American Afghan family, young men had returned to Afghanistan, they had money and they had a position in the past. They had property left over from previous regimes. They opened up a business enterprise that was actually very lucrative and got into a major fight which resulted in a street fight which actually resulted with people getting injured by knife wounds because of a problem they were having with tenants. The fight ended up with police and ministry of interior officials actually battling it out on the street with each other. Everybody was of course claiming to have friends in the Afghan government back in the United States and the United Nations. They were arrested, they were taken, they were held. By the time I met them they were already out and they never went back to prison as far as I know. Yes, indeed there were Americans, they were beaten and they were held and that was that.

Q: Contact with the government on doing political work. Were there really parties or was it sort of a well-warned situation?

METRINKO: In the beginning it was all individuals and contact was, well, when I arrived there in January there was almost no government. Within one day of my arrival because we had the head of AID visiting, I found myself in President [Karzai]'s office sitting there and having tea for two or three hours in a long meeting. It's not often that you get to meet the president of a country the first or second day. I was sitting there with my jeans on, too by the way because nobody had good clothes with them. I had been told to just bring jeans and sort of nothing decent because there was no way to clean anything. I would say that contact with the government was extremely good, perhaps too good. We could walk into [Karzai]'s office whenever we wanted to. We could get into the palace whenever we wanted to. We could and did meet all of the highest-ranking present and former officials of the country including the former shah when he returned. I immediately met with him. I met with the warlords. I met with the leading clergy and they sought us out, too. If we hadn't gotten to them, they sought us out. I was dealing directly with ministers, directly with the Ayatollah's other high ranking clergy.

Q: Did you have the feeling, I mean obviously this is what we were all looking at, were things beginning to coalesce, to gel or not?

METRINKO: It's hard to say because we didn't know very much about the country at that point. There was no communication system in the country. We knew a bit about what was happening in the palace. We knew a bit about what was happening on the streets. You have to remember that we had no FSNs, or very few FSNs, and almost nobody who spoke [Pashto] or [Dari]. I was one of two officers in the political section and we were the two officers in the embassy who spoke it for the first couple of months. We had no real connection with anyone out in the provinces except for some of the military teams and they didn't really know what was happening politically out in the provinces and also they weren't reporting to us. We did not do a lot of traveling in the beginning. In fact the embassy still doesn't do a lot of traveling because traveling was difficult. You couldn't go anywhere by car. There was no surface transportation or travel whatsoever. You could not go very far by plane because there was no plane system in the country. You had to go by UN planes; UN helicopters or by military flights and military flights were at best a chancy thing. It was hard to organize them, arrange them and they didn't want to do it just on the drop just because somebody from the embassy wanted to travel. There had to be a very good reason. It was after all a war zone at the time. I remember when INL sent someone in to do a survey of police.

Q: Who was that?

METRINKO: INL, who did they send, God I can't think of the name now, I'm sorry, but from the Department. We wanted to do a survey of the conditions of the Afghan police force. I think he arrived probably in late February and I devoted a major part of a week to go around with him. Number one it was very necessary for me as a consular officer to know this, but it was equally necessary for me as the political officer to know this, too. What were the police doing? We started by going to meet the minister of interior then worked our way down to the chief of police with introductions and then through various precinct commanders. One of the questions I asked first was what about police in other cities, other towns, other villages and what the police commander of Kabul said was, "We assume there are police out there, but we don't know who they are. We have no communication with anybody. We don't have a phone system. We don't have a radio system. We're just assuming that our former police who have taken up their jobs just like we have. We don't know." This was true of the whole country. You could assume that things were happening, but unless it happened to be a town or a city where there was a reason to go, where [there were] pretty heavy American contingents already, you really did not know what was out there.

Q: What about you know, during the heavy point of the war, it was certainly one's observation that we had special services and CIA types all over the country doing things. Was there a net of that nature or not?

METRINKO: There was that. There were a lot of guys running around doing stuff. I don't think the policy of what they were doing was ever carefully coordinated or coordinated at all with the embassy. Originally I was in on the briefings that they would give, but then they decided that the briefing should be limited to the ambassador only or to the chargï¿½ only. So, nobody.

Q: When you say they, who was it?

METRINKO: The CIA decided this.

Q: CIA.

METRINKO: So, within about a month or so the political section was excluded from all briefings by the CIA. They used a variety of gimmicks you know saying we have to get new clearances for you. We have to do this; we have to do that. We have to get this signed off by our headquarters, but they were lying. I don't know why they decided that nobody from the embassy besides the chargï¿½ or the ambassador should be involved.

Q: So, essentially there wasn't a team out there?

METRINKO: Not a team that involved cooperation of the CIA or the military who were actually fighting. We had a very good relationship with the military's, the side of the military house that was doing cooperation. Military cooperation, building up trying to build up the new Afghan national army, trying to provide military assistance and in other ways. We had at least the political section had very little to almost no relationship to the people who were fighting the war. I'm not sure to what extent the ambassador did for the chargï¿½. I know they went out to briefings would receive briefings, but the briefings were I would say not very good. We had a great many military people and CIA people who were assigned to Afghanistan like State people who had never been there before.

Q: It sounds like all of a sudden there was a lot of publicity about soldiers and CIA people with global position equipment on horseback and all, but you know and I know, going through the Vietnam experience, it sounds great, but you don't give somebody a couple of weeks training and plunk him down into a situation and really get very much out of them.

METRINKO: They didn't as far as I could see get very much training at all. We certainly got no training to go there. The training for Afghanistan was shameful I'd say for everybody concerned. There was none. When the Department called me and we started to talk about my going to Kabul very early in December before the embassy actually opened I told them that I was free and that I would just as soon join the group that was in training at NFATC. I had this look of just amusement from the person I said that to and he said, "What group in training?" I said, "Well, you're opening up an embassy. It's even been announced in the newspapers. It's been announced at press briefings. You're getting people together from the Department. The place has been closed to us since 1989. I assume you have people, a core group of people now in training at NFATC." He said, "No, we have nobody and there won't be anybody." He said, "We're just picking people at random and sending them there." That was the State Department planning for opening up the new embassy.

Q: I think it's important to understand, it sounds like the CIA again, it sounds like it was kind of doing almost the same thing of throwing people in or you know, I mean, maybe all right is helping direct fire or something like that, but I mean did they seem to have a cadre of people who knew what they were doing?

METRINKO: No, not at all. Well, when I think of knowing what one is doing I think of people who are regionally aware who have a smattering at least of the language and know something about the culture, the history, the morays of the country who know where they are, who can sort of blend in to what they are doing, who can meet people, make friends, establish relationships with people. Using those criteria, no, the CIA was a zero. They were very good about passing out big bags of money, new SUVs and wonderful little satellite radios to people, but as far as any real knowledge of what was happening, where they were, what they were trying to get done, the past, the present, the future, was zero.

Q: In our previous set of interviews, we've talked about your experience in Iran, Peace Corps, Kabul, Tehran, prison and all that. You've gained a great deal of experience in this area. How much of this was transferable both in language, but also in society and the way things operated in Afghanistan?

METRINKO: An incredible amount of it. Being in Afghanistan in the year 2002 and the year 2003 was very much like in fact incredibly like being in the Peace Corps in Iran in 1970. I would say that there's that many years between Iran and Afghanistan, 35, whatever, 34. The way people acted was the way the villagers around my Peace Corps site acted. Especially in Iraq, the language that I spoke was [different] from Iran. The foods that we ate were extremely similar, the way we sat, what we talked about, the interests of the people, they way they acted, the way they dressed, everything was very much like Iran, not Iran of today, but the Iran that I knew in 1970. Part of that is because so many Afghans had been to Iran, a couple of million who had gone there have lived there have come back, but part of its also due to the general sharing they have of culture and of language and of history. My own experience, I never, from the first moment that I arrived in Afghanistan I felt that I was thoroughly familiar with my surroundings. I knew how to act, what to do. I knew what was likely under the counters and the stalls and the bazaar. I could recognize the goods. I knew what everything was used for. The patterns, the music, the art, everything was extremely, extremely like Iran. Now, in the entire time 2002 and 2003 that I was in Afghanistan, no Afghan ever asked me if I was an American without exception they would always ask me, they would assume I was from Iran and they would ask me from what city I was from in Iran.

Q: What would you tell them?

METRINKO: I would laugh and I would tell them I was an American and on several occasions I was told I was lying. Number one, an Afghan teenager told me I should be proud to be an Iranian and why was I trying to conceal it. When I went to buy material in the bazaar once for my Afghan clothing the shopkeeper that I was dealing with kept asking me what city I was from in Iran. I kept telling him that I was an American, that I wasn't Iranian and he looked at me because I always spoke [Farsi], I never spoke English on the streets. He looked at me and he said, "I've lived in Iran for ten years. I know you're an Iranian. What city are you from?" I finally said, Tabriz. He said, "Oh, well, why didn't you say so?"

Q: Well, you said for Afghan clothing, what was this?

METRINKO: Afghan clothing is very similar to Pakistani village clothing. It's a long, well, very wide baggy pants which are cinched with a rope or a drawstring and cotton of course and a tunic that goes over that. Now there are differences in quality, there are differences in style. If you're in Herat and you're an older person you wear only white. If you're in [other] areas you wear very dark colors, dark green, dark brown, dark black. If you're younger in other areas, they have a very large amount of embroidery on the front. So, I have all kinds of these costumes.

Q: Oh, were you getting this to fade into the thing?

METRINKO: No, I was getting it because it was comfortable if I went out to someone's home. Everyone sat on the floor and you can't sit on the floor with a pair of tight pants on or jeans on. It's far more comfortable to dress Afghan style. Also, I had a long beard. I carried prayer beads. Nobody would notice me on the street when I walked like this.

Q: Yes. What about, what were you getting from your contacts going out to dinner and all? How did they see things developing at that time?

METRINKO: Everybody wanted change immediately. It wasn't going to happen immediately. Everyone talked about how evil the warlords were and how America had to get rid of the warlords. That also was not going to happen because we had several different policies about the warlords. But I say everyone; the people who were my contacts were a limited group of people. I had a number of younger Afghans who had always been in Afghanistan that I met through the embassy or as I start going out and meeting religious figures or other people. I started to see a large number of tribal elders who were coming to the embassy on a daily basis because they thought they were supposed to. We were the new power in the country; therefore, they were coming up to introduce themselves to the new power. I would get called to the gate whenever one of these groups came and I would bring at least a sampling of them into the embassy to small meeting rooms that we had down by the main gate and sit and talk with them. I'd say that my contacts were non-existent. I knew some women of course, but I don't know what the women of the country were thinking. I do not know what villages were thinking at the time unless they were talking to us in the embassy.

It's a bit hard to explain. It was still rather chaotic out in the countryside and there was no network of information or communication or transportation. When you think of a bowl of spaghetti, you think of a bowl of spaghetti that's all been chopped up. You might think you had a strand and you would discover it was only an inch long and it wasn't a strand. So many of the Afghans were in the same boat, however because the new government was coming in from abroad. Some of them had been in America, had been living in other countries, they'd been in Pakistan, they'd been in [Iran]. They were coming in to take high government positions. A lot of the younger guys in the place, the gophers, the ones who were running around doing speeches, etc. were coming in bright and fresh from England and the United States. They didn't know anything about Afghanistan. I mean they could speak [Pashtu] or [Dari] because they had learned it at home, but they really didn't know anything about the country and they were perhaps less prepared for it than many of our military and CIA people were.

There were very few, I never met anyone I don't think with the possible exception of a few top leaders to whom other people came and gave constant reports. I never met anyone who seemed to have a grasp on the whole country.

Q: Well, did you, were people looking over their shoulder for insurgents or the Taliban at that time or not?

METRINKO: They didn't need the Taliban, they had themselves. We've met the enemy and the enemy is us. There wasn't so much talk about a resurgence of the Taliban at the time. The Taliban were there. The government bureaucracies did not disappear. The police had not all disappeared. The schools had not all disappeared. Various ministries had not disappeared during the Taliban area. The people stayed and the guys simply cut their beards when we came in. It's amazing how peoples have a wide tolerance for stupidity at the top of their leadership, but in general much of the bureaucracy, much of the commercial, cultural, social life of the country did not change when we came and the Taliban left. Much of what we call Taliban activity was really tribal or it was rivalry or it was old feuding. I'd had this explained to me over and over and over again by tribal elders, you know, the old men who had come in with their long white beards and would sit and talk for an hour or two. They would laugh about some of the things that were happening. What they always said was you American soldiers don't understand this, but you know, what they think is a Taliban act is really a feud going back more than 100 years in that particular family. I have to agree with that. I would say that even today much of what we call Taliban is not, it's simply, commercial rivalries, land grabs, power grabs, power struggles or ethnic problems using Taliban. When you say was there a fear of Taliban resurgence, no. It was more a fear of, it was not a fear, it was just a fact, the warlords, generals, high officials, other rich people, people who had power at the local [level] and the landwards were trying to grab what they could in this great realigning of property.

Q: What in your language ability and moving around, what role did you play with the ambassador?

METRINKO: Our first chargï¿½ was Bryan Crocker. Bryan Crocker has been described as the most self-contained person in the Foreign Service. He shares no information and he doesn't really ask questions. He falls into that category of officer who believes they know what is happening and they do not need either counseling advice or expertise. That having been said we certainly traveled quite a bit together. We went to meetings together. I did reports, which he would routinely sign off on. The entire time I was there I never once knew if he thought my work was good, bad or indifferent. Then again, nor did anyone else, which is fine. It's just, not a criticism; it's just a statement.

Q: Just the way he was.

METRINKO: Just the way he operated. The ambassador was a different story. The ambassador was Robert Finn. Finn came in I think around April I want to say if I'm not mistaken and Finn came in with a very good background of the general region. He had already been ambassador in Tajikistan. He spoke Tajik. He was a serious language scholar. His Turkish was excellent. He was bilingual in Turkish and English and he and I had known each other since we were in the Peace Corps together in Turkey back in the '60s. The relationship there was I'd say quite a bit better. He had a very good sense of humor. He liked to sit and talk about things, which made a big difference.

Now, having said that, we had other ambassadors as well. He had the president's special envoy who came back and forth and back and forth sometimes for a couple of days, sometimes for a couple of weeks. He shared with no one. He I don't even think shared very much with the ambassador. He was also an ambassador with that title and he was carrying out his own sort of relationship with the Afghan government. I remember the very first meeting that I mentioned when I'd been there for two days [with] myself, Bryan Crocker, and the head of AID sitting in [an] office for a couple of hours. Right after we'd been there for about an hour talking about development plans and AID's assistance program for Afghanistan a man came in with a note and he gave it to [Bryan]. He looked at it and said, "Excuse me, gentlemen, I have an important call that I have to take. I'll be back quickly." He came back about 20 minutes later and all he said was, "That was [the] ambassador from Washington." He sat down to continue the conversation. He never told us what [the ambassador] had said. There was that. I don't think our ambassadors talked to each all that much. I would include General McNeil in that. General McNeil was the head of the American military forces in the country. He had his own relationship with the government. The head of the CIA there had his/her own relationship with the government. Later on well into the year 2002, Ambassador Bill _____ came out to handle assistance programs. I believe, I've been told that his relationship with Finn was far, far better, was very good, very close and they worked together quite well. He was also there with the title of ambassador. We had [a] political advisor to General McNeil and to the military. He also had the title of ambassador on his business cards. So, we had in Kabul itself three permanent civilian ambassadors, plus one visiting special envoy who came out constantly and was always on the phone when he wasn't out there, plus a military general who really had all the toys in the game.

Q: Tell me about the general and what was his relation do you think to the embassy and his political advice.

METRINKO: I don't know. When I was there the first year they would come to meetings, but not all that often. There was a defense attache's office of counselor in the embassy, which also did not seem to have very much to do with the actual military combat forces of the country. They were supposed to be a liaison. We had the office of military cooperation in the embassy, which also did not really; it was not really part of the active combat operations going on. How the defense attache's office, the office of military cooperation and the physical fighting army there cooperated, you'd have to address that to them I think.

Q: You've got an army fighting in essentially a civilian area. Did you feel that the army that was going out in the field was sensitive to being and understood the ocean in which it was dealing or the area it was dealing?

METRINKO: I'd say the answer is a flat no. Even many of the military people assigned to Kabul itself in the office of military cooperation and certainly many of the paramilitary assigned to the CIA in Kabul seemed to have no clue about what or how ridiculous they looked and acted on the streets. The standard gear, now, we were slowly, quite steadily, slowly, but steadily getting into law and order of a sort in Kabul and there was a very strong attempt by the [central] government backed up by the embassy to show that things were returning to normal, the people were dressing in normal clothes, that they weren't going to carry weapons in the country nor in the city. In fact weapons were banned in the city of Kabul unless you happened to be an American soldier or one of the international soldiers. The American military, especially the paramilitary associated with the CIA went around looking like a combination of soldier of fortune and Fredericks of Hollywood in this sort of weird military getup with lots of leather things and extra holsters and bandoleras and places to put guns and knives and bandanas and neck scarves, weird shirts. They looked like they had come out of a Rambo movie and they sort of loved doing this. So, if you went into a normal restaurant, there weren't that many decent restaurants in the beginning, but if you went to a normal one for lunch or dinner and happened to be seated in the same room as a group of these guys it became ludicrous after a while. They were covered with weapons. Covered with strange gear, none of it standard military gear and it looked like a while bunch of Rambos sitting there. They had no sensitivity, no sense of, they acted like they were, they had conquered Afghanistan.

Q: Did you get any feel for the station chief and the ambassador, how they got along and how supportive things were between the two or not?

METRINKO: I think there was a good relationship there as far as I could see. Very friendly, social and professional, but again, that's something to address to those guys.

Q: You stayed at the embassy during most of this time, didn't you?

METRINKO: During the first time I was there, yes. I lived at the embassy except for a two-week period when, let me qualify that. I left the embassy to go to other places in the country several times. The first time was with the chargï¿½ on a one-day trip to. In June I took a sort of leave of absence from the embassy for about ten days or two weeks and I was seconded to the United Nations organization assistance agency for Afghanistan and went off as an election observer. This was absolutely great. I used to wander around myself usually with an FSN in Kabul. I could get away with that. Number one, nobody knew what I was doing. Number two, I was often out as the consular officer as opposed to the political officer and I would take the consular FSN with me. So, I could disappear and sort of come back several hours later. I guess the DS people decided that I knew what I was doing on the streets, but this was the first time my trip with the UN that I was really and truly off on my own. The UN provided what they called the UN security blanket. DS accepted this. As it turned out when I arrived in [Herat], the UN security blanket was about 150 miles away and consistent of somebody who would sit at a desk and receive phone calls. This was great. I got to wander all around those two provinces for quite a long period of time with a bunch of Afghans who were also newly employed by the UN to help run elections.

Q: How did the election go?

METRINKO: Well, this was the election, it was when they were choosing the representatives from the towns and villages who were going to represent those regions at the regional loya jirga, grand consuls and then from the regional grand consuls they were then going to select a smaller number to go to Kabul for the major grand consul, loya jirga, L-O-Y-A J-I-R-G-A. It went great considering nothing like this had happened in a very, very long time that the entire world was watching it and that nobody knew quite what to do.

To give an idea of how much state work had to be done by the international organizations, my very first day in Kandoz I was out with the regional _____ representative who by the way was a former Soviet military officer who had done training for the Soviet troops who invaded Afghanistan and he was retired from the Soviet army. I was talking to. It was the day when in a very small town outside of Kandoz people were gathering together to select representatives to go to the larger counsel down the road. There were at least 1,000 people, maybe more, you know, milling around a big field, going into groups and back and forth and up and down and it was taking them forever. The UN man had explained everything. Other people had tried to explain what they were supposed to do, but there was still a lot of chaos. It was a combination of ethnic groups as well. There were Kajiks there, there were Turkmen there and there were Uzbeks there. This was an area where there was a mixture. Of course there were no women there. One of the men started to talk to me and he said, "We're having a problem doing this because this is the first time in more than 15 or 20 years when we've been able to get together in a group." I looked at him and said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, you couldn't form a group under the Soviets and it was too dangerous under the Taliban as well. If too many people were in a group they would get arrested. So, we don't know how to talk to each other in a big group." Something as simple as that. Lord knows it would have been much harder if there had been women there to talk to them, too. Although that happened in a [cases]. I did several of these. I spent time in Kandoz. I went up to the town of Nahrin where there had been a major earthquake earlier that year.

Driving over the mountains in northern Afghanistan now, everything was dirt of course, driving over the mountains with a rickety old SUV and coming down, literally driving on mountain slopes. There was no real road because people don't use vehicles that much. They use horses or donkeys. There was a kind of track that we called it and coming down off the mountains, it was a plateau surrounded by high mountains. I looked around and thought that it was the most beautiful place I had ever seen in my life. It looked like Shangri-La, that's all I could think of. It was late spring. The grass on the plateau was deep green. There were a million small poppies out and the plain was extremely as flat as a table and it went for miles and miles and you could see herds of horses in the distance and incredible birds of bright plumage. It was just so beautiful.

Q: You mentioned poppies. What was the situation drug wise?

METRINKO: The situation drug wise. Well, in theory the Taliban stopped the cultivation of poppies or at least they stopped most people from cultivating poppies so I believe they could just concentrate a little bit of the poppy production in their own hands. In the two years that it's been independent, Afghanistan has turned into the world's second largest producer of poppies or opium. It's an amazing accomplishment aided and abided by all sorts of people. Everybody grows poppies. All the major landlords, all the major warlords, major government officials, police officials, military commanders, everybody is involved in it. Everyone makes excuses for the Afghan farmers as well. The excuse is going along these lines: if [a farmer] tries to raise corn or wheat he would only make $400 a year and its backbreaking work and if he just turns his fields over to poppy cultivation he could make $5,000. It's true. If I go into a jewelry store and grab a bunch of jewelry I can make a lot more money than I'm doing right now, but I also know that it's illegal. Afghans don't care. The concept of law that we have, the rule of law, is simply an alien concept there. If it's something to their advantage, they simply ignore the morality and the illegality of it. The government ignores it. The military ignores it. They tend to aid and abide it in general.

Q: While you were there was the opium penetrating particularly the youth, which seems to be a problem, you know. First it seems only benign, you sell it to those stupid Europeans and Americans, but then it starts to enter your own culture.

METRINKO: That's an interesting question. Now in the entire time that I was there, how many months? Seven plus six, 13 months that I lived in Afghanistan going out constantly being in villages and small towns, living whatever passes for a normal life I never once saw opium used, not once. I was told over and over that Afghans do not use it. They sell it, they deal with it, they package it, they produce it, they, you know, raise it, they do whatever you want to do with it, but they don't use it. That having been said, if I compare, I've compared Afghanistan of the year 2002 to 2003 to Iran in the year 1970. In Iran in 1970 I knew lots of people who used opium and it was used fairly routinely, socially, in all classes, villages, all the way up to the top level of society. I never once saw it being used or even smelled it being used and I can tell the smell. I know that one. The only time I saw something like that used was when I had taken over the two DEA guys, the new head of the marine corps security detachment and the new head of the, the new RSO from the embassy to meet the northern alliance commanders who have the northern alliance army base right across the street from the embassy. As we were all sitting on the ground just sort of chatting the commander lit up a hash cigarette and one of his deputies did, too and they offered them to us. I thought it was great watching the DEA people and the marines sort of sniffing and pretending they weren't there. That was the only time and that was just whatever, probably just hash. It certainly wasn't opium.

Let me say this, too. I was in Afghanistan in 1970 and I saw it used then. I could smell it. I watched people using it. I mean Afghanistan was on the drug trail in 1970. It was no longer the silk trail or the spice trail. It was the drug trail. I saw nothing like that in 2002 2003. I did see fields that were under cultivation and I saw certainly in village houses stacks of opium plants and it was used as thatch sometimes on sheds and out buildings, the stocks with the pods. Only the one time and one man out of hundreds and hundreds of hours, thousands of hours of my being with Afghans did I see somebody actually using it and that was hash.

Q: What about do you remember you told me off make or not, I'll make sure it gets on here, about visitors from Washington.

METRINKO: Visitors from Washington were extremely concerned about this. Everyone from congress and we had at least half of the congress out there the first year I was there. Everyone from congress brought it up immediately. It was important to them. It was for us up until later on in the year of 2002 it was a bit of a moot point because we simply couldn't get anywhere. We didn't know what was happening. We had indications. We had reports that it was being grown, but we sure couldn't get out there to see it. It was not part of the U.S. military mission to wipe it out. Perhaps it should have been, but it wasn't. For visitors it was very high on the agenda.

I remember once early on when a congressional group was out there and we were giving the normal country team briefing and since I was the political officer at the time and the economic officer and in theory also, there was no one else there to do it, responsible for tracking drug production, they were asking questions about it, you know, why aren't we doing more. I looked at the congressman and I said, "Congressman, we don't have a functioning toilet here in the embassy yet. I share one with about 100 other men. How far do you want me to go trying to eradicate the poppy production on the other side of the country?" It was just, the first year it was I'd say impossible. Now, the British got excised about it or exercised about it and they came into the program to pass out large sums of money to people who would then promise to destroy the opium. Afghans like most other people are quite willing to accept large sums of money and promise anything knowing that you will go away. The British would come and hand out sums of money and the Afghans would say yes, yes, yes, we're going to burn it right now and the Brits would leave. They would then get two sources of income from the same crop, like the Iranians and like others.

Q: Speaking of handing out money, obviously it's no secret that this is how the CIA gets many of its support and informers and all this. Did you find yourself being warned off by the CIA, you know, you're seeing Genghis Khan or something like that and all of a sudden he's one of their sources.

METRINKO: No, I'd say just the opposite. Very much the opposite. Several times I was asked if I would meet with particularly people that they were interested in because if they said we can't support them financially anymore, but this person is worthwhile maintaining a relationship with. It happened several times. That was one. The other thing is the way it worked, it's no secret that, I mean people, everyone in the city knows where the CIA headquarters in Kabul was. In fact, it was brought home to me very quickly once. I had mentioned before standing at the main gate. We had no communications with the city, very few with government leaders. There was no phone system in the country. People who wanted to see us would simply show up at the embassy and they would give their names or pass a note in to the heavy contingent of marines at the main gate who were there working with the local translators or just local new staff, security staff. I would be called down constantly to the main gate because it was a political group. We had. Do you know what an F hawk is?

Q: No.

METRINKO: Well, it's protection. The marines had a very, very good force protection unit assigned to the embassy a couple of whom were linguists. I mean they spoke decent Persian and these were marine Intel officers whose job was to do Intel work to protect the marine presence in the city. This de facto meant protecting the embassy because the marines were the embassy. We were all part of the same unit. One of their guys would stand down at the gate, too and their job was to sift through who was coming through the gate to see what direction they should be sent in. They developed a real knack for it. We had lines of people showing up. People who wanted jobs, people who wanted to bring in stingers, people who wanted to give us information, people who wanted to rat on their next door neighbor, people who wanted compensation for having lost property during our attack, people who were looking for their relatives who we had put in prison or people who were just curious who wanted to see the embassy. Also, people who were coming in from the provinces and knew they were supposed to pay a courtesy call on the embassy because we were the new power brokers of the country.

The main gate was a gate. It was a big iron gate that opened into a driveway. All the vehicles came in that way. There was a small passenger entrance as well. There was a lead to sort of jerry rigged little security box there along with a larger area that was sandbagged. Afghans would come to the main gate. They would be turned over immediately if they needed something or wanted something to the marine who was doing Intel work. He would determine if they should be set aside to be dealt with by the CIA or if it was a matter for my office and me or if it was something they should be doing. I found the criteria; I found their selection process pretty good. They would call me when there was somebody they knew I would find interesting whether because it was an official who just wanted to pay a courtesy call or because it was somebody who wasn't really CIA material, but we often traded these people back and forth. I would sometimes get called to see if I would meet with the person, for example, call directly by an Afghan or an emissary of the person. I met a large number of high-ranking Afghans because they sent emissaries in. I would determine for example if it came up that the real reason for the meeting was because they had stingers or some sort of.

Q: When you say stingers.

METRINKO: The stinger rockets.

Q: Yes, we were trying to bring them in having supplied them during the war with the Soviets.

METRINKO: We were trying to buy them. Well, if it was that, then I would turn the person over pretty quickly to the marines, who would then turn them over to the CIA. It just depended on what the reason for the person's being there was and again, sometimes the CIA would realize that the person was really a straight political contact and they didn't want to deal with this so they would turn him over to me. But we did, it was sort of like a meat market down there and we traded meat back and forth.

Q: I'd like you to talk about Paul Wolfowitz coming out and an incident that had happened prior to that.

METRINKO: The incident was the bombing in early July by the United States of a wedding party in the village of Dehrawod, D-E-H-R-A-W-O-D. There was reason to believe that former Taliban officials were going to be gathering or at least present at a wedding in Dehrawod. There was a military operation going on in the area. The military believed that one of their planes was being shot at by the people who had collected for the wedding so they called in an air strike. The wedding party or the wedding area was bombed. This happened I think probably on July 1st or so. It happened and we found out about it by late that day because the whole [place] was bombed and the wedding party happened to be good friends and supporters of President [Karzai] in fact. It was his staunchest supporter in the area, the person who had helped him had supported him, who had stayed with him actually when he was fighting against the Taliban. This thing Afghanistan was a dearth of information. It was decided to send a team up immediately to investigate what had happened. A team to go up on the ground. The team was going to consist of special forces, a team of ministry of interior and other Afghan officials including the minister of tribal affairs because familiar with the area and myself as sort of a liaison or bridge between the military team and the Afghan officials. We found out about this, this was all decided late one evening and we were supposed to stage at the airport the next morning at 7:00. The Afghans were there early. I was there early. Special forces showed up several hours late because they couldn't get their helicopters in the air to come from about a 15 minute ride to the VIP section of the airport. They arrived very late with apologies. They had had mechanical difficulties and we flew from Kabul Airport to the town of Tarin Kowt. We were supposed to stage in Tarin Kowt and go up over land from there to _____. A decision was made by the special forces person that he needed more support and so we called in; he called in support for more special forces to come up. They had to drive up. The military U.S. military team, paramilitary team I should say that was at Tarin Kowt did not support us in this. They did not want to go to Dehrawod at all and so they had no vehicles or any other way to help us get up there I believe because they had been part of the actual military operation two days before and did not want to return. The military team arrived very late. It took them far longer to get there, to get to Tarin Kowt than they'd thought and they arrived the next morning. Our departure was delayed and delayed and delayed. We finally departed and because we took the wrong road since no one had brought any guides ended up going up streambeds, riverbeds, etc. It took about six hours or so to get to our destination as opposed to the two hour drive it was supposed to be over what turned out to be a good road we found out.

We arrived, did the investigation which because of our very nature had to be cursory. None of us were trained investigators; we could look for things logically. I could look around at the sight and try and determine and try and see what it looked like compared to a normal Afghan house, whether this indeed was the way a wedding would have taken place, things like that. We stayed overnight in Dehrawod and then the next day. You know, I don't know if we stayed one night or two nights. We stayed two nights I believe because, yes, it would have been two nights that we stayed there.

Q: How were you received?

METRINKO: Well, very strangely. In the village of course people were extremely angry, very emotional. They were extremely quiet, silent, but we had enough high-ranking Afghans with us, ministers and generals, etc. and we also had a lot of firepower with us. We had about 25 special forces guys with big weapons. They showed us the site, took us around and showed us where people had died. The bombs had hit the side of the, had hit the wedding party where the women and children were, not the men. I might add that no weapons were ever found that might have been shooting at the airplane. Also, well, it's like the investigation with the investigation, but we stayed for one night at least, possibly two nights, my mind is blank on this already in Dehrawod at the government guesthouse. It was two nights. It was two nights that we stayed there. I stayed one night sleeping in the guest house which was a large compound with the military and the next night I went and stayed with the minister and the other Afghans at the home of a local official which was far more comfortable. We were received emotionally, but not with over hostility. People were very angry. A great many women and children had died they believed and said.

I did one of the strangest things I've ever had to do in my Foreign Service career at least. The second day we were there when the governor, the general who was with him, the Afghan general who was a deputy minister of the interior and the minister of tribal affairs. The local clergy decided to call everyone together, all the men of the town and area together to have a large prayer service in the mosque. None of my military companions would come to this. I represented the United States government at this ceremony, which had about 1,000 armed men sitting. I sat against the wall of the mosque in the front under where the preachers stand with a couple of the other officials. The commander of the special forces unit did come. He sat in a different place out of the crowd really. I was the one who sat up front and I was the one pointed to as the representative of the American government. It was not easy because everyone of them was heavily armed. Normally they don't carry weapons to the mosque, but they did this time. Then again.

Q: Were you and your military colleagues convinced that this was what it was portrayed as a wedding party?

METRINKO: To this day I do not know what happened there. What I saw was a total absence of blood. There was no blood at all anywhere. A couple of specks, a couple of drops here and there. We walked through a large double compound. We walked up on the roads. There were lots of holes from probably bullets, but no indication of how long the holes had been there. This of course is a big mud wall compound, adobe mud compound. When I asked about blood I was told that it had, they had destroyed all the bedding, all the quilts, all of the mats, the carpets that the blood had seeped into. They finally brought one sort of quilt out to us to show us that was all slashed up, but there was no blood on it. The problem I have with it is that I did not see any indication myself that blood had actually been spilled there. That having been said the clinic insisted that a large number of people had been brought in wounded, hurt and others had died. People who had been wounded were actually seen in Qandahar by military representatives who went down to the hospital in Qandahar. We were shown places where people were buried, but we did not exhume any of the graves to see how long the bodies had been there. I guess what's important is that the people there believed this had happened. They came in one after the other to report to the minister and his staff the names of the people who were killed, wounded, their identifications, etc., daughter of so and so, sister of so and so. When we left they had a whole long list of names of the killed and the dead and the wounded with full identifications. I don't think Afghans would lie about that, but I'm not sure. I don't think so many people would lie about it. I guess I came away from there feeling that yes, indeed something had happened, a lot of people had died, been injured, but a slight hesitation in my mind, did it really happen in the place that we were looking at.

Q: What about the military side of the investigation? How did they feel about it? I mean were they going in to essentially to justify the military action or were they going in to take a look?

METRINKO: The guys who went in there as part of the investigation team and it really wasn't an investigation team, not really. They weren't trained police; they were just guys in uniform. None of them had been part of the operation so we all went in pretty open-minded. Our conclusions I guess because we hesitated. The Afghans were adamant that this had happened and when we came back two days later we went straight from the airport to give a briefing. It was quite clear then that the Afghan team believed that this had happened. These were the people who had died, these names, this number of people. The Americans were more hesitant. Something had happened, but we could not describe it in detail. What happened was that some time after this Wolfowitz came in on one of his quick little jaunts.

Q: Oh, Wolfowitz, the assistant or deputy or under secretary of Defense?

METRINKO: Yes. I gave the regular political briefing during the country team presentation to him, but then the ambassador said that I had also been the officer who had gone with the military team to Dehrawod and I gave a description of what we had done up there. He got angry, quite angry and his comment was, "You sound like you believe the Afghans that this actually happened." I said, "Well, I'm just giving you the evidence. We did an investigation. Our conclusion was that something had happened, but we weren't trained police investigators." He wanted to dismiss the whole thing as though it was a figment of the Afghan imagination. In fact I understand that when he came back to Washington he complained that the political officer there was touting the Afghan line.

Q: You left there after how many months, about, the first time?

METRINKO: The first time I went there it was supposed to be for one or two months max. It ended up being seven. My first break was actually to accompany a CODEL up to Tashkent for one nights, two nights in Tashkent. It was great. It was the first time I was out of Afghanistan. I'd been in Afghanistan for about four months. I finally got my own bathroom, my own bed in a room that was not shared with anyone else because we slept dormitory style in the hallways and in the meeting rooms in the embassy. I came back from Tashkent because I was going to be staying on until August. The State Department decided to give me a break, an R&R and I took two weeks off and spent about ten days in the United States and four days traveling. I came back and left again in August.

Q: Then what happened?

METRINKO: I left in August with an onward assignment as the WAE to go to Yemen to take over the consular section.

Q: You were in Yemen then from when to when?

METRINKO: I was in Yemen from October of 2002 until January of 2003.

Q: When to when now?

METRINKO: October 2002.

Q: To?

METRINKO: To January 2003, four months. No, actually, I'm sorry, I got there in September, it would have been September. I can double check on the dates.

Q: Well, that's all right. What was the situation in Aden at that time? Were you in Aden?

METRINKO: No, I was in Sanaa at the consular section of the embassy.

Q: How different did you find that from Aden?

METRINKO: Very, very different. In Aden I had spent all my time surrounded by guys with guns, surrounded by security forces of my own as the head and principal of an operation although it was only a ceremonial title. In Sanaa I was part of an embassy team in a very well run, well directed embassy which had all the functions of a normal diplomatic institution and I had real work to do all day long and sometimes very late at night. Interesting work and an interesting place. I was also able to go out without security most of the time. I also had my own apartment to live in and that was a semblance of a normal life. Friends, dinners, social life, going to the embassy in the morning, etc.

Q: How did you find, first of all who was the ambassador while you were there or was there one?

METRINKO: The ambassador was Edmund Hull, H-U-L-L.

Q: Yes. What was his background?

METRINKO: Edmund Hull is one of the Department's best Arabists. He spent Peace Corps and much of his career in the Arab world. He is an absolutely fluent speaker. His wife happens to be Palestinian from Jerusalem. You could not have found a better person to be ambassador in Yemen. He was, I mean absolutely perfectly prepared and was going a very good job.

Q: Consular wise what were you doing?

METRINKO: Consularwise, well, Yemen has a large American Yemeni population to begin with, probably about 40,000.

Q: I helped add to that back in the 1950s when I was in Dhahran. I was sending Yemenis to New York and Youngstown, Ohio.

METRINKO: You may have sent the families of the ones we've picked up and locked away.

Q: I remember they used to come straggling in.

METRINKO: Well, the guys who went there in the '50s are now back in Yemen and they're very rich and they have built huge chateau houses and they have big SUVs and their wives have lots of gold jewelry.

Q: You better explain, you used the term SUVs.

METRINKO: Oh, sport utility vehicle.

Q: It's a large almost a pickup truck with a fancy chassis on it.

METRINKO: Yes, exactly, it's like a big Jeep, a big fancy Jeep. The preferred mode of transportation for anybody with money in much of the undeveloped world because you can drive them over dirt.

Q: Where were their wives I mean what were their wives?

METRINKO: Well, you know, the Yemeni American community was very large and it had money that had been made in the United States often at things like running supermarkets, gas stations, commercial life of all sorts.

Q: When I was doing it we were sending them off to work in the mills.

METRINKO: The mills and the car factories.

Q: Yes, but that had ceased. I mean the places had ceased. They'd moved on.

METRINKO: They had moved on. There was a Yemeni American community, which meant there was a great deal of immigration and visa work. There was a great deal of registration of American babies, reports of birth, less reports of death, only occasionally if they had to give [permits to] work to the United States. Because of the number of young children, the number of young women and men who had become American citizens based on their parents having been in America, there was a lot of ongoing immigration work. It was considered something that would add to your value as a bride if you could guarantee the green card to your groom; it upped your price considerably. We had that. We had almost no standard tourism work. I mean Yemenis simply had been banned from going to the United States by us. I was there at a time when all of the new regulations were in effect about either stopping or so rigorously proceeding with Arab visa applications that it was impossible for an Arab male to get a visa to go to America. Unfortunately, many of these procedures had been put into effect that summer which meant that all of the students who had returned to Yemen. The Yemeni students who were studying in the United States could return to Yemen for the summer got stuck and could not return to school in the United States. This was a problem that every diplomatic post in a Muslim country was facing all around that region of the world and it was a major foreign relations problem. We were not giving routine visas to anybody. If you wanted a tourist visa you had to be a real VIP or somehow get yourself an aid referral or be referred to a truant officer of the embassy to the consular section. We did have those. Basically it was a very restrained or constrained visa operation.

NIV was very brisk. We had a steady stream, you know, several a day of NIV work, non-immigrant visa and a lot of American citizen work. We also had a very active warden system. When I was there indeed we had a terrorist attack on the American hospital and three Americans were killed. This was in January of the year 2003. The hospital of Jibla, J-I-B-L-A.

Q: Who did it did you say?

METRINKO: It was done by one man who was very familiar with the hospital. His wife had been a patient there. It was a missionary hospital. The three people he killed were two elderly, I mean, an elderly nurse, an elderly doctor and an elderly office worker, all of whom had been there for many, many years and devoted their lives to the hospital, maintaining it.

Q: What was the motivation?

METRINKO: The trial was just over recently and I haven't seen the results of the trial. I didn't really follow it after I left, but the motivation, my understanding of it was the Americans were doing too well. They were missionaries indeed in a very, very radically Muslim area. They were sort of placid missionaries. If somebody asked them a question about Christianity they would respond. If they were asked for books they would give, but they would not prosthesis actively. The person who did this was what we now call a Muslim fanatic. I'm not sure if it's a good term, but that's what the newspapers use. He did he said because he thought they were having too much of an impact on the community. These were people who spent their time doing good works. They were out volunteering. They were out visiting the prisons; visiting the poor, giving free medical assistance to all sorts of people in the town and apparently bearing witness if you will in the Christian sense. This guy did not like it.

Q: Did you get any feel for the reaction within the Yemeni community?

METRINKO: A lot of reaction. I had been in that town two days before just by chance. I had passed through. I had visited an American prisoner there. We had six or seven prisoners in the country, American Yemeni prisoners. I had done my prison visit. I left and I came back to Sanaa and arrived back in the evening and the next morning I received a call from the hospital from one of the doctors who was crying. He said they had just been attacked and people had been killed. The reaction in the community was I would say extremely outgoing for the Americans. These Americans were very well known. The officials in the community were aghast. The head of the prison for example, in the town told me the next day that, the killer was captured immediately. He was captured that same day. He was well known. The people knew who he was. He walked in and they just thought he was doing regular business in the hospital with the hospital staff when he walked in. The warden of the prison told me they could not even put him in the regular prison when they captured him because one of the doctors, a woman, had been the prison doctor and she had volunteered at the prison once a week and was the one who would talk to all the prisoners. She spoke very good Arabic apparently. She would carry messages to their wives. She would take messages to their kids, bring letters back and forth, etc. She was sort of regarded as a mother by the entire prison population of the city. The warden said that if we bring the guy here, the killer here, the other prisoners will kill him. Now, that having been said, I'm not sure that was how other Yemeni in this establishment and others feel about it, I have no way of knowing.

Q: Did you get any feel for a growing or maybe it was an established fanaticism within the, this Muslim area against the United States? I mean, you know, I mean, well, this is so much has been happening and we are tagged with supporting Israel and attacking the Palestinians and all that. Did you get any feel?

METRINKO: Let me distinguish between Afghanistan and Yemen. In Afghanistan the entire time I was there both times, both in Herat and in Kabul the year before I do not recall any Afghan ever bringing up the subject of Israel or the Palestinians. The average Afghan doesn't like Arabs, doesn't give a damn what happens to them and because they had so little access to the news they don't really know much about- (end of tape)

I remember a chargï¿½ coming back once from a meeting and saying one of the best things about being in Afghanistan is that you don't have to worry about getting beaten up on the Palestinian issue every time you saw an official. Nobody ever mentioned it, they didn't care. I think they disliked, they disliked Arabs so intensely that if they thought about the Palestinian issue they were kind of good. They had no love for Israel either and basically didn't know anything about them. I mean this is Asia. It's not the Middle East. It was far away from things.

Q: Did Iraq play a lot, a role?

METRINKO: No, it did, but it didn't. There was one statement attributed to the governor of Herat who had been, a speech he was giving at one of the local mosques said that the American invasion of Iraq was the same as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Maybe he said it; it was attributed to him, but not clear. The top clergyman, the top mullah, in Herat looked at me when I asked him about Iraq and he said, "We have never forgotten that Saddam Hussein applauded the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and he supported it."

Q: Well, we'll come back.

METRINKO: You know, I think the chief Afghan reaction to our invasion of Iraq was that oh my God they're going to spend money there, they could be spending here instead.

Q: That's one of the political. I mean they're right. It is a matter of concern. How about in Yemen? We're talking about fanaticism and anti-Americanism.

METRINKO: Yemen is very, very different. Number one it's the home ground of Osama Bin Laden. His family is from Yemen originally. His father was Yemeni, not Saudi. Yemen borders Saudi Arabia. Yemenis are always in Mecca. They're in places like that. They're not particularly pro-Palestinian. No one is, but Yemen if you'll recall was one of the few countries that openly supported Saddam Hussein during our first war with him. In fact, they supported his invasion of Kuwait and they paid dearly for that support because when that war was over Kuwait and Saudi Arabia simply ceased giving any assistance to Yemen. So, they paid big time for their support. They learned a lesson then.

Yemen has a far more conservative approach to religion. Afghans and Yemenis are both religious - at least in outward appearance they're both religious - but I never felt uncomfortable for a moment with any Afghan [mullah] I met. They were always hospitable and pleasant. I didn't meet more than one or two Yemeni [mullahs] and they happened to be American Yemenis. In Afghanistan it was very easy to go into a mosque and if you were old you could walk into them. I knew religious leaders. I knew religious teachers. I saw them all the time. In Yemen this simply wasn't done. I don't think that the embassy has any relationship with the Yemeni religious hierarchy that I know of. It's possible the political section did, but we sure did not in the consular section. As opposed to Afghanistan where I had good relations all the time with Afghan religious personnel or people. I never myself was subjected to any sort of pressure or problem because of our support for Israel in Yemen. I was met unfailingly with hospitality and friendliness by Yemenis. On the other hand I don't speak Arabic, so I don't know what was being said, you know, behind my back, but in Yemen I got out a great deal. I went to homes, Yemeni homes for dinners and I left the city many times to go off on visits to see my prisoners, to visit the American communities in various places and the subject was never brought up with me really.

Q: How did you find the Yemeni Americans? How were they, what were they up to in Yemen and were they a problem or not for the Yemenis or the Americans.

METRINKO: No, just the opposite. They were building big houses. They were buying big cars. They were putting up satellite dishes. They had very beautiful houses. I mean, you know, regular little palaces. They were investing in agriculture. There were tractors, things like that. They were opening up businesses and it was considered very much, very desirable to go to America to get involved with one of these families that you could get the money to go to America yourself. Whether or not any of them support Al Qaeda, etc. I have no idea. The ones that I met were friendly and hospitable to me. It's a rather strange thing. It's a town in Yemen called Al Qaeda. That's the name of it. I passed through it at least ten or 20 times on my various visits. It's about six hours from Sanaa. It's funny: the sign at the beginning of the town, "Welcome to Al Qaeda," at both ends of the town, went up after the attack on the towers. There was no problem with it; it's just that so many people wanted to stand to get their photographs taken under the sign. These were mostly the foreigners which I actually have my photograph. Luckily I remembered not to send the film into the United States to get developed. I had it developed locally because I don't know what would have happened if I had sent film in, you know, given the psychologically in America right now and someone had seen me standing with a gun and I had a scarf around my head under a sign that said Al Qaeda.

Q: Going back to my experiences when I was in Belgrade and particularly in Macedonia with Yugoslav Macedonians often went to the United States and then they would come back and get themselves a bride. Do you have a line on this?

METRINKO: You know, big time, yes. In fact, it was sort of standard. You have by now the second and third generations, often the third generations in the United States. People go back and forth all the time. It's sort of like this constant coming and going and sifting of people. Cousins, brothers, uncles, aunts, grandma, grandpa, mom, dad, your daughter, your son are back and forth. Now, the American Yemenis who have not been to Yemen are sent back in their late teens to sort of get to know the place, to spend a year or so with grandma and grandpa or an aunt or an uncle, and very often to pick up a bride or a husband. So, we had a fair number of young American girls who were Yemeni by background coming back to marry guys who spoke no English and we had a fair number of young guys from New Jersey and California who were coming back and had just married a non-English speaking bride from the family village. Yes.

Q: That's kind of fun.

METRINKO: It's kind of fun and they're very often very nice, interesting people. I met a lot of nice people that way.

Q: Yes. You mentioned these Yemeni Americans in jail. What did they get in jail for and how were they treated?

METRINKO: Yemeni jails are not unpleasant, not particularly. In fact, how many did I visit? I visited four different Yemeni jails. Everybody was in jail because of a homicide. Often homicide involving either honor or land. Now, in one case for example, well, an automobile problem involving a death afterwards where the guys got out and had a fight and somebody opened up fire. A fight over land with an uncle and somebody getting killed. People get put into jail and there is a death penalty in Yemen. Somehow or other my predecessors in Yemen had forgotten to pay attention to the prisoners. They simply had stopped visiting and they had stopped keeping records. I've always felt particularly sensitive to knowing about prisoners. It's an important, that's why the Foreign Service is [there], after all.

Q: Yes.

METRINKO: The first thing I did when I arrived there was to ask for a list and then get it checked. The FSN in charge of this had just come newly to the job. He'd only been there for a month or so. He didn't know he was supposed to have been doing this. The officers who had been there had simply not done it apparently. We discovered that one American had been executed and nobody even knew for example. Others were out of jail and others were in jail, but we got it all sorted out. Basically they were American men or American guys who had come there at least in four cases, American guys who had come to Yemen on these long visits and had not understood how far you could or could not go. Yemenis who grew up in Yemen know the parameters of behavior. The American guys would come from California or New Jersey and on arrival at the airport be presented with their own Uzi or their own G-3 automatic or semi-automatic and a dagger and a belt to wear. Unfortunately they didn't know when and how to use this stuff. So I had at least four American young guys because of that sort of dumb, stupid, nice guys, a little bit of testosterone back home, back in Yemen for the first time with too much money, probably reacting to the reaction of Yemeni guys to them.

Q: What about blood feuds? I've that heard in Afghanistan you don't want to get involved with a blood feud, which we can talk about later, but what about in Yemen?

METRINKO: Yes, there are. Yemen has been a fairly stable society for a very long time. Yemeni society is still as feudal as Afghanistan is. It's tribal, feudal, with little remote villages and people who carry individualism to a real large extent living in towers. It's there. I don't know enough about it to go farther than to say that it's there, but certainly fighting over land is common. Two of my young Americans were in prison because they had gotten involved in a fight involving land claims.

Q: Did you run into the problem of Yemeni American guys or just Yemenis gone to the United States, married an American girl, brought her back to meet the folks, had a baby and then she couldn't get out? It certainly was a problem in Saudi Arabia and it continues to be and Iran and Iraq.

METRINKO: The Yemenis have the same sorts of laws that the other countries do about women not being allowed to travel without parental permission or without spousal permission. In my time there we had a couple of cases that seemed to be developing in that way, but they never really developed full-time. In other words, women who came in and would complain about the way their husbands were treating them, but nothing really definite in my time there. We could counsel them, we could give them advice, we could tell them the law and that was about it. No one who ever actually said, "I have to get out of here and I want to take my kid with me."

Q: How about while you were in Yemen did you, how were communications with consular affairs and all that?

METRINKO: Right now, I mean it's good because everyone has e-mail now. In fact all of my officers communicated routinely everyday on their own with their counterparts back in the Department. I did with people in CA. Communications I'd say are excellent now as opposed to pre-e-mail. Now, you have to know who to communicate with. We had good communications. We answered congressionals that way. Most of our congressionals would never have been seen by the ambassador and the DCM. We answered them routinely by e-mail because that's how things are done. It's all e-mail.

Q: Did you find, I mean, you're still a creature of the older Foreign Service and all, did you find this instant communication a good thing or a nuisance or how did you find it?

METRINKO: Well, in general a good thing. You have access now to a great deal of expertise that we never had. In the old days everything would have had to come through the boss who would have then have gotten it through the DCM or through the ambassador even to ask routine questions of the Department. Now you don't have to bother with that. In fact, much of the routine work I didn't have to bother with at all. I could point my officers in the right direction and I could often say, really you ought to ask someone about this in the Department.

To give you an example, because of the changes in visa processing for Arab males were having to wait forever and ever for the FBI and the CIA and the State Department to clear applicants. Even after they were interviewed their names would be sent in and it would take several weeks or several months to get a response from the Department on individual cases. You could work around that by dealing directly by e-mail with the agencies concerned or the Department saying these six cases are okay. They have time until next semester. This one has a week to go and you could have five, ten, 20 e-mails back and forth to get it straightened out. Without ever, no one in the sort of upper floor of the embassy ever even knowing this was happening. Certainly I did that, my officers did that, trying to get things straightened out like that.

Q: I must say, one of the things one always learned as a consular officer even back in my time was try to keep the ambassador and DCM and all out of it because they don't know what you're doing and they're too used to getting clearances and puzzling over it.

METRINKO: Or trying to set you off in a different direction. I would say you know, this embassy was a real exception. The ambassador was excellent. The DCM was excellent. Of course I attended staff meetings all the time. The ambassador was also a personal friend, which makes a big difference. The DCM was one of, I think one of the best DCMs I've ever see, Alan Mizenheimer, I think really, really good. He did not have a strong background in consular affairs, but he knew that he had to understand it. He did a very, very good job. We had every week like clockwork he was down in the section for an hour meeting or an hour and a half meeting on consular issues. He would say things, I would say things and this was, we're going to have this meeting no matter what's happening and we did every week. Plus access immediately whenever I needed it or whenever he needed it for an exception. We worked very carefully with visa referrals, he and I to keep the ambassador's name out of things for example. You don't want your ambassador talking about visas with people at cocktail parties. So, the ambassador and he both knew whenever a visa question came up they would give somebody my card or my name and phone number and ask them to call me and that's how I got it. This worked and they were professional. Very, very professional. They also knew the area so well that it made a big difference, too.

Q: What was your feeling about almost, well, the understandable clamp down on Muslim young men getting visas because you know, to me a name check sounds, names can be dillied with and a short interview is not going to. You know, you say, are you a terrorist and normally the answer would be no no matter what they are. I mean I'm not quite sure what this, how this would work.

METRINKO: Clamping down on travel by Muslim men to the United States and especially on education travel, coming here to study is one of the stupidest things the American foreign policy and security establishments have ever done. The reasoning is simple. The leadership in Afghanistan today are friendly to the United States and open to American officials because they have all studied or lived in the United States. This goes on and on and on country after country I've been in. People make friends, they marry here, often they have wives here and then they go back to their own country and take a position and become very useful both in helping us and explaining us to their colleagues. What we have done is ensured that our successes ten years from and 15 years from now will not have that. That when they go in to see an official in Yemen or in Saudi Arabia or in Indonesia or Malaysia or wherever, 15 years down the road that that person will be somewhat hostile from the beginning because that person either got screwed financially by us or lost his chances of an education in the United States. The people who come to the United States in general to get educated here are people with a little bit of money and a little bit of standing already.

I remember one report from our embassy in Indonesia was that the visa problem, the visas for children of VIPs, members of the parliament, etc., was the major foreign policy issue that the embassy was facing because so many hundreds of them had gone back to Indonesia for the summer and the change had come [before they returned]. I was dealing with very, very well placed VIP students who could not come back to America and who lost either their semester or the rest of their education in the United States. I could think of several cases of that where fathers were highly placed officials and they also lost things like their down payments on their apartments or their... They lost thousands of dollars and it just went on like that.

Q: The problem is anyone knowing anything about the business, the screening really doesn't, it is so I mean it's hard to think that the screening can do anything or if it does it can be taken care. I mean if there is something to it and if you put the name in and it's various ways. It either will turn something up right away or it won't.

METRINKO: Well, I've also, I've always felt this way that if somebody was really coming from an organization who was going to do an act of terrorism against the United States especially now they wouldn't use their own name. They would have a pseudonym or they would be using a passport belonging to someone else and there would be no way to find this out.

Q: Well, Mike I think this is probably a good place to stop and we'll pick this up the next time when you're going to what happened I mean after you left Yemen?

METRINKO: I left Yemen and had a month in the United States and was off to Afghanistan again where I was sent in March of 2003 to be the political advisor at an army outpost, a U.S. army outpost in the city of Herat in western Afghanistan. I spent six months there.

Q: All right, well that's what we'll talk about. You said there were two things I should ask you about.

METRINKO: One is the problem of civilian compensation for damage and injuries and deaths suffered in the American attack on Afghanistan. The other is the question of prisoners of war or prisoners taken by U.S. military and the CIA and the way they are treated.

Q: Okay.

***

Today is the 21st of October, 2003. Mike, before we move on to Herat, let's talk about Afghan civilian compensation for war damages and prisoners of war.

METRINKO: I wanted to bring this up because it sort of fell into a combination of the political and the consular field and covered duties of mine in both those offices. When we attacked Afghanistan to drive out the Taliban and to try and locate Osama Bin Laden we damaged a considerable number of buildings destroyed private homes, the homes of people who were in no way involved with the government or with any effort to attack the United States. We also killed a fair number of Afghan civilians. We destroyed a number of businesses. In Afghanistan there is no insurance if your home is destroyed. There's no such thing as life insurance. There's no such thing as medical insurance especially at that time these things did not exist. This meant that if we destroyed a civilian residence the chances of the family being able to rebuild a house were exactly zero. People built houses over the course of a generation. Very few people had the money or the resources to simply build some place to live in.

The best example of this that I can give is a meeting that I had with the head of the police academy early on in my first stay there in February of 2002. I had taken the representative from the State Department from I&L over to meet the head of the police academy. We were discussing police programs, police policies, etc. This was clearly an important person. He was a very pleasant, very sort of cooperative officer, one of the old breed of police officers who were coming out of the woodwork and taking up their positions again. When our first meeting was finished he asked me if he could speak about a person problem and I said of course. He said, "I sent a letter to the embassy when it reopened in December about three months ago, but I've never had a reply. Did during the American attack on Afghanistan a bomb hit my brother's house? My brother and his wife and several of their children, his wife's sister and his wife's father were killed. A couple of the children survived. I'm now taking care of them. I'm responsible for them, but the house was demolished in this attack. Will the U.S. government ever pay any sort of compensation? These children are now my responsibility, but they have no income, they have no resources, they have nothing left because everything was destroyed when the bomb hit the house." I asked him for a copy of the letter that he had sent to the embassy. I took the letter and presented it once again to the Defense Department, the representatives at the embassy. All of those letters were basically going into a black hole.

Later on in the spring we had a large demonstration at the embassy in front of the compound of people who had lost family members or their homes or their businesses in the American attacks. They were asking about compensation. It wasn't a violent one, but it did take about an hour and a half or two hours to talk to the people and to dispel the crowd. This problem kept surfacing over and over again. We would get letters sent to us by the new Afghan government that had been forward to them by various people. There weren't a lot, but there was a steady trickle and looking at the problem I realized that by spending just a couple of million dollars because housing costs were cheap at that point, it was the property that was expensive, not the houses, spending a couple of million dollars, compensating people for a lost bread winner, a lost caretaker, a child, whatever or agreeing to pay medical expenses for people who had been injured by the American attacks. We could have gained an incredible immeasurable amount of good will from the people. The military stopped that. They refused to consider it. They said they didn't want to set a precedent for a future war or past war. My argument was that they could simply declare this something that was unique for the case, an exception, not a precedent, but to the best of my knowledge nothing has ever been done. The result is that we created quite quickly a class of enemies to the United States when we didn't have to. Granted they had been killed in conflict. It was not necessarily their conflict. They were civilians. They were innocent and we could have taken care of the problem quickly, precisely and to the credit of the United States. Instead there will always be a few thousand people who will say that the Americans killed their mother, their father, their sister and their brother, their daughter, their son.

Q: It sounds like the lawyers take over. The lawyers are all powerful and they have no concept of the repercussions.

METRINKO: If I started to give my opinion of the lawyers in the State Department and the Department of Defense, this would be an x-rated oral history.

Q: All right. POWs.

METRINKO: POWs, well, are they POWs?

Q: Yes.

METRINKO: The Defense Department, the White House, refused to consider Afghans who were arrested by us as POWs. The standard operating procedure was to capture people, to take them not to notify anyone that they had been captured and to simply imprison them, whether it was a dark room at Qandahar or sending them out to Guantanamo in Cuba. Families were not notified. Families had no access. I had a constant round of visitors usually tribal elders, groups coming in from villages and towns, coming to the embassy to ask how they could find out about their son, their brother, their uncle, the village school teacher who had been arrested by the Americans. I worked out a sort of arrangement with the International Red Cross that was in Afghanistan because they did have access although they had very limited access. They weren't happy with their access. In fact they were very unhappy with it and they were routinely not notified by the Department of Defense when people were being moved from one prison to another taken out of the country or changed. There were very good reasons to believe that we were mistreating prisoners. In fact, during one Red Cross visit to a prison they saw two Americans and quite clearly Americans escorting someone who had a hood on his head and the Americans identified themselves as CIA. Then sort of caught themselves and whisked the man with the hood on out of the way and disappeared.

I think that probably the stories the prisoners are telling now, the ones who are being released from Guantanamo have a great deal of bearing in truth. Granted it was a violent time and we were trying to locate people who might have ill will towards the United States, might be planning an attack on the United States, but what we have done is basically tossed out the principles that the Red Cross supports and that we used to support. The problem with this is metafold. Number one it goes against what we think of as the American way of life and our principles. But number two and I go back to my time as a consular officer, I routinely visit or have visited American prisoners in foreign jails. We were not allowing the families, the lawyers or the legal representatives or the embassies of people who were captured by us to be visited, to visit their prisons. It makes it very difficult for me or another consular officer to go to a prison in Yemen in Saudi Arabia, wherever and say I demand to see my American citizen prisoner. We have thrown out that entire principle. That was one of the principles of which the Foreign Service, the State Department is founded. Access to prisoners in time of war. We've allowed the Defense Department to simply toss that away and I think it's going to have pretty serious consequences down the road. We have certainly lost a huge amount of good will in the Red Cross and the international community and much of it I think was probably due to our own incompetence. Many of the people were probably not really serious prisoners. They were picked up. They could have been dropped off just as easily. It was because there was a lack of confidence within the interrogators as to whether or not they should let someone go. It was a lack of original awareness. It was also a lack of language skill. It's going to have consequences all down the road. Talk about creating enemies. The combination of not paying compensation for damage that we caused and then simply imprisoning people and not letting their mothers, fathers, etc., husbands and wives see them or know about their status. That has created a huge amount of ill will in many, many thousands of people and it seems to be to me purposeless.

Q: Well, Mike, this brings us to Herat, but it also brings me to a chance encounter I had this morning. As I was walking to an interview, I met an old colleague of mine, Liz Raspolic, who was with Peace Corps and then served with me in Seoul. She was also ambassador to an African country. I mentioned I was going to interview you again and she said she understood, this is sort of corridor gossip, that you got kind of crosswise with the bureau in South Asian Affairs. From what you've been telling me, you are not a bland person.

METRINKO: No.

Q: This is what goes to make the Foreign Service. You've got people who are calling things are seeing things from a different perspective and are maybe more attuned to the culture. Was there anything to this? Did you get any feel that you weren't a team player or something?

METRINKO: No, not particularly. In fact, when Ambassador Finn talked to me about Wolfowitz, he laughed because he said he had been part of the complaint, too. He had been complained about.

Q: Well, so this may have just been something.

METRINKO: Yes.

Q: Okay, the Herat thing. How did this come about?

METRINKO: I had talked to the embassy before I left about the possibility of my coming back and being one of the representatives at a PRT, a provincial reconstruction, I forgot what the T stands for. Reconstruction Center, yes, PRT. These were now, a PRT, the concept of it has changed over time. It's changed since day one. It was supposed to be and is supposed to be a combined military civilian contingent living out in the provinces in smaller towns, smaller cities that would provide an island of security, help the NGOs and the IOs coordinate their assistance and development efforts and also help extend the hand of the central government into the provinces to show that the central government was indeed helping to develop and assist, helping to reconstruct buildings, do public works projects, etc. The concept of it was fine on paper. The reality of it is something a little bit different. I'd give it a score of probably a solid 80, not a failing score, but not a tremendously successful score either. One problem was that despite the Defense Department's wishes for the American military to coordinate NGO activity, the NGOs had none of this. They were having none of it. In fact they didn't even want to associate with anyone who was carrying a weapon or wearing a uniform. They wanted the soldiers to wear uniforms and to stay out of their way and to stay out of their activities and to sort of not be there. In fact there were a couple of confrontations between NGOs, IOs and American military because of this absolute different concept of the military role and the NGO role in Afghanistan.

In general, in theory rather, the central government out of Kabul will eventually have representatives on these PRTs. In theory there will be AID representatives. In theory there will be a State Department representative to do political work and in theory they will be otherwise staffed by civil affairs, people from the U.S. army who are well versed and trained in providing development and assistance work in conflict areas.

Q: It sure sounds like CORDS from Vietnam.

METRINKO: I know. I kept saying CORDS, but I was the only one of my generation there so nobody else knew what I was talking about. It sounds like CORDS. We all know how successful CORDS was. Nothing like basing an idea on a previous failure. Having said that, originally I think the United States wanted these to be concentrated in American hands but very quickly came to the conclusion that other countries had to take part, too. Number one they were becoming very expensive and number two we wanted to show this was a multi-national effort, not just an American effort. Now, that was the philosophy of them. The reality of them is rather different. There are parts of Afghanistan that don't want to have any development or assistance from the West. It has nothing to do with Taliban or Al Qaeda or anything like that. It's just that they don't want Westerners there. The tribal areas don't want us mucking about telling them to educate their women or to build schools or to build this or to build that. They simply don't want anyone there doing that. Afghans are throughout their history have been a bit xenophobic. That's fine, they don't want it in certain areas.

There are other areas like Herat where they wanted the money from us. They wanted us to rebuild the buildings, but they really would have preferred that we do it long distance and send a check. They didn't much want an armed U.S. presence in Herat province, at least the governor there didn't want it, the local government didn't want it. I'm not sure what the people of the city wanted. I think maybe they probably didn't much care one way or the other, but certainly the governor did not want the Americans there, any sort of military force.

Other problems stem from our ability to staff such an organization. For example, I saw two different teams of soldiers come and go. One was there when I arrived in March. They left in approximately July. The next team that came in was there for a month and a half when I was there. The problem with the teams was that they were good people, they were all nice people, but they were all reservists who had very little or no experience at all in assistance or sort of development projects. The coordination they did with the NGOs was minimal because the NGOs didn't want to talk to them because they were in uniform carrying weapons. The projects that they did were supposed to be quick impact, but quick impact had already passed its time. You do quick impact in your first month. By the time I was there a year had passed or more, a year and some months had passed since our arrival in Afghanistan. I saw for example school buildings that we had put up, we had paid for, had had constructed that by the second year were already in a state of collapse because they were so poorly built. I saw a whole series of projects that AID had done without coordinating them in any way with the military in Herat, which were simply sad, sad, pathetic little projects. For example, one teachers training college, a large building they were putting up on a hillside where the plaster and cement work was so bad that if you just sort of slapped the wall chunks would fall out of it. They were continuing to construct this with very shoddy base materials.

Q: Where was the problem, lack of supervision or just the Afghan construction?

METRINKO: Lack of supervision. No, you could do beautiful buildings in Afghanistan. They have mosques and other buildings that have been up for a thousand years there, hundreds and hundreds of years. You can do great stone buildings. I went, the head of education for Herat Province took me out one day and we spent the whole day looking at ongoing projects, things that were being done, both U.S. military projects, AID projects, other NGO and IO projects. He took me to one school that was being put up by one of the NGOs and the place was spectacular. Extraordinarily well built, solid stone, beautiful stone floors, good electricity, good plumbing. The American buildings were basically shells with latrines out in back, with bare wirings hanging from ceilings for lights. We were building sort of ghettos, ghetto buildings.

Q: Why, I mean, what was behind this?

METRINKO: Again, it was a matter of timing and the belief that you should do as much as possible with the money that you have as opposed to doing a few things well. I could go on. The city of Herat had money. There was a considerable amount of money coming into Herat from customs fees, from taxes, from other sources and all up and down the street that I lived on, all around the city, incredibly fine homes were being built covered in white marble-stained glass windows with a big courtyard, swimming pools, all sorts of amenities and luxuries in them and yet the same people who were building their beautiful mansions were letting their kids go to school under tents. They simply did not seem to care very much. We could build the schools, but the chances of anyone taking care of them are probably pretty slim. There is just not a concept of responsibility for public buildings that way. I would have said after being there that we should avoid projects in the big cities, move out, let the Afghans do things they can do themselves. If they want school buildings they can put them up themselves instead of building luxury homes. Perhaps we should have been concentrating on major public works projects, for example a highway system to unify the country, to allow communications and transportation around the country, and not wasting time, materials, assets and people doing a whole series of piddling little projects that took up too much time and effort.

Q: Talk about the NGOs. What was your impression of the NGOs? How were they, what they were doing and the relationship?

METRINKO: I came to the conclusion after a few months in Herat that the NGOs were not part of any master plan to develop and assist Afghanistan. The NGOs had come to Afghanistan and each of them had some expertise in some particular form of development. They presented their areas of expertise as what should be done for Afghanistan and because everybody was trying to throw money at Afghanistan they were given lucrative contracts to do what they wanted to do. If you look at a list of projects that we have paid for, the United States government has paid for, in Afghanistan, it looks sort of like...

Q: You were saying that it looked like a garden.

METRINKO: It was a garden that was just thrown together, bits of it overgrown, flowers here, some dead things there and just a miscellaneous hodgepodge of projects and public works. We spent an inordinate amount of time doing pissant little projects for women, everything from little sewing machines to teaching embroidery classes to paying to have child care done or things that were fine, but not essential at the time. We have been building little tiny schools all around the country, but probably not allowing for them to be maintained down the road, putting buildings up that will not be easy to maintain and they are ghetto buildings already after one year or a couple of months. When I looked at the projects for Herat for example, there were things like helping women plant a women's garden. Well, that's fine, but we're in a major city of that part of the world. You don't have to spend $40,000 or $50,000 helping a group of women plant a little garden. We were paying farmers to clear out the underbrush in a forest area. This is insane. We were paying people money to clean up their own wells. If an Afghan family is not going to take the initiative, make the effort, expend the energy to clean its own well in front of its own house, screw them. This is not something the American taxpayer should be paying for. A great deal of money and time were spent on all these little tiny things.

Q: Now who was calling the shots on this?

METRINKO: That was the problem. The lack of coordination on development and assistance was beyond [belief]; it was pandemic. I could never even get a cohesive list of what development projects, what assistance projects had been funded in Herat Province by the United States government. It wasn't because there was ill will in the embassy. I don't think the embassy knew. There are a great many different organizations that do funding and in Washington they do not work together. This is a real failure on the part of our central government here. For example, inside the State Department itself you have money that comes from DRL, you have money from INL [Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs]], you have money that comes from the Refugee Bureau, you have money that comes out of AID and you have money that comes out of Cultural Affairs. These people don't talk to each other.

The best example I can give is this. I was out with a combination of special forces and civil affairs people in a town about a day's travel away from Herat. We had gone out there to spend a couple of days basically looking out over the town and doing some site reports about it. The morning that we were departed we had all of our SUVs, these sport utility vehicles, lined up on the road outside the town for a final check and two SUVs pulled up alongside. Out of one of them steps what was clearly an American. He looked American, he sounded American, he was carrying some sort of semi-automatic weapon in his hands and he had a revolver on a belt. He was wearing U.S. army sort of camouflage pants and he had a polo shirt on and a baseball cap. In unmistakably American English he said, "Hey, you guys American?" I said, "Yes, we're American. Who are you?" He said, "I'm the State Department representative here." My reaction was, "Excuse me?" He said, "Yeah, I'm with the Department of State in Washington and I'm up here doing some projects." I said, "Really?" The head of the military team was looking at me and looking at him and I said, "Which office in State?" He said, "With the embassy in Kabul." I said, "Really, I thought I was the Department of State representative in this part of Afghanistan. What exactly are you doing?" It turns out he was a former special forces guy who had retired and gotten a job with a private company that had a contract with INL.

His company had a contract with them to put a radio network in for the Afghan national police. They were putting it in all the provincial centers so that the police could talk to one another. Now, he had two SUVs and I think they had diplomatic plates on them. He had another American with him, also armed. He had an escort of Afghan police including the one of the provincial police's top ranking people. Then he told me he had spent the day before with the governor of Herat at a meeting. Now, he was doing a project, U.S. taxpayer money, funded by the Department of State, great. I asked him how the had gotten the cars. Did he drive all the way from Kabul because you're a long way from Kabul, maybe 500 miles? He said, "No, we had a C-130 drop us off yesterday. They brought in the cars for us and they dropped us off yesterday morning and then we met with this [group] and then we came up here." I looked at the army guys who were with me and they said, "Do you mean a C-130 arrived at the airport yesterday?" "Yeah." Well, as it turned out he did have a project that he was working on. I went back, I was seething about this, so was the army because the army commander who was with me was the commander for the whole area and he didn't know a C-130 had arrived the day before at the airport that he was responsible for. We go back to our team house and I sent off an e-mail asking the DCM and the head of the political section and Bill Taylor, who was the head of development assistance at the embassy, what's going on, who are these people? They're armed and they're introducing themselves as Department of State. I don't like this. Are they Department of State? Who are they? The head of the political section came back and said I have no idea. It's the first time I'm hearing anything about this. The DCM answered a day later. He said, I have to check; this might be an INL project. But it was like nobody had bothered to coordinate it inside the embassy. Nobody had bothered to coordinate it with the Department of State representative there and it was basically a display of incompetence and stupidity on the part of the State Department, this lack of coordination.

Now, that having been said, I'd had a meeting just the week before with the head of police for the whole province, on which I had sent in a report that was distributed inside the embassy. He had talked about the problems with communication with other police facilities. They had the report and yet it never occurred to anyone to think that maybe they should tell me there was a project like this going on that my taxes were paying for. This was one example of what was happening all the time there. I was really angry about that. Fine, I could understand how it could happen.

Not long afterwards an AID officer who was responsible for projects out in the provinces was in Herat on one of her periodic site visits. She had been there for a couple of days. She was staying with us. I was invited out by a newspaper reporter who had just come in and wanted to have coffee with me at the United Nations guesthouse. I went over to the guesthouse and we were sitting there having coffee and an American guy walked up and introduced himself and said that he was there working with AID. I looked at him and said, "You're here with AID?" He said, "Yeah." He handed me a card and indeed it was an AID business card. I said, "What are you doing here?" He said, "I work with the Ministry of Finance. I'm here as one of the inspectors and an advisor to the ministry of finance. I've been here for a couple of months now. You know, I stopped over at your house before you arrived and I just said hello to people about two or three months ago. I should have gotten back, but I never did." Well, here we have somebody from AID living with the United Nations number one, which is contrary to all of the security restrictions that we had. That's fine, I won't even get into that part of it. I went back and told the AID person who was staying in our house for a few days. She had no idea. She had no idea who the person was. The AID director in Kabul did not know there was an AID contractor living in Herat and working at the ministry of finance. He apparently went ballistic when he found out. Now, the Ministry of Finance happened to be one of the most sensitive ministries in Herat for all sorts of American policy reasons. We were having a major problem. The central government was having a major problem with the governor of Herat collecting customs and other taxes and refusing to send the money to Kabul. He was keeping all the money for use in Herat by himself. The Ministry of Finance was totally involved in this. Here we had an American AID advisor who was part of this, looking at this, but no one knew he was there. It was just this sort of lack of coordination. Unfortunately it could be seen all up and down the bureaucracy and the structure, the infrastructure of both military and State and development, that we had constructed in Afghanistan. You never knew what the other hand was doing on projects.

The last example which is really quite funny. The civil affairs team was going to build an office building and school for the administrative women's affairs branch in Herat. This was a great project. The women were studying and working and they were centered in what was a very small, somewhat ramshackle, house, very inadequate and not easy to get to, etc., very inappropriate for school facilities. They were trying to teach women, widows, other women who were breadwinners, skills that they could use out on the market. We had the money for the school. We talked about it up and down. We went through all this with the Ministry of Planning with the Department of Education, with the Ministry of Rural Development and with the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Fine. We submitted (I say we because I thought of myself as part of the army team there) a proposal to the authorities. It was approved by the American authorities after they had vetted it with the central government and then we presented it as a project proposal just as sort of an info to the governor of Herat. He called us into a meeting and he said. He had told the Ministry of Women's Affairs director in Herat that he didn't want it done because another building was already being put up by the American government for that same ministry; why were they doing two? We didn't know what he was talking about. I have to admit that this was a combination of American incompetence combined with an Afghan sort of stupidity. It's a great combination. The head of the Ministry of Women's Affairs knew indeed that AID had also put a project proposal in to do exactly the same sort of building. They were doing it through IOM, the International Office for Migration, the national organization of migration. She hadn't told us this. We'd been talking to her for about two months about a building project. AID and IOM had been talking, but AID had never told us what they were doing and we had never told AID. We only found out when the governor called us in and said he couldn't accept this because it was a waste of money to put up the same building twice in the same place. We had no idea what he was talking about. While we were sitting in her office and she was sort of looking up in the air trying to avoid our questions, the phone rang. Her deputy or one of her office workers went over, answered the phone, turned to her and said, "It's the people from IOM. They want to have a meeting with you so they can bring over the plans for the new building they're doing." I immediately said, "What? IOM is putting up a building for you?" "Oh, yes, maybe, perhaps." We left and went over to IOM and found out that IOM, which was the contractor for USAID, was indeed far down the road in planning for this. AID had agreed to it, they had the money, etc. This is the sort of lack of cooperation that we had faced, that all the NGOs, the IOs, the American government and its military civilian hats face there all the time, aided and abetted by Afghan willingness to grab as much money as they can while the grabbing is good.

You asked about my opinion of the NGOs in general. On a scale of one to ten, a solid five. Neither very good, nor very bad. They were there to do their thing and to get paid well for it. There were some groups that were there because they were Christians who were proselyting in a very sort of quiet manner. I won't even touch that. It's something that I think is counterproductive and it could lead them to get killed like it led my missionaries to get killed [elsewhere].

Q: I have to say that I think our experience and we're talking about several centuries of experience, Christian missionaries have done almost zilch, nothing in Muslim areas.

METRINKO: They've put up a lot of good hospitals.

Q: Good hospitals, but I'm talking about conversions.

METRINKO: Oh, conversions, no, zero.

Q: Yes.

METRINKO: Zero, I know. The occasional person who goes to work on the missionary compound and is getting a salary is fine, but that's it. I know and I agree with that completely. But on the other hand without them I know [that] much of the school system in Iran would not exist. The best schools in Iran were built by missionaries in the 19th Century. Absolutely fine schools and they continue to this day.

Q: I won't say exactly because I don't think anything is exact, but particularly as you described it, what was your job?

METRINKO: What was my job? That's a good question. My job was something that I kind of created for myself. My job was to be the political officer in Herat. This meant four provinces in western Afghanistan because the country was divided up into sectors. My job was to get to know the political leadership in my area, to explain American policy to them, to report back to the embassy on what was happening in the provinces. The military teams that were in Herat and in other sections of the country did indeed do reporting, but their reporting was not analytical. Their reporting, military reporting, is more like a diary. You give long lists of everything you did during the course of the day and you send it up that night and it goes into some vast maelstrom of facts and figures. The problem with the military reporting was that it was just that, it was this huge amount of data, a fair percentage of which was inaccurate or basically simply wrong because they could not speak the language or did not know quite what they were seeing. Much of it was fine, but much of it was also useless. It's also incredibly boring to read because it's just long lists of what we did today. They did give equal prominence to meeting with the governor along with getting bread from the bakery. They don't do analysis; they're not supposed to. It's a different way of looking at things. I was supposed to sit back, think about what was happening, look at the area, look at trends, look at the future, look at the past, talk about what people were saying and thinking and that's what I did.

Q: What was the situation there? In essence was really the war over and we were reconstructing or was it still a war time situation or how did you see it?

METRINKO: I don't think there's ever been a time in Afghanistan when there wasn't some sort of political violence going on. When you had lulls, when there were no foreign invasions, you had the tribes and families having feuds. That's of course continuing. Is the war over? No. It might have been except that the warlords are playing games. There are a number of political figures, military figures in the country who are trying to carve little bailiwicks for themselves. Afghanistan today is perhaps best compared to early Renaissance Italy or medieval Italy with lots of little mountain cities, lots of villages, lots of little areas controlled by lots of little wardlings and this happens because again there's no way to communicate with the rest of the country. So, the little wardlings, what do you call them, war lords or generals or khans or whatever title you want to use for them, basically have a great deal of political, military and social control over their immediate areas. Sometimes these wardlings band together. Sometimes they fight each other. It has not been a particularly sanguine type of administration for the country. This is what prolonged the civil war. It prolonged the conflict in Afghanistan for at least an extra ten years. This is what led to the destruction of Kabul. It wasn't the Soviets bombing Kabul. It was the stupid little warlords playing their games and trying to destroy each other, all of it for personal gain. I did not see any indication whatsoever that any of the warlords I met had any moral, religious or philosophic fiber to them. These were not people interested in Afghanistan. These were people interested in their own power, lining their own pockets and they were quite prepared to let the country go to hell if it meant that they could become richer.

Q: In Herat, what were you seeing? Was there a warlord in Herat?

METRINKO: We had the best of the bad lot, yes. Let me say one thing about Herat first. Herat was perhaps the most peaceful city in Afghanistan. Herat was certainly the most prosperous city in Afghanistan. Herat was only about five hours, no, only about four hours, three and a half, four hours from the Iranian border. It was a fairly decent gravel road that went to the border. All surface transportation. All surface cargo traffic that came out of Europe had to come through Herat to reach Afghanistan. Europe wasn't that far away from Herat. It may sound funny, but you can cross Iran in two days' travel and you're in Turkey and two days across Turkey and then you're in Europe. So, it's close. This was the way that the tourists traveled up until the mid-'70s. There was lots of ground transportation; busses would go to Kabul from Europe. With that having been said, Herat had not had any recent damage. The [Soviets] had not fought over the city the way they had over Kabul. In fact, you'd be hard pressed to find a building in Herat that had been demolished and that still needed renovation. We were looking at one point for a building to reconstruct or remodel as the headquarters for our office. Under the military regulations for assistance, you can renovate or reconstruct something that exists. You cannot build from scratch. You can't build something brand new on new land. You have something that exists and renovate it. When we talked to the governor and the mayor of the city about this, the governor simply laughed and he said, "If you were in any other city in Afghanistan, there would be lots of places. There's nothing in Herat. It's all been rebuilt. We have no buildings like that now." He's right. He also of course didn't want us in his city so even if he had been wrong he still would have said that. The city was prosperous. Houses in the city could and did cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. The homes could be palatial. I saw many homes, many homes in Herat that could very easily be situated on Foxhall Road and would look quite appropriate there.

Q: Foxhall Road being probably the premiere residential area of Washington, DC.

METRINKO: There were homes that I would love to be able to look at.

Q: Where's the money coming from?

METRINKO: Well, that's a good question. There is and was and has been considerable trade between Iraq and the West. There are two sources of money. The first one first. Legitimate trade from Herat that exports carpets. It's a carpet-exporting center for Afghanistan and the carpet bazaar in Herat had hundreds of good carpet shops. They export wool. They would export things like nuts, raisins, dried fruits, agricultural products, lamb, sheep, etc. They also export workers. The people who left Herat during the time of conflict went to Iran in general. In Iran they worked, they didn't sit in camps. They sat in camps, they lived in camps very often, but they also worked. Heratis have been going to Iran to work for from my own experience back in the 1970s, I remember Afghans coming at that point before there was ever a war or simply any kind of problem in Afghanistan. Because they went to Iran they learned even better buildings, trades and they had known that in Afghanistan when they came back they built buildings following the Iranian models. This is why you had beautiful homes, some very beautiful public buildings as well.

I had to do a just a quick sort of study once for the Bureau of Trade here in the United States where they were questioning an Afghan's request, I'm sorry it was from OPIC, Overseas Insurance Cooperation, O-P-I-C, where an Afghan had requested a loan. He had described his business partner or his sources of supply in Herat and I was asked to go and talk to some of these people and see if it was legit. Well, that's when I discovered that a great deal of people in Herat had partners, I mean they had offices in Dubai and offices in Iran and sometimes in Europe as well. It was all for the export of things like wool, agricultural products and they were doing quite well. The other source of supply. I'd spent an afternoon once with the minister of housing who was visiting Herat. As we were driving around the city I pointed out a street of brand new beautiful homes and I said, "Will you please tell me where people who always say they're making $30 a month are getting the money to do a $300,000 home?" He said, "They're all drug smugglers. The city is famous for it." Opium. We would get reports about major city officials all the time who were involved in this, major government officials.

Q: Was this something we just observed or was there a problem to do something about it?

METRINKO: We had no problem to do anything about it. Nothing at all. I kind of doubt that the names of people were even being put into the program for visas.

Q: How did you relate with the military?

METRINKO: Whose military?

Q: Our military.

METRINKO: Oh. I thought they were great. I had a lot of fun with them.

Q: They must have felt like strangers in a strange land.

METRINKO: You know, they did, but they adjusted pretty quickly because we had a strange living arrangement. When I got there we had three different houses. Two of them on one street within a block of each other and another one several miles away. The one several miles away was occupied by the special forces. The other two were by civil affairs. We all seemed to get along quite well. Of course there were personality differences based on personalities with different people. Different people with different people and that's fine, you're going to have that in any group. In general it worked out very well. I was the imbedded civilian. The military were not what you'd call. I mean they were professional, but they were also all reservists. They all had lives outside of the military and they understood civilians because they all were civilians or within a month of becoming one or a month or two of having been one. They wore uniforms and basically pretty competent. I had no problem with their military abilities whatsoever. They certainly kept up their skills. They had steady training programs themselves. They went out and did shooting this, that, all sorts of drills outside in one of the closed out military areas for the Afghan army. I'd say enough discipline tempered with common sense that they were not in a military base in the United States. Actually they had to sort of meld into the civilian atmosphere they found themselves in. One thing, when I talked before about the competence of the people who were sent to do public works projects and assistance projects, I would say that the military has a lot of training it has to do for their people because they pull people out of areas where they really did not have training to do engineering work, public works projects and put them into this without really giving them any training. You can't quite do that. We do it all the time in the State Department. We do it in other places, but it's difficult. It's when the military talks about their resources and says they have a million or two million or three million people they can throw into a situation, yes, they have the numbers, but it doesn't mean that those people have the training and the background and the experience to do the job that's required of them. For everyone there it was very much a learn on the job type thing.

Q: What about the Afghan authorities military, civil at this particular point in time? How did you find dealing with that?

METRINKO: They were at least to our faces universally friendly, pleasant, easy to deal with. I had rather little relationship with the Afghan military authorities there. I knew them, but a very limited, I had just paid some courtesy calls. That was it. I would see them at functions. Our special forces team was responsible for maintaining a relationship with the Afghan military. With other civilian officials in the governor's office, with the ministries, all of the ministries in Kabul had branches in Herat staffed by people from Herat, but selected by the governor of Herat, but approved by the ministries in Kabul. We had very good relationships with the ones we dealt with all the time. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs for me, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Women's Affairs, etc. I'd say very cordial relationships to the point where we were also invited out by them. They occasionally would extend personal invitations to their homes or the gardens.

Q: You were mentioning an awful lot, I don't mean to be derogatory, but sort of piddling little things that were being done in order to improve the lot of women which of course had really caught our attention because of the horrible things that the Taliban had.

METRINKO: Politically correct.

Q: The Taliban and many of the inherence that might not be Taliban, tribal people, what was your impression of how that was working and what was happening?

METRINKO: In Herat it probably wasn't happening or working very much, just like it not happening or working very much in the rest of the country. There has never been as far as I know a government or a culture in Afghanistan that believed women were equal to men. Women have been kept under wraps, shrouded for all of modern Afghan history. One of the kings of Afghanistan back in the early 1930s lost his position as king because of a photograph of his wife circulated showing her with short sleeves and he was tossed out as king for that. Now this was in the 1930s. To this day even though they pay lip service to the concept of equality, there is no one in the government of Afghanistan who really believes in it. President [Karzai], despite his Western education, the fact that his family lived in America, Europe, etc., the fact that his wife has a very good education, there has never been a photograph of her in the press that I know of and she is never brought out in public. So, no one sees the president's wife, no one sees the wife of any official there. None of the officials of the country believe that women are equal or should have public access no matter what their education might be or their status. When we go in and talk about programs and projects for women, the women who are allowed to take part in this are the widows and sort of the women who have nothing else. The women who have no male protectors or no other way of getting assistance whatsoever. Afghans don't talk about women, they don't joke about women, they never discuss their wives, their mothers, their daughters, unless it's a daughter who is very, very young, like under the age of four. They simply don't. It's just a subject that with a normal Afghan you don't even raise. I've been in places where I've seen thousands of men wandering all over and no women at all, even in the small towns, you don't see women. Now, it's great that we are trying to improve the lot of women there. It's not going to be done by teaching them embroidery or by giving them money to clean up a garden. It will be done over the next generation when the country gets fully exposed to what the rest of the world is. Having said that, women do teach, girls in Herat go to school in huge numbers. There were in, the statistics for the number of students in Herat Province was something like 400,000 students in the province almost 50% of whom are girls.

In the first year of school, the first grade 100,000 students, in the second grade 90,000. The other 200,000 were spaced out from grade three to grade 12. This is because schools have reopened; girls have been allowed to come back. What Afghans have learned I believe from being refugees because there are several million who are refugees is that women have to be educated. This applies to the younger ones, now, the ones who are coming out. What we are looking at is an Afghanistan that will change tremendously in the next several years as more and more girls are educated. Right now what we have is something like a 90% or 95% rate of illiteracy for women. The mothers, people whose sisters, aunts and the grandmothers are all behind walls and behind their veils. It's almost like a lost generation. As far as resource allocation is concerned, probably there's not much you can do there.

Q: Well, again, how about TV and the Internet and all this?

METRINKO: It's all changing rapidly. When I got to Afghanistan in January of 2002, there was nothing of the above. Television stations starting opening up. The Taliban had television, but it was city by city which meant that there were studios in each of the major cities and you could get transmission only if you lived in that particular city. There was no cooperation or coordination between the various television transmission stations. So, if you watched television in Kabul last year in 2002 because it was controlled by adherence by the minister of defense, what you got was, "what is [he] doing today and if." In Herat the local television station was like a Muslim religious channel. All you had was sort of unhappy singing, music where you just had question and answer sessions, where there are just speeches or what is the governor doing today, what did he do yesterday? I'd be on TV quite frequently as a matter of fact because every blessed visitor who went to his office was filmed and it was part of the news. Every time I went to see him I was on the news that night.

Now, what was also happening, the wonders of modern technology. You could get a satellite dish in Herat and get something like 226 channels from around the world and lots of people had this. There were satellite dishes on every building, not every building, not the village houses in the city, but anyone who was middle class had a satellite dish. The very first dinner I went to in Herat at a private house, occurred oh, maybe I'd been there for about ten days and some Afghan guys at a soccer match invited me for dinner. They were university students. I went to their house for dinner. We were sitting on the floor in their huge sort of reception room and the father and the uncle were there in their long white robes and these guys were there. They were having a very traditional meal when a couple of the little girls from the family, aged maybe 6, 7, 8 years old, came in and asked their father if they could watch TV and he said yes. They went over to the TV in the corner and switched on the European version of MTV.

Q: You might explain what MTV is.

METRINKO: MTV is the basically a music program that shows the latest in music videos. I think it's gotten a bit too much. They turned on a program where I'm sitting with a couple of old men in beards and we're talking about Islam philosophy and American assistance to Afghanistan and out of the corner of my eye I am watching nude dancing. No one thought there was a problem here. Now, these university students told me that they'd had a satellite TV in that house all through the Taliban and kept it concealed. They were rich. The rich have satellite TV. We had a satellite TV in our house for our use and we got 226 channels. Of course it was always kept on AFN, the Armed Forces Network, but you could get channels from all over the world including directly from the United States. Now, what did people listen to in Herat? Herat radio was sad; it was limited scope, not much imagination, very little planning or programming. Herat television was the same. [Iran] was only five hours away by car. We got broadcasting from [Iran] and anyone who had a TV could pick up Iranian television stations. You had a pretty good range of Persian language transmission and good music, good shows, good movies, good films, etc. The Iranian version of the news, always the Iranian versions of the news.

Q: Well, this brings up another question. We obviously have been concerned since 1979 about you had a certain role in this about Iran and meddling in other countries in spite of the Shiite village and all this. What were the Iranians, what was the Iranian influence here in Herat, which was called the window onto Iran or the door to Afghanistan?

METRINKO: I approached it with a certain sense of irony because we had 10,000 or 11,000 American soldiers occupying the country of Afghanistan. We had soldiers in all of the major cities and in some of the non-major cities in units like the one I was assigned to and were conducting military operations. It's an American guard forces that lives with the president in the palace and protects him. So, talking about Iran interference in the country of Afghanistan is a bit, but having said that. Iran and Afghanistan share a language. They share a culture. They share a religion. They share a common border. They share travel and history. They share literature. They share music. This may be less true for the [more distant] areas, but it's very, very true for Herat. Herat and [Iran] have been linked throughout history in every possible way and very often in history they were ruled by the same person as the two ends of the property of the local leader. In Herat today if you want to go to Kabul you have to drive 400 miles over a dirt road. It takes two full days and there are security problems along the road. You get stopped. It's a hell of a drive. No one does it. There are very high mountains between the two cities, 400 miles of mountain. It makes it an unpleasant and difficult in bad weather to get anywhere. On the other hand, if you are living in Herat and you want to go to a good furniture store, you want to buy nice clothes, if you want to go to a good doctor, go to a good dentist, if you want to go to a good school, all you have to do is drive a couple of hours and you're in one of the most developed cities in Iran.

Q: Any motor problems in getting through the guards?

METRINKO: Not really. If you want to go to work, you have to get a work visa. But for most people if they're just going for a couple of days, it was no problem at all. I've been told that. Certainly anyone who had a serious medical problem went to [Iran]. Now, out of all of the young men I knew in Herat, let's say 100 right here, I'm counting the guards that we had, other people I'd met, the young students that I'd met, the young guys who worked in the shops and the stores that I would talk to, every single one of them without exception had been to Iran. Many of them had studied there and had lived there for a number of years. Not one had ever been to Kabul. Over the last two and a half decades, travel to Kabul had simply become impossible. It was either war or the Taliban or there was no reason to go there. Kabul had nothing to offer. The good university had sort of disappeared in the 1970s in a political maelstrom. So, if you wanted to go to a good school and you sure weren't going to go to Kabul. If you wanted to get anything at all, a medical checkup, there was no reason to go to Kabul, there were no good doctors there either. People simply went to Iran. Now, having said that, Afghans were not treated well by the Iranians. Iranians think of Afghans as being-

Q: Hillbillies?

METRINKO: Hillbillies, even worse, far worse. At their best the Iranians treat Afghans the way the we treat- (end of tape)

At worst they could be treated very, very harshly, badly. The Iranians dislike Afghans. They think of them as inferior. The head of security in Herat was talking about Iran once. He gave me a list of reasons why he disliked the country. He had had lots of problems with the country. His mother had lived there because she didn't want to come back to Herat so he'd have to go and visit her, but he hated doing it. He said even when, he said, the Iranians look down on us. He said, when I'm talking to an American whether or not I agree with the American, I know that the American is looking at me as an equal. He's talking to me like I'm a real person. He said, when Iranians talk with me even though I'm a high ranking official, they look down on me. He said you could see it in the way they talk and the way they act. He said even when they call you "brother" when they're being Islamic, they mean you are the younger brother, you're not the equal brother. Talking to another, I remember a woman who was [one] of the representatives, talking about her time in Iran. I asked her how long she had spent there and she said she mentioned the number of years and she said they were the unhappiest days of my life. I have no good memories of Iran. You would get this over and over again. It was sort of like they had to be there because they had lost their homes, they had lost their jobs, conditions had gotten so bad in Afghanistan, they'd have to run away, but they didn't like being there and the Iranians treated them like they were savages.

Q: The refugees from Herat were not any of them from Pakistan?

METRINKO: No, they weren't.

Q: These were ones that had gone to Iran to be refugees.

METRINKO: Yes, they went to Iran because to go to Pakistan was a two day trip and you'd be going through much of the country that you were trying to get away from.

Q: Also, they would find themselves in essentially an alien culture.

METRINKO: Yes, so the Heratis tended to be far better educated than other people in Afghanistan. Even the women, it was a higher level of education for women in Herat than in other parts of Afghanistan and this was traditional. I think quite a bit of it because of this relationship with Iran. What is the significance of Iranian involvement now? Well, if you're the governor of Herat you have to be on good terms with Iran. A big part of your electricity comes on lines straight out of Iran into Herat Province. All of your trade coming from the West, all of your machinery, your cars, your busses, your trucks, anything that is being imported into the country is coming through Iran and the Iranians could turn off those spigots immediately. All of your younger men from the villages and towns who are job hunters have gone to Iran to look for work. They either have in the past or they are there now. Many of your friends probably many of your relatives still live in Irn because they simply have not come back to Afghanistan not trusting that it is secure yet. So, you have that. You have the cultural influence. You listen to music from Iran. You listen to the radio from Iran. Our cook had spent several years in Iran and the radio station that you played in the kitchen was also the [Iranian] radio station. The soap in our house was from Iran, the detergent, lots of the food in our house came from Iran. If we bought new furniture, desk furniture, you know, paper, things like that locally; it was always from Iran. There is a very, very strong relationship. It's not one based on love, but it sure is based on necessity and good business.

Q: Well, then Mike, you're an old Iranian hand and had been as we documented before, very much versed in Iranian affairs. Were you getting any reflection of what I consider the ongoing civil war revolution in Iran sort of between the modern and the Islamists and I don't know, you've described it differently. But I mean I assume you couldn't help but being picking up vibes.

METRINKO: I've talked to a lot of Afghans who had lived in Iran, had visited there including people who had seen the actual demonstrations by the students and seen the reaction, but I wasn't getting what I considered really good information. They didn't go there for that reason and they generally were in the eastern part of Iran and not in the places where there was a problem. Now, they did talk and even joke a lot about how Iranian friends would tell them how lucky they were that they had the Americans. They said that Iranian friends would congratulate them for having the American army there. They would say they wished it would come to Iran, but that's as far as they could go with that. I don't want to talk about Iran unless I go there and see it myself.

Q: No, no, I understand, but I was wondering, you were getting reflections. Was Mashhad, where did it fall in the Iranian political spectrum?

METRINKO: Mashhad is a very wealthy city, which sits smack dab in the middle of the saffron industry. It's centered there. It has an incredible income because it possesses the shrine of the leading Iranian saint. Every good Iranian does pilgrimages there whenever there's a life crisis or lots of other times. It's a manufacturing city, a major cultural, political and economic influence on the country. The previous religious leadership of Mashhad that was there until the Iranian revolution was shunted aside and the previous religious leader of the city was put under house arrest. He has only come out of house arrest in the last three or four years and is still adamantly almost anti-Khomeini and anti-Islamic government. He's known for making comments in public even now that he's out from under house arrest. That having been said, it probably will not play a significantly role in the political life of Iran.

Q: Well, now, we're coming to the end of this episode aren't we, don't you think? Is there anything else?

METRINKO: I guess [we are]. What's happening now, when I left Afghanistan in August of 2003 the PRT, the future, was being talked about. They were expanding. More countries were taking over more of the PRTs, New Zealand, England, Germany, etc. The security profile is changing there. NATO is now in there as the international security force. I understand that the security presence of ISFA, International Security Force for Afghanistan, is going to be extended to other cities in the country, so things are changing. Whether this will improve the security of the country or simply embroil what we call a green-on-green law I don't know. You know, the expression green-on-green?

Q: No.

METRINKO: Green-on-green is when local people fight and up until I left certainly the standing rule was we do not get involved. If the local governor and the local police chief want to go at it tooth and nail we let them. We're not supposed to be involved in local warfare. It's probably a good idea because it was never quite clear to me whether the Department of Defense, the Department of State and various other agencies were supporting the same leaders in Afghanistan. In fact I would say that we weren't.

Q: Well, I've just finished interviewing someone who was essentially DCM in Mogadishu when we were going against Aidid and this is where we got involved in a green on green war. It came out badly and it usually does with this type of thing.

Mike, one final question. I have a certain malice of forethought in asking this because I think we've been over this before. You had these experiences. You obviously spoke the language and all. Did you find that you were able to pass on your knowledge through debriefing or something other than sort of chatting with people in the corridor? Did anybody sort of ask you what you were doing and how things were going and that sort of thing?

METRINKO: In the State Department?

Q: Yes.

METRINKO: No. Well, I know that my reports were well read. All of us and because we had representatives in several different cities when I was there from the State Department, it was a bit strange. We were doing reporting, but getting no feedback and never seeing a final version of what we did and sent up to the embassy.

Q: You would send it to the embassy and it would go through its filter I guess then?

METRINKO: Yes and then it would go off. I never once saw an incoming piece of traffic to the embassy because I didn't receive traffic out in Herat. Therefore, I did not know at all what the embassy was reporting. Remember the old cases in the 1700s of what they used to call the wolf children? Children who were found in the woods and had been raised without any human companionship. Sometimes I felt like that as far as my reporting was concerned. I was out there. I was doing things like meeting people, talking to people, representing the American government or the American Embassy anyway, that part of the government, and doing reporting, but all of it without any sense of being part of a system or an organization. I was just out there and my salary was being put into the bank, but no one ever told me what they wanted me to say, what they wanted me to do. I was told that they trusted me to do whatever I thought was necessary. Now, I don't know whether that was a failure based on lack of planning in the State Department or whether they just felt that they could get more from me if they just let me do my own thing.

Q: Now, was there any attempt made to get your people doing your job in other places all together to chat up?

METRINKO: Oh, no.

Q: I was in Italy and every once in a while they would bring the consuls general together to talk about what was happening in Italy and here is a place that's so crucial.

METRINKO: No. I spent six months in Afghanistan, in Herat rather and in the whole six months I went up to Kabul once in the middle of my time. I only went up because the Afghan student who was living in my house in the United States had come back to Kabul to visit his parents and I wanted to see him. I found out quite by chance that one of the other State Department people from one of the other PRTs was also in the embassy, but we had no relationship either by communications or any other way [with] each other. The embassy certainly did not. There was never a general meeting, in other words, of those of us who were out in the provinces with the political section or with any other section in the embassy. No one coordinated this.

Q: How about your reports, e-mails, were they circulating around, were you able to read traffic from other people?

METRINKO: No because they all did the same thing. They sent their reports directly to the political section.

Q: I come out of the Vietnam era and I remember a lot of my colleagues who were provincial reporting officers and they would go to the political section and many of them were not very happy with what came out. I mean was there any, did you pick up any of that or is it just a blank?

METRINKO: I don't think there was any great degree of disagreement about the country between myself and the political section. The political section in Kabul did no traveling at all. It was locked into its office in Kabul and because of the constant security, the perception of constant security problems, apparently rarely left the environs of the embassy. It was also a transitory section; people changed all the time. They're weren't assigned for very long and no one had the language there. One person had a language, I take that back, in the economic section. I had no sense of unity with the political section. I sent my reports to the political counselor, the head of the section, the job that I'd had the previous year. He was receptive and I understand that most of my stuff went out without being changed, but I've never seen it. I've only seen one of my finished telegrams out of all the things that I wrote; so I really don't know how much they were editing or changing what I was saying.

There were two ways they could have handled this. We live in the age of e-mail. I could have gone to Herat and I could have sent draft copies of informal copies of all of my reporting directly back to people in Washington. I chose not to do this at all because in my time with the State Department I had been both assigned to consulates outside of the capital city and I'd been assigned to capital cities. I believed that people in the provinces should coordinate what they're doing through the embassy. I saw no purpose in trying to run my own reporting program, reporting independently to Washington. I could have. I don't think anyone would have noticed actually, but I told the head of the political section that I would not send anything to Washington at all. Now, I started to send some things directly to Washington my last month just because it was no longer clear to me that anyone was taking care of any of the reporting. There had been so many changes in Kabul that I didn't even know if my reporting was going out at all and no one seemed to know. There was just this whole flurry of changes. The whole political section changed. There was a lack of personnel, no secretary, etc., so I just started sending things directly, but sending the original copy by e-mail to Washington, to Kabul. Other than that I wanted to be a team player. The ambassador and I would exchange e-mails about once a day, usually on fairly minor things. I would send [my drafts] to the ambassador, the DCM and the political section. Without fail either the DCM or the ambassador would always say good job, nice report, great report, something like that. That would be it. I don't know if that was true of others who were doing my job in other cities because there weren't very many who had had political reporting experience. I don't think any of them had regional experience; so they're things may have been a bit more edited.

Q: All right, well, I'm not sure if this is the end of your saga, but we'll type this up. Any thoughts about going out again?

METRINKO: I'm supposed to be going back to Kabul in the very near future in the next few weeks, but not with the government. I'm going and taking a job with a private foundation.

Q: What foundation is that?

METRINKO: Well, I'm still talking about the offer with them, it's with the Asia Foundation. The job is interesting. It's a contract job. It will give me a lot more independence of movement than I would have in the embassy. The work is all involved with helping set up the framework for the coming election and also for doing political analysis of the election, but not [just] politically correct.

Q: Yes. Good, well, keep in mind when you come back from that let us know and we'll grab you again.

METRINKO: Fine.

Q: Okay. Thank you very much.

End of interview