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

AMBASSADOR DANIEL A. O'DONOHUE

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: May 28, 1996

Copyright 2000 ADST

Q: Today is May 28, 1996. This is an interview with Ambassador Daniel A. O'Donohue, being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Well, let's start at the beginning. Would you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family?

O'DONOHUE: I was born on October 27, 1931, in Detroit, Michigan. Both my father and mother were immigrants from Ireland, although they had met in Detroit. I was the first-born in the family. My father was a bus driver. I spent all of my youth in Detroit.

Q: We're talking about when the Great Depression hit the United States.

O'DONOHUE: Yes, although in those days the condition of "poverty" was so widespread that, as a child, I hardly noticed it, as a matter of fact. I can't really claim that the Depression ever bore very heavily on me.

Q: I think that that's true of most of us at that time. It wasn't that bad a time for kids.

O'DONOHUE: That's right. This was an utterly different kind of American society. This was actually the beginning of a period of "lean years." We were children growing up in an adult society, unlike the "baby boom" after World War II, when children were the focus of society. It was an unexceptional childhood. Then I went to the University of Detroit.

Q: Where did you go to high school?

O'DONOHUE: Catholic Central High School in Detroit.

Q: Did you get much material on foreign affairs? We're talking about the period of World War II.

O'DONOHUE: Well, I had always had, and indeed quite clearly the reason why I was interested and entered the Foreign Service, was that I was an omnivorous reader. I was particularly interested in history. At that age I wouldn't have described this as "foreign or international affairs." In effect, I was reading a great deal and continued to do so throughout my life.

At the University of Detroit I actually majored in chemistry. Then, in my junior year I found out that I was color blind. I received a Bachelor of Science degree and went into the military. Up until that point, I had never heard of the Foreign Service, having come out of an immigrant milieu.

Q: When did you graduate from the University of Detroit?

O'DONOHUE: I received my degree in 1953. I served two years in the Army, including one year in Korea.

Q: What did you do in Korea?

O'DONOHUE: I was assigned to a very strange group. It was a special category of the Army, detailed to serve with the Air Force. It had a very mysterious title but, in fact, it was an Aviation Battalion which built airfields. In Korea. I was first assigned to Kimpo Air Base, which was called "K-14" in those days. I was briefly at "K-55" Air Base, a large air base down near Osan [about 30 miles South of Seoul]. Then, for most of my time in Korea, I was at "K-16" Air Base on Yoido Island in the middle of the Han River near Seoul. In those days "K-16" could take a C-47 transport aircraft. During the rainy season one end of the air strip was flooded, and we were evacuated at that time. Later it was the site of a massive land fill, where there now may be a million people living on what had once been a very small island.

When I came back from the Army, I then entered Wayne State University in Detroit, where I obtained a Masters Degree in Public Administration in 1955. Early in the fall of that year a friend of mine told me that there was an examination for the Foreign Service and suggested that we take it. Up until then I had not known that we had a Foreign Service, but I took the Foreign Service examination in October, 1955. Then, events proceeded in a slow manner which, I think, are as true today as they were then. I took and passed the written exam, passed the oral, and, at that point, became much more seriously interested in foreign affairs. The process finally ended in July, 1957, when I entered the Foreign Service.

Q: Could you give us a little feel for the oral exam you took? Do you remember how and when it was given?

O'DONOHUE: Yes. It was given regionally. I drove down to Cincinnati from Detroit. As I remember, there were three examiners. The examination was heavily oriented toward foreign affairs with emphasis on how I expressed myself. I would say that it was quite "open ended." That is, the questions didn't lend themselves to "Yes" or "No" answers. Indeed, the examiners let me ramble on. However, the questions were all related either to government, foreign affairs, or international developments.

As I said, they were really questions to elicit responses. The examination was conducted in a fairly low key way by the three examiners. As I recall it, it lasted for about an hour or an hour and 20 minutes. I didn't feel that it was an "interrogation." On the other hand, I felt that I had been put to a thorough test. As I remember, I left the room at the end of the exam. Later, one of the examiners came out and said that I had passed.

Q: Were you married when you entered the Foreign Service?

O'DONOHUE: No.

Q: After you took the written exam, were you starting to make some inquiries about what the Foreign Service was? If you did, I was wondering what people told you.

O'DONOHUE: Well, in Detroit and among the people that I associated with, the Foreign Service was really quite a mysterious thing. When I passed the written exam, I became more interested in the Foreign Service. At the same time, then as now, you couldn't "bank your future" on it. So, while waiting for all of the events involved in entering the Foreign Service to unfold, I went to Lansing to work in the State Government. Essentially, I was quite ignorant about the Foreign Service.

Although I had majored in chemistry, I had two strengths. There was my massive reading in history and foreign affairs. Then, I also had a practical and solid grounding in American politics and government, because my father had been very active in the Democratic Party. Indeed, he had the rather ignominious experience of having been a campaign manager in 1932 for a Democratic candidate for Congress in Detroit who lost in the Roosevelt landslide. So this kind of influence obviously affected me. I was essentially ignorant of the Foreign Service, outside of descriptions of what it did. My approach was somewhat like the Navy slogan of joining the Foreign Service "to see the world." Although, during this period the Wriston program had the State Department and the Foreign Service in a state of turmoil, I knew nothing of this. A measure of my ignorance was that I delayed entering the Foreign Service for a year because I had made a commitment to take this particular job in the State Government. Meanwhile, those who had gone to Georgetown University and elsewhere had "rushed in" to the Foreign Service. They had come in as FSO-6's in the old system and then had become FSO-7's in the new 8 grade system. As they were literally the only FSO-7's, they were quickly promoted to FSO-6, while I came in as an FSO-8 and struggled for several years before I caught up with them. Indeed, one of my classmates was sworn in while he was in the hospital. He had gone to Georgetown and had come down with "mumps." They swore him in when he was in his hospital bed. At that time the Foreign Service was paternalistic and highly personalized.

Q: When did you take the Basic Officer Course?

O'DONOHUE: In July, 1957.

Q: Could you tell us something about the composition of your class at the Foreign Service Institute? What was their outlook and what kind of training did you receive?

O'DONOHUE: First of all, we were in the midst of a tremendous expansion. The Foreign Service expanded in the sense that it took over many jobs which had previously been under the Civil Service. It wasn't so much that the State Department grew immensely, but the Foreign Service was suddenly recruiting for a much larger entity. The Foreign Service Institute [FSI] was training one class of new officers a month.

There was a great sense of excitement and adventure. Like me, there were other, new officers for whom the Foreign Service was a career that they had not previously thought of. Then, in 1956-57, when the Foreign Service broadened its recruitment, the FSI classes grew in size. My recollection is that we had 25-30 students in my class-one such class every month. As far as the men in the class were concerned, almost everyone had served in the Armed Forces. I think that we had two, 22-year-olds who had come directly out of college. Most of the others were like me. I had graduated from college and then served a couple of years in the Army. Then I had gotten an advanced degree and worked for a year. So most of the members of the class were 25 or 26 years old. They came out of graduate school or military service. Three members of the class, as I remember it, were older-about 30. I think that 31 was the age limit.

We had three or four women officers, whose background was somewhat different. Some of them were 22, but in our class we had a couple of women who had already pursued careers of their own. In their case, they were in their mid-20's. They had worked for five or six years before entering the Foreign Service.

The class included several members who, you might have said, were very "traditional." They would have been there in any case. There was a larger group like me, who would not have been in the Foreign Service under past circumstances. There were some who clearly shouldn't have been in the Foreign Service at all.

What characterized the class was enthusiasm. In those days, as now, the State Department had its budget problems. We were not sure where we were going. There appeared to be no money available to cover our ongoing assignments. Then, at the last minute, the Department found money in the Refugee Program. This meant that most of the class went either to Italy, Germany, or, in a few cases, Greece, where a residual refugee program was going on. This program dealt with what was the last residue of refugees left over from World War II. Remember, we are talking about the situation in 1957-1958.

Q: This was the Refugee Relief Program.

O'DONOHUE: Exactly. This was the last gasp of this program. There had been a much larger program before this. Anyhow, I ended up being assigned to the Consulate General in Genoa, Italy, in connection with the Refugee Relief Program. Those of us who went overseas under this program wound up in consular jobs. The Refugee Relief Program was a means for funding our jobs. You might say that the Department met the legislative intent of the Refugee Relief Program in a geographic sense. I went out as a junior Consular Officer in Genoa. I spent about six months issuing immigrant visas, as Genoa handled immigrant visas for northern Italy. It also handled the visa applications for Austrian or German wives of US servicemen.

After six months handling immigrant visas I ended up becoming the Consular Officer for everything but visas. I did Citizenship and Protection work, handled notarials, and did other consular work for a year. For a relatively young man like me this was an interesting experience.

Q: When were you in Genoa?

O'DONOHUE: I was there from January, 1958, until July, 1959. I was engaged to be married by then. My wife graduated from college in Detroit and came out to Genoa, where we were married.

Q: Was there a pattern of northern Italian migration?

O'DONOHUE: Well, first of all, during that period, Italy was an exciting and happy place to serve. Generally, there was a sense that Christian Democracy was working. The civil servants were running the country, and the politicians were acting like politicians. The country's economy was growing at a rate of 8- 10% a year. In northern Italy this was a period of very significant, social change, in that the Vespa motorbikes were being succeeded by Fiat automobiles with 500 cc engines.

Also, there was new social legislation which was changing the patterns of life in Italy. Overall, I had the sense that Italy was a thriving country. In Italy I don't think that politics or politicians were ever viewed as "working." After the 1948 elections there was a sense that American policy toward Italy was succeeding very well. So it was almost an exuberant time in Italy during those years. For a young person like me it was a very exciting place, in that sense.

As I said, in terms of migration the Consulate General in Genoa handled all of the immigrant visas for northern Italy. I've forgotten the figure, but maybe, let's say, that amounted to about 50 immigrant visas a day. As a Consular Officer handling immigrant visas I think that I interviewed about 20 people a day. The immigrant visa program was a reasonable heavy burden, but nothing like that at other posts, even in those days. Nothing like the patterns which developed later in terms of the sheer volume of applications.

Q: Were there any problems with Italian-Americans? We call taking care of them "American services," involving Americans in your consular districts.

O'DONOHUE: There were problems but not particularly in terms of Italian- Americans. If you looked at the American citizens we provided services to, probably about 75 % were Italians who had become naturalized American citizens in the US and then had retired in Italy, where they almost completely disappeared into Italian society. Probably their only real connection with the Consulate General would have been Social Security problems. On the whole, at that point, there were almost no problems with the Italian-Americans. In those years tourism by American citizens in Italy was large but a far cry from what it is today, although there were some problems. Then, as now, there were problems with Americans who went abroad to escape their problems-which only intensified them. In terms of consular work for someone my age, coming out of school and so forth, although I had served in the military, probably the most different aspect was the number of American citizens who were in jail in Italy. They included a Hawaiian-American "mass murderer." Another was an American seaman who had not talked to his shipmates during his whole voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. His ship arrived in Genoa, and then he suddenly stabbed and killed one of them. There was also a young Marine who had badly beaten a prostitute. These were some of the cases.

There was also an oil worker from Saudi Arabia who was "honeymooning" in Genoa with his fifth wife, a Greek dancer whom he met in Beirut. When they did a routine check of hotel registers, the Italian police found that this man was on their list. They more or less apologetically took him in, only to find out that the poor man had had a fourth wife who was an Italian. While married to her, he was caught in a "Cambio"-money exchange center-with a gun in his hands. He claimed that he was just carrying the gun. An Italian court sentenced him to jail for a year, after which they let him go. He thought that he was free, but the State Prosecutor had appealed the release from prison. Unbeknownst to him, the court had added another year and a half to his sentence. The Italian authorities were as embarrassed as anyone, but by the time he was apprehended, every legal recourse had been exhausted. The poor man was in jail until the next amnesty was handed down, and we got him out of prison.

It is a measure of those times that you could number "serious incidents" in terms of a handful, but certainly no more than one a week-ranging from the incident I've just described to another, when two Navy planes crashed simultaneously into two mountains. These two planes were "wing men." In one case all of the crew members were killed. In the other case they all lived. Out of cases like these when people served as Consular Officers, come some of the best Foreign Service stories.

Q: Absolutely.

O'DONOHUE: I learned to be a "father confessor" to all sorts of people who would come into the office and pour out their woes to me. So in terms of broadening and maturing, all of that was a very positive experience.

Q: Who was your Consul General?

O'DONOHUE: The first Consul General was David Maynard. He was a man with a great thrust and enjoyment of life. This had probably carried him a little bit beyond his abilities. Genoa was his "retirement post." He had had some very major jobs. As a young man he had started out in the Foreign Service in China. During the 1930's he had been in the Foreign Commercial Service under the Department of Commerce. At one point he was the senior Foreign Service Officer in USBER in Berlin. So he was in charge. He had had a very active and varied experience. He was very much of an extrovert-but Genoa was clearly his "retirement post." He was succeeded as Consul General by a man named Joyce who had had a more important career in Washington. However, for physical reasons Joyce was assigned to Genoa for his last few years in the Foreign Service.

In both cases these Consuls General "presided" over the Consulate General, rather than "ran" it. Both of them had had major responsibilities previously, although both of them took very seriously their responsibilities toward the two, young Foreign Service Officers who served under them in Genoa. In that "institutional" sense, they had considerable influence on me.

Q: Our Ambassador to Italy at the time was Claire Boothe Luce, wasn't she-at least for part of the time?

O'DONOHUE: My brother-in-law had entered the Foreign Service with me and then had met and married my sister. He was assigned to the Embassy in Rome, but our connection with the Embassy was very remote. The DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] was John Jernigan, who later became Ambassador to Algeria. He paid some attention to the Consulates. When he visited the Consulates, he made a point of meeting the younger officers-so we had a very clear impression of him.

James Zellerbach was the Ambassador to Italy during my assignment to Genoa. However, as far as the Embassy was concerned, it was a very distant and remote organization. As I said, my brother-in-law worked in the Embassy, and we went to Rome to visit my sister and him. So we had some contact with the Embassy, but otherwise the Embassy was very remote from our concerns in Genoa.

Q: I take it, from what you are saying, that you had a very good, positive reaction to the Foreign Service.

O'DONOHUE: Yes and no. I learned a lot about consular work, which was a big "plus." But I wanted to be a Political Officer; However, I found that consular work had helped me, both in maturing and in handling responsibilities. Generally in the Foreign Service several years go by before you have supervisory responsibilities equivalent to those in the consular field. In terms of leadership, both of the Consuls General I served under in Genoa were admirable men.

The Consulate in Genoa itself was "nutty," bordering on the bizarre. After hearing other people's tales of other Consulates, my only conclusion was that one's experience in Consulates varied greatly, indeed, but that my experience was very common.

The rest of the staff of the Consulate was a very mixed bag. When the Consul General was out of the office, there was some conflict between the Economic and Administrative Officers over "major issues" like parking space. In the first efficiency report which my first superior in the Foreign Service wrote he said that I must have been absorbing what he was saying, although I never asked any questions, because I was doing a "good job." This was not exactly how I would have described his performance!

I knew that there was something very strange about the office I was in, but it was only later that somebody bothered to tell me that the Consul, that is, the man who was supervising the office, had had an "affair" with the chief Foreign Service National employee which had become public knowledge. He had asked for a transfer. The Embassy arranged for home leave orders for him. However, in those days it hadn't told the Office of Personnel in Washington why it had done this. The Department, all unknowing, assigned him right back to Genoa! In my naivetï¿½, it took me a few weeks before I realized that there were some real tensions in the office and that it wasn't just my imagination.

Overall, I had the impression that I was living and working in a very small cloistered community, without the broadening experience that you have in an Embassy, where you are in a national capital, dealing with a variety of issues.

I did my first report to the State Department in Genoa on a fruit fly that was devastating the olive industry. I wrote another report on the proposed construction of a new airport for Genoa and whether it would ever be built. I think that it was about 20 years later when it eventually was built! I learned a lot from my experience in Genoa. With the exception of the two Consuls General, I would say that most of the rest of the staff was self-absorbed, neither outward oriented nor participating in the Italian culture.

Q: Italian society is extremely friendly and open, but essentially it is pretty much "closed" as far as getting out and meeting people.

O'DONOHUE: Well, in general this was true. The Genovese tend to take the view that other Italians are "foreign." So if you look closely at it, the "foreign community" includes Italians from other parts of Italy. Most of my friends were Italians who had come from other parts of Italy.

We had that brought home at my wedding. As I said, my wife had finished college before she came out. We are Catholics, and I had to make the arrangements for the wedding. I was attending Mass at a very small church in a fishing village which Genoa actually surrounded. However, the village was still there. There was a quaint and charming church, and I thought that this was the place to be married in-instead of being married in the Cathedral, as other foreigners were. This was the beginning of my trials and tribulations with the parish priest in this village. He was from Liguria, the area surrounding Genoa. For him foreigners were really a "strange breed." My sister had come over to Genoa with my fiancï¿½e. We were married in Genoa one week, and my sister and brother-in-law were married in Rome the next week.

At one point in an Italian wedding you always sign the marriage registers. It could be in the middle of Mass or at the end, but it would be at some point. So we were signing the register during the middle of Mass. Behind me, in the midst of it all was the little old parish priest, who was sort of the "master of ceremonies." A friend of ours. Another priest was actually presiding over the marriage. The little old priest shouted out in Italian, "Stop the wedding!" I had dealt with him for six months and knew that nothing would go very smoothly. It turned out that my sister had signed the wedding register and put in her home address, which was Detroit, Michigan. The little priest made clear that no one from Detroit, Michigan, had ever been a witness to a marriage in his church and that no one ever would be.

So our various Italian friends got involved in the matter. For a change I was the one who was utterly relaxed, this incident having confirmed my expectation. They finally agreed that, as we were all "men of the world," my sister could cross out "Detroit, Michigan," since she was going to live in Rome. She wrote, "Roma," and the wedding proceeded. Certainly Ligurian and Genovese society was more "closed" than Italian society in general. However, the impression that I came away with at the time was an immense respect for senior Italian civil servants, who had immense authority. Indeed, my impression was that, in our system, we devolve authority and responsibility "downward" quite well. There, in Genoa, lower level officials were only obstacles and nuisance to be overcome. At the senior levels government officials had near absolute authority which they exercise quite effectively. In fact, at this time, they were running Italy to all intents and purposes. The politicians were scurrying above them but were not really in charge. As I say, I had great respect for the senior Italian officials and for the authority which they had. In our society you could not contemplate that kind of authority. It seemed that the senior Italian officials could deal with any problem that came up.

Service in Genoa was a good experience for me. However, I had sort of "fallen in love" with East Asia when I was in the Army in Korea, with Korea as devastated as it was. I was there just after the agreement on the cessation of hostilities [in 1953], and not during the fighting. At the time I was in Korea in the Army, the country was still wrecked. In Seoul one could see the Catholic Cathedral standing on a hill. The old Japanese Capital building was bombed out, and its dome was gutted. It was still there, but there were holes in it. One had the impression that most of the city had been almost leveled. As a matter of fact, when I went back later to Korea, I realized that there were more buildings than I remembered.

Korea in 1954 and 1955 was an utterly different world than it is now. Since I entered the Foreign Service, I have always been interested in going back to East Asia and Korea. So I requested Korean language training. In the summer of 1959 my Genoa tour of duty was cut short and I was sent to Yale University, where we studied Korean in those days.

Q: So after your tour in Genoa you were assigned to study Korean. How long did this last?

O'DONOHUE: I studied Korean for one year, from 1959 to 1960.

Q: What was your impression of the Korean language program at Yale? At the time Korean was widely considered a difficult and still obscure language.

O'DONOHUE: I thought that the course was unreal and "pro forma," in that there is no way that in one year anyone but the most exceptional student could ever master or even get a good working knowledge of Korean. There are two other East Asian languages, Chinese and Japanese, in the State Department's language training program. An immensely greater amount of attention is devoted to teaching these languages. Regarding the Korean language, perhaps "pro forma" is too strong a term. However, I would say that the Korean language training program at Yale was not really "serious business," in contrast to Japanese and Chinese.

Q: Who taught Korean at Yale?

O'DONOHUE: I think that this was the final couple of years of the US Air Force contract with Yale to teach Asian languages. Yale had an Institute of Far Eastern Languages and Linguistics, which taught Japanese, Chinese, and Korean to Air Force officers and enlisted men. So that is where we went. I think that a couple of years previously the Department had sent someone out to study Korean at the University of Washington. However, in those years Korean language training was very much an offhand sort of thing. The FSI [Foreign Service Institute] did not devote a great deal of attention to it.

Q: You went to Yale in 1959 and completed your training in 1960 and then were assigned to the Embassy in Seoul. What job were you assigned to in Seoul?

O'DONOHUE: I was assigned to the Political Section. A mutual friend of ours, Bob Willner, had studied Korean with me at Yale. We went out to the Embassy in Seoul together. Bob was assigned to the Consular Section of the Embassy for the first year, and I was assigned to the Political Section. This assignment to Seoul ended up being the "second act" of a "three act" play in the Political Section. Syngman Rhee, the President of the Republic of Korea, fell from power in March, 1960. When I arrived in Seoul in June, 1960, those events were over.

Q: This was the "student rebellion" in Korea?

O'DONOHUE: This was the "student rebellion" against the "rigged elections" of 1960. As a result of this "student rebellion," Rhee was swept aside. There was an interim government under a politician named Ho Chong, who presided over a transition period. Then free elections were held which led to the establishment of a government headed by Chang Myon. However, this period was marked by immense and intense, political turmoil. The turmoil ranged from factional fighting within Chang Myon's own party to the bitterest of factional fighting with the other civilian party. There were labor unions and students still on the streets. This was a period of very significant, political disorder.

At the same time, as became evident later, the Korean military began plotting coups d'etat. In this case President Park Chung Hee's coup succeeded, although it was not the only one being planned. President Rhee fell from power, he kept the military very much under his thumb. Rhee had constantly kept in his mind balancing factions in the Korean military. Generals did not stay in one job for very long. He had seen this as part and parcel of the process of ruling. After he fell, the military began to go through a period of change. We saw all of these things as harmful to military efficiency. Chang Myon didn't have the same independence of action which President Rhee had had. He was so absorbed with the domestic political situation that he erroneously assumed that the Americans were "taking care of the Korean military."

As you know, the Korean military were under the operational control of our generals in the context of the U.N. Command. However, the meaning of "operational control" changed as the Korean military became more independent. Nonetheless, until then the illusion was that the American generals commanded and that the Korean generals, in effect, were their docile subordinates, dependent on the US for everything. As time went on, particularly as we moved into 1961...

Q: Before we go on, could you talk a little about who was our Ambassador in Seoul? What was the composition of the Political Section? Also, what were they telling you? What did they say about the Koreans in the Political Section?

O'DONOHUE: Well, when I arrived in Seoul in 1960, we were still in the last phases of a transition in which the Ambassador was finally emerging as the "senior American" in the country. During the Korean War [1950-1953] and throughout the 1950's there were really four, distinct US entities. There were the Embassy and the Ambassador. There was also the American military who, as I said, in fact commanded the Korean forces, provided the military assistance, and had dominating influence. There was the AID [Agency for International Development] Mission which, for a good part of that time, was quasi-autonomous. In terms of size, we're talking about 400-500 people and AID programs of as much as $500 million in 1960 alone. So immense resources were going into Korea. Then there was also the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency].

So there were these four entities. Of these four, the one which didn't give the Koreans any resources was the Embassy. Also, the entity which gave the Syngman Rhee the most headaches and lectures on democracy was the American Embassy. During my period, the Ambassador slowly emerged as being more than "first among equals."

In this context when I was in Seoul, 1960-1964, the Embassy was quite modest in size. There were about 40,000 American troops in Korea and a huge AID Mission. The Political Section had five officers assigned, and the Economic Section had four or five officers. In a relative sense the Embassy was small, compared to the other official American elements in Korea. Also, what characterized the Political Section was its youth. The first Political Counselor when I was there was Don Ranard. Phil Habib was the second Political Counselor. We had one FSO-3 in the old system-equivalent to an FSO-1 now. The rest of us were all junior officers. So this was a Political Section which was dominated by youth.

On the other hand, we had an almost unlimited "mandate." For instance, from beginning to end of this tour in Seoul I handled the unification issue and dealt with North Korea, UN questions, and the major opposition parties. I probably had the broadest responsibility. Phil Habib was my senior boss and also my closest friend. We were on particularly close terms. However, all of us in the Political Section had our finger in everything, at one time or another. It was an exciting time to be in the Political Section. There were limits to what we could do, which became apparent, particularly in the period immediately before the coup d'etat [of 1961]. The Embassy Political Section was absorbed with the domestic political situation and at that time, the Korean military were more or less "off the screen." As we approached this period prior to the coup d'etat, the Ambassador and the DCM were certainly dependent on the other agencies for any feel for what the Korean military were doing.

Q Who were the Ambassador and the DCM?

O'DONOHUE: The Ambassador at first was Walter McConaughy. Marshall Green was the DCM. Ambassador McConaughy had derived a tremendous amount of prestige from the way the fall of Syngman Rhee was handled by the Embassy. He left South Korea to come back to Washington as the Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs. Marshall Green was Chargï¿½ d'Affaires at the time of the coup d'etat. As I noted, they were essentially dependent on the other agencies for intelligence on Korean military attitudes. That was the result of the Political Section being composed mainly of junior officers. Also, there were no "patterns," of Embassy contact with the Korean military. This showed up very strongly. The next time around-three years later-it was quite the opposite.

Q: Prior to the coup d'etat, how did you get out and around? You were saying that Korean society...

O'DONOHUE: Korean society then was completely dominated by males. However, if you worked at it, you could really manage an amazing level of access and entree across the board. What it meant was that you were literally working all the time. During the day, for example, there would be a fair amount of business with the Korean Foreign Ministry and other ministries. We would go out to lunch. We used to vie with each other to see who could submit the cheapest luncheon vouchers. At the end of the day we would often meet with someone at the old Bando Hotel for a drink. Maybe you would pick up a couple of other Korean friends and go off down to Myong Deng and the bar areas. We were constantly in motion. We were literally going all of the time.

So we became very disciplined at work, meaning that we got our work done very quickly. We turned out an immense volume of reports, because Korea was so important to the US At the same time, the reporting was invariably based on wide ranging contacts.

Q: What were the political currents going around at that time-before the coup d'etat?

O'DONOHUE: In the pre-coup d'etat period the basic currents on the domestic political science were, first of all, the almost bitter nature of the domestic, political rivalries among the parties which had been united against Syngman Rhee. Then they broke up into their original, factional groupings as soon as he was forced out of power. However, first and foremost was the bitter, almost pre-modern factionalism characterizing the Korean political parties. To a degree, you can still see this tendency to this day. I met Kim Dae Jong in 1960 in Mokpo as a young man. Kim Yong Sam was in the other political party-at that time under Yun Bo Sun, who was President, a figurehead position.

The first characteristic of the political currents was the inability of the Korean political parties to work together. You can argue that, to this day, this remains an institutional problem in Korea.

Q: This is Side B of Tape 1 of the interview with Ambassador Dan 0'Donohue. Please continue.

O'DONOHUE: Secondly, student unrest was a significant factor but, as it turned out, not unmanageable. Nonetheless, you could argue that the students felt that, having overthrown Rhee, they were ultimately the conscience of the country from that day until now. So student unrest in the universities was another major aspect of the political currents in Korea.

A preoccupation with North Korea and the attraction it had for students was another thread in the political situation. From the perspective of the Political Section in that period the Korean military was essentially "terra incognita." The Political Section had almost no dealings with the Korean military-certainly none that would contribute to our reporting.

Q: Did the American military have any ability or interest in reporting on the Korean military?

O'DONOHUE: Our military essentially viewed the Korean military as "loyal subordinates." They found it almost inconceivable that the Korean military would do anything that we didn't want them to do. There was some reporting on the coups d'etat being planned-mainly from the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] but a little from the American military. The tendency of the American military was to dismiss these reports.

Now, in all of this President Park Chung Hee-who, in those days, was a Major General-was probably the one Korean general whom our military actively disliked. He was austere, didn't speak English, and was critical of what he regarded as the American dominance of Korea. Probably, if you looked at the whole spectrum of Korean generals, Park Chung Hee probably would have been considered by the American military as the least likely to lead a coup d'etat.

What happened is that the Korean Army factional group led by Park Chung Hee moved first to stage a coup d'etat and secured power. After securing political power, he went back and "purged" the Korean military of his rivals.

Q: I've been told a little about this period. Park Chung Hee remained in power for a long time-until 1979. The South Koreans have been called the "Irish" of the Far East. Since you and I are both of Irish ancestry, we can appreciate that this means that the South Koreans had a certain inability to "get it all together."

O'DONOHUE: Well, you can even trace this back to Korean history. In my mind the Korean economic "miracle" is the most impressive of all of the East Asian economic "miracles." In effect, if I go back to when I first arrived in Korea in 1954 in the US Army and to conversations I had with a very close friend who had been there in the US Military Government during the period 1945-1947, we were essentially talking about a country which the Japanese had thoroughly "dominated." For a Korean, promotion to the rank of Sergeant in the Japanese-run Police Force was a success. A few Koreans "broke through" in various areas of society during the Japanese period. However, the Korean "large" business community, when I originally arrived in Korea, could easily have fit into a single living room. Indeed, the job of chauffeur was regarded as a prestigious occupation. There was a sense that the Koreans were unable to do much of anything.

To my mind, what was most interesting in terms of US policy was the far-sighted decisions that were made in 1959-1969, in which I was not involved. Essentially, at this time decisions were made to start cutting back on assistance to South Korea to force the Koreans to stand on their own two feet. Up to that point, the per capita, annual income in South Korea was something like $100- 150. In one way or another the United States provided all of Korea's very limited foreign exchange needs. Now, these were at a level well below the poverty line. However, between our economic assistance programs and our purchases of Korean currency for the use of the American military, essentially the Korean businessman looked to the government for support not to competing in the world.

Starting in 1959-1960, decisions were made to wean South Korea from dependence on US assistance. Initially, there was a debate, if one can even contemplate it these days, over building one Korean fertilizer plant. An American company would manage it, but it would be provided under the aid program, and it would belong to Korea. The debate about whether the Koreans could manage one fertilizer plant was intense. That was where South Korea was in 1960.

In 1961 the Chang Myon government had made all the "right" decisions economically. However, it had fallen from power before implementing them. President Park Chung Hee came in and, initially, made all of the "wrong" decisions. His approach was highly "statist" in character. He had some economic "guru" from one of the lesser known universities. At one point-I think that it was early in 1962-they had a change in the currency which amounted to confiscation. There have been few times in South Korean affairs when Americans have had the opportunity to use "lines that you don't often use, but this currency change was a disaster-a sheer, unmitigated disaster. The government had "frozen" the economy. You could only exchange currency up to a certain amount.

From the beginning Ambassador Sam Berger had cast his lot with President Park Chung Hee and the military government. He was very sympathetically disposed to the Park Government. He was able to go in and say to them, in effect, that South Korea was a sovereign country and that they could do what they wanted. However, we were also a sovereign country, and we weren't going to fund this South Korean economic silliness with our AID program. In effect, he forced the South Korean Government to "retreat" on this issue. I guess that you could say that this was a "watershed" development. Park's later decisions didn't necessarily flow from this, but in a sense it was the last dumb economic decision he made.

From that point on, President Park became, without a question in my mind, the "father" of South Korea's economic development. It was not that he was an economist. However, he invariably gave the "technocrats" his full support. Invariably, when decisions came to him, the decisions he made on broad, economic paths were the right ones. Often, the advice given to him, including our own, turned out to be overly cautious and he chose the bolder course.

In 1961-1962 South Korea was a country where human hair for wigs might have been their second or third largest export. By 1964 this situation was beginning to change. Just as the Korean War was the catalyst for the Japanese economic resurgence, the Vietnam War became the catalyst for South Korea's emergence as an economic power on the international scene.

Q: Could we go back to the period of the coup d'etat? At the time, what was your estimate of Marshall Green?

O'DONOHUE: It was a traumatic period. This was influenced partly because of the particular circumstances in Washington. The Kennedy administration had just gone through the "Bay of Pigs" fiasco in Cuba. That colored the administration's treatment of the senior officers in the Embassy in Seoul. In other words, an administration was in office which had just had one "amateurish failure." Then, all of a sudden, there was a coup d'etat in a country where, allegedly, the US was running their armed forces. So the focus was on, "Who was to blame?" The blame had to be outside of Washington. This attitude hurt Ambassador Walter McConaughy, who had gotten his job as Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, partially because of the acclaim for his handling of the situation in Korea. It also hurt Marshall Green on the scene, because there had to be someone to be "blamed." However, it didn't hurt him long. Actually, the Political Counselor, Don Ranard, probably suffered the most in career terms.

Marshall Green had both standing and ability. He may have lost appointment to an Embassy at this point but he went to Hong Kong as Consul General. So for Marshall Green the Korean coup d'etat was nothing more than a "bump in the road," in the career sense. In a professional sense, I am sure, it was an excruciating period for him.

In fact, looking at the problem retrospectively, during the next three years the role of the Embassy and of the Political Section in Seoul was utterly different. Our contribution was in the whole, broad range of Korean affairs, during a period which was as tumultuous as before. Qualitatively, it was of a different nature.

Q: As one of the more junior of the Political Officers, how did word of the coup d'etat get to you?

O'DONOHUE: Well, as I said, the way in which the situation developed then was that whatever information there was came essentially either from CIA or the American military. There were several coup plots going on. Reports from CIA and American military sources involved restrictions on access to this information. I was very junior at the time-an FSO-8. The fact that we were not given access to such reports was understandable. By the way, the next time around-and there were several "next times"-we were brought into it. At the time of the coup d'etat in 1961 even the Political Counselor was not given access to this information.

In my view Marshall Green was left utterly dependent on the judgment of an American four-star general, because the South Korean Army was "his army," so to speak. I don't think that the General could contemplate them as being actually "disloyal." So the coup d'etat came as a shock. Not that there weren't reports in advance. However, the coup happened, and the South Korean military moved in and took over the government. I received a call from the Embassy and went into the office. Then, for the next five or six days we worked day and night, sleeping on couches. The Korean military group tended to view us with hostility. They resented that the Embassy had condemned the coup.

On the other hand, in terms of relations between the United States, the Korean military couldn't just "walk away" from us. So we had a surprising amount of freedom to move around. Now we couldn't see some of the people that we might have wanted to see. However, in our case it became a period of intense activity, focusing on: first, picking up the threads of governmental dialogue. In the end, as our basic judgment was, coup or not, the security situation was dominant, and the US had to work with the Korean coup leaders. So, we were "picking up the threads." Secondly, the South Korean military put a government into office. The civilians in it were people whom we had known, one way or another. But we had to pick up contact with a whole new government. Thirdly, as best we could, we had to be out and active enough to try to make an assessment whether the new regime was going to "hold together" and whether there was going to be a public backlash. In fact, there wasn't. We also needed to know what was happening in terms of the political dynamics.

Then belatedly, but not really until Phil Habib came on the scene as Political Counselor, we had to pick up on developments in the South Korean military, an area which, up until then, we had not paid any attention to. The work of the Political Section was overwhelming. The Washington interest in the situation in Korea was intense. The situation was complicated by the fact that at one time President Park Chung Hee had been a communist. So we had the general who was reputed to be "anti-American," and maybe a former communist, in charge of the government. Among the various coup groups the Park faction was the one group that the American military wouldn't have "liked." At some time in the mid 1940's Gen. Park had been associated with the Communist Party and, indeed, had been "saved," by his senior ROK army friends. Even though Park Chung Hee was a Major General, in an Army where there were 30 or 35 year old Lieutenant Generals, his standing in the military was immensely higher than his rank because his background had been the Japanese Military Academy. He was also viewed as being "non-corrupt." His standing in the South Korean military was far higher than the positions he had held.

So there was that concern. Indeed, at one point I had to do an assessment which was sent to Washington on General Park's leftist background. This was a period of immense tension. What dominated other considerations was the Kennedy administration's concern that it might be charged with yet another foreign policy "fiasco."

Q: In my interview with him, Marshall Green made a big point that he was left "dangling "for about three days after the 1961 coup, with no instructions.

O'DONOHUE: That's right.

O'DONOHUE: Well, he didn't get any support. As I remember it, he not only didn't get any support, indeed was undercut by critical "backgrounders" to the press in Washington. He had to come out, and so did General Magruder, the UN Commander, with statements condemning the coup and asking the troops not to support it.

In fact, it wasn't simply that Washington didn't give him any instructions. Washington was talking about this "young" Chargï¿½ d'Affaires in Seoul. Washington was talking about Green as being "inexperienced" and said privately that he had "gone off on a limb." So it wasn't simply that Green was left dangling. It was clear that he was being made a "scapegoat," although I think that the "scapegoat" theme disappeared relatively quickly. However, it was quite clear Green never felt that he had support or understanding during the period of several months before Ambassador Sam Berger arrived in Seoul.

Marshall Green had a standing and reputation in the Foreign Service which protected him from the worst consequences. Nonetheless, it wasn't just three days that he was left "dangling." The whole period immediately after the coup was clearly a time when someone else was going to come out as Ambassador to South Korea. Ambassador Berger was going to "run" the relationship with South Korea. Marshall Green was just there "holding the reins."

Q: You understand this now, but at the time did you get the feeling that this was a case of Washington trying to "duck" responsibility? Later on, as recently as the Gulf War of 1991, there was...

O'DONOHUE: In my view at the time this was very clear. I was the most junior officer in the Political Section, and my career was not caught up in this situation. On the other hand, as a result, there was a much closer relationship within the Embassy. What had been too "compartmentalized" a situation changed. So there was a very different atmosphere. Yes, I had the very strong impression that, in effect, Washington clearly wanted to put the onus on the Americans on the scene in Korea for having "mismanaged" the situation. They wanted to find an excuse for picking up the relationship with General Park Chung Hee and the new government. All of those things were understandable. However, this attitude was also characterized by "slights." The word "discourtesies" isn't the right one, but Washington gave the impression that it wanted to make the Americans on the scene feel that they were "pariahs." This affected Don Ranard, the Political Counselor, more than Marshall Green because he didn't have the same kind of reputation and standing. Washington did not give the impression that they were reposing any trust in the Embassy's judgment. They were simply waiting for Ambassador Sam Berger to arrive.

Q: I know both Marshall Green and Sam Berger. I worked for Sam Berger in Vietnam. I have great respect for both men. However, I almost have the feeling that Ambassador Sam Berger arrived in Korea, not so much with the attitude of a "hostile takeover, "but with the attitude, "All right, I'm in charge. I'm taking over.

O'DONOHUE: Oh, there's no question of that. He came in with the view that the Embassy had mishandled the situation. With Marshall Green he was much more tempered-but certainly not in public. We were made to feel that it was clearly Ambassador Berger's view that the Embassy had mismanaged the situation. That was a 'given.' Also, Berger probably saw the Embassy leadership as complicating his own efforts which, from the beginning, were aimed at trying to establish a close relationship with Park Chung Hee.

It was a very difficult period when Ambassador Berger arrived. You might say that this situation lasted until Phil Habib arrived on the scene in Korea. I think that Ambassador Berger had scant respect for the views of anyone in the Embassy, although he treated Marshall with respect. I was more involved in these things than others were because of the role I had created for myself. I would generally "pipe up" and express my views. I can't say that I wasn't treated with courtesy. Indeed, later on Berger and I became very good friends. However, certainly it was a case where, simply put, Ambassador Berger didn't give the old team's views any great weight.

Both Marshall and Don Ranard were loyal members of the Embassy team, but the situation worked against them. You could argue that the situation was objectively impossible, and a new "caste of characters" was needed. My impression was that Berger was "careful" in his relationships. He didn't go out of his way to embarrass Green and Ranard. However, this was a case where there were two senior officers in the Embassy who knew that their days were numbered and that the Ambassador wanted them off the scene.

Q: Berger was not a diplomat in the sense of the "niceties" of protocol. He was a very good Foreign Service Officer, and I had great regard for him. However, he was fairly blunt-spoken. He more or less came out of the labor movement.

O'DONOHUE: I would say "yes" and "no" to that. In the Embassy in discussions and in the conduct of business Ambassador Berger could be blunt to the point of curtness. Later on I found out that he put up with my talking back to him, and he did with others. But there was a terseness and a bluntness about him. On the other hand, in a social context, he was an utterly different, charming person. Particularly during that period, we had a really difficult time of it. Everything that you would propose to send out, he would want to re-write or argue about. Then there was also the problem of my two intervening superiors, Marshall Green and Don Ranard, who were having their difficulties. However, if you went to Ambassador Berger's house on a social occasion, he couldn't be more charming. He left these problems in the office.

However, be that as it may, Marshall Green then moved to Hong Kong as Consul General. As I said, this episode, in a career sense, was just a "bump" along the way. As far as Don Ranard was concerned, this episode marred his career.

Q: After he retired from the Foreign Service, Ranard later became a vocal critic from the outside of our relations with South Korea. I wonder if you could talk about how he was to work for at the time.

O'DONOHUE: Well, Don Ranard was the first Political Counselor that I worked under in South Korea. I owe him an immense amount in terms of training a young officer in how to write and to be a political officer. He showed confidence in me. He had an utterly relaxed manner and allowed me to go along at my own pace. I learned an immense amount from him. He was a fine writer and had done an excellent job in handling the domestic political turmoil in South Korea.

As I said, he had been kept out of the flow of intelligence on the coup d'etat. So, he was hardly to blame for what happened. Whereas Marshall Green had many friends in the Foreign Service, Don Ranard had come into the Foreign Service under the Wriston Program and was not in the same situation. He was "out" of his job in South Korea and had no ongoing assignment. He stayed in Seoul until January, 1962. Ambassador Berger did not simply "ship them out.' Marshall got his assignment and left. Don Ranard stayed until Phil Habib arrived in Korea in early 1962. So Ranard was more or less in "limbo' for seven or eight months.

At the Washington end Don Ranard was treated shabbily. I'm talking about the way career officers treated him. He went back to Washington without an assignment. He finally was assigned to Cultural Affairs. Then he went out as DCM to Burma and to Australia. He came back to Washington and was Country Director for the Republic of Korea, a position in which I eventually succeeded him. For Don the events in South Korea, the coup and all the rest, were the central event in his professional life. They dominated and colored all of his perceptions. You may say that Don Ranard never "forgave" President Park Chung Hee. As Office Director for South Korea Don took a very strong human rights stance. He and Phil Habib, one as Office Director and the other as Ambassador, undoubtedly were the key figures in saving Kim Dae Jung's life. We issued a very strong statement which I don't think we would ever have gotten out if it had ever come to the attention of the Seventh Floor of the Department before being issued.

Don Ranard increasingly viewed South Korea within the prism of the 1961 coup and what might have been-and also in terms of the brutality and the oppression of the Park period. Then Don moved from focus on Korea into the broader "human rights" milieu. Once he retired from the Foreign Service, he almost deliberately avoided retaining his relationships with other people in the Department and the Foreign Service. His interests overwhelmingly were concerned with human rights. To a large extent the catalyst for that was the Park Chung Hee Government in South Korea.

Q: When Park Chung Hee came into office, I would assume that one of the first things that you, as a young officer, would try to do was to find out what the students were up to. Could you talk about that?

O'DONOHUE: When I was in Korea, I was happy with the two Political Counselors we had. They really gave me broad-ranging freedom. What it meant for me is that I started out doing several things. One of them was getting to know university professors, particularly those who were closest to the students. To get some feeling for students, I also started giving an English class once a week. This attracted some student leaders. One of them ended up going into the Korean Marine Corps. However, at the time he was regarded as a "leftist' leader on campus.

Q: That is a common pattern.

O'DONOHUE: Four of the students, in today's terms, were "activists." Two of them were fairly prominent. I will call one of them, "Mr. Kim." I said to him, "Do you have to be the one handing in the petition in front of our Embassy? Let somebody else do it." So this ended up being more than I bargained for. I just use this example because you can't pick four students and extrapolate too much. I did this just to get some feeling for the students. It ended up being a little more than that, because a couple of the students were quite representative of the politically active student leaders.

So all of the Political Officers in the Embassy had a wide spectrum of political contacts, among them the professors at the universities. Also, I stayed in close touch with the USIS [United States Information Service] officers. One of them, Bernie Lavin, was the director of the USIS information center in Seoul. I would go down and talk to them. So this was also one of the areas that I focused on, just as I developed contacts in the political sphere. The overwhelming change resulting from the coup d'etat took the form of the emergence of a new political dynamic. The coup itself led to a "purge" in the military, and the coup group itself began to break up into factions. One of President Park's weapons was the controlled manner in which he applied brutality-usually for very clear purposes. He wasn't a sadist, but no one was exempt. If his closest associates misstepped, they could find themselves in the clutches of the Korean CIA. Then they would eventually be released but they would have had their lesson and would know that what they did was what he told them to do, nothing else.

Overwhelmingly, the thrust from that point on became plugging in to this new, political dynamic. The South Korean military who were in the senior political positions had to deal with us. That situation then provided an opportunity to broaden our contacts. This posed problems for the South Korean military and major opportunities for the civilians whom they attracted, since these civilians often didn't have a "track record" with others. The South Korean military had brought in a group of advisers. Two of them became very close friends of mine over time. So in the field of foreign affairs I was always able to go down and talk to the people who were, in effect, advising Park Chung Hee.

During my first year in Korea, as I said, we had done an immense job with the civilian, political figures, which turned out to be irrelevant, since there was a military coup which replaced them. During the next three years [1962- 1964] the Political Section and the Embassy made substantial policy and reporting contributions across the board. We never could deal with tactical military units but we at least had enough contacts to do our job. Then we were blessed by another circumstance. Phil Habib came on the scene as Political Counselor in 1962. He was Ambassador Berger's protï¿½gï¿½. Phil cut out a major, dominating role, whether it was with the American military, the CIA, or whatever. So all of a sudden, the Political Section was the "heart" of the American Mission in Korea. That was due to Phil Habib and his relationship to Ambassador Berger.

Within the Political Section, if an issue was important to Phil Habib, I was assigned to handle it. So during the years from 1962 to 1964 we turned out an immense amount of work. The dominant element in American policy toward the Republic of Korea became the Embassy-specifically Ambassador Berger and Phil Habib, and the Political Section under Phil, because of his role.

We went through a tumultuous period during the military government. Ambassador Berger did a superb job partially because of Phil Habib-but you really have to give much credit to Sam Berger. It was clear in 1962 that the military government was shaking itself to pieces. Ambassador Berger and Phil concluded that the South Koreans had to move from military to civilian rule. Berger was very comfortable with Park. However, Park resented his dependence" on Berger and the US, so this feeling was not fully reciprocated. Nonetheless, we had an American Ambassador who, both rightly and wrongly, had made judgment after judgment, based on support for Park and the South Korean military. There was no hostility toward Park in this. However, Berger and Phil Habib were convinced that it was necessary to return to civilian government, since political/factional controversy was resonating through the whole South Korean military establishment. So it was necessary to separate the South Korean military from politics. Now, this didn't mean separating President Park from politics. Berger simply realized that it would be necessary to get the South Korean military back in the barracks and let those military who wanted to be political leaders get out of the army.

Q: You re really saying that the South Korean military, at various levels in the government, had established "rule by the major generals."

O'DONOHUE: Well, the problem was that political strife in the military government resonated throughout the whole military structure. For example, the South Korean Marines had originally been key players in the coup. Their leaders were then "purged," and so forth. A high degree of tension developed. "Plotting" is too strong a word, although not completely so. So Ambassador Berger and Phil Habib concluded that it was necessary to return to a form of civilian government in South Korea even if it was dominated by the military coup leaders, converted into civilian politics. Now, as it unfolded, no one could have been happier than Berger that Park Chung Hee became President of the Republic of Korea. So it was not a case of getting President Park out of power. It was a question of getting the South Korean military out of politics.

This tumultuous process went on. At one point President Park decided to call off the election. Ambassador Berger went in to see him and made it clear that elections had to take place. Park never forgave Ambassador Berger for having forced him to do the right thing. So throughout 1962 and into '63 we went through a process of high tension, with the US playing a huge catalytic role in bringing about elections.

Q: Well, Park Chung Hee remained President of the Republic of Korea, but...

O'DONOHUE: At that point Park Chung Hee was Chairman of the Council for National Reconstruction, which was, in fact, Park's faction of the military leadership. Under Park was a mixed government of military and civilians. There also was the Korean CIA, which emerged as Park's political secret police arm. As military governments all do, the South Korean military government had promised to return to civilian rule. Then there was the process of getting back to civilian rule, which was accompanied by tremendous tension. Finally, after a lot of pressure from the US, there were presidential elections which Park barely won. He won by 0.5%, or something like that, over the former President, Yun Bo Sun, who ran against Park. It was a measure of the unpopularity of the military. At this stage you would have to say that the military controlled everything. If they won by only 0.5%, or whatever it was, clearly enough a more objective vote count would have led to a defeat for the military. Nevertheless, the South Korean military learned a lot from that. From then on the Korean CIA was much more effective in managing elections.

One of the things that the KCIA learned, which they then applied frequently from then on, was that you didn't need 90% of the votes to win an election. In the 1963 parliamentary elections, using a variety of techniques, including the power of the government officialdom money, and coercion, Park's government party was able to win a massive victory with only 33% of the vote. In rural districts, for example, they would put up two or three "independents," thus splitting the election. This ensured that the government candidate would win with a minority. From that point the government no longer worried about getting 60 or 70% of the vote. What they did was to manipulate the results at the margin by a variety of ways. This led to an outcome which was adequate for the South Korean government's purposes, and government victory avoided "blatant" irregularities.

During this period, as I said, Ambassador Berger certainly played a strong role. Then he had Phil Habib as Political Counselor. Phil was a tremendously effective Foreign Service Officer.

Q: Phil Habib is one of the great "legends" of the Foreign Service. But looking back at this period, he was the Political Counselor, which is an interesting job in itself However, you're talking about somebody who could really "do things." What were his strengths?

O'DONOHUE: Phil Habib had come into the Foreign Service comparatively late in life. He was 29 when he entered the service. He had graduated from Idaho State University, fought in World War II, came out, and got a Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley. So when Phil came into the Foreign Service in 1949, he was then and was always viewed thereafter as an outstanding, mature officer. Everyone who worked with Phil thought that he was one of the best. When Ambassador Berger was in political exile as DCM in New Zealand under the Republicans, Phil served under him as Economic Officer. Berger thought the world of him. So from the beginning Berger was determined to get Phil assigned to South Korea. Phil had been working on Africa at the beginning of the Kennedy administration, which was exciting at that time. So Phil already had a reputation at that point as a very strong performer-with a personality that most people liked but some found overwhelming.

If you compared Phil and Marshall Green, Marshall was a rank or two senior to Phil. Marshall was widely known in the Bureau of East Asian Affairs, while Phil had no real East Asian experience. Phil had a reputation as an outstanding, energetic officer. In South Korea Phil was in a perfect situation for him, in that he was Ambassador Berger's "right hand man." The DCM's at the time had to adjust to this relationship.

Q: Who were the DCM's in Seoul at this time?

O'DONOHUE: The first one was Frank Magistretti and then Ed Doherty. Both of them had to adjust to Phil's dominant role. Phil had to pay some attention to them, but not all that much. He just did an immense job. Being Political Counselor at that time fit him. He was an outstanding writer, tremendously gregarious, and politically sure handed in what was a very difficult situation. In a variety of ways the American military in South Korea was playing its own games. So there was a difficult, American interagency situation. Various American military officers saw as their first objective getting as close to President Park Chung Hee as they could. As I said, you couldn't have had a more favorable view of Park than Ambassador Berger did. However, at various times we disagreed with Park and Berger always had US policy interests in mind.

Phil Habib did a superb job, but you cannot imagine the work involved. We would literally be going from the morning hours to late in the evening. Fortunately, what saved us was the curfew, as you know. This meant that your working day ended sometime around 10:30 to 11:30 PM. We worked all the time. In Phil Habib's case he had easy access to all of the South Koreans, short of Park. With that tremendous energy of his, whether he was dealing with businessmen, politicians, or others, and using his ready wit, he played a dominating role in the US Mission in the Republic of Korea. Phil "dominated" the AID and CIA. When I say "dominated," I mean that they had such respect for him that, in effect, they accepted his lead.

Q: As a Political Officer, what was your feeling toward the CIA?

O'DONOHUE: We were actually quite close. This was partially a reflection of the fact that Phil Habib and his counterpart, the Chief of Station [COS], were on close terms. As I said, in a very real sense they accepted his policy "lead." That attitude was pervasive throughout the Mission. There was a closeness between the officers of the Political Section and the Station. One of them and I were on particularly good terms. We would go out together. In my last three years in Seoul on this tour as a Political Officer I would go down and talk to the Chief of Station. There were certain areas, primarily domestic political and foreign politics, on which we knew more than Station officers did. In others their access was far better. There was a minimum sense of competition. Our relations with the AID Mission were also as they should be.

Q: This is Side A, Tape 2, of the interview with Ambassador Dan O'Donohue.

O'DONOHUE: However, at this point in time, the period between 1961 and 1964, when you looked at American activities in South Korea-whatever it was- the focus had become overwhelmingly the Embassy. In the Embassy the Political Section, under Ambassador Berger, had the major influence, and for a simple reason. Phil Habib headed it.

In all of this, while all of these developments were taking place in South Korean domestic life: our security commitment remained of immense concern. We had a whole range of activities in the international field going on with the South Koreans, including defending South Korea in the UN and dealing with Korean-Japanese rapprochement. The latter issue was first negotiated with the Korean CIA-led by Kim Jong Pil-in 1963. This led to an immense, public reaction. Instead of fighting against this public feeling, President Park Chung Hee, with that good judgment that he had, let every student in Seoul, from the universities to the primary schools, go out on the streets and demonstrate. He let them march, he put this issue on "hold," and then he negotiated it with the Japanese in a more formal open way in 1964. The South Korean Government then rammed the Korean-Japanese rapprochement agreement through. However, they had created enough public acceptance of the issue that they were able to deal firmly with the opposition to normalization.

Q: Did we play any part in trying to bring the Japanese and the Koreans together?

O'DONOHUE: The answer is "Yes" and "No." First of all, during that period there was the emergence of what, over time, was an essentially "corrupt" relationship between Japanese businessmen and politicians and South Korean businessmen and politicians, with the Korean CIA engaged. So you would have to say that that certainly was an underlying aspect of the rapprochement. However, as the matter developed in 1964, the South Koreans had to handle this issue in an acceptable public manner, and normalization was in Korea's interest. We played a very useful role in support of this rapprochement, providing them with a sense of solid support. In the negotiations, I think, we were able to pull the South Koreans back from extreme positions occasionally. The negotiations were between President Park and the Japanese in the first instance. However, without a question, we played a helpful and useful secondary role.

Q: While all of this was going on, what was the mood? There was, first, a weak South Korean Government, then there was the coup, and Park Chung Hee made some "missteps" in all of this. We both served in Korea. You have your "night thoughts, "when you think about the North Koreans standing 30 miles to the North.

O'DONOHUE: First of all, the whole period was one of intense involvement by the United States. As you know from your own South Korean experience, the one thing about South Korea is the intensity of our relationship with that country. In an emotional way, it is quite exhausting. On the other hand, we were dealing as close to "first hand" as we could get with the South Koreans on major issues. So there was that sense of satisfaction or of challenge, I guess.

Regarding North Korea, our concern was far more about North Korea trying to exploit the South Korean domestic scene than about North Korea "marching South." Invariably, when there was domestic trouble in South Korea, the North Koreans would do whatever they could to heighten tensions. So there was a pattern of heightened tensions. Nonetheless, there were invariably incidents. During this period there was the first of the US helicopter crashing in the North. However, in the period from 1960-67 the front lines were fairly quiet. There wasn't a sense of impending invasion or high military tension. Rather, there was a sense of North Korea constantly trying to put increased political pressure on the South.

Later on, the period of 1967-1972 was a time of really intense activity along the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone]. This period included the North Korean raid on the "Blue House" assassination attempt [residence of the South Korean President], the PUEBLO incident, and the shooting down of the EC-21 [electronics intelligence] aircraft. This was also a period of far more violent clashes along the DMZ and the North Korean tunnels under the DMZ.

By contrast the 1960-1964 period involved less physical threat to South Korea, although that was always there. I think that during this period we had a few incidents regarding the islands off the South Korean coast. Then we had the helicopter incident involving an American helicopter which strayed North of the DMZ. It took about a year to negotiate for the release of the American pilots. In fact, I had left South Korea by that time.

Q: Before we leave this period, one last thing. Can you describe the group which waxes and wanes in importance, but none more so than in other countries? That is, the role of the American missionaries during this period from 1960 to 1964. Did they play any major role or not?

O'DONOHUE: No. First of all, the Catholic missionaries did not play a noticeable role during the 1960-64 period. The American Protestant missionaries, such as the Underwood's, for example, ended up being a focus for student activities. They were the focus for "anti-foreign feeling" or whatever you want to call it.

When we traveled in the countryside, we would always stop and see the missionaries. I am talking here, in particular, about Catholic missionaries-overwhelmingly those belonging to the Columban and Maryknoll orders. Through the missionaries we were able to get a perspective on what was happening in the countryside. Not that they were active or advocating anything, but in terms of what was actually happening. That is, whether people were hungry or how the government was functioning in the countryside. They were an invaluable source of information.

Q: During my time in South Korea, 1976-1979, the missionaries played a much more active role, because "human rights" was a deep concern of the Carter administration at the time. They were well informed about "peace moves." They were much more of a factor then.

O'DONOHUE: In that period, the Catholic missionaries were much more engaged in the South Korean political situation, particularly as they moved away from parish work and into urban work. There was a tremendous growth, at least in terms of the Catholic Church, which began to appear "institutionally" in the 1970's.

In the 1970's a lot of things happened. There was the growth of an indigenous, Korean priesthood. As they were Koreans, they also had strong views, most notably Cardinal Kim. The foreign priests played a different supportive role. The foreign priests were always valuable for perspectives on what life was really like, especially in the countryside.

Q: Shall we leave this period now? When did you leave South Korea?

O'DONOHUE: I left Korea in July, 1964, and went back to the Korea Desk in the Department of State for two years.

Q: So we'll pick this up in 1964, when you were on the Korea Desk.

O'DONOHUE: Okay.

Q: Today is August 9, 1996. Dan, you have now taken over the Korea Desk. When did you serve there?

Q: What was the "chain of command" in the Bureau of East Asian Affairs JEA] at the time?

O'DONOHUE: The "chain of command" was as follows. In the EA front office William P. Bundy was the Assistant Secretary. He did not spend much time on Korea. Marshall Green was the senior Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs. Obviously, Marshall was very much engaged in Korean and Japanese affairs, as they arose.

The Office of Northeast Asian Affairs [NA] was headed by Bob Fearey. His deputy was Josiah Bennett. There were three desks in NA, dealing with Japan, Korea, and Taiwan-or, in those days, the Republic of China. There was a separate office dealing with Chinese Communist, or China Mainland Affairs. On the South Korean desk Chris Norred was first the Officer in Charge, and then was followed in that job by Ben Fleck. When the Department eventually went to the Country Director system, Ben Fleck became the Country Director.

Q: During this 1964-1966 period what were the major concerns on the Korea desk?

O'DONOHUE: Actually, Korea is always a "busy place." However, this was, relatively speaking, one of the "quieter" periods. The tremendous tumult over South Korean rapprochement with Japan and the normalization agreement that they had to abort continued. However, the South Korean Government then handled this matter in the right way. While there were demonstrations in South Korea, they got through the normalization agreement. We had had the first of the cases of US helicopter pilots inadvertently crossing into North Korea. The pattern for handling these cases, which has pretty well held until now, obtained. There was a very lengthy negotiation. Then, finally, by expressing our regret that the incident had ever happened-and we surely did regret that it had happened-we finally arranged for the release of the aircrew.

In terms of South Korean domestic affairs, outside of the very much more controllable demonstrations over the agreement for normalization of relations with Japan, it was actually a quiescent period. The dominant, bilateral issue with South Korea was actually the negotiations and the circumstances that led to the introduction of Republic of Korean forces in Vietnam. This was a very concrete negotiations, in which the South Koreans looked to see what economic benefits they could get.

There were three major elements leading to Korea's economic takeoff. The first element leading to Korea's "economic miracle" was the American decision in 1959-1960 to wean them away from dependence on American aid. The second, crucial element was President Park Chung Hee. The leadership he provided, and the role he gave to the South Korean "technocrats" was central to the country's economic success. The third crucial, catalytic element was the economic benefits from South Korea's involvement in Vietnam.

This developed in an analogous way, to what happened in Japan during the Korean War. The dimensions were not the same but, nonetheless, there were similarities. In the negotiations the South Koreans had pressed for access to contracts and a series of other economic benefits, which we gave them cheerfully enough. At that time we would have done so, anyhow. However, essentially, we saw these as minor 'throwaways,' because the South Koreans were still struggling at the very beginnings of their economic miracle. The most optimistic observer would never have predicted the pace at which economic growth took place in South Korea.

Indeed, the general view was that the Filipinos would be the major economic beneficiaries of the Vietnam War, in the sense of providing technical services and a variety of skilled and semi-skilled technicians. We didn't expect the South Koreans to do this. However, what happened was that the South Koreans, in fact, took hold. In Vietnam the South Korean companies learned how to compete internationally and how to work in an international environment. Just as importantly, they developed the self confidence to do it aggressively.

If you took a South Korean businessmen in 1960 or 1961, the only economic models that they had were the US, which they saw as a different world, and the Japanese economy. That was it. In both cases they saw themselves as not being in the same league. All of a sudden, in Vietnam they found out that they could compete very well on the international scene.

Q: At that time, as you were looking at Korean performance, what was the attitude in the State Department and your attitude and that of the Korea desk about where South Korea was going? Did you see these arrangements as "bones" to throw to the South Koreans to get South Korean troops to be deployed to Vietnam?

O'DONOHUE: First, all of us were impressed with South Korean economic growth. What we're talking about was still on a fairly small scale. To give you an example, in 1960 the only private cars in South Korea were driven by foreigners, except a few vehicles with Jeep chassis with painted, plywood tops.

You drove through potholes, around ox carts, and men carrying loads with A- frames on their backs. I'm talking about the middle of Seoul. When I left Seoul in 1964, you had your first traffic jams at the middle of the day at Chongno intersection. So while statistically and visibly the country was changing. The truly "dramatic growth" was in the period starting in 1964-1965. I was always impressed with Park Chung Hee's decisions on economic matters. These decisions were always better than even his advisers had recommended, in the sense that he had a larger vision, which turned out to be correct.

Q: Speaking of this, you were in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs. What were you getting out of the Philippines? How did the people who dealt with the Philippines view the situation there?

O'DONOHUE: I can't recall. I don't have any focus on that. Secondly, I was an FSO-6 [in the old system] or an FSO-5. I was fairly low-ranking. The world we worked on included Japan. Taiwan didn't really figure with us very much. I would have to say that I don't have any great impression of the Philippines at this period of time.

Q: In the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs you had Marshall Green there as a Deputy Assistant Secretary, who came out of his time of "trauma, "you might say, when Park Chung Hee took over in South Korea. Obviously, we were pretty uncomfortable with Park Chung Hee when he first took over in South Korea. However, by the 1964-1 966 period what were your own feelings and what were you getting from Marshall Green and others in the Bureau about the direction South Korea and Park Chung Hee were going in?

O'DONOHUE: I think that we were fairly relaxed. The tensions in the Korean-American relationship ebbed after the 1963 elections. I think that I mentioned before that the period before the 1963 elections was a period of very high tension.

However, the South Koreans had gotten through the 1963 elections. At that point, and as we entered the period from 1964 to 1966, the situation wasn't particularly marked by extreme repression. The opposition was not a major threat and there was no charismatic figure like Kim Dae-Chung yet on the scene. The country's economic development and its participation in the Vietnam War, plus normalization of relations with Japan, were the major issues. In Korean terms no period is placid. However, there were not the dramatic dimensions that you could find previously and afterwards.

We had, on the whole, good relations with South Korea. From my perspective, Marshall Green never carried any particular baggage in terms of South Korea, because of what had happened in 1961, although this had been a difficult period. I don't think that I ever noticed in Marshall any particular sense of concern. In the case of Don Ranard, his South Korean experience colored the rest of his professional life.

Q: How did we look at North Korea at this time?

O'DONOHUE: This period [1964-1966] was the prelude to the following period, which was marked by the most intense, military activity since the Korean War. During 1964-66 we continued to regard North Korea both passively and distantly. There were constant incidents and there was the beginning of erosion for support for our policy of keeping North Korea out of the UN. A constant, diplomatic effort had to be made to keep North Korea isolated diplomatically and to maintain South Korea's favored position. South Korea wasn't in the UN at that time, although it belonged to UN specialized agencies. There was a whole body of UN resolutions left from the Korean War. The UN Command remained in existence. UNCURK [UN Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea] had "withered" away to a small, nominal operation but still existed.

We knew very little about the situation in North Korea. We had no contacts. At the same time, this was not a particularly "bad" period in terms of tensions. Our helicopter crew had flown into North Korea by mistake, but we finally got them out. So, all in all, I think that this was a period when North Korea didn't figure very prominently.

Looking back on this period, in an institutional sense what struck me was how very limited the State Department's role was in a country like Korea. When I was in South Korea, we had had a strong Ambassador. We had Phil Habib as Political Counselor. The Embassy had a very strong and pervasive role. As I look back on the period when I went back to Washington to serve on the Korea desk, I was particularly struck by how, while we dealt with many things on the desk, we had a limited role in major activities. That was a period when AID was still a big and quasi-autonomous player in the field of foreign affairs. The Department of Defense, of course, was also a major player. While we certainly had something to do with both of them, it was nothing like when I later came back to the Department in 1974 as Office Director.

It struck me that the Korea desk had a more or less "traditional" portfolio. We certainly had liaison and contact work with DOD, AID and CIA. Our role on the Korea desk was more one of coordination. I hate to say, "on the fringes," but there didn't seem to be any major issue facing us, in the sense of something that engaged the attention of the Sixth Floor [where the office of the Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs was located]. This was in dramatic contrast to when I came back to the Department later on.

The other issue, of course, was the amazing difference in relationships with Congress. As a desk officer then-and I think that I am pretty much reflecting the situation-we certainly had some contact with Congress. We provided them with information, but they hardly intruded into the conduct of Korean affairs. While I am sure that it isn't true, my impression is that we were more or less handling just "odds and ends" of Congressional business. Congressional staff would telephone us. There were a few who were deeply interested in Korea, and these persons were somewhat different, but our role was providing the Hill information. Overall, my impression was that this was a period in which Congress may have played some role at the policy level, but it had nothing like the major role that came with the growth of Congressional staffs and the programs which we later had when I was Office Director-and ever since.

Now we really have major input from Congress. I think that this involves three things. First, this is a result of the breakdown of Congressional respect for Executive Branch leadership. Secondly, there has been a proliferation of "earmarkings" of programs. In the days of which I am now speaking, the programs were large, but we didn't have Congress bringing all sorts of other considerations to bear and tying the hands of the Executive Branch as they have done-in effect, putting in Congress' own objectives. Thirdly, there is the effect of the expansion of Congressional staffs. Previously, when Congressional staffs were smaller, they wouldn't have had the time to get too deeply involved in matters. So that was an utterly different aspect of our work.

Q: Did you see any indications of what I would term "unhealthy relationships" between some Congressmen and some South Korean businessmen, which developed later on?

O'DONOHUE: No, we didn't, although there may have been such relationships, because of the PL-480 ["surplus" agricultural products sold overseas on concessionary terms] Program, which was the genesis of what came to be called, "Koreagate." Whether there were some beginnings of such relationships between Congressmen and South Korean businessmen, I don't know. My impression is that these programs were essentially run straightforward. AID and Agriculture would develop them and then they would go up to Congress for approval, but I may have been naive in this respect.

Q: I'm not sure whether I have already asked this, but could you look at this in terms of both when you were in South Korea and when you were on the Korea desk in Washington? I'm talking about this matter in a worldwide sense. At one time there was real tension between AID and State. One of the matters which "grated" in this relationship-it was really a minor issue-was that AID people serving abroad lived "better." They had "better" living quarters and had "better" office facilities than their counterparts from the State Department. This situation didn't help bureaucratic relations. How did you see AID, particularly when you were in Washington. Did they tend to go "running off" on their own?

O'DONOHUE: As I said, the matter which, seen retrospectively, impressed me was how little we had to do with AID in Washington. So, with that limitation expressed, my impression was that in AID you had this large, quasi-autonomous entity which pretty much managed its programs as it wished. It was not so much that there were conflicts related to policy than that there was a feeling of "separateness." In other words, you could hardly look at the major AID personalities of those days and see them as somehow "subservient" to Department of State middle level officers. In fact, from the organizational point of view, AID came under the Secretary of State. It was during the Carter administration that AID was set up separately from the Secretary of State. So during my time in South Korea of which you speak, AID was literally a "dotted line" under the Secretary of State. I don't think that, at the very highest levels, AID personnel were challenging anything that they were interested in. I think that AID personnel accepted the policy framework set by other people, for example, in the Department of State. But they implemented policy quasi- autonomously.

It was rather that you had this very large, autonomous entity that, by its very nature, had great influence on the country in which it was located. AID was dispensing immense sums of money. In South Korea during the period of which we are speaking, the amount of money involved was very large by any standard. AID tended to operate, not in conflict with established policy as much as simply within their own framework of operations. I never had a sense that AID was an active player in what we should we doing globally, or anything like that. It was a powerful entity which commanded very large resources, and the State Department didn't have such resources. AID tended to set its own, specific priorities.

As far as the contrast in living styles, I was very junior when I was in South Korea from 1961-1964. If you consider the Embassy as a whole, the Political Section amounted to four or five people. The jobs we had were important. As I said, the Political Section, particularly under Phil Habib, played an immense role, even though we were relatively junior officers. None of those problems came up. In retrospect indeed, you could probably give a lot of people who were many years older than I was a fair amount of grace and tolerance for having me, as a young man, constantly telling them how to do things. So that was not a problem, although AID personnel were usually significantly higher ranking than State Department people, in a bureaucratic sense. Perhaps they lived more comfortably than we did, but I don't think that we would have traded positions because we lived in Seoul, and they lived out on the Yongsan compound. So I don't think that was an issue.

Q: Regarding North Korea in particular, were you getting any information from CIA, INR [Bureau of Intelligence Research in the State Department], or other US Government agencies on North Korea? Did you get much information on North Korea?

O'DONOHUE: No. As I said, if it weren't for the constant pressure or "weight" that came from the border that divided North and South Korea and what was happening at Panmunjom [location of the talks between North Korea and Communist China, on the one hand, and South Korea and the US on the other], it was remarkable how little attention we paid to North Korea. The American military paid a lot of attention to North Korea. Here, we are talking about the State Department. There wasn't much. North Korea didn't intrude much into what we did. There were occasional "spy" issues. The South Korean government, of course, used the threat of Communist North Korea to pry resources from the US However, there wasn't enough "grist" in such matters to have much effect. There were no contacts with North Koreans. So, in addition to the border between North and South Korea and the problems and diplomatic competition which resulted from that, North Korea was not a major difficulty for us. North Korea was almost "two-dimensional," from our perspective. This was also true when I first served on the Korea desk in the Department of State. As I said, this was not true with the American military, which had a concern about North Korea in the military sense.

Q: In 1966, where did you go?

O'DONOHUE: In 1966 I was assigned to the Executive Secretariat [S/S]. I remained intensely interested and involved in the problems of South Korea. I would often go down to the Korea desk and give them my two cents' worth of advice. However, at that time the Secretariat staff did quite a bit more than they do now. On weekends, after the "principal officers" of the Department went home, the staff more or less "ran" the State Department.

My two major activities in S/S were, first, the Paris Peace Talks with the North Vietnamese on Vietnam. Phil Habib, a close friend of mine, was assigned to Paris as the senior Department officer on our delegation. The Department wanted someone from the Secretariat to go. So I went to Paris for about three months in that connection.

The next event involved the seizure of the USS PUEBLO by the North Koreans.

O'DONOHUE: The two incidents were inextricably linked, in terms of the US relationship with South Korea and how events worked out.

Q: Then let's talk about that first, and then the Vietnam Peace Talks later.

O'DONOHUE: I didn't have much to do with the Vietnam Peace Talks.

Q: But we can talk about them later.

O'DONOHUE: Regarding the USS PUEBLO incident...

Q: Could you explain what the USS PUEBLO was?

O'DONOHUE: The USS PUEBLO was an electronic intelligence surveillance ship which had been sent to operate off the coast of North Korea. It was captured by the North Koreans, and the crew was imprisoned. This posed an immense and immediate challenge to the administration because a US Navy ship had been attacked and seized in international waters. It was located about 15 miles off the coast of North Korea when the attack and seizure took place. The ship was attacked and one or two of the crew killed and many wounded. The captain surrendered the ship, and he and the rest of the crew were imprisoned. So this posed an immense crisis for the administration because there was not only the incident itself but the welfare of the crew imprisoned in North Korea. Then there were all sorts of other aspects, which didn't involve me. This was a major intelligence disaster because the ship's sensitive equipment wasn't destroyed.

What colored the South Korean reaction was that, as I remember, just a week before, but no more than two weeks, there had been a major, attempted assassination of President Park Chung Hee. The North Koreans had sent across the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone] 31 agents whose purpose was to assassinate President Park.

The fact that these 31 assassins had crossed the DMZ was quickly discovered. There was a subsequent man hunt going on, which resulted in killing of a string of the assassins as they infiltrated to Seoul. The finale was that three of the assassins actually got to the gates of the "Blue House" compound. There was a "shoot out" in front of the "Blue House" compound, where the last were killed. I think one was caught.

Q: The "Blue House" was the equivalent of the American "White House."

O'DONOHUE: Yes, the Presidential Mansion. It wasn't the house itself that was attacked but the area in front of it. So there had been, in effect, a "trail of bodies." This had been a serious North Korean attempt to kill Park Chung Hee. All of this was taking place during the period which I mentioned earlier-1967- 1969-in which the military tension along the DMZ was at the highest point since the Korean War. There was the "Blue House" raid, there was the PUEBLO affair, and, in 1969, there was the shooting down of the EC-21 by the North Koreans.

This was really a period of immense military tension. Profound consequences flowed from this series of incidents. It led to the modernization of the South Korean Army and to the emergence of the South Koreans as much more active players in their own defense.

In the case of USS PUEBLO President Johnson was faced with twin crises. First, obviously, was the PUEBLO itself, and that involved North Korea. Secondly, there was the reaction of President Park and of the Korean Government. In my view the Department of State earlier mishandled the "Blue House" raid, in the sense of dealing with a chief of state, who has just gone through an attempt on his life. I may be wrong but, as I remember it, the Department did not recommend that President Johnson send a message to President Park, expressing relief that he was safe. Our initial reactions to the "Blue House" raid were focused solely on being sure the South Koreans didn't overreact against the North. We didn't say, "We're glad that you survived," but, rather, "Don't do anything precipitous." The whole thrust of our attitude to the South Koreans was, "Don't react."

Then we had the PUEBLO incident. President Park, at a very real level, and also, as it turned out, tactically, was enraged at the difference in the American response. As it were, he felt that the North Koreans had tried to kill him and all Americans did about it was try to hold the South Koreans back. Then the PUEBLO incident occurred and the Americans, in Park's view, wanted the South Koreans to do all sorts of things on their behalf. So we really had a second crisis with the ROK. So the President of the United States had more problems with regard to Korea than he wanted.

Q: I was going to say that, while this was happening, you were in the Operations Center of the Department, right?

O'DONOHUE: No, I was in the Executive Secretariat.

Q: Well, were you watching this situation as it unfolded?

O'DONOHUE: I was watching it, but, my nature being what it is, I was also down on the Korea desk, giving them my advice, on a daily basis. So President Johnson's most immediate problem was mending fences with President Park Chung flee, in the sense that this was his most "solvable" problem. There was nothing much that he could do about getting the crew of the PUEBLO Out, at least in the short term.

So President Johnson dispatched Cyrus Vance, former Defense Deputy Secretary who had a very special relationship with the President as his personal envoy to Park.

Once Vance had left the Defense Department, President Johnson had first used him as a mediator on the Cyprus situation, with its Greek and Turkish involvement. He did an amazing job. At one time he went on the premise that if he was in the air flying, the Greeks and Turks wouldn't shoot at each other! So Vance was flying from Athens to Ankara to keep the peace there.

In connection with the PUEBLO incident, Vance was charged by President Johnson with handling it. The Deputy Executive Secretary of the Department of State, John Walsh, who had no background on Korea had a very close relationship with Vance and had worked with him on the Turkey situation. Walsh went along with Vance on this PUEBELO negotiation. An Air Force Colonel, Abbot Greenleaf, had been Walsh's executive military assistant. Then I was assigned as the fourth man to go to South Korea.

As I remember, this happened in January, 1968. We left Washington on a cold, wintry day, which matched the signals that we were getting from South Korea, which were even colder. By then Ambassador Sam Berger was the senior Deputy Assistant Secretary in EA, the job which Marshall Green had had. Berger briefed Vance. When we left, the South Koreans were saying, 'Were not sure that we're going to accept you." As we got over North Dakota, the South Koreans said that they would perhaps send the Protocol Officer to the airport to meet us.

Q: This is Side B of Tape 2 of the interview with Ambassador Dan 0'Donohue. You were referring to Lee Bon Sok.

O'DONOHUE: Lee Bon Sok was the Chief of Protocol in the South Korean Foreign Ministry. He was later Foreign Minister and one of those who were unfortunately killed in the 1988 murder of a South Korean cabinet member in Rangoon, Burma by a North Korean sapper squad. In any event, while we were ultimately received in an appropriate manner when we arrived in Seoul, it was a very difficult negotiation. It was further complicated because the South Korean Foreign Minister at the time, was not of any great weight, and negotiations were going on all around him. However, he did figure in one of the memorable tales of that time. In the course of a week the South Koreans and President Park took a very strong stance, in terms of asking, Where do we figure in all of this, or do we count at all to the Americans? Vance was superb. With patience and charm he "rode out" this period of coldness. He kept clearly in mind what he was about, which was, in effect, to deal with the South Koreans and bring President Park to support our approach to handling the crisis.

The negotiations lasted more than a week. It involved a whole series of negotiations on a "quid pro quo" package to strengthen the South Korean military.

Q: Was this "package "for the negotiations with the South Koreans sort of "hastily" assembled, in the view that we had to bring something over there?

O'DONOHUE: Well, it was hastily assembled and then was modified as the negotiations went on. This was happening during the first week of this crisis. In effect, what we were going to do was to secure South Korean agreement to operate within our framework. That is, no military actions. For our part we would visibly strengthen the South Koreans militarily.

As I say, this negotiation continued through that week. Park was both genuinely but also tactically incensed. However, in the end, there had to be an agreement, however difficult it was going to be to reach it. Vance handled this negotiation beautifully, combining the grace and patience that was needed.

In dealing with the South Korean Foreign Minister, Vance allowed him to insert himself belatedly into the process although the details had already been agreed upon. The South Korean Foreign Minister wanted to get together with Vance to dot a few i's and cross a few t's. Well, nobody was happy about that, but Vance agreed.

The Foreign Minister forced Vance into an all night meeting. With great patience Vance allowed the Korean side to tell him that this English word was better than that one and that he should put a comma here, etc. With immense tact Vance went through it all and managed both to endure this process, while preserving everything of substance.

Obviously, Vance worked out the final agreement with Park Chung Hee. Vance was able to deliver one of the great lines in diplomacy. You don't often get a chance to do this. At the last minute President Park said that he wasn't sure that he could agree. With utter charm Vance said, "Well, Mr. President, I have come here only to see if we could help you, and if you believe that this agreement doesn't help you, so be it." Well, that took care of it. Park quickly agreed. In fact, the South Koreans had done pretty well.

The long term importance of the agreement was that this was the point at which the modernization of the South Korean armed forces began. Indeed, the attempt by Kim Il Sung, the North Korean leader, to increase tensions during this whole period turned out to have been a major strategic mistake. This was because this period of tension really led to the modernization of the South Korean armed forces.

In 1968 the South Korean military were still using World War II equipment. Their equipment was increasingly obsolescent. Our military assistance level was still fairly high, because South Korea still had a large army but only allowed for maintenance of the status quo. The Korean War had occurred 18 years before that, and the equipment was deteriorating. Actually, in the mid 1960's we didn't see much of a military threat and our military assistance program reflected this view.

As a result of this agreement, this was when we agreed to provide South Korea with its first F-4 fighter-bomber aircraft. At that point the F-4 was the major American first line aircraft.

Q: It was called the "Phantom."

O'DONOHUE: "State of the art" is the wrong word to describe the F-4, but it was the "standard aircraft" of the US armed forces. We agreed to provide the South Koreans with a squadron of F-4's. We also began a process of significantly increasing assistance and providing the South Korean armed forces with modern equipment. Later, as the economic situation improved, we shifted from our providing and paying for this increased military assistance to a situation where the South Koreans bore an increasing share of the cost burden. This change really meant the emergence of the South Korean Army as a modern, fighting force, rather than a large, static Army.

So Vance had succeeded in this negotiation, and I thought he had done so brilliantly. The negotiation had been difficult, and his negotiating skills had been superb. With it all this established a framework for the Korean-American relationship. It allowed us then to proceed. I had just gone out for the Vance visit to South Korea, and then was in the process of leaving in the summer of 1968 to Ghana to be chief of the Political Section in the Embassy in Accra.

Q: On this situation, when it started to develop, you had the "Blue House" raid and then the PUEBLO affair. In retrospect you can see that we should have been more responsive to Park. However, at that time and when Vance was going out to South Korea, did it become clear that we had "screwed up"?

O'DONOHUE: The East Asia Bureau should have drafted a letter from President Johnson to President Park, expressing concern about the attempt on his life. The Bureau recognized that it had not handled this issue very well, but it all just passed off. Events continued to unfold. This did not affect subsequent developments. As I said, Park used this issue very well, from the tactical point of view in his negotiation with us.

Q: From your perspective, how did Vance use you? You had been in South Korea...

O'DONOHUE: This was a negotiation, and I went along as a sort of a "support" person. However, I did not really figure in any substantive way. I was there and, I think, was helpful, but this was a negotiation and Vance was a superb negotiator. The negotiations were handled at a very high level. Vance had talked about tactics and the rest. However, essentially he had a very firm grasp of what he was doing. We had a very strange relationship, Berger the Ambassador to South Korea and with CINCUNC [Commander in Chief, UN Command in Korea].

Q: Who were they?

O'DONOHUE: The Ambassador was William Porter, and General Bonesteel was CINCUNC. Gen Bonesteel was an officer whom no Ambassador should be burdened with-mainly because he saw himself as a "soldier diplomat." His career had been in political-military questions. Indeed, as a colonel he had been one of those who worked with Dean Rusk on drawing the boundary line between North and South Korea along the 38th Parallel. He combined this experience with a tiresome tendency to lecture people. Ambassador Porter and Gen. Bonesteel tried to pull together. Nonetheless, I would say that this negotiation was a near virtuoso performance for Vance. As close as anything, John Walsh, the Executive Secretary of the Department of State, was the "alter ego" of Vance. However, as far as I was concerned, I was just assigned there to be helpful. The negotiations were all handled by Vance. John Walsh played the "sounding board" role because of his previous experience. John Walsh was a difficult person, but an officer of great ability.

Q What was John Walsh's background?

O'DONOHUE: John Walsh was connected with the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. I think that he ultimately retired after serving as Ambassador to Kuwait. He was a very organized man but very "quirky" and difficult. This clearly negated what I think were his very real abilities. I had always gotten along with him well, which is another reason that I went to South Korea on this occasion. I was certainly one of a handful of people who got along with John Walsh. There were a number of people who felt that he was vindictive. That clearly had an affect on his career. During that brief period with Vance he had established an immense rapport, and his judgments were very good. He played a very secondary but significant role at this time. I don't think that Ambassador Porter, Gen Bonesteel, or any of the rest of us played much of a role.

Q: Let's talk about the Paris negotiations on Vietnam.

O'DONOHUE: There isn't a whole lot to talk about regarding the negotiations in Paris, though I can give you my impressions. At the beginning I had gone to Paris and organized our delegation in S/S fashion. I was the Executive Officer of the delegation.

Q When was this, by the way?

O'DONOHUE: The Paris negotiations on Vietnam started in May, 1968. While I played an active enough role while I was there, it wasn't in terms of the negotiations, except that I was a "sounding board" for Phil Habib. I was somebody that he could talk to. It was more than an administrative job, but I was not involved in the negotiations-for which I had no background, in any event.

We went out and set up the delegation. Of course, it started out with immense, public attention. However, very quickly it deteriorated into a propaganda and public affairs exercise. After each negotiating session, both sides raced to get their version out to the media. Also, after a few days, the negotiation was superseded briefly but dramatically by the 1968 student uprising and general strike in Paris. The events on the streets of Paris were far more dramatic, so it was interesting being there as an observer.

For the peace talks themselves, we had Averell Harriman and Cyrus Vance as the two "Co-chairmen" our delegation. They were "co-equals." I don't think that President Johnson would ever have been comfortable with Harriman only. In my view, Vance would have been Secretary of State if there had been a second Johnson term. Harriman and Vance worked very closely together. Vance had no problems in deferring publicly to Harriman.

Q: Did you mean Vance or Habib?

O'DONOHUE: Vance and Harriman were the "Co-chairmen' of our delegation. Habib was the senior State Department officer on the delegation, under Harriman and Vance. Harriman was viewed as the senior of the two. In a technical sense, that wasn't true. In the real world Vance was closer to President Johnson, but Vance had no difficulty in deferring publicly to Harriman, who was, of course, a much older man with long experience in the US Government.

In short order we set up "secret" talks between Ho Van Lou, Phil Habib, and Vance. John Negroponte was there also on the delegation. These "secret" talks never went anywhere. One thing that came out of it, though, was that Phil Habib was able in that context to raise Phil Manhard's fate. Phil Manhard was a Foreign Service Officer who was captured in Hue in 1968 at the time of the "Tet" offensive. It was assumed that he was alive, but we hadn't had confirmation of it. As I say, the only thing achieved during three months with the delegation was that Phil Habib was able to raise the Manhard question. Some time later, Phil got an answer from the North Vietnamese, who said that Manhard was alive.

I was in Paris with the delegation until July, 1968. By that point, you might say, the whole framework had been set up, including the formal meetings, which were essentially the "propaganda" aspect. I don't myself know what happened later in the "private" or "secret" meetings, because I went off to Ghana. There were all kinds of "intermediaries" allegedly trying to help out. It was not a very edifying period to watch American foreign policy being played out. That was not the fault of either Harriman, Vance, or Habib, all of whom were fully disciplined in what they were doing.

Q: Who were some of the people who were "jostling"?

O'DONOHUE: Oh, you had Dan Davidson, who survived briefly in the Nixon administration, and then was fired by Kissinger. Dick Holbrooke was on the scene, being both helpful-which he was-and also looking for a role to play. There was an American military officer who made general and then retired. Then there were "outsiders" who were around. People like Frank Sieverts who had worked for Harriman. It was toward the end of the Johnson administration. This was in May-June, 1968, and I think that I left Paris in July, 1968.

Q: President Johnson had already announced, in March, 1968, that he would not run for reelection.

O'DONOHUE: So by its nature the pulling and hauling would have been like that, in any event. As I said, that didn't relate to the "principals," who were all quite disciplined.

Q: Next you went to Ghana. When were you there?

O'DONOHUE: I was in Ghana from 1968 to 1971. I was chief of the Political Section.

Q: How did that assignment come up? How did it come about?

O'DONOHUE: Well, I had decided by then that to get ahead in the Foreign Service, you had to be a supervisor. In those days, for a Political Officer like myself, it meant being chief of a Political Section. With that in mind I would have been happy to have been chief of a Political Section at an Embassy in East Asia. However, the posts there were too big for someone as junior as myself. An assignment like that wasn't going to happen, so I looked for a post in Africa. It was a different period. In my view the personnel system we had at that time [1968] was the most responsive and worked the best, although some people thought that it was too dominated by the regional Bureaus.

This was a period when the geographic and functional bureaus had the major role in the assignments process. Personnel functioned as more than "first among equals," but it was less than dominant. The assignment panels were usually made up of a senior Personnel Officer from M and the Executive Officers of the relevant, regional bureaus. Each bureau had a Personnel Officer. In fact, the Office of Personnel had a role a little stronger than "first among equals," but the bureaus, one way or another, handled an immense proportion of the assignments.

So, in effect, this was what I was interested in. To my surprise, and certainly for someone of my rank, I got a gem of an assignment, which was what Accra was in those days. In fact, the Political Section that had been there before I arrived in Ghana was unbelievable for a small Embassy. It included Bill Dupree, who was later an Ambassador. At that time he was probably the best Political Officer of his rank in African Affairs. He was the chief of the Political Section. Jack Matlock, later our Ambassador to the Soviet Union, was Labor Officer. Alan Berlind was an exceptional officer, but he retired in his early 50's. These were three Political Officers assigned to Accra who were immensely productive.

When I arrived in Accra, the officer who succeeded Jack Matlock outranked me, so the understanding was that he would serve as the chief of the Political Section until his tour was up. Then I would take over the job. We also eliminated one job.

At this time Kwame Nkrumah had fallen from power in Ghana, and the gloss was off African Affairs. African Affairs, say, from 1959 to 1964-1965, was of high interest as far as the United States was concerned. African Affairs was a glamour area. That feeling had gone, but there was still some residue there. There was interest in the Department in having Ghana succeed under its post-Nkrumah leadership.

To my surprise, I received this assignment to the Political Section in Ghana. I had three years there [1968-1971], which I much enjoyed. My own impression is that, until recently, these were the last three years when you could describe the country as "tranquil." There had been a coup led by the police and military which had deposed Nkrumah. Then the coup leaders returned the country to civilian government, led by a group of educated people who felt that they should have inherited power from the beginning of independence. They felt that Nkrumah, whom they considered a "demagogue," had usurped them.

This was one of those times in your career when you live in a highly corrupt society. I was fairly close to a number of Ghanaians and found that, for them, corruption was an accepted part of life. When I left Ghana, it was with a sigh of relief that I would be out of the country before the inevitable coup took place. The coup did take place, followed by the downward spiral of violence and repression which has characterized Ghana for about a decade or so.

Q: Who was the Ambassador?

O'DONOHUE: The Ambassador was Tom McElhiney. Originally, his background and focus had been Europe. In fact, at the only time previous to this assignment that I had met him, he was the desk officer for Germany. He was one of those officers who were pulled into African Affairs, when it was considered a high profile area. Jack Foley was the DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission]. I thought the two of them had immense ability.

Q: Well, how did you operate as a Political Officer? Can you talk about "contacts" and what you were looking for?

O'DONOHUE: Very easily. In South Korea we had always had wide-ranging contacts. That had been my modus operandi. You go out and meet people, focusing on people who count. For me it has always involved a very conscious effort to get as close and as high as I can in whatever areas are of importance.

However, I had always been known as a workaholic and an intense person. Well, about a month after I got to Ghana, I had to sit down and assess the fact that, if I continued at the pace at which I had normally been doing things, I would be like a whirling top, against the backdrop of a country which was running at a much slower pace. So I changed then. If you didn't get a cable done by the end of the day, it didn't go out that day, and nobody really noticed. I consciously slowed down.

The Ghanaians are gregarious people. Under the government led by the military and police I developed contacts and friendships with people who later held many of the senior jobs. So I'd established these relationships before the civilian government came to power.

In some respects I thought that Ghanaian society was appalling, in terms of its polygamous aspects. However, you take what you have. With this gregarious group, if you sat around and drank and designed your social events, to be sure there were always more Ghanaians than anyone else, they would want to come. What they didn't want to do was to come to events where they were "tokens." So our social events were always rather large and always had many more Ghanaians than anyone else. They were always fun.

Then, during the day, if you went out and visited the Parliament, you were risking your liver. The Ghanaian politicians drank heavily. You would go to see someone in Parliament, say, at 10:00 or 11:00AM. They would always invite you to go down to what they called "The Library." In fact, it was the bar. You would end up putting away, maybe, a liter of Heineken's or some other beer, while you were talking to someone or, perhaps, to three or four people.

I think that I did very well. I believe that I had a good reputation in the Foreign Service and I was blessed, on the face of it, to serve under an Ambassador and DCM who knew African Affairs well. The DCM [Jack Foley] had a reputation as very demanding. What I found was that the Ambassador and the DCM were fully supportive of my efforts. They not only never hindered me but gave me, as far as I could see, all of the freedom that I could want. They were both people that you could go in to see and kick things around with.

I couldn't get over the talent we had in this Embassy. The DCM, Jack Foley, bloomed very late in career terms. His career really didn't take off, until he was already very close to retirement. He was about the best DCM that I had ever seen in the Foreign Service. He kept a firm hold on things, but he had confidence in me and gave me a free rein.

Q: Did we have any issues outstanding with Ghana during your tour of duty there?

O'DONOHUE: No. Ghana was the first place that I had served where we were not the dominant foreign influence. There were some issues outstanding. We had some interest in promoting democracy and we were interested in seeing Ghana succeed.

We had a significant aid program and played a fairly substantial role, in this respect. I think that we were much more effective than the British were. They never seemed to be able to adjust to the change in their status in Ghana, which had been a British colony prior to its gaining independence in 1957. Assignment to Ghana was sort of "fun" in that respect. We pursued all sorts of objectives. We tried to get the Ghanaians to support us in the UN and elsewhere. We had a continuing interest in the country, but it was nothing like our relationships with East Asian countries.

Q: Nkrumah, Tito, Sukarno, and, I guess, Nehru were the leaders of the "non aligned movement" which we tended to see essentially as tilting toward the Soviet Union.

O'DONOHUE: This assignment was my "African interlude." I went to Africa in 1968 and left in 1971, and that was it. I think that our view of Ghana was more in terms of the African competition between ourselves, on the one hand, and the Soviet Union and China, on the other. Nkrumah had been a Marxist and was clearly heavily influenced and supported by the Russians and, to a degree, by the Chinese. I think that we saw him in that Cold War, African context, and not the broader, "non aligned" aspect.

Q: Was there much Soviet influence in Ghana by this time?

O'DONOHUE: No, quite the opposite. The group that had seized power from Nkrumah was composed of older military and police officers who had only modest educations. These men had been corporals and sergeants during World War II. Indeed, it was interesting that all of their military bases were named after places in the British campaign in Burma. There had been two West African divisions in General Slim's Fourteenth Army. There were younger police and military officers who were somewhat better educated, but these older men at the top had been non-commissioned and warrant officers under the British.

These older men were no less corrupt than others but I had a fair amount of respect for them in the sense that they had to pull the country away from Nkrumah. If you were a Ghanaian patriot, this was the time to do it, because during the seven years that Nkrumah held power, he had ruined it. In their own way, these older leaders had then worked to put back democratic rule, for which they later got nothing but abuse. As I said, these older leaders were not men of any great stature, but, in their way, they tried to do the best that they could.

Q: I always find it interesting to discuss corruption, particularly if corruption is pervasive in a given country, You can send in a cable, talking about corruption. However, if you put it too strongly, back in Washington it will affect everything that you talk about. The country concerned tends always to be called "the corrupt regime...

O'DONOHUE: Corruption is a relative thing. It was a "given" of the situation in Ghana that corruption was endemic. This wasn't a country where we were deeply involved or had a great deal of responsibility. Of course, we didn't want our own programs to be corrupt. We were working to ensure this. However, Ghana was not a country where we felt that its institutions were either of our making or dependent on us. So, objectively speaking, corruption was not our problem in Ghana. We described it. Frankly, you would be hard put to ignore it. However, the existence of corruption in Ghana didn't carry with it any connotation of a US policy failure.

In South Korea corruption was always a strong thread there. However, in South Korea my view had been that the basic economic decisions by President Park and his technocrats were sound. Secondly, the existing corruption always related to who got what. The "what," or whatever was at stake, met their needs. By contrast, in Ghana you had cases marked "machinery." They would open these cases and would find just so much junk. Every aspect of the transaction had been fraudulent. In South Korea that wasn't the problem. The airplanes flew, and the machinery worked. However, the question of who got what, in connection with a given transaction, was obviously what was in question. In Ghana corruption was endemic. However, we were not that deeply engaged, and the institutions were not of our making. So we had no difficulty in reporting on corruption.

O'DONOHUE: At the time Jesse Jackson was a very young leader. This was only a couple of years after Martin Luther King's death. From time to time Jesse Jackson would come to Ghana. That had more to do with emphasizing his own African roots.

My own view is that "incomprehension" is too strong a word. However, in essence, at that time in Ghana the civilian leadership was British-educated. The Prime Minister had been a professor at Cambridge University. All of this, as I said earlier, was to no avail. They were incompetent. Furthermore, the leadership was rather supercilious.

It wasn't that there hadn't been discrimination in Ghana prior to independence and that the Ghanaians didn't resent it. However, they didn't have the same experience as blacks did in the United States, and tribal differences were always more important. American blacks tended to see themselves as playing a leadership role vis-a-vis Africans. However, American blacks never seemed to have any immense rapport with the Ghanaians. Now with Nkrumah it was a very different kind of situation. He had been to the United States and had experienced discrimination. He had gone to Lincoln University in the US, and had experience of a completely different situation than that in Ghana.

At that point the Ghanaian civilian leadership saw themselves as having been educated at Oxford and Cambridge and felt that this system was immensely superior to the American system. There were occasional American black figures visiting Ghana. Their meetings would be "amiable" but they were just talking different worlds.

Q You left Ghana in 1971. Where did you go then?

O'DONOHUE: I went back to the Army War College as a prelude to going out to South Korea. Phil Habib had been appointed Ambassador to the Republic of Korea and wanted me to come out to Seoul as Political Counselor. So I was at the Army War College for a year, up in Carlisle Barracks, PA.

Q: This was a traumatic time in the United States, 1971 -1972. The Army was going through the whole Vietnam "syndrome."

O'DONOHUE: Yes, it was an immensely traumatic experience for the families of members of the class at the Army War College. This was a period when the military were being denigrated and were going through immense tensions with their own children influenced by the social upheavals of the 1960's.

I came away with immense respect for the Army from my year at the Army War College. The class was heavily composed of Army officers, though there were others from the other services and a few people from civilian agencies. We lived with them. You were treated the same as all of the other members of the class. You lived in one of the houses that they had for the class members. You were just part of it, in a family sense.

Physically, we lived in those tiny, little houses that the Army had, surrounded by other classmates and their families. My wife and I came away with immense respect for what the Army had gone through. Almost all of the officers and other service members of the class had served two tours in Vietnam. Their families had survived in different ways, but it was a period of great strain for them. I thought that the families, in particular, bore up under it with amazing dignity. It was a difficult period. That was an interlude. Then I went back to Korea.

Q: You were in South Korea from 1972 to 1974.

O'DONOHUE: There was a Political Counselor in Seoul when I arrived. It's fair to say that we had a mutually uncomfortable relationship.

Q: Who was it?

O'DONOHUE: Dick Peters. It was an uncomfortable relationship in the sense that I was obviously Ambassador Habib's protï¿½gï¿½. The Ambassador was almost visibly waiting for Dick Peters' tour to end. However, Habib handled this in a nice way.

Since I had been in South Korea previously and knew a large number of people, Dick Peters really couldn't ride herd on me. I don't think that he was the most likable or effective of supervisors. This showed up in his desire for control, and one person whom he couldn't control was me. However, looking at this relationship from Peters' perspective, you have to appreciate his position. At the end of almost every day, one way or the other, Habib and I would just sit around and talk. For my part, it's fair to say, I never talked to Habib about my relationship with Dick Peters. I talked about business with Habib. I didn't feel that it was proper for me to talk about relationships within the Political Section. In that sense, whether Dick Peters knew that, or had the confidence to believe it.

When Phil Habib came back to the Department as Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs in 1974, Dick Sneider, who had been Deputy Assistant Secretary in EA, came out to Seoul as Ambassador. Phil wanted me to come back to the Department as Office Director on the Korean desk. Dick Sneider had always seen himself as being in "competition" with Phil Habib, although Habib did not see himself as being in competition with Sneider. I think that Dick Sneider would have been happy if I had stayed on in Seoul. However, I thought that he would fret too much about having a Political Counselor whose ties were so strongly to the Assistant Secretary, with whom he had an abrasive relationship.

Q: Well, Dick Sneider was a very forceful person.

O'DONOHUE: He was. But, as I said, I think that Dick would have been delighted if I had stayed on in Seoul for a longer time. However, I don't believe that he was all of that unhappy when I left. Then he had me as Office Director for Korean Affairs, and he still had to live with me! I was Office Director for two, tumultuous years, following on my two years in Seoul.

This period of time [1972-1976] was dominated by the institution of the "Yushin" [emergency situation], during which President Park led a "coup from above," followed by the establishment of a much harsher regime. There was the subsequent kidnapping of Kim Dae Jung and the assassination of Mrs. Park. There also was a breakthrough leading to South Korea's dealing directly with North Korea. At the time this seemed a very hopeful development. The Korean CIA chief Yi Hu-rak, negotiated this secret agreement which led to the direct, North-South talks.

This was really a spectacularly busy period. It was a period in which we again saw the re-emergence of major tensions. There certainly were governmental tensions, but the US Government in general and Secretary of State Kissinger in particular were not tremendously caught up with human rights issues. The US Government was forced into a position which the State Department's Seventh Floor leadership was uncomfortable with, for a variety of reasons. Phil Habib managed this period of tension brilliantly and played a very active role.

Q: This is Side A of Tape 3 of the interview with Ambassador Dan 0'Donohue. At this point [1974] you had been gone from South Korea since 1964. Did you sense a difference in the "spirit of South Korea, "both how things were done, and then the military and the economy?

O'DONOHUE: There were significant differences. First of all, the economic development was mind-boggling. This hit me first in 1968, when I came back to South Korea at the time of the PUEBLO incident, some four years after I had left the Embassy in 1964. There had been an immense, physical change in Seoul, and this was continuing. South Korea was a country in terms of the economy and infrastructure, which was a universe away from what it had been, when I arrived in Seoul in 1960-and even in 1964, when there were only the beginnings of this enormous change. So that was different.

For better or worse, and I think that, on balance, it worked out well in the 1960's, there was a settled, authoritarian regime, but with enough room for people to breathe. In the 1960's, under President Park, there were all of these economic improvements which colored everything. There was a sense that this was a framework that was going to last for a while. Park had brought in, not so much a military government, but one in which civilians had found their role.

In the 1970's there were very significant tensions, essentially deriving from the 1971 presidential election, in which Kim Dae Jung had emerged, had run a race, and had always claimed that it had been stolen from him. He may even have been right. Whatever the facts, here was a relatively unknown politician who had, on the face of it, almost beaten Park Chung Hee. From then on until-who knows, maybe even now-Kim Dae Jung has been the "indigestible element" in the South Korean political dynamic. This is not a criticism of him. In effect, what happened after the 1971 election, and certainly what "drove" Park toward this "Yushin" or heavily authoritarian regime was concern over Kim Dae Jung as a Democratic political rival.

Q: The "Yushin" was the Korean term for a political revitalization.

O'DONOHUE: It was a "coup from above" to restructure the political system and core political institutions. Park already had an authoritarian structure, which was sufficient for his purposes. The drive for more power was really driven by the fact that here was Kim Dae Jung, who posed such a threat to Park. Park believed that the other politicians in the country could be bought off or scared into submission. They weren't a problem. However, Kim Dae Jung was a very different element.

Because of Kim Dae Jung, President Park first, through political manipulation, bribes, and all of that, was able to use elements of Kim's opposition party to split it. Kim Dae Jung did not control the opposition party. It was really controlled by people who were oppositionists because of the economic benefits which this stance brought them. Park had done that. Then he struck, suddenly imposing the Yushin regime, with attendant arrests and repression. We had a little warning about Park's move, but not much. Of course, Park clamped on martial law. Kim Dae Jung was out of the country at the time. Park set about creating a situation which was politically much more repressive. He strengthened his own arbitrary powers.

The Office Director for Korean Affairs at that time was Don Ranard. I think that Robert Ingersoll might have been Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs at that point [in 1974]. Don Ranard had a very deep and emotional commitment on human rights which had grown from the time of his experiences with the first coup that brought Park Chung Hee into office.

Ambassador Phil Habib was a man who had a keen sense of what you could accomplish. Although Phil always was a democrat, in the end he took what the situation gave him. He didn't tilt at windmills. On first acquaintance with individuals he was always "ferocious." He never took what was given him in terms of actual impressions of people. In a political sense he took what he could, but his whole thrust was that South Korea would be a better place with a democratic system. This didn't mean that he didn't work with Park. Indeed, in that framework, it meant that he did what he could do to push Park towards a more liberal, less harsh regime.

Q: What was the feeling toward Habib? This is something that I picked up even later. I'm putting this in my own words to you. I understood that Habib felt that the Koreans were the "Irish of the Orient." That is, a rather pugnacious people who "couldn't get their act together." If there was a democracy in South Korea, it would be a disaster-not completely, but I mean that it wouldn't work well. Did Phil Habib have that feeling?

O'DONOHUE: I can't say that the South Koreans could "never" get their act together. If you look at the thread of American policy toward South Korea from 1945 on, essentially it has reflected an effort to create a viable, democratic, institutional framework. This policy has always been based on the assumption that, first, this objective is not easy to attain and, secondly, that there is always the security aspect.

For example, I think that it was clear that we didn't think that Syngman Rhee was the man we wanted to lead his country. However, he did lead his country, and we had to accept that. I think that, over the years during the Rhee period, the State Department wanted to be firmer with the Republic of Korea. The American military and other agencies said, in effect, "No, we have other interests." During the period 1961-1963, when Park Chung Hee was initially President of South Korea, our policy toward South Korea was initially colored, as I said earlier, by the Kennedy administration's concern about another "fiasco' after the "Bay of Pigs" episode in Cuba [in 1961]. Nonetheless during that period, the thrust of US policy toward South Korea was that the South Koreans had to establish a civilian, more democratic framework. That didn't mean that Park had to leave office. However, the 1961 post-coup environment was threatening both military and political stability, creating military and political factional crises.

I don't think that there's ever been a time when American policy toward South Korea favored a "harsher" rather than a "less harsh" regime. However, our outlook has always been tempered by what we had to deal with. In fact, if you look at the Korean people, their outlook has been measured by the same outlook. My view has always been that, in the end, the Korean people always tended to choose stability and security over instability. Nonetheless, they have always wanted a freer political institutional framework.

During this whole period Don Ranard, with some differences from the emotional point of view, actually kept United States policy toward South Korea visibly one of support for freer institutions, tempered with concern for the security situation. I think that Secretary of State Kissinger was annoyed with those serving under him, not because he wanted a "harsher" system in South Korea, but rather because he saw tinkering with other political agencies as a fatal, American failing. He was always accusing his Foreign Service Officers of being "political scientists."

For the first time we also had North-South talks going on. Park is a supreme realist. During the 1971 presidential campaign Kim Dae Jung was the first South Korean figure to bring up the view that South Korea was confident and strong enough to deal with North Korea. He expressed the view that South Korea should accept the existence of North Korea. Park initially attacked this view but then very quickly afterwards embarked on his own policy of opening up secret talks with North Korea. Also, that became clear when South Korea adopted its own and opposite version of the "Hallstein Policy." In this context it meant moving toward mutual contacts and recognition. All of this followed the 1971 presidential elections.

In my mind Kim Dae Jung has been the only imaginative South Korean civilian politician in recent history. He was the first publicly to view mutual recognition of the two Koreas, not so much in terms of conceding anything to North Korea but in stating that South Korea was strong and effective enough to deal with North Korea.

Q Just for the record, since you mentioned the "Hallstein Doctrine, "I might just say that the view of the Federal Republic of Germany, up to the 1960's, was that any country which recognized East Germany would lose any aid from West Germany. In this context West Germany had a lot more "goodies" to offer than East Germany. In other words, it meant, "Either you or me, but not both of us." This was what you were referring to.

O'DONOHUE: So there was a variety of policy threads. It is probably true that the prospect of dealing with North Korea also figured in Park's decision to establish more authoritarian rule. He wanted to have the firmest control he could have in South Korea. However, I think that the major factor was that running against Kim Dae Jung in the 1971 presidential elections had been a very unsettling experience for Park.

Then, in the midst of this period, which already had its own difficulties, Frank Underhill, the DCM, received a phone call one evening from Tom Shoesmith, the DCM in Tokyo. At the time Frank and I were having a meeting at around 6:00 PM. Shoesmith reported that Kim Dae Jung had been kidnapped from his hotel in Tokyo. This was a bombshell.

Ambassador Habib was superb in dealing with this matter. Don Gregg was the CIA Chief of Station in Seoul. Habib got on the phone to the US military and got Don Gregg to check in on the intelligence side. He had me contact a couple of the major South Korean political figures, including Bud Han to get a message to Kim Jong Pil, the Prime Minister of South Korea at that time. In succeeding days we and the Japanese put immense pressure on the South Koreans. The South Koreans started out, saying that "It wasn't us" who had kidnapped Kim Dae Jung. Habib's instructions to us were, "Don't argue that point. Just tell them one thing. Kim Dae Jung cannot be harmed. Don't get into any arguments about whether the South Korean authorities kidnapped him or not. We know that they did it. There is the one message: "He cannot be harmed.'" This pressure was unrelenting.

The Japanese did the same thing in Seoul. We worked very closely with them. We put immense pressure on the South Koreans, throughout the whole governmental structure. Park, who had to have approved the kidnapping, working through the Korean CIA, was also feeling pressure coming from major South Korean political leaders. We weren't limiting our pressure just to Park.

As a result of that pressure and Phil Habib's efforts, Park and his supporters were left with the prospect of a major crisis between South Korea, on the one hand, and the US and Japan, on the other. Now, whether he would have had a major crisis with the Americans alone is less clear, because I think that both Ambassador Habib and Don Ranard probably...

Q: And with Secretary of State Kissinger?

O'DONOHUE: No, I think that once the pressure began to be mounted, there was nothing that he could turn off. I do not know whether a more cautious Ambassador than Phil Habib would have done what Habib did. It was interesting.

Q: Obviously, you were hitting your contacts. What were they saying about it?

O'DONOHUE: They were appalled. None of them knew about it. It was essentially an operation of the Korean CIA. Park must have approved it. The South Korean political figures knew nothing about it. I couldn't reach Kim Jong Pil, the Prime Minister. I had to see Bud Han, his principal assistant. He was just dumbfounded. They could believe that the Korean CIA did it. They couldn't comprehend why it was done. So the resonance of this affair among all of those outside of those involved in the kidnapping was very strong. So I'm sure that this was what was happening with Park, who was subject to the same, strong pressures. Everybody was coming in, including the Americans and the Japanese. I shouldn't say that the Japanese reacted uncharacteristically, because this had happened in Japan. Ultimately, Kim Dae Jung reappeared in Seoul but was subject to house arrest. Without a question, Ambassador Habib was the driving force in his ultimate release. The Department of State fully supported this effort. But, whether Kissinger liked it is unclear, given the fact that Habib and Ranard acted so quickly on their own.

Q: Did you ever have any chance to talk to Kim Dae Jung?

O'DONOHUE: Actually, I met Kim Dae Jung in 1960, when he was the losing candidate in an election in Mok Po, down in South Cholla province. I met him on a couple of occasions at that time. When I returned to South Korea, he had been out of the country. When he came back after the kidnapping and was under house arrest, I did not meet him. We did not attempt to meet with him when he was under house arrest. Other people, like Paul Cleveland and others, may have met him later when sensitivities eased but I never did.

Q: What was our assessment-and your assessment-of Kim Dae Jung's background and where he was going?

O'DONOHUE: Well, I always had a high regard for him. However, I felt that perceptions were too colored by what we were hearing from his political enemies. My own view of him was that he was an immensely able, charismatic politician. Indeed, I thought that he was the only truly imaginative, civilian politician that the country had. The reason that he posed a threat-and, indeed, was "indigestible" to Park-was that the South Korean establishment had no "hooks" on him. It wasn't so much that his policies were viewed as wildly "radical," nor was he wildly radical.

I don't think that he was incorruptible. I don't think that any Korean politician is incorruptible, since they always need funds for political purposes. But what "drove" him was certainly never a need for funds. As far as most of the other politicians were concerned, I could always envisage them as being manipulated. He was of sterner stuff. He may well have been "indigestible," but I have never understood the "denigrating' of him that sometimes happens. I felt that if you took 1971, when he really appeared or became a public figure, as your point of departure, it is amazing how the sequence of domestic events in South Korea for over 20 years has been driven by how to keep Kim Dae Jung from power.

He was kidnapped. Then he came out after Park was assassinated. If you took what was going on after Park died, involving Kim Jong Pil, and the others the group that the Korean military led by Chon Du-Won later overthrew-what was driving them in that whole period was how to hold elections that Kim Dae Jung wouldn't win. Then you had the Korean military. When they took over power they moved against Kim, and the Kwangju massacre took place. This was all linked together.

Q: And still is an issue.

O'DONOHUE: The Kwangju massacre was a watershed in our own relationship with South Korea and in the South Korean perception of the United States. Among young South Koreans we have never recovered from the impression that, in some fashion, we were associated with this massacre. However, during that whole period events were driven by Kim Dae Jung. And, finally, President Roh's decision to join with Kim Yong Sam as a more predictable political partner. So Kim Dae Jung, with all of his ability, has been the one figure whom the South Korean political structure somehow has never been able to absorb. Indeed, most of the traumatic events for 25 years in South Korea, one way or another, have been related to blocking him from coming to power. It's an amazing thing.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point? I just want to put a couple of things on the end here. Next time, before we finish this 1972-1974 period in South Korea, I would like to talk about how much we knew of the "secret" talks between South and North Korea. Also, the assassination of President Park's wife, and maybe something about how you saw the South Korean media at the time. Furthermore, drawing on your experience as a Political Officer, could you describe how we "related" to the American military and our knowledge of the Korean military?

Today is August 23, 1996. Dan, would you go ahead with the subjects we mentioned at the end of the last session?

O'DONOHUE: Among the things that you had listed, let me cover the subject that will take the shortest time. That is, the South Korean media. The South Korean media were absolutely dominated and controlled by the Korean CIA and the government. At any point in time during the Park period, the media were under heavy pressure. However, in the "Yushin" period in particular, all of the various strictures and emergency measures would have applied even more heavily. In the real world, the South Korean CIA and the government kept a very close watch and exerted pressure on the media to conform.

Q: What was your feeling at the time and what you were hearing about the Korean CIA? One always thinks of the KGB [Soviet domestic and foreign intelligence organization] and the Ministry of the Interior in the Soviet Union as being a world unto itself. Was there a Korean CIA "outlook"?

O'DONOHUE: The Korean CIA was something like our American CIA, in that it engaged in and had basic responsibility for intelligence and covert action abroad, vis-a-vis North Korea. It also had the attributes of the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], in that it handled serious and sensitive domestic issues. However, beyond that, it was the operational and action arm for President Park in a variety of areas that fall into the political area. For instance, it engaged in significant fund raising by controlling bids being run by nominally, say, the Ministry of Commerce. In fact, the Korean CIA was engaged in manipulating financial events for the benefit of the government, going back much earlier than this period. This included the organization of the Korean stock market and the introduction of the first automobiles that were assembled in South Korea from Japanese components. The Korean CIA was not so much engaged in economic policy making. However, it played a major role behind the scenes in fund raising and corruption as they related to political funds collected for President Park. For his part, Park was not a man driven by money personally. Money, combined with brutality, were instruments which he used to maintain and exercise power. In both instances the Korean CIA figured as his main agent.

Beyond that, the Korean CIA had the essential responsibility for the management of elections. As I said earlier, very early on President Park and the Korean CIA learned that you did not have to have an unduly high percentage of the total vote to accomplish the objectives of winning elections and controlling parliament. Therefore, throughout this period you never had obviously manipulated 80-90% majorities in the elections. Rather, in the parliamentary elections, they saw that you only needed a vote between 30 and 40% of the total to come up with really significant majorities. Since you were going to get some of that vote anyhow, even in a fair election, they were therefore able to operate more at the margins. Throughout this whole period, South Korean elections were manifestly unfair in the sense that the opposition never had an even playing field between legal harassment, government favorites and KCIA manipulation. However, these elections were never blatantly and visibly rigged. The government didn't have to.

President Park was not a sadist. However, from the beginning Park used brutality and fear as essential elements of his rule. Of course, the Korean CIA was the primary entity for this. For example, a professor who was too critical was pulled in and the torture applied to him led to his death. No one was "safe" from the Korean CIA. For instance, one of the most prominent businessmen of this period and a strong supporter and financial backer of the government was a man called S. K. Kim. He was a major textile manufacturer. That is, his business was originally textiles. Then, as the country boomed economically, he became a leader of one of the business conglomerates. He was very powerfully placed. When he got "too big for his britches," he was pulled in and given a week or so of confinement and KCIA treatment. He came out a very sobered and chastened figure, indeed nearly broken.

So the Korean CIA was the operational instrument for President Park. In the management of contacts with North Korea, the Korean CIA had the policy lead under Park, as well as the operational responsibility. It handled various and sundry sensitive issues, including, for example, the kidnapping of Kim Dae Jung and others. It was also Park's ultimate instrument for maintaining political control and manipulation of the body politic.

Q: How did you find that our CIA Chief of Station dealt with the Korean CIA, as far as you could see? Were you getting good reflections of how the Korean CIA worked? Sometimes, you get a Chief of Station who almost "gets into bed" with the intelligence agency of the country.

O'DONOHUE: I think that there was a qualitative change over time. During the first period that I was in South Korea, 1961-1964, when Park Chung Hee took power and the Korean CIA emerged, there was a sense that our CIA Station was building relationships with the Korean CIA. During my second tour in South Korea [1972-1975], particularly after the "Yushin," the Chief of Station was trying to keep a space between the Station and the KCIA on domestic politics and cooperation in the more traditional intelligence liaison activities. The American CIA did not want to be too closely associated with the KCIA. After the Kim Dae Jung kidnapping this tendency was intensified.

During my time in South Korea, during the period from 1960-1961, up to the coup that brought Park to power, I cannot describe and don't know the relationship of the Ambassador and the Chief of Station in our Embassy. I was just too junior an officer. It's my recollection that Don Ranard, the chief of the Political Section, was not privy to a fair amount of intelligence on what was going on. Therefore, we did not really have a very clear perception of whatever the Chief of Station was getting on the Korean military. However, I don't know about Marshall Green, the DCM, and Ambassador McConaughy, who should have had better access to available intelligence.

The relations between the CIA Station and the Political Section were always pretty good. I was the most junior officer during the 1960-61 period and I often dealt with the Chief of Station. There was actually quite a collegial relationship, which was true during both of my tours of duty in Seoul.

After Ambassador Berger and Phil Habib arrived in South Korea, and afterwards, when Habib was there as Ambassador, Habib always had a close relationship with the CIA Station. Even when he was Political Counselor, he very quickly emerged as the ambassador's prime advisor and was the peer of the Chief of Station, not secondary to him. Then, when Phil was Ambassador, he was, of course, the dominant figure. That doesn't mean that he directed the CIA Station. There were so many things going on which were really of major and basic interest. By no means did he sit over and dominate the CIA Station. He did not ignore what the Station's own agendas were. Nonetheless, he was the dominating figure and kept a firm oversight role and clear policy direction.

In terms of the South Korean domestic situation and Korean policy, certainly as Ambassador-and even as Political Counselor-Habib was very clearly the major voice in those areas, and, to a great degree, the CIA Station worked for him. As I said, that didn't mean that they didn't have a whole series of other things which Station personnel were doing. Certainly, after the kidnapping of Kim Dae Jung, Habib's disdain and contempt for the then Director of the Korean CIA was considerable. On the whole, he didn't want US entities to be associated with the Korean CIA. This had its effect. It didn't mean that contacts didn't continue. Without question Habib's views and disdain for the KCIA led to the CIA Station following Habib's lead, rather than working at cross purposes with him. The CIA Station joined vigorously in the effort led by Ambassador Habib to put pressure on the Korean leaders to save Kim Dae Jung.

Q: In the Political Section in a country like South Korea-today and always-you want to know what's going on within the South Korean military establishment. Most of South Korea's leaders have come out of the military. Even if the leaders have not come out of the military, you want to know what's fermenting in the military establishment. Of course, on the military side, we have very close relations with the South Korean military. Were you getting very much information out of the American military who were dealing with the South Korean military?

O'DONOHUE: The American military, both by training and outlook, are not going to be too much caught up in political matters. That included their contacts with the South Korean military. So we always appreciated that the American military really didn't know what was going on in terms of factions within the South Korean military. In 1960-1961 our military advice to the civilian government clearly contributed to the coup, in the sense that we wanted to keep the South Korean generals in place. We didn't want the South Korean civilian government to view the political reliability of the South Korean military establishment as its number one problem-which had been the case during the period of Syngman Rhee.

It wasn't as if there weren't reports of coup plotting. Indeed, when Park Chung Hee's coup succeeded, I think that there were at least two other coup groups preparing coups. So we were not completely unaware of this. However, during my time in the Foreign Service, the American military has never been the best source of information on the politics within the local military establishment. There have been exceptions, in that one of the lesser- known but significant figures on the American side in South Korea, from 1945 until the 1980's, was Jim Hausman. Jim had been an Army officer during World War II. He had been very much associated with the South Korean Constabulary Officers' Training School started in 1945 or '46. He probably was on active duty in the Army throughout the Korean War. Then he left the military service to become a Department of the Army civilian employee. His role in Korea has been as interlocutor or father figure to a whole generation of South Korean military officers, as well as the source of intelligence and knowledge for the CINCUNK [Commander in Chief, United Nations Command in Korea]. He played a liaison role, half father figure, half reporting officer.

Jim stayed so long in South Korea that the officers whom he "grew up with" were men who were "pushed out" of the South Korean Army after the 1961 coup. They were the Korean War generation of senior officers. You could hardly call them "older." But, in that job he continually cultivated officers and played his unique role for a very long period. I don't know when he passed from the scene-whether it was in the late 1970's or the early 1980's. He seemed to be the major source for the book on South Korea by John Toland. It is not a very good book, but he relies heavily on Jim's reminiscences.

Nonetheless, Jim was a significant figure who, interestingly enough, during the periods I was in South Korea, probably had warmer, closer relationships with the Embassy, particularly in the person of Phil Habib, than he did with the American military. This was simply because of personality. Jim worked for the CINCUNK. Phil Habib-first as Political Counselor and then as Ambassador-always treated Jim Hausman as a very valued friend. As a matter of fact, it was not that Jim was in constant, close touch with the Embassy per se. However, he was in close touch with Phil Habib. He was a figure who could have been a very difficult person, if he was either pursuing his own agenda or working to help the American military pursue their own agenda. In fact, Jim Hausman was always a source of information and advice and highly supportive.

His successor is named Steve Bradner who, I think, is still in South Korea. Steve had been in the Army and then had been with the Asia Foundation in 1959-1960. He went back to the United States and then returned to South Korea, where he has been for, perhaps, 30 years by now. He is a very different personality. Where Jim Hausman was a gregarious person and not an intellectual, Steve is more intense. Over time both of them have had close relationships with us-Jim Hausman with Phil and Steve with the Embassy more broadly. I don't know what the relationships are now.

With the exception of these two men, the American military have not been particularly useful on the internal, political dynamics of the South Korean military. In times of crisis, the South Korean generals would run to American generals. At such times we would get more from the American generals on the situation.

Q: What was the effect of the assassination of Mrs. Park? Could you explain how it came about? It happened when you were there, didn't it?

O'DONOHUE: It happened while I was there, but I can't remember whether I was on leave or not. I was fairly deeply involved in it at some point but, somehow, I think that I might have been out of Seoul at the time it happened.

Madame Park's assassination was personally traumatic for President Park. Just as on other occasions, there were two aspects to his reaction. One was the profoundly personal aspect. She was a gracious woman who obviously did not figure in politics.

Q: She was not the target of the assassination. She was just "in the way," wasn't she?

O'DONOHUE: Probably. The assassin was running down the aisle and he shot.

Q: So the man who assassinated her was also running down the aisle...

O'DONOHUE: And shot her. In South Korea there are wives who play major political roles. She was not one of them-and, indeed, his family was not much involved in his military and political roles. Their son and two daughters lived very normal lives-at least this is my last recollection of them. So, in a personal sense, it was a traumatic loss for Park, which contributed to his increasing isolation, but it was not the only factor. You could look at it and see a progression throughout the "Yushin" period. Nonetheless, her assassination contributed to his isolation. The depth of his feeling was profound. In this episode the Japanese managed to be utterly insensitive.

Q: Why were the Japanese insensitive?

O'DONOHUE: Because the assassin was a Korean resident of Japan. I think that the gun used may have been Japanese made. I think, although my recollection of the event is dim on this, the gun he used may have been a Japanese Police pistol, or something like that. By no means did the Japanese provide the pistol, but nonetheless, the assassin was a resident of Japan.

Q: This is Side B of Tape 3 of the interview with Ambassador Dan 0'Donohue. Dan, please continue.

O'DONOHUE: In any case, the assassin was a resident of Japan. As I said, President Park, at one level, was profoundly and traumatically saddened by the murder of his wife. That was very real. However, as Park has done in other situations, he also used this tragedy as a tactical lever in terms of the South Korean-Japanese relationship. First, he felt true unhappiness and rage at Japanese insensitivity.

Q When you say "Japanese insensitivity", what do you mean?

O'DONOHUE: I think that Dick Ericson [a Foreign Service Officer and Japan specialist] went into this. Nonetheless, the Japanese initial handling of the tragedy involved a pro forma expression of regret. You might say that it sounded something like, "Well, there go the South Koreans, shooting at each other." I have forgotten the details about the attendance at the funeral and the rest of it. However, as the matter developed, the South Koreans and Park used it in a variety of ways. First, there was a very real unhappiness. Park used this incident to bring a close to the political fallout from the Kim Dae Jung kidnapping. Secondly, Park sought to pry from the Japanese a public manifestation of regret, in effect forcing them, however uncomfortable it made them, to genuflect toward South Korea. Then, thirdly, Park used the incident to establish or re-establish various political relationships.

This was a very difficult period-one in which we played a useful role, though I wouldn't describe it as quite as dominant a role as Dick Ericson called it. Nonetheless, it was a useful role, along with other channels that were used. All of this was going on, in terms of resolving this situation. We were one of several channels being used. This was a period when we obtained a clear perception of some of the less savory Korean-Japanese relationships and channels being used, in an effort to bring the South Korean-Japanese relationship back into balance. I think that in all issues that involved President Park there was always going to be a pragmatic resolution. Park would press along a given line, but he was a supreme realist. So, in a sense, this was not a crisis out of control. You might say that it was a crisis being controlled by Park. I don't want to create the impression that this was a man who simply manipulated his wife's death. Quite the contrary. He was profoundly affected by her death, so his rage and unhappiness were real. On the other hand, you could argue that this was also another instance where Park used this incident to benefit the interests of South Korea.

Q: Is there anything else that we should cover in connection with South Korea?

O'DONOHUE: Well, we didn't go into what the Embassy knew about the South Korean talks with North Korea. I arrived back in Seoul in 1972 shortly after the truly secret part of these talks had been completed. I think that I mentioned that the Korean CIA ran policy toward North Korea. The Red Cross representatives, in effect, took their directions from the Korean CIA and looked to them for operational directions. We were not aware of the initial contacts. However, at a certain point the South Koreans undertook to keep us informed. I doubt if we knew everything that was going on. In fact, the Korean CIA did provide us with information. Remember, Yi Hu-rak, the Korean CIA chief, was the chief South Korean negotiator. They kept us informed of developments as they proceeded after they ended the secret part of the talks between South and North Korea. Undoubtedly, there were conversations that we didn't know about, but I would say that we were reasonably well informed.

Q: Then you left South Korea in...?

O'DONOHUE: I left South Korea in the fall of 1974. Phil Habib had left South Korea and had become the Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs. Phil wanted me to come back and be Office Director for Korean Affairs. Don Ranard was retiring. Dick Sneider had arrived in Seoul as Ambassador. We overlapped a month or two. Then I went back to Washington in October or November, 1974. Don Ranard retired, and I took over as Office Director.

Q: You were in Washington this time from when to when?

O'DONOHUE: I was there from the fall of 1974 until the summer of 1976, when Phil Habib became Under Secretary for Political Affairs. I moved with him to become his Executive Assistant.

Q: During the period from 1974 to 1976, can you describe where South Korea fit in the Bureau of East Asian Affairs? We had just had the opening to China. How did South Korea fit in?

O'DONOHUE: First of all, when I arrived in Washington, Phil Habib was the Assistant Secretary. I guess that Bob Miller was the Deputy Assistant Secretary of EA for Southeast Asian Affairs. Owen Zurhellen was there at the same time. He was the principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs. He also dealt with Northeast Asian Affairs, meaning that he was responsible for Japan and Korea.

At that point, and from then on, what really struck one was, of course, Vietnam. If you asked what was the dominant, operational issue, it was obviously Vietnam. This was the period after the 1973 Paris Accords. Then came the massive North Vietnamese invasion of South Vietnam in 1975, followed by the collapse of the South. This was a period of immense and intense focus. By the end, in 1975, it was my impression that about the only senior US Government official who had any credibility or weight on the Hill [in Congress] on Vietnam was Habib. So he was deeply enmeshed in that.

China was significant, but the Office of Chinese Affairs itself was not only very self contained but saw itself as having a direct, Seventh Floor mandate. China was a Seventh Floor issue on which Habib certainly played an operational role, but it was a secondary one. China wasn't his area. He hadn't been deeply engaged in it. China had earlier been an NSC [National Security Council] matter, so it wasn't that it didn't affect Phil Habib. However, Phil Habib was one of the "significant" figures caught up in Vietnam, which, of course, had the whole government absorbed. On China Phil had a secondary role. So the Office of Chinese Affairs was deeply engaged, and there was the whole issue of handling Taiwan. There also was a series of issues outstanding with Japan. EA was an immensely busy place at this time but Vietnam dominated.

Now essentially, in the case of Korea, Phil Habib and I managed it. There had been a series of issues that came up. One of them was "Koreagate. This was the corruption scandal, which became very absorbing as time went on. Habib was always deeply interested in Korea. Korea has always been a demanding place to work on. Nothing ever goes smoothly-there are always various and sundry crises.

Certainly, while I was on my second tour in South Korea and then back in Washington, the human rights question was becoming a major irritant. In contrast to the 1960's the missionaries and the church groups were much more active. In the "Yushin" fallout there was an unending series of issues. There were a couple of expulsions of missionaries. Congressman Don Fraser began to focus on South Korea. So, from the "Yushin" period on, human rights became a significant focus in our dealings with South Korea. This was also true in Washington for those following South Korean affairs.

During this period we had a South Korean effort to develop a nuclear capacity, which we were able to turn off. "Koreagate" also emerged, in which Phil Habib was one of the central figures, In effect blowing the whistle. He was deeply involved in that-more so than I was. By the end "Koreagate" became a nearly totally absorbing issue. Indeed, it lasted through the time he served as Under Secretary for Political Affairs. We can talk about that later. When Phil became Under Secretary, we still were deeply engaged in managing Korean- American relationships-more than we wanted to do, because the EA Bureau was so skittish in dealing with the ROK Government after "Koreagate." Those were the major issues that absorbed us on the Korea desk.

Q: When you arrived on the Korea desk and took over from Don Ranard, he had been very emotionally involved in Korea and was very anti-Park Chung Hee, as you said before. Did you find that you were engaged in "mending some fences" around Washington? Sometimes, when you have people who are emotionally involved in an issue, they turn other agencies "off.

O'DONOHUE: No. First of all, Don Ranard had been Political Counselor in Seoul when I served as a Political Officer during my first tour in South Korea. Probably, in terms of learning about political work, he was probably the best teacher that I had. I always had, not only a deep regard for Don, but he had very significantly contributed to making me an effective officer. While I didn't have Don's emotional approach to South Korea, when we looked at South Korea, I didn't really see the various issues all that much differently than he did. Nor did Phil Habib. It was a case of operating within a sense of what we could accomplish and also bearing in mind that there were other aspects that we would have to weigh, most notably the security relationship. So I didn't come onto the desk with the intention of "reversing" the position which Don Ranard had. The same thing was true of Phil Habib.

As Office Director, for instance, on some issues such as our military presence and so forth, Don Ranard was probably less ready than either Habib or I was to consider a change. That was the situation at first. It was not dramatically different, either in what we were doing-my views or his views. Remember, he worked well with Phil Habib. As I said, in some areas affecting Korean-American contacts, Don originally did not have much different a view of the importance of the security relationship. In some ways he was more conservative and rigid than Habib or I about what kind of a military presence we should have in South Korea.

Once Don Ranard left the desk, his views on this changed. You could say that human rights being changed into one of the issues on our agenda, rather than being the emotionally dominating issue, as it had been under Don Ranard. I always had deep respect for Don Ranard and felt that he was very poorly treated in 1961 after the coup, by the Department and the Foreign Service as an institution.

Q: You mentioned human rights. From the perspective of the Korea desk, how were you involved in matters of human rights? Could you give some examples?

O'DONOHUE: My memory for details has somewhat faded. Essentially, though, we had the major responsibility, although by no means the only player on human rights. This essentially meant we maneuvered as best we could given the attitude of Secretary of State Kissinger, who did not want us to be deeply engaged in South Korean domestic affairs. We dealt constantly with the various human rights groups in the US

Q: With Amnesty International?

O'DONOHUE: Less so. It was Ferris Harvey and the Christian Korea-focused organizations. We were inevitably the action office on any action we were going to take from the Washington end. We had a situation where the Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs was as personally interested as I was. Phil Habib was equally the focus for action, since many of these people knew him. Phil, by his nature, had his door open to everyone. So Habib was at least as deeply engaged, and Habib and I saw things exactly the same way. That is, we did all that we could, within the framework within which we were operating. Also, we weren't going to "pull down" the Korean-American security relationship. In the first place, we didn't have the power to do that and security(?) saw that relationship as essential.

One has to say that Secretary of State Kissinger had great respect for Phil Habib. Therefore, Habib was probably able to do more on human rights than Kissinger was probably comfortable with. And Kissinger let Habib do this. However, Habib, from his point of view, realized that you always have to show that what you were doing made sense in terms of "real world objectives.' This meant that you always had to have a reason when you pressed for something. It couldn't simply be in pursuit of a broad, human rights issue. Your approach had to be, "Look, we've got to deal with this because of, let's say, Congressional pressure." Habib's basic motivation, particularly at the personal level, was always very human and very humane.

Also, Ambassador Dick Sneider in Seoul was very uncomfortable with human rights issues. First of all, Dick didn't know Korea in the personal sense as Habib did. Habib had been there twice and knew a large number of people. In the end Dick wasn't going to affect his ROK government relationships by pressing on human rights issues. When Dick Sneider arrived in Seoul as Ambassador, he first spent his time becoming comfortable with the issues. Secondly, he saw himself in a more traditional sense as focused on the power structure in South Korea. He saw the human rights issue as a complication. Thirdly, I think, he found it uncomfortable to deal with human rights activists. He had no particular warmth for the opposition spectrum, whether the political oppositionists, the missionaries, and others. I hate to use the word "respect" in this regard. However, in Dick Sneider's view, this spectrum was not very impressive. For Dick, human rights were a problem which had to be managed as gingerly as possible. He was blessed to have Paul Cleveland on his staff, who always did far better with the human rights issue.

Q: Was Cleveland the Political Counselor?

O'DONOHUE: Paul was not Political Counselor at first. Ed Hurwitz was Political Counselor. Then Ed left, and Paul replaced him. Paul had a very close relationship with Dick Sneider. Paul was much more active, gregarious, and friendly. He had been in Seoul when we were very active. So, as the Deputy Chief of the Political Section under me, Paul had both exposure to my contacts and developed his own range of contacts. So Paul WAS comfortable in Seoul.

So Dick Sneider was uncomfortable with the human rights issue. He saw it in terms of how to manage the matter tactically, while Phil Habib always saw tactics in terms of an objective, such as how to save somebody, or mitigate the ROK government's harshness if you could, although, in some cases, you might not be able to.

That difference was a complication which I don't think affected any major policies. However, this difference was part of the tensions between Habib and Sneider, which were clearly evident.

Q: At this time the role of Congress was very important. In the eyes of many people Congress had "cut South Vietnam off at the knees." If you look at it from one perspective, promises had been made about a given level of support for South Vietnam. However, Congress got tired of the whole issue and, essentially, cut off most of the support to South Vietnam. In the eyes of some people this was quite instrumental in the collapse of South Vietnam. I would think that, during this period, because Saigon fell during this time [April, 1975], the South Koreans must have been looking at this matter closely. They must have been saying to themselves, "Boy, we have all sorts of promises about what the US would do for South Korea." If they compared this to what was happening in South Vietnam, where Congress greatly reduced the support-was this a problem for you?

O'DONOHUE: Well, let me go back a little on this, because there was one episode that we didn't touch on. I think that President Park, probably more than most Koreans, had a sense that Korea couldn't completely depend on the United States. Having said that-and this is just my own view-I would say that if Park had looked from beginning to end at our relationship, the United States turned out to be surprisingly constant and supportive of South Korea. This means that, in fact, if you had realistic expectations, which Park did, we ended up being supportive. I think that for Park, and as long as he was President, there was a sense of realism, tempered by a recognition that the United States, one way or the other, had come to South Korea's assistance in one crisis after another.

However, during the period when Phil Habib was Ambassador to South Korea, and I was also in Seoul, Phil was called down to Saigon for the final stages of our involvement there. He didn't participate actively in the negotiations. He was just there as an adviser to Secretary of State Kissinger. You may recall that in the Paris Accord of 1973 there was a time frame, after which the two Vietnamese sides were not permitted to introduce additional military equipment. They were also not allowed to introduce anything that was qualitatively different. Consequently, the US was scrambling around to get as much military equipment into South Vietnam as possible before the deadline.

One day we received a message from Washington which, in effect, instructed Habib to ask the South Koreans for their whole jet Air Force, or almost all of it, for deployment to South Vietnam, within this time frame! The South Koreans had F-5 fighter aircraft, as did South Vietnam. This was a point where both Ambassador Habib and President Park were absolutely at their best. When South Korea continued to face a threat from North Korea. President Park was being told that what the US wanted to do was to take these aircraft and put them into South Vietnam, as part of the process of "beefing up" the South Vietnamese Air Force and getting everything in before the time limit set out in the Paris Accord of 1973 on Vietnam.

Q Were there substitutes offered?

O'DONOHUE: We offered to assign an additional American F-4 squadron to compensate for the F-5's to be deployed to South Vietnam. Habib read this telegram and, unlike some Ambassadors, he knew that this was something that you didn't argue about. There are some cases where you might ask the Department to reconsider its instructions, but this was one that you couldn't dispute. Habib had been told to ask the South Koreans, and he knew that he couldn't do anything other than what he had been told to do. At the same time, Habib was appalled. He realized that this was going to be an immense and traumatic shock to the South Koreans. At a minimum, what we were doing was that we were leaving South Korean Air Force pilots with no planes to fly. It was the F-5's that the Department wanted to deploy to South Vietnam-not all of the South Korean aircraft. However, for all practical purposes, we were asking for the "cutting edge" of their Air Force. Nonetheless, Phil presented this request. He did it seriously. Our best friends in the Korean Government were appalled, shocked, and couldn't believe it.

President Park was also at his best. He looked at the request as something which, given our relationship, could not simply be rejected out of hand. After all, the United States Government had made this request seriously. So he took this request, which to others was a devastating action, showing our indifference to South Korea, and turned it into a negotiation. As I remember, we didn't take all of the South Korean F-5's. We got, maybe, half of their inventory of F-5's. Instead of our providing one squadron of F-4's, my recollection is that the South Koreans ended up getting a second squadron of F4's. In other words, they ended up with an additional F-4 squadron. So, in a sense, this exchange ended up with everybody happy. The United States got what it reasonably could expect. The South Koreans, over the longer term, were strengthened by it.

Between the two of them-President Park and Ambassador Habib-this was a perfect example of two men who had a keen sense of realism, while everyone else in the South Korean Government had reacted so negatively and viscerally. In effect, Park realized that he couldn't say "No." Then followed a negotiating process which he and Habib handled. For its part the United States Government also realized that there had to be more in this for South Korea. As for Habib, by so clearly doing what he was instructed to do, he acquired sufficient credibility for what he advised in the ensuing negotiations with the South Koreans. Washington saw that Phil had done his job. Therefore, he was in a good position in terms of where the South Koreans ended up.

Q: Credibility-where?

O'DONOHUE: Henry Kissinger, the White House and in the State Department. By contrast, if he had fought and argued against this instruction, he would have been viewed as suffering from "clientitis" and an inability to understand what his government's priorities were. So, by doing this in a straightforward fashion, knowing full well the flak that he was going to take from the South Koreans, Habib ended up being able to negotiate with Park an arrangement which met American needs and strengthened the South Koreans.

Q: After the fall of Vietnam in April, 1975...

O'DONOHUE: I was back in the Department at the time Saigon fell, not as a participant but assigned to the EA Bureau. I was impressed with the VLC [Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia] office. The office made what I thought was a very impressive analysis of the dire consequences of the cutoff of assistance to South Vietnam, and so forth. I was just an observer and, being a close friend of Habib's, I talked about it but was never involved in Vietnam. That was the dominant issue with Congress, and relationships were venomous. Habib had still managed to maintain reasonably good, personal relationships with Congress. So he could at least go up and get through a Congressional hearing. He couldn't reverse what was going on in Congress but he could at least go up and get through a hearing without being savaged.

Q: Did you find that, being responsible for Korean affairs, Congress was looking at South Korea as "another Vietnam"? Was this a sort of "isolationist" outlook that you were encountering?

O'DONOHUE: It's important to remember that Congress has always accepted the central significance of the security relationship with South Korea. During this period we had the beginnings of what was a long-term thread, of Congressional interest in human rights-whether it was Congressman Fraser or whoever followed him. However, when you looked at this more closely, in the end Congress has never been ready to take actions which would threaten our basic security relationship with South Korea.

This was also the case with the succeeding administrations. Rhetorically, you couldn't have a greater change than that between the Ford- Kissinger approach to human rights and that of the incoming, Carter administration. On the other hand it is difficult to see where the Carter administration handled South Korea much differently than Secretary of State Kissinger did. The one exception being the proposed troop withdrawal which it finally cancelled.

Q Were you in Washington during the 1976 presidential elections campaign?

O'DONOHUE: Yes. In July, 1976, when Phil Habib became Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, I was his Executive Assistant. Phil maintained a close, oversight view of Korea. Art Hummel succeeded Phil as Assistant Secretary for EA, and Ed Hurwitz succeeded me on the Korea desk. In the case of South Korea, Phil's close, oversight attention was doubly necessary because "Koreagate" involved him so much.

Q: Before we get to "Koreagate, "I'd like to continue talking about human rights. When Jimmy Carter was running for President in 1976, he was running on a platform of no more involvement in Asia. I can't remember whether he made an explicit promise...

O'DONOHUE: He said that he would withdraw a division of troops from South Korea.

Q: He said that he would withdraw the one, fully-formed division that we had there, but not all of our troops. In a way, this was appalling to many people because it seemed that if you withdraw the American division from South Korea and still say, "We'll be with you, "you raise the risk of a North Korean attack on South Korea, if they conclude that the United States might not come back to South Korea. After our performance in South Vietnam, this was not an unreasonable conclusion. How did you deal with this Carter promise to withdraw a division from South Korea which he made during the 1976 election campaign?

O'DONOHUE: You should remember that Habib always favored a reduction in the US military ground presence in South Korea-whether a division or something less. Indeed, on this issue the difference between Habib and Secretary Kissinger was that Habib saw a reduction-not a withdrawal-as part of a process of moving away from operational control of the South Korean Armed Forces, through the UN Command, which so involved us in every domestic crisis in that country. So intrinsically, Habib was not opposed to a reduction in our forces in South Korea and, as Under Secretary of State, supported it. Indeed, my last act in Korean Affairs was going out with Habib and Brown in 1977 to discuss this withdrawal.

Q: Brown being the Secretary of Defense.

O'DONOHUE: No, he was General Brown, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I think that from Kissinger's perspective-and here I could be completely wrong, although I don't think that I am-he saw the troop reduction as concerned with our relations with China. That meant that if you worked with China to reduce China's commitment to North Korea, it would be easier to arrange for a reduction of US troops in South Korea. So it wasn't so much that changing the American military presence in South Korea was "anathema" to Kissinger. As I say, there were people who looked at this issue in different ways. Kissinger saw it as a "bargaining chip" with the Chinese. Habib never saw it as a complete withdrawal, but as reduction and a shift to the South Koreans of greater responsibility for their own defense. He saw this as an essential element in getting the United States out of its constant and deep involvement in every domestic crisis precipitated by the South Korean military, which colored our whole relationship with South Korea.

So during the presidential election campaign of 1976 itself I can't remember how we handled this proposal by Jimmy Carter. But this was partially because Habib would not have been-and wasn't-intrinsically opposed to reducing the level of our troop presence in South Korea. Later on, when he continued as Under Secretary for Political Affairs, he was actively engaged in the initial process of planning for such a reduction.

Q: In looking back at when you were dealing with South Korean affairs, both in South Korea and elsewhere, was there any time when there was a change, as we saw it, in the way the South Koreans were dealing with North Korea? For a long time there has been the idea that some day the Koreans would "take over." At a certain point there would be a feeling in North Korea of, "The hell with the communist regime, "as happened in Germany. For their part the South Koreans might say, "We're not going to 'strike North,' and North Korea can stew in its own juice.

O'DONOHUE: If you talk about North Korea, in the initial period up to the time when the two sides started seriously negotiating, outside of a small residual segment of the political spectrum-and we're talking about a real "sliver" of the body politic of South Korea-I don't think that they ever saw unification as a pressing issue. Every Korean had the feeling that they wanted unification of the country in some, abstract form. However, unification was essentially a radical student issue. Virtually all of the students were in favor of unification. It was probably a serious issue only in the sense that North Korean efforts at subversion of South Korea allowed some people to advocate it. However, public pressure was not a major factor on unification. Every government said the "right thing" on this issue, paying lip service.

When the South Korean Government started dealing with the North Koreans, this reflected a "sea change" in the self-confidence of the South Korean Government. As I mentioned earlier, I always thought that Kim Dae Jung was the most creative of the Korean politicians. He was the first one who talked about this and said that they could deal with North Korea. After Park won the 1971 elections, in effect he adopted this line. The key change is that there was a South Korean Government that increasingly had the self confidence to see itself as stronger than North Korea. This was partially because the problem of South Korea has always been the weakness of its political institutions-and this is still true today. The key change is that there was a South Korean Government confident enough to go off and deal with North Korea the way it did. In dealing with North Korea, Park certainly wanted firm control of his domestic situation. I don't think that this was the dominant reason that he adopted "Yushin." I do think that it was one of the reasons. As I said, I think that it was the Kim Dae Jung election threat that Park never wanted to go through again that precipitated "Yushin." This was the central, motivating issue, but I also think that having strong control of the South Korean body politic to a counter the control that North Korea exercised over its own body politic was another issue.

O'DONOHUE: The SS MAYAGUEZ incident involved the seizure of a container ship of US registry off the coast of Cambodia by the Khmer Rouge. Subsequently, this led to a bloody action, in which the US Marines seized and liberated the ship. Interestingly enough, it had a Korean connotation, as well as providing an insight into how Washington operated at that particular time.

On a Sunday, a week before the MAYAGUEZ incident happened, I had a phone call at home from the State Department Operations Center that a Korean ship, sailing off the coast of Cambodia, had been shelled by the Khmer Rouge, who apparently made an attempt to capture it. The Khmer Rouge didn't board the Korean ship and it was not clear whether they were really attempting to board this ship or frighten it off.

I discussed this incident on the phone with Owen Zurhellen, the Deputy Assistant Secretary who dealt with Northeast Asian Affairs. The Operations Center, CINCPAC and Embassy Seoul were all involved, and an account of the incident appeared in an FBIS [Foreign Broadcast Information Service] report. For some reason there was no cable traffic regarding the incident. The Embassy [in Seoul] had done all of the reporting on it over the telephone.

A week later, when the SS MAYAGUEZ incident happened, there was a sense of shock to find out that there had been no notice taken, that a similar incident had happened the week before. There was no formal Notice to Mariners, or anything else promulgated. This led to an investigation as to what had gone wrong and what had happened. In the process of this investigation it turned out that we didn't have any established procedures for dealing with an incident of this kind. Apparently, the State Department Office of Maritime Affairs and the US Navy had equal responsibility for reporting to mariners an incident of this kind, but no one in the Operations Center knew of this. That's why the Operations Center only contacted me. For my part, I had never heard of any established procedure for handling such an incident. Had I known of any of this, it would have saved some trouble, as it was a very painful process being involved in this inquiry. It was less painful for me in Korean affairs. However, for the officers on the VLC [Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia] desk, it was a very painful experience.

This incident also had another aspect in terms of Owen Zurhellen. As I said, he was Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs, but he was also Acting Assistant Secretary of State at the time of the MAYAGUEZ incident. Habib was on one of his rare periods of leave. As the MAYAGUEZ incident was unfolding, Secretary of State Kissinger was pressing for military action. Kissinger saw this as a deliberate provocation, coming soon after the fall of Vietnam. He felt that we had to show our firmness. It ended up that we used Thai airfields without Thai Government permission to support the operation which resulted in liberating the ship and its crew but loss of Marines. The Defense Department didn't want to react militarily, but Kissinger finally forced the action.

Just before the NSC meeting I mentioned, there was an FBIS report indicating that the Khmer Rouge might be willing to release the crew. Zurhellen flagged this FBIS report at the NSC meeting. This was only proper, as he was a relatively minor figure in this affair. After the Defense Department mounted the action to secure the release of the crew of the MAYAGUEZ, and it was a bloody one, Kissinger's enemies leaked that Kissinger had dismissed this FBIS report. Owen Zurhellen paid an immense penalty. He did not leak anything and had nothing to do with it. However, Kissinger didn't forgive him for having provided the script for this leak. As a consequence Owen, who was an officer of long experience, ended up being sent to Surinam as the only Embassy that he could get.

Q: You moved up with Habib when he became Under Secretary for Political Affairs. At that time, anyway, this was the top Foreign Service job.

O'DONOHUE: It was.

Q: When were you there with Phil Habib?

Q: So you were up there in "P" [Office of the Under Secretary for Political Affairs] for about a year. What was your role?

O'DONOHUE: As Habib's Executive Assistant I had two roles. One, I still maintained a fairly close oversight of East Asian Affairs. Things were still fairly active-particularly in Korea, as it turned out. Secondly, I oversaw the substantive work of the other special assistant looking at the other regions. When he went up to P, Phil Habib had seen his job as involved in East Asia and the issues in other parts of the world that Secretary Kissinger wasn't interested in. Phil never had any background in nuclear negotiations, for example, and those were handled in a different channel. He saw himself as picking up the loose ends, as David Newsom, Phil's replacement, did more obviously.

In fact, Phil became very much engaged in Near Eastern issues-in other words, Arab-Israeli matters. This ended up being Phil's number one job under Secretary Kissinger. I think that that came as a surprise to Phil, as he hadn't quite expected it. However, he thrived on it. He loves negotiating and he very much enjoyed it. However, he was always closely involved in East Asia. Then he followed Africa as well, in addition to a whole range of additional issues. These ended up as the matters which fell to him in which Secretary Kissinger was not deeply interested. In those days in particular the Deputy Secretary's job was not without substance, but the Deputy Secretary did not fit comfortably into the Department structure. During this period Bob Ingersoll was the first Deputy Secretary. He was a very amiable man who truly handled what was left over from what Kissinger and his substantive players, including Phil, were doing.

Then there was a man named Robinson, a rather formidable figure who had very strong, economic credentials. He had been Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs and then moved up to be Deputy Secretary. To avoid going out of his mind, boring inactivity, he cut out niches to handle. He had a more active portfolio. Indeed, on certain areas, and we're talking here about the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and not about negotiations on nuclear weapons, he ended up ensuring that the Department of State played a larger role in what were essentially areas that the Department of Energy and others were really more interested in. This happened simply because of his ability and his need to have something to do. So the Deputy Secretary of State was not an alter ego to Secretary Kissinger. Indeed, he functioned like a deputy commander in the military services. That's not really a "Number Two" position.

Phil Habib, as I said, had oversight responsibilities for East Asia, Africa, and, increasingly, the Near East. Kissinger clearly enjoyed having him as Under Secretary for Political Affairs because he appreciated the cut and thrust of the arguments he had with Phil. He also valued Phil's views. So Phil played a larger role than he expected in the Near East. Still, this was a very subordinate role as, of course, Kissinger was the principal figure. Under Kissinger Phil played a major role in East Asian affairs. Dick Holbrooke, the Assistant Secretary, was much different from what Phil had been. On African and other matters Phil Habib ended up playing the traditional Under Secretary's role as the one, "Seventh Floor person" paying attention to them.

Q: Just to touch on the Kissinger-Habib relationship, did you ever sit and watch the cut and thrust of their exchanges?

O'DONOHUE: To only a limited extent, because I was mainly Phil Habib's Office Director and only a bystander or a "spear carrier." Regarding the meetings between Kissinger and Habib, Kissinger would rail and rant, usually to Foreign Service officers trying to remake countries in the American model. Habib would hang in there. There was an element of "enjoyment" in it for both Kissinger and Habib. First, Habib was realistic in what he was trying to do. This meant that he got a surprising amount of what he wanted from Kissinger. For his part, Kissinger gave Habib more "slack" than he would have given to another person and probably than his own inclinations would have led him to do. So I saw that part of the Kissinger-Habib exchanges. It's also fair to say that what I saw was always fairly controlled on both sides. There were very real tensions when they really went at each other, usually on Korean and human rights, and had to pull back. They were both emotional men, in their way. They had to pull back when they had almost gone too far. However, I was never there for those encounters-just for the lesser meetings.

Q: What was your job?

O'DONOHUE: I was Habib's Executive Assistant, the senior assistant. East Asia was the area which I, in a very personal sense, followed as well as intelligence. I had to do so, because the EA Bureau was not as effective as it should have been-particularly in connection with Korean affairs. Other than that my responsibilities were to be sure that the Office of the Under Secretary "ran" properly. In the areas that other assistants were responsible for, I knew what they were doing. I kept a fairly close look at these areas, to be sure that we were, in effect, operating cohesively and in a manner that Habib wanted. Then I spent a lot of time as his "friend," just talking about all of the issues, "kicking them around," and giving him my thoughts.

Q: How did you find the relationships of the various bureaus with the Under Secretary for Political Affairs?

O'DONOHUE: I have to separate the two periods, under Secretary Kissinger and then under Secretary Cyrus Vance, because there were significant differences.

During Secretary Kissinger's tenure Habib's relationships with the various Assistant Secretaries were good, without a question. I think that Art Hummel, the Assistant Secretary for EA Affairs, chafed to some extent. Art would find Phil operating in areas where he would, in effect, consider Art as a desk officer, so to speak, and would differ with him. Having said that, I would have to say that Art always accepted Phil's views with some grace. He knew that Phil was going to be intervening in some EA affairs, and all of the rest of it. You can't look at this pattern and say that any EAP Assistant Secretary would have liked Phil's manner of operating. However, that certainly was manageable. For the rest, the situation varied with the other Assistant Secretaries.

The focus of the EUR Assistant Secretary. was Secretary Kissinger. For Phil Habib working with the EUR Assistant Secretary involved odds and ends. It was the peripheral issues with EUR that came to Phil Habib as Under Secretary-not the central ones. So the relationship between Phil Habib and the EUR Assistant Secretary was friendly enough but relatively distant. Secretary Kissinger had Helmut Sonnenfeldt [Counselor of the Department of State] and the people working under Sonnenfeldt. Phil's relationships with the Assistant Secretaries of AF [Bureau of African Affairs], ARA [Bureau of Latin American Affairs], and NEA [Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs] were very good. I think that those Assistant Secretaries saw Phil in the traditional Under Secretary's role as "their man on the Seventh Floor."

In the case of the Assistant Secretary for NEA, Phil played an active but still subordinate role to Kissinger and his immediate circle of intimates. I think that NEA saw him as surprisingly effective. I think that both Assistant Secretaries Hal Saunders and Roy Atherton of NEA liked Phil and enjoyed their relationships with him.

When Cyrus Vance was Secretary of State in the first year of the Carter administration, the situation was different. First, under Vance, Warren Christopher really was the Deputy Secretary. There were certain responsibilities which Phil had had under Kissinger which were transferred to Warren Christopher. So you started out with a Deputy Secretary who really was the "Number Two" in the Department and was really an "alter ego" to Secretary Vance. Secondly, Warren Christopher had taken over certain issues in the intelligence area which Phil Habib had previously handled. Thirdly, at least at first, human rights were the dominant theme with Pat Derian, the Assistant Secretary for Human Rights. In the office of the Deputy Under Secretary for Political Affairs we went almost overnight from being viewed by Kissinger as political scientists trying to re-do the world in a democratic form to a new administration in which we were viewed as having a conservative point of view defending authoritarian regimes. It was an absolute reversal of roles.

Q: This is sort of the way in which the "political" principal figures in the Department were looking at you.

O'DONOHUE: As I said, if you look very closely at both periods, there really wasn't a great deal of difference between the Ford and the Carter administrations. Indeed, the administration which, in many respects, most effectively pursued the subject of human rights turned out, surprisingly enough, to have been the later Reagan administration. The Reagan administration found out that you couldn't ignore human rights and then pursued this issue with a certain balance. So, paradoxically, in the case of the Carter administration you went from a tremendous, verbal focus on human rights to supporting the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia in the UN!

The atmospherics under the Carter administration were such that in one case, where we had always been pressing in the field of human rights-though not always successfully-under the Ford administration we ended up under Carter in pursuing a more balanced approach.

Q: On the Korean side, in August, 1976, there was the "tree chopping" incident in the Demilitarized Zone. Could you explain what it was? Did you get involved in it?

O'DONOHUE: Well, we were deeply involved but not on the scene, because, obviously, as it evolved, it dealt with Washington approval of the CINCUNC planning.

Q: Could you explain what this incident involved?

O'DONOHUE: I'll give you my recollection of it, which may vary from the real situation, because, as I say, I was in Washington, not in Korea at the time. Essentially, there was a period of tension between the troops on guard at Panmunjom, in the Joint Security area. It all involved a tree that we wanted to chop down, because it was obscuring the view from one of the guard posts. It started out simply with the UNC wanting to trim the tree, but the North Koreans refused to agree. It became a "chip on shoulder" issue.

Finally, the UN Command mounted an expedition to go in and just chop the tree down. Remember, the American soldiers who died in this incident were killed with ax handles. The UN Command had sent in a work detail, in effect, to cut the tree down without North Korean agreement.

Q My impression was that the North Koreans sent in men with ax handles.

O'DONOHUE: Well, they might have. I've forgotten. It was my impression, somehow, that it was our own ax handles that figured in the incident. Then a brutal brawl broke out, in which two Americans were killed. Then the major focus was how to get out of this situation while maintaining a modicum of self respect. No one wanted to dismantle the Armistice Agreement. In retrospect, this matter was not well handled, because we did not want to be where we wound up. The North Koreans, just as obviously, must have been taken aback by what happened. Nevertheless, we lost two men and the tree was still standing. The UN Command then mounted an operation which involved marching a detachment into the DMZ which simply cut the tree down, as I remember, and the incident passed peacefully into history as both sides backed off from further confrontation.

Q: From the Washington perspective there was a "concentration" of troops and all of that, wasn't there?

O'DONOHUE: Oh, I think that we went on an alert and extensive contingency planning. We were determined to save face. The problem was that we always had the possibility that things would get worse and that we would have another fight there in the JSA. However, I don't think that anyone saw this incident as threatening the peace on the Korean Peninsula. I think that it was more a matter of our having lost the two men, and having to do something to show we were not backing down. This, in effect, was the price that was going to have to...

Q: Were you and Habib involved in sitting down and talking about what we were going to do, now that this had happened?

O'DONOHUE: Yes, but to be honest with you, as I remember it, that kind of planning came from our military and the Embassy in Seoul. That is, the planning was realistic. It was designed to do realistically what we could do, as I said, to save face on all of this, not exacerbate the situation. The North Koreans were also ready to back down, allowing the second tree cutting to proceed unhindered.

Q: I was a member of the Country Team in the Embassy in Seoul at the time. My "great contribution" was to say, "For God's sake, let's make sure that the chain saws work. Take a couple of extra ones along."

O'DONOHUE: My recollection of it all is that nobody was happy about the events that led to the deaths of the two men. In retrospect the first action was ill-advised and inadequately thought out. However, as far as subsequent planning was concerned, my impression is that it was done in Seoul with Washington approval and was prudent and restrained.

Q: I was just wondering about the concentration of forces near Panmunjom...

O'DONOHUE: I don't remember that this incident was viewed as a major threat, as much as a prudent reaction to the possibility that, since this kind of incident happened once, we could have the same thing happen a second time. And we certainly wanted to be prepared. My recollection of this time was more that this involved contingency planning. Everyone in Washington had a sense of doing what was necessary, in effect, to demonstrate that we hadn't been cowed. There was surprisingly little saber rattling.

Q: How about subsequent planning after the SS MAYAGUEZ incident.

O'DONOHUE: None at all. The general impression that I had is that the handling of the fallout from this incident by the Embassy in Bangkok, was far superior to the handling of the "tree chopping" incident in Korea. However, you should remember there then was one big difference-Washington and Secretary Kissinger ran the show including forbidding the Embassy to let the Thai government know we were going to use their bases without permission.

Q: I think that the decision to chop down the tree near Panmunjom was taken at a pretty low level.

O'DONOHUE: I doubt that the Embassy in Seoul knew much about it. But the decision to send in a work party must have been approved by the military command. The first indication we had is that they hadn't made any contingency plans in case there was a North Korean reaction to chopping the tree down. There was unhappiness in Washington over this, but it was water over the dam. We were left with two dead American soldiers. That was our focus-what to do next.

Q: What was happening with regard to Japan during that period?

O'DONOHUE: During that period the major issues involving Japan were the lingering effects of the Kim Dae Jung kidnapping and the death of Madame Park. Then, there was the decision by the Carter administration to withdraw a division of troops from South Korea. I thought that this marked another watershed. Up until then, and now I'm going back as far as when I was a junior officer in Seoul in 1960, when you talked with Japan about security issues involving Korea, it was almost as if you were talking about a peninsula off the coast of Antarctica. There was a certain air of unreality and a lack of concreteness on the Japanese side. Obviously, the Japanese wanted to stay away from any serious discussion that involved security of Korea, expecting us to bear the whole responsibility.

Also, there was a sense that the Japanese clearly did not have a balanced approach, but always weighed unduly the North Korean angle. Once we announced the troop withdrawal, that changed. First, the Japanese were actively opposed to this. Secondly, the Japanese were suddenly quite willing to talk seriously to us about security in South Korea, and particularly our troop presence there. This had always been justified, in good part, because of Japan. From that point on the Japanese were more clearly associated with South Korea on security matters.

When Habib, General Brown (an Air Force general who was then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), and I went to South Korea to outline President Carter's thinking on troop withdrawal from South Korea, we stopped in Japan and met with the Japanese Foreign Minister. It was the first time, in my recollection, that we ever had the kind of hard-nosed discussion in which the Japanese were visibly unhappy and blunt. They were talking about strategic issues in a manner that they had never discussed them with us before. Mainly because they were afraid that we were weakening our Korean security involvement, and that affected Japan.

My impression was that, from that point in time, the Japanese were much more actively engaged, both with the South Koreans as well as with us, in discussing security issues. They realized that they couldn't count on the US as being an absolutely predictable buffer there. So that was a very significant change in Japanese attitudes.

Q: When you got to Korea on this trip, how did that work out?

O'DONOHUE: Park almost invariably handled issues like this one to exact the maximum advantage for Korea. He said that the United States had the right to make its own decisions. So he never challenged us in an emotional way on this issue. He indicated his unhappiness about the decision to withdraw the division from South Korea and the need to deal with the consequences of it. He was fairly restrained on what he regarded as a "fait accompli," meaning that he recognized that the US had made its decision. Now in the Embassy, both General Vessey and Ambassador Dick Sneider opposed this decision. Dick did so less vocally, in a formal sense, and General Vessey, with utter courtesy. Certainly, General Vessey opposed it quite clearly. He always did it with utter integrity, in contrast to General Singlaub, who opposed it publicly.

As I remember it, in the discussion with Park he accepted that President Carter had the right to decide where he was going to station US troops. Park made clear he didn't like this decision and thought that the US troops should remain in South Korea. He expressed his views but he also listened to Habib. Park was being told of a decision that really had been made. He wasn't being asked for his views on a matter under discussion. Park then focused on the need to strengthen Korean forces.

Q: When the Carter administration entered office, Carter had made this campaign promise. This decision was really rooted in the Vietnam experience and developments after the Vietnam War. Were you aware of talks between Phil Habib, Warren Christopher, and Cyrus Vance about the plan to withdraw troops from South Korea?

O'DONOHUE: I remember that Habib essentially supported the withdrawal of troops. That was his basic attitude.

Q: But you were saying that he did not want to withdraw US troops totally.

O'DONOHUE: No. Habib's view was that we should have a reduced, military presence in South Korea. In fact, in the 1993 post-Yushin period, we even sent an airgram to the Department, recommending a reduction in our ground forces in South Korea to a brigade and transfer of operational control over South Korean forces to South Korea. Kissinger rejected this recommendation angrily.

However, this was not a difficult issue for Habib. Whether he would have favored withdrawing a division or a brigade or something like that, in Habib's view this should not involve a complete withdrawal of US forces from South Korea. His concerns had to do with US ground forces presence in South Korea and operational control over the South Korean forces, which he saw as something that inextricably involved us in South Korean domestic events.

South Korea was not an area with which Secretary Vance and Deputy Secretary Christopher were familiar. Vance had dealt with Park in connection with the USS PUEBLO incident and had some knowledge of the country. Nonetheless, I don't think that either of them had particularly strong feelings regarding South Korea. They were ready to implement the President's campaign promises.

In the Bureau of East Asian Affairs, Assistant Secretary Dick Holbrooke' s role has always been very ambiguous, in that I think that its never been clear whether the withdrawal of US forces from South Korea was originally his idea. I don't know whether it was or not. Nonetheless, the bureau position on the withdrawal of US forces was somewhat ambiguous. The problem with the Department of Defense at that time was that it was opposed to a withdrawal of US forces from South Korea but then was stuck with having to implement the withdrawal after it was decided on. Mort Abramowitz, the EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense paid a penalty in that he was doing nothing more than implementing something that he disagreed with. But he was associated with the decision in the eyes of some people. Despite the fact that he felt quite the contrary and thought that the withdrawal was a mistake.

Phil Habib never viewed the withdrawal of ground forces from South Korea that way. He saw this issue as something that was both manageable in security terms and that we should do. Now, he had already left the job of Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs when the Carter administration reversed its position on withdrawal of forces from South Korea.

Q: What about the advent of Dick Holbrooke as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs? How did that work Out? He had left the Foreign Service, made a career elsewhere, and was considered a "stormy petrel.

O'DONOHUE: Like many people, Phil Habib had tremendous respect for Dick Holbrooke's ability and intelligence. Relationships with Dick Holbrooke always have a certain tumultuousness but had been, and remained afterwards, very close. Dick came in as Assistant Secretary for EA, determined that Phil Habib was not going to look over his shoulder and be a kind of Super Assistant Secretary. Dick never suffered anything quietly. So his relationship with Habib had stormy elements about it.

As I said, Dick always reacted strongly if he felt that Phil Habib was going too far into his area. However, there were areas-for instance, the troop withdrawal issue-in which Dick decided tactically to move to the sidelines, leaving Habib more out front, so to speak. In areas like human rights, I think that Dick quickly realized that the Carter administration's human rights policies were threatening relationships throughout his whole area. So he let Bob Oakley, one of his Deputy Assistant Secretaries of State, get out in front. Bob and I would tend to be at these various human rights meetings, defending our relationships with Thailand, South Korea, or other places, against the onslaughts coming at us. This had Dick's full support, for he had, in effect, decided to remain on the sidelines, rather than be either an advocate of the original human rights policy. As I said, the thing that struck me was how in the end the policies of the Carter administration-whether regarding South Korea or elsewhere- ended up not greatly different than human rights policy under Secretary Kissinger. But did cause significant foreign policy damage in getting there.

In fact, we earlier mentioned the attitude of Congress. My impression of Congress has always been the same. That is, you had some Congressmen who were willing to take actions that would risk our bilateral relationships in pursuit of human rights objectives. However, Congress as a whole has never supported this view. Therefore, once again, Congress, as was the case during other administrations, has accepted the view that the security relationship with South Korea had an intrinsic validity which should be maintained. In the end Congress never acted in the way it did in the case of Vietnam. Even during "Koreagate," which affected Congress itself, I cannot remember that Congress ever considered actions which seriously threatened our relations with South Korea. That didn't mean that relationships with South Korea weren't "painful" and that the human rights issue was not a significant element. However, the Congressional impression of South Korea's importance seemed to mirror the outlook of the administration.

Q: Before we touch on "Korea gate, "which will probably end this session, I would like to ask one question which came to me. Of all the places we've talked about that involved Phil Habib, you didn't mention ARA and Latin American affairs. Did Latin American questions come across your desk at all?

O'DONOHUE: By the time Phil was involved in Central America in the mid- 1980's, I was Ambassador to Burma.

Q: I was thinking about this particular time, when you were Phil Habib's Executive Assistant.

O'DONOHUE: At that time he was a Seventh Floor resource person for ARA. It wasn't that he played a major role in ARA affairs as much as it was that ARA could turn to him for specific actions. ARA then, and still was a bureau somewhat different from other bureaus operating in its own milieu. Phil was a person that they could turn to, but as far as issues were concerned, I don't remember any that were very significant involving Phil directly.

Q: That's what I thought. Now, could you explain what "Korea gate" was? It overlapped both your position as Korean Office Director in EA and as Phil Habib's Executive Assistant.

O'DONOHUE: "Koreagate" was the name that was given to the investigation of corrupt relationships involving the South Korean businessman, Tong Son Park, the South Korean Government, and certain American Congressmen. It really involved PL-480 sales of rice. As I said, it concerned Tong Son Park, who was a relatively young, South Korean businessman who had established himself in Washington in the late 1960's. When I arrived back in South Korea in 1972, Phil Habib, then Ambassador to South Korea, had already put a bar on any association of Embassy officers with Tong Son Park. This was because of the various allegations of corruption in his relationships. When Phil saw Tong Son Park playing golf out at the Eighth Army Golf Course, he went through the ceiling and insisted that the Army bar Tong Son Park from the golf course.

So I arrived in Seoul with this atmosphere already existing. Tong Son Park had close relationships with several Congressmen. When several of them visited South Korea, in effect, the Embassy Control Officer would be out at the airport jostling with Tong Son Park's minions or depending on the Congressmen involved, Tong Son Park would either take them over at the airport or they would show some tact and wait until they got to the hotel under Embassy auspices. Nonetheless, there was a group of Congressmen who clearly had a special relationship with Tong Son Park. Beyond that Tong Son Park had this diffuse reputation as being "Mr. South Korea" in Congress. So you had a much larger group of Congressmen who were not involved in any corrupt relationship with Tong Son Park who saw him as the one who handled things in South Korea for Congressmen.

Phil Habib would warn all and sundry about Tong Son Park. He was absolutely forthright in his refusal to have anything to do with Tong Son Park. He would tell the Congressmen that they shouldn't have anything to do with him. Tong Son Park had a well known standing as the "Mr. South Korea" lobbyist in Washington. Actually, in the South Korean context he was a "small boy," so to speak. Among Koreans he had no standing except that which came from his contacts with American Congressmen. Clearly, Tong Son Park had contacts with the Korean CIA and the Korean Government.

In this case the Korean Government, in a naively Machiavellian fashion, thought that it was buying influence in Congress. My own view in looking at this matter is that the only thing involved was money. That is, the Korean Government really wasn't getting anything out of this. While we were in South Korea, Ambassador Habib had warned Chong Ii Kwon-I think that, at that point, he was the Speaker of the South Korean National Assembly-that Tong Son Park must have nothing to do with a visit to South Korea, I think by "Tip" O'Neill, the Speaker of the US House of Representatives. Anyhow, Phil went to the airport and saw Tong Son Park there. He called over to Chong Ii Kwon and told him that either he would get Tong Son Park out of there or he, Phil, was leaving the airport and would take every Embassy officer with him. He said, "In that case, you can meet the Speaker by yourself." Needless to say, the Koreans quickly put Tong Son Park on the sidelines. I think that he had a party for some of the Congressmen later, but Phil just pushed him aside. That was a measure both of Habib's integrity and disdain for Tong Son Park, when he saw this corrupt figure at the airport.

When Phil was Assistant Secretary in Washington, at one point and to keep their skirts "clean," the US intelligence agencies provided some information about Tong Son Park and his Congressional contacts. Habib said that this information couldn't be ignored. So he went to the White House and the Department of Justice. From that point the "Koreagate" investigations began. The Department of Justice handled this and worked closely with Phil. At one point there were false allegations that he was personally involved in Koreagate. Phil refused to answer such allegations, later the subsequent revelations speak for themselves. In any case the investigations continued and, eventually, one Congressman was indicted, "plea bargained," and was sentenced. The reputations of several other Congressmen were clearly damaged. The most obvious case was that of Congressman Passman, the Chairman of the East Asia Aid Subcommittee. Between the sales of Louisiana rice and other things he was involved in this matter in a variety of ways.

So the "Koreagate" issue dominated US-South Korean relations for a year and a half. There were the Department of Justice investigation and Congressional hearings. Tong Son Park had fled the country. He later came back under a grant of immunity to testify, although not much came out of it. However, in effect, for about a year and a half there were these revelations of corruption involving the sale of PL 480 rice. As I said, the allegations were that the South Korean Government was "buying influence," but they didn't get very much. They certainly didn't get any accolades for morality. What was really going on was that some people were getting a lot of money out of this whole affair, not that the Korean government was successfully buying influence.

Q: This is Side B of Tape 4 of the interview with Dan 0'Donohue. Dan, please continue.

O'DONOHUE: So in this connection there was a very strange relationship between the US and South Korean Governments. Habib had been appalled by Tong Son Park's activities and, as an American, by his efforts to corrupt American Congressmen. In his own way, Habib was a realist. However, on the other hand, he had immense, personal integrity. So this really bothered him, as an American.

Q: I think that for most of us, the greed of our elected officials is legendary. In addition to money, women would also be supplied.

O'DONOHUE: Oh, they would do that if they could. That was their standard tactics for most visitors outside the State Department. I was never sure whether that was a tribute to the State Department or not. In effect, these lobbyists made sure that their visitors knew that they could have women supplied, and all the rest. Tong Son Park would simply take over some of these visitors, place them in a hotel, provide women and so forth...

Q: A tailor would arrive...

O'DONOHUE: They would just take over. Remember that we're only talking about some Congressmen. Most Congressional visitors, even those who dealt with Tong Son Park, simply saw him as a South Korean "arranger." It's important that we not accuse everyone who visited South Korea. Several of the Congressmen-I think this included "Tip" O'Neill, Congressman Bloomfield, and others-always stressed to Habib how much they appreciated his warnings about Tong Son Park. Nonetheless, it was a seamy, sad tale.

As "Koreagate" unfolded, though, the problem for Habib and me, both when I was on the Korea desk and then when I was Habib's Executive Assistant, was to bring the South Korean Government to realize that they had been caught, that this had been wrong, and that they must deal with it and put it behind us. However, within the American Government, the difficulty was to deal with the problem, but not at the cost of irretrievably damaging the basic the US-South Korean relationship. Congress was involved in this to a degree. However, in the Executive Branch of the US Government there was a sense that the South Koreans were "tar babies." This is why, to a degree that was more than we ever expected, we ended up with Phil Habib still deeply involved in South Korean affairs when he was Under Secretary for Political Affairs. This was partially also because "Koreagate" was so much identified with Habib. He was the one who, as Ambassador to South Korea, had adopted this position of not dealing with Tong Son Park; who had, in effect, precipitated the Department of Justice investigation; and whose reputation was caught up in "Koreagate" in the perverse way that Washington operates. So there was no way that another Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs could come into office and be able to deal with "Koreagate."

What we found out was that both the EA Bureau and the Korea desk were very uncomfortable dealing with the South Koreans, for a variety of reasons. The relationships were being unduly strained. They were strained enough in the real world, over the "Koreagate" issue. That was a given. However, EAP's nervousness about dealing with even reputable senior government officers and Korean embassy officers only made things worse.

Kaln Pyong-dan(?) was the Korean Ambassador to the United States at this time. He didn't drink alcohol and came from one of the traditional Protestant Christian families in South Korea. The Ambassador and the South Korean Embassy found it very difficult dealing with the EA Bureau and the Korean desk because of their nervousness about the issue and their sense, as I said, that the South Koreans were like "tar babies" to be kept at arms length.

So since Habib, in a sense, had precipitated the investigation of the whole complex of issues involved in "Koreagate," the last act for me-and, I suspect, for Habib-meant getting the Korean-American relationship back on an even keel. As a result, the South Korean Government paid the penalty-as it should have-for its actions. However, we still maintained a working relationship with them.

Interestingly enough, "Koreagate" did fade from the scene, although Korean imports of rice did not fade away until the early 1980's. Out of all of the investigations, it is my recollection that only one Congressman "plea bargained"-in other words, plead guilty.

Q: All right, let's stop at this point. We'll pick it up next time when you left the Office of the Under Secretary for Political Affairs in 1977, en route to Thailand as DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission].

O'DONOHUE: Do you want to go into those matters then? There are still a couple of issues on South Korea left, if you are interested in them. One of them is the relationship between the Ambassador and the UN Commander.

Q: I think that we covered that. So we'll pick this interview up again when you were off to Thailand.

Today is September 3, 1996. Dan, you are now off to Thailand as DCM. When did you go out there?

O'DONOHUE: I went out to Thailand in July, 1977.

Q When did you leave Thailand?

O'DONOHUE: I left Thailand in October, 1978, to come back to be the principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs.

Q: How did you get the job of DCM in Thailand? Usually, the Ambassador has a say in this.

O'DONOHUE: Well, Charlie S. Whitehouse was the Ambassador to Thailand. Charlie sent a cable to Phil Habib, saying that John Burke, the then DCM, was leaving Thailand to be Ambassador to Guyana. Whitehouse needed a DCM and asked Phil if he had any thoughts on the subject. So I volunteered myself. Phil didn't want me to go. However, by this time I had had enough of the Washington grind. "Koreagate," in particular, had been an emotionally exhausting experience because we went through all the pain and pressure as "Koreagate" surfaced. Then I had to play a larger role in the Under Secretary's office than I should have had to do in maintaining an appropriate balance with the South Koreans. There was a tendency to pile on, not only to exact a proper amount of pain in terms of what the South Korean Government had gotten itself into, but to overdo it. Our point was to hit a balance, in which the basic elements of the Korean-American relationship had to be maintained, essentially intact.

Q: We tend to get pretty "moralistic" on these things.

O'DONOHUE: We tend to be moralistic. The EA Bureau found it almost overwhelming dealing with how to hit the proper balance. As I say, that's how in the Under Secretary's office we got more involved. We would have been involved, anyway, because Habib and I had such a long connection with South Korea. However, it was more than we should have been involved. So it had been a long and emotional strain. Then, with the advent of the Carter administration it was not so much the troop withdrawal issue as such, although that also exacted its toll. So, since 1960, with the exception of a total of several years spent in S/S, in Accra, and at the Army War College, I had been continuously involved in Korean affairs. I wanted to do something different. So Charlie Whitehouse readily agreed to take me as DCM in Bangkok, and I went out there.

Q: As you were out of EA and the office of the Under Secretary for Political Affairs and as you inquired prepared to go to your new post, what were the issues involved in Thailand which you learned of, either from the Thai desk or in the hallways of the State Department? What were your principal jobs going to be?

O'DONOHUE: My vantage point by then was the Seventh Floor [where the principal officers of the Department have their offices]. It was very clear that there was a policy vacuum in Southeast Asia, resulting from the fall of Vietnam in April, 1975. That was first and foremost. Indeed, in Habib's office we had been battling, even with the East Asian Bureau-but more with other offices in the building-about the need to maintain a residual American role and activities. We felt that we had residual interests in Thailand at a time when, in the EA Bureau itself, there was almost a sense of, "Well, at least one of the results of the Vietnam collapse is that we don't have to deal with the Thai any more." So there was a policy vacuum.

When I arrived in Bangkok, there was a resentment and reaction to what had been one of the two, worst negotiations I had ever seen conducted by the Department and the rest of the US Government. The other one, and this happened while I was Executive Assistant to Phil Habib, was the Philippine Base negotiations, which was a "fiasco."

The first of these negotiations was with the civilian Thai Government over a residual American presence in Thailand, following the withdrawal of most of our troops. We had wanted to keep some facilities and some military personnel in Thailand. We are talking about truly residual facilities, meaning not really large numbers of personnel. There was a combination of arrogance in Washington and utterly confusing signals coming from the various agencies in the US Government, as well as ineptitude in the Thai civilian government which engaged in the negotiations. Both sides, in effect, wanted to keep a residual American military presence. However, by the time that we were through with the negotiations, we had no alternative but to leave entirely as a result of foolish ultimatum by the Thai government.

From our point of view, this failed negotiation turned out to be strategically a benefit because it gave us great freedom of action from that point on. We could determine the extent of our involvement in Thailand. From the Thai point of view the failed negotiation was viewed, particularly by the Thai military, as a disaster. The US had been already forced to leave Vietnam, the South Vietnamese Government had collapsed, and a resurgent and united Vietnam had come into being under communist control with the US withdrawal. Thailand had thus lost the anchor for what had determined and dominated its foreign and security policy since 1945.

The man who conducted the negotiations on the Thai side, Anand Panyarachun, the permanent Secretary of the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was later suspended from the Foreign Ministry and later sent out to an almost insulting assignment as Thai Ambassador to Bonn, as a prelude to retiring as still a very young man. In fact, Anand came back many years later to be Thai Prime Minister, after the coup in 1991. He performed exceptionally in this position and is now one of Thailand's two leading elder statesmen. This showed that in Thailand only the decrepitude of old, old age prevents you from coming back into office.

Q You weren't there during the negotiations with Thailand about a residual American military presence.

O'DONOHUE: I saw them from the Washington perspective.

Q: Let's talk a bit about these negotiations. You spoke of the "arrogance" in Washington. What do you mean?

O'DONOHUE: First of all, this period from 1973 to 1976, when the situation in Thailand was beginning to stabilize, was a period of profound uncertainty. All of this emanated from the general situation in Southeast Asia in 1973. There had been student demonstrations in Bangkok which the Thai military had at first tried to put down by force. Then the King of Thailand intervened, and a civilian government came into power which presided over a chaotic, domestic situation. At this time in Thailand the Thai military were temporarily cowed. The Communist Party of Thailand, which was supported by China, figured prominently in the mythology of the time as an insurgency. It later disappeared, for all practical purposes, when the Chinese adopted a pro-Thai policy. However, at the time counter insurgency were factors.

Over the long history of our relations with Thailand after World War II we had very close ties with the Thai military, who, in effect, ran the country. The negotiations on a residual American military presence in Thailand took place at the one time when the Thai military had been pushed to the sidelines. We had a CIA Station in Bangkok, which had its own contacts, as did our JUSMAG, the Military Assistance Group. They were constantly saying that we should "hang tough in the negotiations. The Thai military, in the end, will put these civilians in their place."

We had a negotiation which was eminently manageable and which Ambassador Charlie Whitehouse, in this, as well as in several other cases, suffered the fate of being a Cassandra. As far as I could see, Whitehouse was generally correct in his judgments on Thailand, which were generally ignored in Washington. As a result of all of these signals emanating from other agencies, Secretary Kissinger was insistent that we would set the terms for our residual presence. I've forgotten what we were asking for, but, let's say, at this point we wanted a residual force of about 2,200. The Thai wanted, perhaps, 1,000, or something like that. I don't exactly recall the numbers. However, this was all eminently negotiable. For their part, the Thai started giving us foolish ultimatums, which is why we ended up withdrawing. As the negotiations proceeded, from arrogance and intransigence on our part, to the Thai getting caught in their own rhetoric and their own ultimata, finally, the conclusion was that there was no way out. We had to pull out our military units and ended up with JUSMAG but no other residual American military presence in Thailand.

The Thai military never forgave that Thai civilian government, not simply because of the failed negotiation with the US, but also because of the chaotic, domestic scene. The Thai military moved back into power with a coup in 1976, installed a civilian government of its own making, or, I should say, of the Queen's making. The Prime Minister was a favorite of the Queen of Thailand and, to a lesser degree, of the King. That's the situation when I arrived on the scene.

Q: In terms of foreign policy, when you were in EA, were you involved or were you an observer of the Philippine Base negotiations which went on?

O'DONOHUE: No, again it was when I was Phil Habib's Executive Assistant.

Q Could we talk a bit about that?

O'DONOHUE: I was reasonably close to the two negotiations. Essentially, both the Thai and the Philippine Bases negotiations were begun during Habib's service as Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs. However, the situation in South Korea was all absorbing for me and, though I had a picture of what was going on, I wasn't directly involved in the Thai and Philippine negotiations at that time. I didn't think that the two negotiations were handled very well. It was really when I was Habib's Executive Assistant that we began the negotiations on the residual American military presence in Thailand. Because of Phil's responsibilities, I was following the Philippine Base negotiations much closer. These negotiations started out with a sense of utter arrogance by the Department of Defense and the Bureau of East Asian Affairs in the Department of State. There was constant battling about our draft, so that we didn't reach agreement on a "draft strategy." Indeed, we never had a "tactical" game plan until immediately before the negotiations were to start. Meanwhile, the Filipinos tabled their own draft first, which threw the Washington Departments into even more confusion. So the negotiations started out with the US side having barely papered over the differences between the views of the Departments of State and Defense and having given no consideration to what the Filipinos might demand.

Q: What were some of the essential differences?

O'DONOHUE: They were the typical differences which always come up in negotiations. There was the question of maximum freedom to use the bases, criminal jurisdiction, and a whole variety of issues like these. There was the "price tag" question. Consequently, we did not adopt a cohesive approach. We did learn from that fiasco both in a subsequent interim negotiation with the Filipinos of 1981-1983. In 1981 we sat down and said, "What do we want and how do we get there?"

So the negotiations of 1976 with the Philippines started out poorly. Ambassador William Sullivan headed our delegation. I don't think that he ever had a good feel for the Philippines. I may be wrong, because this was the only issue that I had any connection with. Sullivan was convinced that he was going to negotiate the agreement with President Marcos. In one sense, this was true enough, but Sullivan proclaimed it too loudly, thereby embarrassing all of the Filipinos. The nuclear issue was another, very sensitive matter. As the negotiations proceeded, they became almost a comedy of errors. There was one meeting that I can remember. It was held in New York with the Philippine Secretary of Defense. Clements, our Deputy Secretary of Defense, had just come back from the Philippines. He explained what the Philippine position was in the negotiations. Ambassador Sullivan told him, "No, you've got it completely wrong!" He then explained what, in his view, the Philippine position really was. This was what he said just outside the door as he entered the room for the meeting.

So the meeting began, and the Filipinos immediately gave the position as Deputy Secretary of Defense Clements had described it. So this left me with a feeling that there was no sense of hands on or dialogue with the other side. This all happened during the Ford administration. The negotiations stumbled on. The final, sad act was when the President of Mexico was to be inaugurated in December, 1976. Secretary Kissinger went down to represent the United States. He and Philippine Foreign Secretary Romulo got into a discussion. With his typical passion for negotiations, Kissinger immediately started negotiating. Telegrams came flying back to Washington. I remember that Habib called Dean Rusk, who was the foreign affairs adviser to Carter. They had the incoming Carter administration on board for an agreement and made a tremendous effort. Well, as soon as President Marcos heard about this, it turned out that Romulo hadn't received his approval. So this effort simply collapsed.

Then the negotiations went on, with which Phil Habib and I were not involved. There was an interim agreement reached, followed by highly successful negotiations in 1981-1983 which, in my mind, was almost a model of how to conduct negotiations. Perhaps I shouldn't say that, since I was at the Washington end of it, and Michael Armacost was the Ambassador to the Philippines.

Q: Let's not leave it there. We can pick it up when we come back.

O'DONOHUE: When I was going out to Thailand, the first and the most obvious question was, "Whither the United States in Southeast Asia?" That really was a question mark. The Vietnam War had left such a sting. The Thai, most obviously, but all of the other Southeast Asian non-communist countries were obviously very unsettled and concerned. Secondly, even though we didn't have a residual American military presence, we still had a residue of all sorts of relationships, mainly with the Thai military and the Thai intelligence people. Being Americans, we liked to have our cake and eat it, too,' so, even though things had changed dramatically, we still wanted to maintain the benefits we had in the Thai-American relationship. We had a residual military assistance program and the beginnings of the Indochinese refugee problem. When I was in Bangkok, the refugee problem grew exponentially, but nothing like the way it did in the years after I left Bangkok. So those were the major issues.

Thailand also no longer had the huge, interagency presence of Americans in terms of numbers-both US military, CIA, and AID. Nonetheless, there still were many US covert personnel in Thailand. As I said, in several areas we still wanted to maintain the previous relationships that we had had with the Thai. These had been very beneficial to us.

Q: What was the reputation of Ambassador Charles Whitehouse when you went out to Thailand? How did he operate with you and in the context of the Country Team?

O'DONOHUE: Ambassador Whitehouse had come down to Thailand from Laos in 1975, two years before I arrived in Bangkok in 1977. Laos, of course, had fallen completely into communist hands following the fall of Saigon in 1975. Whitehouse had arrived in Thailand during one of the few times of popular, student unrest which had begun in 1973 and which led to the Thai military withdrawing to the sidelines. During the period 1973-1976, Thai leftists were allowed a freedom which they have never had since then-in terms of demonstrations and so forth.

When I arrived in 1977, there had been the negotiations on an American residual military presence, which had finally failed in early 1976. I think that when I arrived in Bangkok, Charlie did not have a high reputation in Washington for a variety of reasons. In the Thai context, as far as I could see, he was coping and grappling as well as one could. As I see this retrospectively, his real problem was that, as he was not taken seriously enough in Washington, thus the Department was losing the benefit of his views. This was an area in which I had not been engaged, so I could be quite objective about it. I thought that his judgments were right. However, there were difficult, interagency relationships-more so before I got there than afterwards. There had been a strong, CIA presence, a strong US military presence, and all sorts of people who saw themselves as experts on Thailand.

There was a sort of bizarre, political dynamic. The strangest people would float into Bangkok, see somebody, go back, and have somebody in Washington convinced that they had the accurate story about the situation in Thailand. There were the Thai military, but, beyond the military, there were other Thai who had had a long relationship and many contacts with Americans. The Thai were not at all as systematic as the South Koreans were, in playing with and using various groups. Historically, the American Ambassador had been one of several voices involved in US policy toward Thailand. In a superficial way one could see some points of resemblance to the situation in South Korea earlier on, but this misses the fluidity of the relationship in other respects. South Korea and Thailand are very different countries.

Nonetheless, for the American Ambassador, maintaining control of the various American agencies was not an easy task. Ambassador Graham Martin had created the illusion of control, and I think that he really did have such control, for the most part. However, there were certain things and areas where Ambassador Martin was not in control. However, in this period of confusion and instability in Southeast Asia, maintaining control was particularly difficult. Charlie Whitehouse had neither the Washington support, or understanding that he needed, in almost every case.

Q: This was no fault of his own. However, the fact that he had come to Thailand as Ambassador in 1975 from Laos, which had "gone down the tubes," along with everything else in Indochina, did this affect his "corridor reputation" in the Department of State? Was there any criticism of him for having been associated with a "losing cause"?

O'DONOHUE: No. I would say that it was less than the fact that Charlie was viewed as one of the "old guard" with regard to Vietnam. He had served there in the provincial aid program and had been the Deputy Ambassador in Saigon before he had gone to Laos. Now we're talking about the Ford administration. During the Carter administration, Whitehouse was regarded as a lame duck, which was going to be replaced. If anything, he was viewed as one of the "old guard" who was caught up in the failed Vietnam effort.

However, for any Ambassador the situation in Thailand was going to be difficult and chaotic. I myself both liked working with him and thought that his judgments were basically very good. It struck me that most of the Foreign Service officers with Southeast Asia backgrounds never really figured again in Southeast Asian policy. Remember, my whole background was in Northeast Asia. I think that most of them came out of an Embassy "culture" in which the other agencies and the State Department were always jostling for position. These officers didn't seem to have a very straightforward approach to running the Mission. I think that this was based, not so much on the fact that they were that different, but that their experience had been that each of the agencies, over time, had always been doing "its own thing." Nobody ever really knew what the others were doing.

I wouldn't fault Ambassador Whitehouse for this or criticize him for not establishing a strong lead and domination of the other agencies. However, we did not have the kinds of problems that had existed even six months before. There had been an almost "impossible" chief of JUSMAG, an Air Force Brigadier General ["Heinie" Aderholt]. When I got there, there was a very amiable Army Colonel on his last tour who had succeeded Aderholt. Whitehouse had his own relationship with the Chief of Station, which meant that I had a "watching brief" but was not as actively involved as I would have liked to be. It wasn't so much that I did not know what was going on. I would check with Ambassador Whitehouse. It was not a case where I could not go in and discuss my concerns, as he always left his office door open. Overall, though, the Mission was declining in size. The AID Mission was shrinking, as was the aid program itself. The Military Assistance Program was also declining in size. There were a number of challenges. First, there was an absence of clear policy from Washington and then there was the growing refugee problem.

Q: How did Ambassador Whitehouse use you?

O'DONOHUE: He gave me immense freedom. In fact, it was quite remarkable, because I did not have a Southeast Asian background, and we did not know each other. Now, Ambassador Whitehouse was away a reasonable amount of time. I was frequently Chargï¿½ d'Affaires. I knew that in terms of policy and oversight I've always been active, working on contacts and all of these things. The Political Section chief [Tom Conlon] had known Ambassador Whitehouse at a previous post. He had no difficulty with my exercising my supervision over him. Ambassador Whitehouse certainly encouraged me in dealing at the highest levels, as often happens in Thailand. It's a great job for a DCM.

In terms of Mission management Ambassador Whitehouse wanted to know the "big things," and he paid particular attention to personnel questions. He was really interested in "people issues." He expected me to oversee the daily operational activities, he saw "people issues" as intrinsically involved in the role of an Ambassador, and correctly so. He really paid attention to this. I mean things like births and deaths. He taught me the value of writing notes. He always wrote little notes to people, by hand. He would often call people to congratulate them for one reason or another. On the "people and personnel" side, Whitehouse paid very close attention.

Q: I would have thought that Thailand, judging from its reputation, would have been a place with a lot of personnel problems because of the drug problem and its effect on the American School and community and problems with sex because Bangkok had become sort of the "sex capital" of the world, with people coming from Europe and the United States for "sexual holidays." This must have put strains on everybody.

O'DONOHUE: Well, Bangkok was the "sex capital" of the world. All of these things were less, rather than more, during my first tour in Bangkok. Our Mission had shrunk dramatically in size. For instance, the school, called the International School of Bangkok, had had major drug problems. However, we had lost an immense number of Americans and their dependents as Mission components and related agencies were reduced in size or eliminated. We were mainly down to the Mission itself, American businessmen, and missionaries. Previously, we not only had a large American military community but also a large number of American women and children who were in Bangkok on a "safe haven" basis, because their husbands and fathers were serving in Vietnam, and they were not allowed to go there because of the fighting. Many of these "safe haven" families had left Bangkok. So, the International School of Bangkok was coming out of a very difficult period.

Our Mission in Thailand has often experienced "bizarre" events, in a variety of ways. I will give you two examples-one tragic and one that was not so sad. We were having a Country Team meeting, which I was presiding over. Suddenly, the DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration] chief was called out and rushed off. He came back to the meeting to report that one of his officers had been carrying a type of gun, which he wasn't supposed to have. He had put the gun on top of his three-combination file safe while he opened it. He had somehow dislodged the gun, which fell. The gun discharged, and the bullet hit the DEA officer in the stomach, causing a wound which was ultimately fatal. The Marine Guards were called. In those days the young Marine Guards had served in Vietnam and, as a matter of fact, knew what to do about gunshot wounds. The Marine Guards rushed in, but it was too late, and the DEA officer eventually died.

The other incident, in a lighter vein, was that the Marine Guard called me as DCM and said, "Sir, there's a reporter here from The Bangkok Post to cover the wedding." I said, "What wedding?" He said, "Oh, the mass wedding in the cafeteria." I said, "What mass wedding?" He said, "Oh, the one the Refugee Office is putting on." Well, when we traced it all back, it turned out that these were Lao refugees who were involved. Say, the name of someone who had been in the refugee camp for, perhaps, eight months or a year would come up for a visa to the United States. He had married, but in a tribal ceremony, and there were no records of it. The Thai had refused to acknowledge legally the presence of refugees in Thailand. You couldn't register a birth or do anything else in the case of one of these Lao refugees.

We had officers from the US Immigration and Naturalization Service detailed to the Embassy, who was really quite understanding. All the INS officers wanted was some evidence to show that a marriage had taken place. The Refugee Officers had come up with the idea of a mass wedding. They weren't really "mass weddings." There may have been eight or 10 couples involved. They would bring in a local, Western clergyman, who would "mumble" his way through a marriage ceremony, which many of the Lao could not understand, anyway. God knows what these people thought they were saying. I think that the refugees thought, "Well, if this is what it takes..." Then the clergyman would sign US Department of the Army wedding certificates which would go into their visa file. Everyone knew what these certificates were and what their purpose was. So the next day the ceremony proceeded. A picture was taken-with the Anglican clergyman that week- although it could have been any clergyman-with the eight to 10 couples, all holding their wedding certificates, with "Department of the Army" printed across the top!

Usually, my view was that, with the Thai, you succeed best when you identify the problem but don't try to "force" your own solution. This was one time when I said, "This is it! The Thai are going to register weddings and births in the camps." And they finally did. We had one American come in with a problem. He had bought a surplus C-47 aircraft. He announced that he was negotiating with certain, Rightist elements to bomb Thai Supreme Command Headquarters! It seemed that there was an unending flow of the bizarre and the tragic. Sometimes they were funny. These incidents happened less frequently later when I was in Thailand as Ambassador, but they still occurred, to some degree.

Thailand is a difficult environment for people if, for example, their marriages are not too strong. Sexual temptations were there.

Drug abuse in the Mission was not a problem, although it was with a few of the children, but not as many as one might think. The schoolchildren at the International School were easier to deal with. Their parents were either from the Mission, or they were businessmen or missionaries. The atmosphere was, is, and can be corrupting. Indeed, some Americans find it difficult being in Thailand for that reason. They see Thai society and Thai leadership in this sense. I myself never felt that the Thai had a great deal more vices than the general run of mankind, but they are tolerant of almost any behavior if it is not flaunted. There are some people who look at the Thai situation and find it very difficult to deal with.

Q: Looking at some other things before we turn to the refugee problem, what was the attitude at that time of, "Whither Southeast Asia"? That is, from the perspective of our Mission and what you were getting from the Thai. What were the Vietnamese communists up to?

O'DONOHUE: At that point [1977-1978] the Vietnamese communists were filled with the arrogance of victory. In Southeast Asia the Thai were the most vulnerable, but by no means alone, as was proven in the ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] context. The Thai saw themselves as seriously threatened. There was a much talked about communist insurgency, particularly in northeast Thailand, although the talk was greater than the reality. When I got there [in 1977], I think that, in the real world, the Chinese were already cutting back on their support for the Communist Party of Thailand [CPT].

Thailand was also a country which had the student upheaval in 1973, which brought down a military controlled government. It had a couple of coups, though with little or no violence. It was a country which really was profoundly concerned about where to turn. As I say, their basic security relationship, from their point of view, had been with the United States since 1945. It appeared clear that the Americans had lost interest in Southeast Asia, following the end of the Vietnam War. So there was great uncertainty. The time I was in Thailand as DCM [1977-1978] was before the serious worsening in the situation following the Vietnamese communist invasion of Cambodia in 1979. Cambodia was unsettled, with the Khmer Rouge and their activities, as well as the situation in Laos. This whole situation caused Thailand society great concern. It saw itself in a perilous situation.

From the Embassy's point of view, we were trying to manage and keep alive a relationship in which we were constantly under pressure from Washington, in effect, to do things the US wanted as if the basic Thai-American relationship had not changed. However, at the same time, as far as our own responsibilities were concerned, our previous, strategic relationships with Thailand had disappeared. For the Embassy it was a constant effort-and this was not a case of "clientitis"-to keep in front of Washington a sense that we still had remaining interests in Southeast Asia, despite the defeat in Vietnam. We made the point that we had to pay attention to maintaining these relationships. Paradoxically, both the United States and Thailand focused on the same institution, ASEAN, to meet this policy vacuum. Originally, ASEAN had been a sort of paper entity thrown together by the non-communist governments.

Q: This is Side A of Tape 5 of the interview with Ambassador Dan 0'Donohue. You were talking about A SEAN.

O'DONOHUE: ASEAN was originally a collection of Southeast Asian countries which formed into a regional grouping. It was viewed as essentially an entity with no specific purpose. Its focus was originally to be non-military and nonpolitical, rather economic and cultural. However, there was not much trade between the ASEAN members, and culturally these countries had little to exchange. In those days what it really meant was that it was essentially an organization which provided a framework for these countries which had more differences than relations in common. As the ASEAN countries looked around, and we're talking here about Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia, they faced a threatening, communist Vietnam and no US military counterweight. At that point, there was an equally threatening China. These countries focused on the ASEAN framework as the institutional mechanism through which, in fact, they would handle their common security concerns. So, although ostensibly that was not the purpose of ASEAN, in fact, it became the mechanism that allowed them to fill the void left by our withdrawal from Southeast Asia. The ASEAN leaders did this extremely well.

Under the Carter administration, we had no real policy for Southeast Asia. In fact, under the Ford administration the situation had been no different in that respect. The Carter administration focused on ASEAN because, in effect, it was an organization that allegedly didn't have a security aspect. It was regarded as one of those things like "motherhood' that you could agree on. So the Carter administration gave great lip service to ASEAN. However, in that respect this reflected the absence of a US policy toward Southeast Asia. This ASEAN support was rhetoric in lieu of a policy. We could say that we supported ASEAN, but we did not mean it in a security sense.

This situation continued until the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia [in 1979] and the normalization of US relations with China. The Carter administration never was able to come to grips with what you could call either a strategic concept or a policy for Southeast Asia. I was there in Thailand in that period. Despite the lack of an established US policy, we were constantly involved in dealing with the Thai on all sorts of issues, ranging from, as I said, human rights to refugees to other, foreign policy issues. We were still trying to maintain what had become a small, but nonetheless, from the Thai military point of view, an important military assistance program. It was overwhelmingly the "care and tending" of a relationship which couldn't be described as "frayed" so much as "in traumatic transition."

The Thai came out of this period of transition exceptionally well, mainly because the Thai and the other ASEAN countries developed a cohesive, security approach and one that served them very well during a period when the US wasn't there. By the end of the Carter administration, as was the case with Central America, policy was in a shambles. Then occurred the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia [in 1979] and the US, in effect, siding with the Chinese. So there developed a greater interest in security in these countries, with refugees growing as a separate policy issue. However, it wasn't until the Reagan administration that we had clear and balanced and morale policy and programs, and we were probably more supportive of Thailand than the Thai probably ever expected. Nonetheless, by no means did it mean a return to the "old days" in terms of our Thai security relationship.

Q: You were in Thailand during the beginning and middle years of the Carter administration.

O'DONOHUE: I saw it all. I was Habib's Executive Assistant, then I was DCM in Bangkok for 15 months, and then I was the principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs to the end of the Carter administration.

Q: The human rights issue was one of the hallmarks of the Carter administration. From your perspective in Bangkok, how did it translate into action and how were you involved with the human rights issue in Thailand?

O'DONOHUE: I think that there was about a three-year period in which Pat Derian, the Assistant Secretary for Human Rights Affairs, had a dominating role. By the way, Pat worked hard and often was better informed, I thought, than the Assistant Secretaries of the regional bureaus. The Carter administration was caught up in the human rights issue. I was caught up in this as Habib's Executive Assistant, sitting in on meetings or representing him when he was not there. It was usually myself and the Assistant Secretaries of the regional bureaus, or their representatives, arguing for a more measured or more balanced approach on issues. We did not often "win" in these discussions, but, usually, the policies eventually were more "balanced," because no administration can ignore underlying foreign policy or economic realities. It always has to weigh other considerations than simply human rights. It was less the effectiveness of our arguments than the inevitability that the senior officers of the Department were not going to risk our various relationships on human rights issues alone.

In Thailand there was an unending series of cables from Washington. One such cable instructed me to go in to inquire about some news stringer newspaper who had been killed. We couldn't even find where the town was where he was allegedly killed! Human rights involved constantly doing what you were told to do, but trying to do it in a way that was not destructive of basic necessary working relationships with Thai officials. We were putting all sorts of demands on the Thai. At times I received as many as three and four cables in a day, telling the Chargï¿½ d'Affaires to do this and do that. It was a constant effort to "do what you're told," which is always important. Otherwise, people in Washington will just dismiss you as too client oriented or unresponsive to Washington priorities.

Q: Well, with Pat Derian, whom I'm interviewing, by the way. The human rights people would pick up almost anything, send it out to you, and you would have to translate it into...

O'DONOHUE: That's not fair. I have a lot of respect for Pat Derian. As I say, later on, when I went back to Washington as the principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs, I was in a lot of meetings, including those with Warren Christopher, the Deputy Secretary.

I felt that the problem with human rights was not so much Pat Derian. She was aggressively and intelligently pressing her issues. She did not operate off the graph. I do not remember Pat personally raising matters which, on the face of it, looked ludicrous. She was serious and usually well prepared. The problem was there was an administration and a leadership in the Department of State which, for a few years, made the balancing act involving human rights and other policy considerations far more painful than it should have been. It was an administration which postured on human rights, rather than prudently pursuing them as part of a broader policy.

Indeed, what struck me is that, if you look at South Korea and compare the attitudes of the Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan administrations, in essence all of them had the same priorities. In the end the Carter administration wasn't going to threaten our security relationships with South Korea. It was under the Carter administration that President Chon came to power. The Carter administration did not know how to handle that, any better than anyone else. This is not a particularly harsh criticism. What I'm saying is that, if you look at it, it's interesting how, with regard to South Korea, the Carter administration ended up just like the other administrations. While I think that this is generally true, the cost in terms of how the Carter administration handled human rights issues, you might say, very often involved an antagonistic or adversarial process. Within the government this involved a higher policy cost than we should have had.

Then in 1979 and 1980 events occurred which turned the process into a shambles. As I said, you had the coup in South Korea, the Vietnamese communists invading Cambodia [in 1979] and the United States, in effect, defending the Khmer Rouge seat at the UN in New York. There were the Sandinistas in Nicaragua whom we accepted as the wave of the future. They turned out to be impossible to live with. An "unraveling" process was under way which, by the end, meant that the Carter administration was left with no real framework for handling human rights. By the last year that the Carter administration was in office, Pat Derian's role had diminished. I wouldn't really fault her so much. She was a person who often had to deal with bureaucratic opponents who were not of her own mettle. Consequently she won more arguments in the beginning than she should have, given our broad policy interests.

What was interesting was that, without a question, and to their surprise, the Reagan administration hit the right note on human rights. I don't know how much credit you can give them on this because I think that they sort of stumbled into it and found, to their amazement, that Latin America was going democratic. Of course, they welcomed developments in Eastern Europe, which was going in the non-communist direction. They also found out that no American administration can ignore human rights as an issue and as a thread in the fabric of foreign affairs.

The Reagan administration learned that there is no way that any administration can ignore this issue. Even Secretary Kissinger learned that, at least tactically, no American administration can pursue a foreign policy without weighing and integrating human rights concerns into it. You can't ignore human rights, as we keep finding out. You can do it better or worse. The curious thing is that the Reagan administration came into office, intending to use the human rights issue against the Russians. They found out that, more generally, there was a "blooming" of democracy and that they, themselves, could not ignore broader human rights considerations. In fact, they managed the issue pretty well.

Q: Having been dealing for so long with the South Korean Government, how did you find dealing with the Thai in the 1977-1978 period? What was your impression of the Thai Government and society?

O'DONOHUE: Well, I was in Bangkok as DCM when the government was headed by a rigid, civilian Prime Minister who had been installed by the Thai military. He had been the choice of the Queen of Thailand. He was so rigid that the Thai military ultimately deposed him. Then you had governments led by the Thai military. From my point of view, the virtue of this situation was that I got to know many of the ultimate leaders, like General Prem, who was later Prime Minister for seven or eight years. In my view he was the outstanding statesman in the 20th century in Thailand. I met him initially when he had just become Deputy Prime Minister with a reputation as a non-political, austere military officer.

Thailand had a society in which the civilian political institutions were very weak, but the basic institutions of state were surprisingly stable. First is the King, who created the modern monarchy. He had been in Switzerland and was brought back to Thailand in 1945 by the Thai military. His brother was to be the King, but essentially as a figurehead. The King's brother died in a mysterious gunshot incident, so the younger brother, the current King, inherited the throne. After he had ascended the throne, he was known at the time as the "saxophone playing king," married to one of the most beautiful women in the world. There was this whole aura about it of "The King and I."

The Thai military determined who was to hold political power. The Ministry of the Interior was a strange and wondrous institution, largely run by senior civil servants and the police. So these three elements, the Thai military, the King, and the senior civil servants sort of ran the country. Politicians held office and briefly might have roles and went back and forth, in and out of power. However, essentially, the Thai military; the Ministry of the Interior, which is a kind of civil service, but is not limited to that; the senior civil servants; and the King provided a stable framework for the country.

In Thai society the monarchy, due to the King's immense efforts, was very important. The current King provided the cornerstone to this whole structure, but that came later in his reign. It was only in the 1970's, after the student uprising in 1973, that the King first intervened to play a decisive political role.

Through the 1970's, the Ministry of the Interior was the equivalent of about four or five ministries in other countries. It was a huge entity in itself. It controlled the Police; it administered the provinces under civil servant governors; it ran the schools up to the fourth grade; it had social welfare programs; it dealt with labor; and it controlled the state prosecutors and prisons. It was an immense entity. Its role has now diminished significantly.

So there were these institutions which provided the framework or the foundation for a society which certainly has violence and a lot of apparent instability external to it. However, it was a very cohesive society. Thai society was utterly different from that in South Korea. As a career Foreign Service Officer assigned to Thailand, I found that what I had learned as a Political Officer in South Korea was completely valid. That is, you get out, you deal widely with various elements of society, you identify people who are important, you work hard with them, and you develop friendships. These, then, become the basis for both your ability to function in Thai society as well as the grist for your analysis. For me its always been a case of getting out, calling, and doing things that might appear onerous and somewhat time-wasting. However, they drew me into contact with people with whom I later picked up. With my wife we paid serious attention to representational activities. If people like coming to your house, it's not so much that you pull them aside to do business at home, but you find that it's much easier doing business in the office with them.

For me, serving in Thailand involved plugging into a society which, in a sense, was much more established than Korea. It hadn't been rent by war or crisis and had a long established important figures and families. You had more people to deal with than you could manage. However, you don't rule off as out of bounds any relationships. For instance, the Thai military. I worked at developing relationships there. It paid immense benefits at the time. Then, when I went back to Thailand as Ambassador, most of these people were still around, and I could circulate freely and informally at the senior levels of Thai political and business leadership.

Q: Let's talk about this time wizen you faced the refugee problem. What was it and how did we see it and deal with it at that time?

O'DONOHUE: When I arrived in Bangkok in 1977, there was a single AID officer on loan, handling refugees. He was on loan in particular because they didn't know what to do with him except to use him where anyone saw a problem. However, by then we had had an infiltration of Lao refugees and the beginnings of the "boat people" from Vietnam.

Q Who were the "boat people"?

O'DONOHUE: People from South Vietnam who traveled by boat and landed in Thailand. While we were there, I had to take action, because the situation was out of hand. In effect, I arranged to have the deputy chief of the Consular Section take over the refugee operation. We were straining our own resources to deal with them. We went in with a recommendation which, when you look at the operation in retrospect, was sort of funny. I think that we said that we were going to need something like 9 people. We were laughed at by the Department for our request.

The Department sent out Tom Barnes. Tom was a Foreign Service Officer, one of the old, Southeast Asian hands. His whole background had been that of a Political Officer. He had been Political Counselor in Bangkok in 1975. Tom was sent out to Bangkok with one Foreign Service Secretary on the verge of retirement [Georgia Acton] to run this refugee program. This was the Department's response. This problem was overwhelming. You have to remember that we were talking about tens of thousands of people. Within a year after I left Thailand, the total number was in the hundreds of thousands!

The Thai were constantly afraid of being "inundated" by these refugees, who arrived in Thailand by boat-the "boat people." Furthermore, the refugee problem continued to grow, particularly after a flow of Cambodian refugees was added to it. They were coming over the land border into Thailand. The Department sent out Lionel Rosenblatt and one other officer to survey the situation. The Refugee Office also got some Foreign Service officer volunteers who spoke Vietnamese and Khmer to help. In this way Lionel Rosenblatt began to set up a large structure, based on the voluntary agencies. When I was in Bangkok as Ambassador, if you counted the "contract personnel' from the voluntary agencies, there were several hundred people involved in this effort.

We were in constant conflict with the Thai over the refugees. We usually succeeded in persuading the Thai to take a more receptive attitude toward the refugees and let them land in Thailand but it was always a battle. There were constant crises which continued more or less indefinitely.

Q: Could we concentrate on this period, 1977-1978, when you were DCM in Thailand? Can you talk about the type of little crises you encountered?

O'DONOHUE: To give you an example of one of the things that happened, one night I received a "desperate" phone call from Tom Barnes down in Pattaya.

Q: That was a port?

O'DONOHUE: It's really a beach resort some 50 miles Southeast of Bangkok. More of a resort and beach area than a port. The Thai would not let in two or three boatloads of Indochinese refugees and were going to push them out to sea. The refugees were in really imminent danger of sinking.

I had to deal with this. I worked mainly with the Ministry of the Interior, which was responsible for operating the refugee camps. Later on, it became the Thai military who dealt directly with the refugees along the land borders. I had to get in touch with the Ministry of the Interior at night, go over, plead with them, get their agreement that they wouldn't push these refugees off the Thai coast, and then pick up the matter on the next working day, trying to get the Thai to accept the refugees. These crises occurred repeatedly.

Then, Mort Abramowitz arrived as Ambassador in late 1978. Mort and I overlapped for about three months. The refugee situation became one of his main preoccupations. Mort devoted an immense amount of time to this situation, and there eventually developed an elaborate structure for dealing with the refugees. From beginning to end Indochinese refugees were a significant aspect of our dealings with the Thai.

Q: We were talking about human rights. Obviously, Thailand was an integrated society and didn't want to see a "foreign entity" develop there. What sort of backing did you have from the Department in terms of human rights, from an administration under President Jimmy Carter that was sensitive to human rights problems? I don't want to use the wrong term, but the Carter administration seemed to try to be very "Christian" and charitable about issues that came up. How did this attitude translate into action? We were trying to persuade the Thai to take these refugees. I would like to concentrate on this 1977-1978 time frame.

O'DONOHUE: When I was Executive Assistant to Phil Habib, my initial impression was that the people in the Carter administration were indifferent to the refugees. They saw them as the "residue" of the unhappy experience of the Vietnam War. So initially one would say that the new appointees were not terrifically interested in the refugee issue. Habib saw the issue in personal and moral terms and wanted to help.

Now that Carter administration attitude changed dramatically, as the human dimensions of the problem grew and as they grappled with a very real sense of responsibility for what had happened to the refugees. So first there was consideration of the human dimensions of the refugee problem and, secondly, a sense that, however we viewed the Vietnam War, these refugees were fleeing their homes because of the relationships which they had had with the US. This was something that we could not walk away from.

On that basis I thought that we developed under the Carter administration-and this certainly continued under Reagan-a very sensible and very committed approach to refugee issues in Southeast Asia. We took immense numbers of these people and did make refugees a part of the equation in all of our relationships with Southeast Asian countries. They were an important part of these relationships. In one way or another, from the beginning, when we were talking about saving a few boatloads of people, to later on, when the numbers grew, this was one of the most admirable aspects of our policies in Southeast Asia.

So, initially, the Carter administration's attitude was one of indifference. This changed within months to one of growing concern for the refugees. Eventually, we developed a policy which, as I say, was both humane and just.

Q: I was going to touch on the relationship with the CIA, but you've alluded to this. I'll come back to it later when we touch on your time in Thailand as Ambassador. You left Bangkok in 1978, which is fairly early.

O'DONOHUE: Yes, I was asked by Les Gelb, the Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs [Pol-Mil, or PM], to come back to Washington as his principal Deputy Assistant Secretary. This involved leaving Southeast Asia and returning to Washington, but it meant a far greater change than that. East Asia had been involved in wars, and Pol-Mil was an area which every senior East Asian officer had dealt with. However, the issues of nuclear non-proliferation and alliance policies, one of the major focus areas of the Carter administration, were matters which I had never dealt with. I came back as the principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, actually to succeed Dick Ericson, who was going off to Iceland as Ambassador.

My basic responsibilities as principal Deputy to Les Gelb were the Military Assistance Program and munitions control activity and arms sales generally and oversight. I should say that those two functions reported to me. Then, beyond that, I would have to say that I operated at times as the alter ego to Les Gelb but more so to Reg Bartholomew, who later replaced Gelb. Reg more so than Les, because we got into pol-mil issues, like our presence in the Persian Gulf and things like that. These were things that I related to more specifically.

Q: You were in Pol-Mil from when to when?

O'DONOHUE: I was there in Pol-Mil from 1978 to 1981.

Q: This took you into the Reagan administration.

O'DONOHUE: Yes, the beginning of it. But I was quickly pushed out of P-M. After an interlude of a few weeks at the Board of Examiners for the Foreign Service, I became Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of East Asian Affairs in August of 1981.

Q: Let's talk about this period from 1978 to 1981. First of all, Les Gelb. Can you explain a bit about his perspective and how he operated during this time?

O'DONOHUE: Les Gelb was extremely bright. He had been the head of the ISA [International Security Affairs] policy planning unit in the Department of Defense under Paul Warnke. He had been involved in the assembly of the "Pentagon Papers" on Vietnam. He had worked for the "New York Times" as a correspondent on national security affairs. He had then come back to government service. Les had very sound judgment but had one basic weakness. That is, he bruised too easily in bureaucratic warfare. In this case he was working for the Carter administration. In the Carter administration you always made a distinction between "arms control" and "disarmament." You might say that most of the professionals in this field were in the field of "arms control." They weren't talking about "disarmament." However, President Carter was emotionally on the side of "disarmament." Now Secretary of State Vance, like most of his generation, had a deep, deep respect for the Presidency and the President. Vance would become engaged in initiatives which the President wanted. I can't believe that Vance didn't recognize the serious problems involved in some Carter initiatives, as did Les Gelb. However, as a result, we would have difficult situations in which Vance and Gelb loyally defended Presidential initiatives while the NSC and DOD pressure for "more realistic alternatives. This intramural battling certainly made it an "unhappy administration."

Zbigniew Brzezinski, [Special Assistant to President Carter for National Security Affairs], didn't feel anything like the same loyalty to the President's proposals. So what you had was a Secretary of State and the Assistant Secretary for Pol-Mil Affairs engaged in initiatives and negotiations which an outsider could look at objectively and say, "This doesn't make a whole lot of sense." In their hearts they probably didn't disagree with this view. However, this was what President Carter wanted, and you would have Brzezinski backbiting and undercutting them. It was not a happy relationship.

There were all sorts of arms control initiatives going on. There was the follow-up to the SALT-1 agreement [Strategic Arms Limitations Talks - 1] on nuclear arms limitations. There was an agreement under negotiation on conventional arms transfers. This caused immense tension within the government. We were negotiating with the Russians about limiting the kinds of equipment we would sell in various regions of the world. The critics of this arrangement would say, "You're negotiating with your enemy to limit the help you can provide to your friends."

In these negotiations my role was minor because, as I found out when I went into it, that arms control was an arcane, highly technical world.

Then, in other areas, we were negotiating with NATO on short range missiles. For the first time we were engaged in negotiations on access in Oman, Somalia, and Kenya. It was a period when the Bureau of Pol-Mil Affairs dominated European security issues. It was a very frustrating period for EUR [Bureau of European Affairs].

Nonetheless, if you took what were the major NATO and European related issues in the security field, it was essentially the Bureau of Pol-Mil Affairs, first, under Les Gelb and then under Reg Bartholomew. Reg Bartholomew is a superb, bureaucratic operator, while Les was not. It took too much of a toll on him. Whether it was European security issues or NATO issues, the Bureau of Pol-Mil Affairs handled them. In the case of African negotiations, Pol-Mil controlled these by default. Reg Bartholomew was not called the Assistant Secretary at that time. The head of the office was still called the Director of the Office of Political-Military Affairs. As far as I could see AF, under Dick Moose, just didn't want to negotiate the introduction of American forces into Africa. In fact, Reg Bartholomew handled this issue, and I was his "back up." It was rather amazing. We negotiated this with the Office Directors in AF [Bureau of African Affairs], but hardly with the Assistant Secretary, Dick Moose. It was interesting. The Somalia aspect of it was the one negotiation which never really worked for various reasons, although we completed an agreement with Somalia. Reg Bartholomew is a superb negotiator.

Q: Was this a "pre-positioning" military agreement?

O'DONOHUE: No, it was on access to their port facilities and airfields. It was all part of the beginning of strengthening our military position in the Middle East. It was all designed with the Middle East in mind. The arrangements with Saudi Arabia were part of it. However, this was at the beginning of it. The objective was to get greater access to Middle Eastern facilities. Then, over time, the importance of these arrangements faded because the air fields in Saudi Arabia became much more available. So work in the Pol-Mil Bureau was exciting under both Les Gelb and Reg Bartholomew. This bureau had a disproportionately larger role than its size would suggest. Certainly, if you were in EUR, you would have felt that Pol-Mil was very, very strong.

Q: I can't remember the exact time. However, did you get caught up with the discussions on the "neutron bomb"?

O'DONOHUE: I was never "involved" in that. In fact, it might have happened just before I returned to Washington. On European issues I was never involved except very rarely in terms of my titular position. I was an observer and, as principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, on occasion would be thrown into the discussions. However, those were really handled by the two other Deputy Assistant Secretaries. I became engaged outside of these areas, as in the fields of military assistance, security assistance, and the rest. My major involvement was on regional issues. Again, there I had the necessary background. I was very much engaged, for instance, in handling the Washington end on the base negotiations I mentioned previously. I played a role in these negotiations. As far as the European negotiations were concerned, I had no particular background in security discussions. I don't think that you can walk into such talks and play a role unless you have the necessary background. So, while I observed them and would occasionally attend the meetings and so forth, I myself can make absolutely no claim for any involvement in them.

On the military assistance side, the Carter administration wanted to restrain arms sales. There were several issues involved. First of all, if the proposed sale amounted to $10 million or more and didn't involve sales of military equipment to a NATO country, Japan, or Korea-and Australia and New Zealand might have figured in it, too-you had to get the personal approval of the President. Well, as a matter of fact, this process had its cumbersome aspect. You didn't put them up to the President one by one. You put together a "package" of smaller sales. I would comment that, among the many people that I had to deal with on this-and there might be up to 40 clearances to obtain on this-the President of the United States was neither the most difficult or the slowest to obtain approval from.

In a sense, these approvals were silly. Most of the sales were routine and were things that I myself should have been approving, much less anyone above me. However, that is what we had to do.

Another matter that we handled was the effort made to develop a "follow on" to the F-5 aircraft. [A fighter-bomber developed by Northrop Aircraft.] At one time in the Korean context, you will remember, the manufacturer attempted to develop a less sophisticated jet aircraft to be sold to countries facing "lesser threats." They would be easier to maintain. The F-5A was the first model. The F-5E, which ended up being a fairly good airplane, was the last model. However, how would we handle Taiwan in the light of our agreements with the PRC? So the Northrop embarked on a process to get agreement on an aircraft which would be more sophisticated than the F-5E. It would not be a "state of the art" aircraft but better than the F-5E. Eventually, the President rejected this "F-X" plane which Northrop was going to build for Taiwan. So we were left with this "generic" idea and what could we do with it. So we made a great effort and put out a study covering a "generic," rather than a designated airplane. We said that these were the limits to capacity. Northrop saw this proposal as a means of selling this aircraft that they had been working on to other countries like Pakistan, Korea and Egypt.

So General Dynamics which built the F-16 came in and said, "Well, this concept seems to imply that you can build "up to this level." What about building "down to this level?" That is, taking the F-16 and producing a lesser version of it. Of course, that was the death knell to the idea of an improved F-5 if, indeed, this idea had any validity. The answer was, "Of course they could." In fact, no country in that day and age-18 years ago-wanted a "second class" aircraft. Once you got the F-16 on the table, even with a lessened capacity, it so muddied the water that that was the end of the concept.

Q: What about the whole "Camp David" situation? This is political-military, but, in a way, was this just "in the stratosphere beyond you"?

O'DONOHUE: The Camp David agreement itself happened sort of "in between." It was negotiated while I was in Thailand. The aftermath that we dealt with was the agreements that came out. In other words, the issues of military assistance and security assistance. Now there was a clear distinction in one sense between these forms of economic assistance. You had security assistance and you had development assistance. Security assistance was economic assistance ultimately justified because of a security relationship. For example, to a country like South Korea, where we were providing assistance, managed by AID [Agency for International Development]. Well, the Carter administration came in with the notion of separating AID from the State Department-that is, from the Secretary of State to whom the AID administration reported.

Q: This is Side B of Tape 5 of the interview with Ambassador Dan 0'Donohue. Please continue, Dan.

O'DONOHUE: The Carter administration had legislation passed which created an entity which was called IDCA [International Development and Cooperation Agency] which, in their view, was to bring together AID, the Peace Corps, and one or two other entities. The idea was to put them all together. This was aimed at detaching development assistance and all of these other activities from "crass" foreign policy considerations. It never really developed this way, but the net result was that the AID administrator became independent of the Secretary of State. If you ask what was the one result of it all, it is that.

Somewhat surprisingly, this decision began to show up as a significant problem. The AID administrator and AID as an agency saw that, ultimately, the decisions on who received American economic assistance were theirs, and the Secretary of State was a bystander. They would consider State views, but that was it. Some rather silly things happened as a result. They were really, relatively small things on which, bureaucratically, AID should have accepted the views of the State Department and the Secretary of State. They didn't. So development assistance, in effect, became separate from foreign policy. On the other hand security assistance, which is economic assistance given for political or security reasons, remained under the Secretary of State. What this meant was that AID was to administer this security assistance as close to a normal aid program as was consistent with our other, basic objectives. AID still administered security assistance, but unlike development assistance, in the end the Secretary of State determined the levels and recipients of security assistance.

In Pol-Mil we originally handled that security assistance but our involvement in it was quite a pro forma matter. In fact, beginning in about 1978 we began to have-not even consciously-a shift of more and more of the development programs to security assistance as AID became more unresponsive. The security assistance programs, instead of involving countries like Egypt, Israel, and so forth, were broadened to cover other countries, because development assistance had become so unresponsive in policy terms.

This situation lasted until 1981, when the Reagan administration came into office. What had happened regarding aid levels was predictable. AID handled development assistance as they did because they saw that this would allow them to do what they wanted to do. They wouldn't be bothered by the State Department. Well, even a Democratic-controlled Congress wasn't very interested in development assistance unrelated to policy. So when the Reagan administration came into office in 1981, our assistance program levels were in terrible shape.

In fact, it was Secretary of State Haig, working with James Buckley and then Bill Schneider, who saved AID. Haig came into office and saw foreign assistance as an instrument of policy. As a matter of fact, the Reagan administration, seeing foreign assistance as a key instrument for policy, reinvigorated the aid programs. However, the cost of that, from the point of view of AID-not from the point of view of the Department of State-was that, in effect, during those first few years it was the Secretary of State and the Under Secretary for Security Assistance-first Buckley and then Schneider-who successfully "carried all of the water on the Hill" [that is, in Congress]. The price of that was obviously that the whole aid program-in our view, properly- was subjected to close Department policy review.

The AID administrator had been a very strong figure, but he was never able to break away from Department oversight. So, in effect, IDCA, which would have "withered away" anyhow, never played a significant role. Under the Reagan administration and then under the Bush administration, the AID administrator was sufficiently weak that AID, whatever its nominal, autonomous status, in fact was so dependent on the "policy side" for the justification of its programs that the relationships worked out quite well, from the point of view of the State Department.

Q: During your time in Pol-Mil, how did we view the situation with Somalia, from the Pol-Mil side?

O'DONOHUE: Well, Somalia was one of the places where we wanted to go in. President Said Barre was viewed as one of the most disreputable of national leaders. The negotiations with the Somali Government had elements of grim humor in it. As I said, Reg Bartholomew is a superb negotiator. In the world scheme of things, Somalia never amounted to much. Kenya did have some importance and Oman was of major importance. Nonetheless, in the negotiations we got what we wanted, but it is not clear that the Somalis ever got much out of it at all. So it was a successful negotiation but it never amounted to anything.

Q: Were we keeping a close eye on what the Soviets were doing and trying to "counter" them or not-in Africa and other places?

O'DONOHUE: Obviously, what happened in Somalia and Ethiopia is that there was a reversal of alliances. Ethiopia had been where the Americans were, and Somalia had been where the Soviets were. I think that the Bureau of African Affairs [AF], under Assistant Secretary Dick Moose in particular, but he was reflecting a Bureau preference, always wanted to "insulate" African affairs from "Cold War" competition.

By then [1978-1981] Africa had lost the allure that it had had in the 1960's. When I was in Ghana [1968-1970], Africa had really faded as an area of interest. What was driving us to negotiate with Somalia was an attempt to obtain facilities in Somalia. In the background was this idea of pre-positioning equipment and supplies in the area as well as access, and that we might be fighting a war against the Soviets in the Middle East. Bob Komer, who was the Under Secretary in the Defense Department under the Carter administration, was one of the major exponents of obtaining facilities for pre-positioning equipment and supplies as well as military access.

This negotiation resulted from a sense that there was a military "power vacuum" in the Middle East and how would we fill it. So that was what was driving us in these cases and had nothing to do with the African aspect of Soviet-American rivalries at all. This solely involved an attempt to obtain facilities for a strengthened US military presence in the Middle East and Indian Ocean.

Q: How did the dual "events" at this time affect the situation? There was first the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini, and particularly the takeover of our Embassy in Teheran in December, 1979, and then the Soviet-inspired coup and the beginning of the war in Afghanistan, which also happened in December, 1979. How did those developments interact?

O'DONOHUE: In Pol-Mil we were minor players but engaged in a support sense. We were never part of the policy aspect of what the US should do regarding the takeover of the Embassy in Teheran and so forth. We were part of the interagency support group in this situation. We also followed but did not participate in the policy reaction of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

What struck me about those events was first of all, the unraveling of our policy toward Iran, the overthrow of the Shah, and his departure from the country. Those events didn't impinge very much on Pol-Mil. Then there were the subsequent events and many interagency meetings. I was struck with how professedly optimistic the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs [NEA] was about the future. At a time when the Defense Department and others were very, very cautious, the NEA Bureau was pushing to get more people back into Iran and pressing for more things to be taken up with the new Iranian Government. In other words, this involved an effort to prop up what the Bureau saw as the democratic forces in Iran, as opposed to the Islamic Fundamentalists.

I didn't know anything about Iran. However, it's fair to say that a number of those who did know something about that country always doubted that "propping up" the democratic forces in Iran would ever work. They felt that the NEA Bureau got too much caught up with this overly optimistic line.

Now, when we came to the events themselves of the seizure of the Embassy, I think that it is clear that both the Embassy and the NEA Bureau pointed out that there would be a reaction to bringing the Shah back to the United States for further medical treatment. This had been done at the behest of David Rockefeller, of the Chase Bank, and former Secretary of State Kissinger. I may be wrong but I think that from that point on Secretary Vance felt a personal sense of responsibility. Kissinger and Rockefeller had put immense pressure to bring the Shah to the US for further, medical treatment, and the Carter administration had "caved" under this pressure. While I don't know if anyone specifically predicted that there would be untoward events in Teheran if the Shah were brought to New York for medical treatment, I think that the views of both the Embassy and the Bureau, which opposed this, were disregarded. We in Pol-Mil were not engaged directly.

Q: Was there concern from the Pol-Mil side about American equipment sitting in Iran?

O'DONOHUE: Yes, I think that there was concern, but the most pressing problems were a little different. That is, we had to remember that there were hundreds of millions of dollars worth of Iranian equipment in the US already paid.

Q: It was in the "pipeline.

O'DONOHUE: Yes, and we "froze" it. So that became far more the focus of our concern than US equipment items in Iran, which was essentially water over the dam from our point of view. I don't think that, from the technological aspect, our equipment in Iran was viewed as a devastating loss. Over time, the lack of spare parts and proper maintenance would doom such equipment to obsolescence or inoperability. My impression is that we were more concerned with putting an embargo on the export of this equipment from the US, and so forth. The biggest problems that we had to face operationally were what would we do with this Iranian equipment in the US and all of that.

Q Were there any negotiations concerning Iran, or did you just sit there?

O'DONOHUE: Pol-Mil was not involved in the various, later negotiations. There were negotiations to release the Embassy people. These were mainly handled by the Deputy Secretary of the Department and NEA. They did not involve Pol-Mil, as I remember it. The Director of Pol-Mil might have been more engaged in these negotiations than I was.

Q: What about Pakistan versus India and that whole question, from the Pol-Mil standpoint?

O'DONOHUE: During that whole period, as the events in Afghanistan unfolded, we became much more engaged with Pakistan. We started on a program of military assistance and other, cooperative relationships. Bedeviling this process very quickly was, of course, the question of Pakistani nuclear weapons development. This was because the Pakistanis had undertaken such development early on.

It was interesting that the NEA Bureau dominated US consideration of this subject. This obviously reflected the views of the Seventh Floor. It was quite clear that we were adopting a very different view of Pakistan than, let's say, than we had of Korea on nuclear weapons development. We followed a very "tough line" toward the South Koreans. The negotiation with Pakistan was clearly going in another direction, and our attitude seemed to be largely one of reluctant acquiescence. We didn't have anyone "pounding the table." It involved looking at the evidence and always reaching the most benign conclusion regarding Pakistani actions, whereas in the South Korean context we looked at this issue and came to the most serious and, in my view, the most realistic conclusion.

Even the Pressler amendment in the late 1980's was designed to give the Pakistanis more "breathing space." It was not really designed to be "punitive." This was the amendment which did require us to freeze all of our assistance programs because we finally could no longer ignore the reality of Pakistani nuclear weapons development. Clearly, on the nuclear weapons development issue, there was a sense-I don't mean that Congress wanted this or anything like that-that we would consistently seek to avoid a crisis in our relations with Pakistan, if there was a way to do this. Other than that, negotiations with Pakistan were under the control of NEA, at the operational level. In this case the Carter administration was determined to respond favorably to the Pakistani security needs as part of our Afghanistan policy. The Soviets had gone too far.

Our role in Pol-Mil was far more operational in deciding how to implement operational programs on Afghanistan than it was involvement in a great debate about our policy. That decision had already been made.

Q: On the nuclear weapons development issue involving Pakistan, did you find that we just "ignored" the obvious Israeli nuclear development program?

O'DONOHUE: That issue didn't figure in that period in any particular way. It just wasn't an issue. I guess that that's the best way of putting it. This was a sort of acknowledged situation but not one which we focused on. I don't know if "ignore" is the right word, but, certainly, this was never an issue during my period in Pol.-Mil.

Q: What about military equipment going to Israel?

O'DONOHUE: The Israeli program is one which the Israelis essentially run themselves. We turn over an annual check to them, and they order the equipment. There are issues which come up. The most basic issues then, and much more so later on, were really technology transfer issues. The Israeli military assistance program itself is handled at very high levels, if a really serious question is involved. Otherwise, the Israelis have their procurement office in the US, and they deal directly with the Department of Defense. However, as I recall it, unlike most military assistance programs, in effect, we turn the funds over to them at the beginning of every fiscal year and they manage their own program within the framework of the Israeli-American agreement.

There are other issues which came up. In fact, there was one case where the Israelis wanted to sell some of their aircraft, and one of the Islamic countries wanted to buy it. They couldn't buy them directly from the Israelis. So we engaged in a paper transaction to buying them from the Israelis and then "selling" them to the Islamic country. The Israelis, on paper, "sold" aircraft to us, and we "sold" the aircraft to the Islamic country.

As I remember it, there were no major problems with the Israelis during the period I was in Pol-Mil. I went out to Israel with Bob Komer when we were coming to grips with how to fill the military vacuum in the Middle East. At that time the Israelis had some concerns because, by its nature, the focus was on strengthening the Arab countries, particularly Saudi Arabia. However, this never emerged as an insurmountable problem.

Q: Did Latin America play any role on the Pol-Mil side?

O'DONOHUE: In terms of the US-USSR conventional arms transfer limitation negotiations, Latin America was one of the major focus areas. Toward the end of the Carter administration, the US Government moved to bolster Nicaragua's neighbors. This involved the kind of equipment to provide and things like that.

For some reason I was more engaged in human rights discussions on Latin America, mainly within the Department. The meetings would usually be chaired by then Deputy Secretary Warren Christopher. The focus was on Argentina, Chile, and so forth. Pol-Mil was not an active participant, because this was not an area where we had much direct involvement. However, we were pulled into this matter as an observer of various intra-Departmental battles on human rights issues.

We were also engaged on various military exercises, involving ships and so forth. I can't remember any issues coming up in which I was engaged which were of major significance.

Q: In 1981 you moved to EA.

O'DONOHUE: In 1981 I remained briefly in Pol-Mil during the transition to the Reagan administration. Then I went over to the Board of Examiners for a couple of months, before returning in August, 1981, to the Bureau of East Asian Affairs as Deputy Assistant Secretary.

Q: Let's cover that next time. You were a DAS (Deputy Assistant Secretary) in East Asian Affairs from when to when?

O'DONOHUE: From August, 1981, to August, 1983.

Q: Today is September 24, 1996. So, Dan, we are covering the period from August, 1981, to August, 1983. You were a DAS in the East Asian Bureau. The Deputy Assistant Secretaries often have different areas to cover. What area did you have?

O'DONOHUE: When I came back to EA, I succeeded John Negroponte as the DAS in charge of Southeast Asian Affairs. John Holdridge had been appointed Assistant Secretary under the new, Reagan administration. He brought Tom Shoesmith in as principal DAS. Tom handled Northeast Asia. I handled Southeast Asia, which included ASEAN, Burma, and Indochina.

Q: Who handled the Pacific Islands?

O'DONOHUE: The Pacific Islands were put together with Australia and New Zealand. At various times they had been placed under the DAS handling economic affairs. At this time the DAS was Bob Brand, whom I had not known before.

Q: Well, the Reagan administration came into office in 1981. Did it have a particular agenda in Asia? It certainly had an agenda in Latin America. Did you sense any agenda which the Reagan administration had in Asia?

O'DONOHUE: I had come back to Washington after the very first "flush" of the Reagan administration. President Reagan was inaugurated in January, 1981. I had stayed in Pol-Mil as the principal DAS [Deputy Assistant Secretary of State], although purely on a nominal basis, for a month or so, then moved over to the Board of Examiners while waiting for another job. Then John Holdridge picked me for the DAS job in the EA Bureau in August, 1981. So the first flush of activity under the Reagan administration was already over when I arrived in EA, but nothing had "jelled," so to speak.

I would say that in East Asia the Reagan administration's approach was a very "traditional" one. Indeed, there were certain aspects having to do with China and South Korea that were playing themselves out when I arrived on the scene. The Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs was Richard Allen, who had a particular association with China and South Korea. In South Korea there was still tension, not only over the Kwangju incident but also over what was going to happen to Kim Dae Jung. He was still under arrest and under sentence of death. So the Reagan administration focused first on clearing away the Kim Dae Jung issue before moving to strengthen relationships with the South Korean Government. This meant that before South Korean Prime Minister Chon could be invited for a state visit, we had to be sure that Kim Dae Jung was not going to be executed. These assurances were obtained.

Secondly, on China there was immediate tension. Regarding China, Secretary of State Haig very much shared the Nixon-Kissinger view on the importance of China. However, Richard Allen, the National Security Adviser in the White House, had had ties with Taiwan. There were tensions over that issue, which figured prominently during my period in the EA Bureau, although I was not directly involved. Assistant Secretary John Holdridge essentially had the China portfolio, and the Office Director, Bill Rope, was his executive officer or his operating agent, so to speak.

So, in the case of South Korea, there was a desire to move to a more normal relationship, or to put behind us the tensions that resulted from Chon' s seizure of power, the Kwangju incident, and the Kim Dae Jung matter. They managed to handle this sequence of events fairly early. In the case of China and Taiwan, this process played out for about a year, starting first with Richard Allen's efforts to change our arms sales policy toward Taiwan and ending with his failure in this effort and a reassertion of the restricted policy on arms sales previously adopted by the Carter administration. Then, of course, Allen, because of his own problems, was replaced.

In Southeast Asia the Reagan administration did not come in with a specific policy or prescriptions for a policy change. We faced, to a great degree, a policy vacuum, which the Carter administration had just begun to come to grips with only after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and developments in Central America. By the end of the Carter administration they were belatedly realizing that they had to take a tougher stance and had to have a more active policy in terms of confronting the Soviets and Soviet sponsored regimes.

In Southeast Asia there was a different variant of policy. As I said, Secretary of State Haig had a very "Kissingeresque" view of China. He favored very close relationships with China. Initially, this played out in terms of ASEAN and Cambodia in the sense of looking for ways to be more actively engaged in dealing with the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and to be supportive of China.

Q: When did the Vietnamese invade Cambodia? There were several attacks, but when was the basic invasion of Cambodia?

O'DONOHUE: The Vietnamese went in to Cambodia in 1979. They installed their own, Cambodian regime. The Chinese opposed this. The Khmer Rouge had been driven into the jungles of West and Northwestern Cambodia. They were supported by the Chinese and, increasingly, by the ASEAN countries. When I say "ASEAN," I am talking about the Thai and the Singaporeans, who were the most active and the Malaysians. Throughout this whole period Malaysia played a surprisingly active role, reflecting as much the energy and initiative of the Foreign Minister, Ghazali Shafie, as it did national policy. It related as much to the energy of the Foreign Minister and the diminution of his role under Prime Minister Mahathir. He found Cambodian policy an area in which he could play a more active role.

Regarding Southeast Asia, when the Reagan administration entered office, John Negroponte, my predecessor as DAS, had been charged by Secretary of State Haig with doing what he could to find a role for the United States in supporting the non-communist Khmer resistance groups. Now, to a degree, I am speculating on this to some extent. I wasn't directly involved. To a very great degree this seemed to be driven by Haig's desire to make a gesture toward the Chinese, rather than overwhelming interests in the Southeast Asian context. At one point the Chinese were urging Haig to support the non- communist resistance. At that time the key group was the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), which later fell into dissension and became, over time, a minor force. However, during the period 1981 to 1983 it was viewed as the more viable and the more important of the two, non- communist resistance groups. The other non-communist resistance group was headed by Prince Sihanouk.

Q: At that time the Khmer Rouge were just beyond the pale, as far as the United States was concerned?

O'DONOHUE: The Khmer Rouge were beyond the pale, in any direct sense, meaning that no United States Government could consider directly supporting the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge were being supported by the Chinese, with the acquiescence of the Thai. It is not difficult to see that, under the Carter administration, the United States focused more on China than Southeast Asia. The Carter administration, which had both inherited and perpetuated a "policy vacuum" in Southeast Asia, engaged in great convolutions to come up with a rationale to support the Khmer Rouge keeping the seat that they had in the UN, after they had been pushed out of Phnom Penh by the Vietnamese communists. There was the view in the Carter administration that for the Khmer Rouge to keep Cambodia's seat at the UN was the lesser of two evils, and it avoided a fight with the Chinese and ASEAN. At that time the Vietnamese had installed a "puppet" regime in Phnom Penh. This policy of support for the Khmer Rouge continuing to occupy the Cambodian UN seat was certainly supported by all of the ASEAN countries. They saw the Vietnamese as the basic threat to the security and stability of the area and did not want the pro-Vietnamese regime recognized in Phnom Penh.

So that was the contribution of the Carter administration, in the sense that the Khmer Rouge were allowed to continue to occupy the Cambodian UN seat. The US acquiesced in that, but essentially US policy in Southeast Asia was a very passive one. It was in 1981, and rather reflexively, that we looked to take a somewhat tougher or more supportive stance toward Thailand. You could then say that we had decided to become more active in terms of Southeast Asian policy. This is aside from US policy on the refugee issue. As I think I mentioned earlier, the dimensions of the Indochinese refugee issue had burgeoned considerably. There was an immense US commitment in that area.

In 1981 when Haig came into office as Secretary of State, my view is that, more at the behest of the Chinese rather than the ASEAN countries, we looked for ways to support the non-communist resistance in Cambodia. A conference on Cambodia was held in New York. However, essentially, in terms of material efforts to support the non-communist opposition to the Vietnamese in Cambodia, there were very great difficulties in applying this policy within the Reagan administration. CIA, the NSC staff, the Vice President's Office, all had grave doubts about our ever becoming reengaged in any way in Indochina. Secretary Haig's original views-and maybe those of the EA Bureau-were rather grandiose and, indeed, beyond what these non-communist groups could absorb. So there was an element of the grandiose in Haig's thoughts about what we might do in Cambodia but derived from the China relationship.

Q: You arrived back in EA in 1981. What were you getting "on the ground" from people who were dealing with these non-communist groups in Cambodia?

O'DONOHUE: When I arrived back in EA, the situation was "playing out" in an initial failure, for two reasons. One reason related to the grandiosity and the imprecision of what Secretary Haig wanted to do. The EA Bureau was acting as his loyal lieutenants, trying to see what the traffic would bear, rather than being the driving force behind his policy. The Bureau had its reservations about this course of action, but Secretary Haig felt very strongly about it. Paradoxically, what happened was when the non-communist resistance turned out to be very resistant to Chinese influence, the Chinese quickly lost interest in pressing the United States to make a very significant commitment in terms of support to the non-communist resistance in Cambodia. Essentially, this was because the non- communist resistance, weak as it was, did not want to be "dominated," either by the Khmer Rouge or the Chinese. So the Chinese lost interest in their own efforts, as did Secretary Haig. This was essentially the situation when I came on board in EA. John Negroponte was concluding the conference on Cambodia which had been held in New York. After this conference the Chinese concluded that the non-communist resistance in Cambodia was more of a "nuisance" to them than they had expected.

Then the EA Bureau and I picked up this issue in a different way. We came at this issue, not in terms of China, nor did we view the non-communist resistance as a strong, viable force. Rather, I took a much more cautious view. That is, this was a major security issue which posed a threat to Southeast Asia, specifically Thailand. We looked to see what we could do in a limited fashion in support of the policies of the ASEAN countries regarding the non-communist resistance in Cambodia, not undertake direct responsibility for the resistors. In other words, the United States was not going to make itself a separate and distinct player or re-engage ourselves directly in Indochina. Rather, we would encourage the ASEAN countries to take the lead and support these efforts.

This was the approach which I designed. Desaix Anderson was the Office Director of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodian Affairs. The two of us, in different ways, put together this very limited approach. However, as I said, it was premised on a response to ASEAN. This really meant the Thai, the Singaporeans, and the Malaysians.

Q: You mentioned that A SEA N also included Indonesia and the Philippines.

O'DONOHUE: The difference was that the Philippines were essentially uninterested. This was because of the issue of sovereignty over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea and also because the Philippines had their own insurgency in the southern Philippines. The Filipinos were not very much interested in being out in front in hammering the Vietnamese. The Philippine policy was essentially designed to keep communist countries from supporting the Philippine insurgency. So it was designed to avoid giving any provocation to them. Also, the Filipinos were viewed by other ASEAN countries as different. So they were essentially passive on the issue of support for the non- communist resistance in Cambodia. This meant that no one was particularly trying to "engage" the Filipinos in this sense.

At that time Indonesia was essentially leery of becoming engaged in supporting the non-communist resistance in Cambodia. That was a more important consideration. You might say that the Indonesians took a position of putting no block in the way of what ASEAN was doing. They essentially accepted that the Vietnamese were a problem. However, they also had the basic, geopolitical view that the Vietnamese were a block to China. The Indonesians saw China as the ultimate threat to Southeast Asia.

Q: The Indonesians, of course, were particularly sensitive to China...

O'DONOHUE: Very much so. They did not interpose any objections and expressed a minimum of verbal support for the non-communist resistance in Cambodia. However, in fact, they always kept in mind that Vietnam had an importance over the long run as a block to China. They were not just talking about a period of five or 10 years but of a longer period. The Thai, who saw the situation in Cambodia as a very real threat on their border, were the major player. Of course, anything that went on could be only handled through Thailand.

The Singaporeans had two considerations in mind. One of these saw the Vietnamese as a threat, in a manner analogous to the Thai. Secondly, then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, was determined to involve the United States militarily again in Southeast Asia. He saw the United States as important for Southeast Asian security. He was always pressing for greater US involvement.

Q: This moves away from the issue, but you raised an additional question. Did you have a feeling that our Ambassadors to Singapore were sort of "caught up" in the Lee Kuan Yew approach? Pardon, I'm going to switch tapes.

O'DONOHUE: No, I did not feel that our Ambassadors to Singapore took this view.

Q: This is Side A, Tape 6, of the interview with Ambassador Dan O'Donohue. Dan, please continue.

O'DONOHUE: I did not feel that our Ambassadors in Singapore were "caught up" with the Lee Kuan Yew approach, and for one basic reason. Indeed, it was one reason why I turned down going to Singapore as Ambassador. Essentially, I think that the American Ambassadors saw themselves as being on the sidelines with Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew on center stage. Early on, Lee Kuan Yew had found out that he could deal directly with the highest levels of the American Government. He found out that senior American officials were almost masochistic in allowing him to belabor them with all of the US failings, and they just came back for more.

So an American Ambassador in Singapore had a basic problem. That is, the head of government had more "standing" in Washington than he did. That led to a rather tempered approach on their part. They did not wish to appear to "challenge" Lee Kwan Yew, who had this near "guru" status among senior officials in Washington.

Q This sounds a little like the position of Julius Nyerere in Tanzania.

O'DONOHUE: Yes, if you say that you are talking about a "hard nosed," brilliant man, there is that. Yes. Somehow or another, Lee Kuan Yew had established that reputation. It was really only toward the end of what I think was the Reagan administration that this situation was tempered, with the focus on his son [B. G. Lee] and the opposition. In effect, Lee Kwan Yew or the PAP [People's Action Party] ran a highly authoritarian state. For a very long period of time this situation was largely ignored. So Lee Kwan Yew and the Singaporeans, despite the size of the country, played a disproportionately important role on the Southeast Asian scene. To give them credit, they provided some significant resources to the Cambodian resistance, so it wasn't simply "talk." Lee Kwan Yew considered that the Vietnamese communists were a threat and tried to help Singapore and the Southeast Asian region deal with this threat. Trying to re-engage the United States militarily in Southeast Asia was part of his strategy.

In Malaysia, as I said, the Cambodia problem was the particular province of the Foreign Minister, Tengku Ghazali Shafie. In his day, as Minister of the Interior, he had played an immensely important role. He found that under Prime Minister Mahathir as Minister of Foreign Affairs, he was being pushed away from the center of power. Nonetheless, Mahathir gave Ghazali Shafie a fairly free rein on Cambodia. So the Malaysians were much more active than one would ever have expected, given their past patterns.

Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand were the three major players in ASEAN. We kept the Filipinos and the Indonesians well informed of what we were doing. They acquiesced, but neither the Philippines nor Indonesia indicated that they had any sense of commitment to what the rest of ASEAN was doing. This changed later when Indonesia played an active role in negotiating the settlement.

We put together a program of support which was very carefully designed, to "see the light of day." Although we dealt directly with the non- communist Khmer leaders, we left it to others, for instance, to provide weapons, military training, and that sort of thing, while we focused on other areas. Our contribution was a significant, but not dominant one. Initially, at least, there was a sense of "caution" to make sure that we would not end up taking over the dominant role of support for the non-communist resistance in Cambodia. What we were doing was in support of policies and programs of the three, more dominant members of ASEAN-the Thai, the Malaysians, and the Singaporeans. We had no dealings with the Khmer Rouge. That remained both our policy and practice. Over time our later assistance programs, with the support of Congressman Steve Solarz, ended up by probably providing 50% or more of the value of the resources going to the non-communist Khmer resistance-but not weaponry and things like that. At the beginning one of our absolute ground rules which I had insisted on was that we would provide only a "proportionate" lesser share than ASEAN. But our provision of something approaching that figure of 50% only developed over a period of time.

So operationally that required us to keep very carefully focused. Our dominant considerations included Cambodia, Indochina, and the security of Thailand. However, by contrast to the period of the Carter administration, the Reagan administration evolved a "sensible" policy of restrained re-engagement in Southeast Asia. In fact, this was a policy that worked well, filling the policy vacuum which had existed under the Carter administration.

This policy involved no reintroduction of a US military presence. There was no interest in the United States taking on a role of THE major protector. However, this policy involved an active, American policy of support of ASEAN. That meant not only Cambodia but also accepting ASEAN as the basic institution set up by the countries of the area in which we were most interested with which they could manage their security relationships. It also involved a recognition of Thailand's importance to the Southeast Asian area. There was a significant growth in security assistance programs.

In the case of a couple of Vietnamese-Thai "border incidents," the United States reacted visibly to show support, such as flying equipment over to the Thai. In essence, we had a policy in the Southeast Asian area which focused on Thailand's security as the central concern and ASEAN and the ASEAN countries as the area where our basic interests were involved. Thirdly, over time and as the ASEAN economies started growing more impressively, there was a recognition of our important economic and commercial relationships.

Q: Let's focus first on Cambodia. What were the interests of the United States in Cambodia?

O'DONOHUE: Our interests, as we defined them, solely derived from Thailand's security. In other words, that was the point of the whole exercise. We did not intend to "re-engage" in Indo-China. Rather, we accepted the fact that the Vietnamese incursion into Cambodia posed a significant threat to the stability and peace of the region. In this context Thailand's security and stability were central to peace and stability in the region, in which we had a continuing interest. So that's what drove us. It was not Cambodia as such.

Now, if we had looked at Cambodia during the period when Secretary Haig was in office, we would have looked at it primarily in the context of our relationship with China. However, that did not figure in the subsequent and successful policy.

Q: At that time China's interest was to "mess around" in Cambodia and weaken Vietnam.

O'DONOHUE: Yes. Essentially, it was directed against Vietnam. Also, you could argue to a much lesser degree that, whatever their appalling conduct had been, the Chinese considered the Khmer Rouge as a "friendly" regime which had been deposed. So you could argue that the Vietnamese aspect was overwhelmingly the most important consideration. Secondarily, although I hate to use the term, "victim," in terms of the Khmer Rouge, embarrassing and appalling as they were, perhaps even in Chinese terms, the Khmer Rouge were a client state of the Chinese. Then I would put in, that nobody controlled the Khmer Rouge in what they did internally.

Q: Part of this concerns the "mind set" within the Department. How did you view Vietnam in 1981-1 982?

O'DONOHUE: Well, from 1981 through the mid-1980's, I would say, Vietnam was viewed-probably correctly, in my view-as an aggressive, assertive regime. In fact, it posed significant threats to its neighbors. We're talking about Thailand, essentially. The Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia [in 1979], to a great degree, was provoked by the Khmer Rouge themselves. The subsequent Vietnamese decision to "stay" in Cambodia put the Vietnamese on the border of Thailand. Thailand was viewed then as a state whose political institutions were weak. Thailand had had a communist insurgency which was Chinese-supported. I'll go into that aspect later, because as part of a Chinese-Thai rapprochement, the Chinese clearly cut off support to the Thai communists. As a result, the Thai communist insurgency actually did withered away.

However, the Vietnamese and the Thai had been historically antagonistic. In fact, Cambodia was only saved from extinction-that is, being absorbed by the Thai and the Vietnamese-by the French. Otherwise, Cambodia would have disappeared in the 19th century as a state. We viewed the Vietnamese as aggressive-not that they were going to turn their troops loose, but the Thai-Cambodian border was a catalyst for constant instability. They were still fully in their mood of arrogance after their victory in the Vietnam War. While we were not going to reintroduce US military forces into the area, we accepted the ASEAN view that the Vietnamese had to be brought under control.

We used to have a rhetorical phrase which turned out, in fact, to reflect reality later on. That is, the Vietnamese must be brought to realize that they had to establish a pattern of peaceful relationships with their neighbors. As I said, this was a rather slender hope in 1981-1983. However, over time Vietnam's weaknesses became much more apparent. However, in the early 1980's, as I say, this was more a rhetorical phrase than anything else. We hoped that that would happen.

In all of this there was no interest in reopening the Vietnam War. It was not the Vietnamese winning the Vietnam War which led to our policy. It was Vietnamese actions in Cambodia and the Vietnamese threat to Thailand. As we developed this policy, there was no sense that, somehow, we were re-fighting the Vietnam War. That was never part of the equation, although, at times, we were accused of that. The basic focus of our policies was on Cambodia, which was regarded as the catalyst. However, Thai security and ASEAN relationships were the key factors.

Q: I always thought that Laos was also a factor.

O'DONOHUE: Laos was a backwater. I visited Laos in 1982. We took the initiative to propose a step by step improvement of relations. Now, this step by step improvement of relations ended up taking about 10 years. Nonetheless, the Lao were not a major factor. The Thai themselves were ambivalent about Laos. The Thai Government and the Thai military both worked to have better relations with Laos. At the same time the Thai military was supporting and allowing Lao resistance groups to function in Thailand. As I say, the Thai had an ambivalent view of Laos.

However, our relationships with Vietnam in 1981 were tough. The POW [prisoner of war] issue was a measure of Vietnamese toughness but was not a driving issue then, as it became later.

Q: Could you explain what the POW issue was?

O'DONOHUE: After the Vietnam War there was the question of accounting for American military personnel who were missing in action. Put very simply, in 1981 the Vietnamese had to have known of the fate of a number of those Americans who were missing in action. Some of these American prisoners were clearly in the hands of the Vietnamese after their capture. However, for a very long period the Vietnamese saw the POW/MIA [Prisoner of War/Missing in Action] card as a lever which they could use with the United States Government.

Starting in 1981 under the Reagan administration, we really turned that issue around. We started pressing on some of the POW/MIA cases which we were sure that the Vietnamese knew something about. I may be wrong about some of these details, because John Negroponte was still there in EA as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Southeast Asian Affairs.

As I remember, we had asked the Vietnamese specifically about several cases. We had asked about them before, but the Vietnamese said that they didn't know anything about them. The picture of one of the POW's, as I remember, had been published in a Hanoi newspaper, showing him being marched or pushed down a street. From that point on we started taking a really tough stance on these issues. In other words, we said that they should know about these POW's and should tell us. So, instead of the Vietnamese having the POW cases as a lever to use against American administrations, the fact was that we turned the issue back on them. We actively and aggressively pressed for information. It seemed that both of the previous administrations, under both Republicans and Democrats, had handled this issue with some timidity.

Q: You say that we talked to the Vietnamese? How did we talk to them?

O'DONOHUE: When John Negroponte was handling this issue, he had gone up to New York to talk to the Vietnamese UN Representative. At one point, as I remember-it happened before I was back in EA-we had a group going to Hanoi for a visit. In New York and elsewhere we used the links available to us and kept up the pressure. At that point in time, when there was talk about normalization of relations with Vietnam, there were people regularly coming back from Vietnam, announcing that the Vietnamese were ready to normalize relations with the US This created a sense of surprise, almost as if they were going to "forgive" us. We told them, "You don't understand. We're the ones who have conditions for 'normalization.'"

The first condition was that the Vietnamese should establish a pattern of peaceful relationships with their neighbors, and get out of Cambodia. The second condition was the resolution of the POW issue by getting a full accounting. We always knew that this didn't mean that all of the POW's would ultimately be accounted for. The third condition covered unresolved issues regarding diplomatic property and so forth.

Over time the POW issue grew in a manner which I don't think that anyone had expected. We got into the "Rambo" question and issues like that, introducing the view that there might be Americans still alive in Vietnam. Another factor that became involved was the emergence on the scene of a whole series of rather flamboyant soldiers of fortune, "confidence men," and the like.

In fact, during this whole period our relationship with the League of the Families of the Missing in Action was a very close and constructive one. We worked with them and took their concerns seriously. During this period we had a very good relationship with them.

However, during that period the Vietnamese were difficult to deal with. They were aggressive-perhaps intransigent would be a better word. So during this period we had a view of a Vietnam, measured by its actions, as still seeing itself as having both won a war and being quite ready to play a destabilizing role in the area. Over the next decade the sheer economic weakness of Vietnam became apparent, but not at that time. To the Vietnamese this weak economic situation led to a consequent tempering over time and, finally, a deal with the Chinese under which the Vietnamese agreed to get out of Cambodia. The time we're talking about was 1990 and 1991. Also, there was a growing recognition after 1988 by the ASEAN nations and others, as well as ourselves, that the Vietnamese were economically so weak that they were not a threat. However, in 198 1-83 no one considered our objectives of bringing Vietnam into a peaceful pattern of relationships as reflecting a very likely sequence of events over the near term. This policy objective had not been merely a facade because we hoped that at some point the Vietnamese could be integrated into the region. But we did not see it happening soon.

By 1988-1989 it became the accepted wisdom that the Vietnamese were economically so weak and had so many unresolved problems that they were simply not an external threat. On that basis ASEAN policies changed from isolation" of Vietnam and the perception of Vietnam as an active threat to a progressive movement to where we are today. We have Vietnam now in the process of becoming part of ASEAN.

United States policies also changed. For their part the Vietnamese changed their policies. They now saw Cambodia as a millstone, rather than an asset. Whether they ever saw Cambodia as a platform for further attacks on their neighbors, we don't know. The question became how to manage a solution to the Cambodian problem which met everyone's interests. Interestingly enough, the first interests that were met were really those of the Chinese and the Vietnamese. In other words, they agreed on a resolution of the Cambodian problem. From that point on, the international community proceeded through diplomatic negotiations to resolve the Cambodian issue.

Q: You had not been closely involved in Vietnam. This meant that you were coming in without, you might say, the emotional views that other people held.

O'DONOHUE: Absolutely.

Q: How did you people, sitting in EA, think about the results of the Vietnam War? We had been much disparaged by the academic world about the "Domino Theory." I gather that there were still some concerns about the "Domino Theory."

O'DONOHUE: We didn't intervene militarily again. We accepted that Thai security was important and that the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia [in 1979] and the position of the Vietnamese on the Thai-Cambodian border posed a threat to Thailand.

Essentially, I can give you my own view, which is not particularly colored by any emotion. My only connection with the Vietnam War, as I mentioned previously in this interview, was going to Paris as part of the US Delegation. Then, of course, when I was in Thailand as DCM in 1977-1978, the aftermath of the Vietnam War was still very much in people's minds. I think we can say that United States intervention in Vietnam had, in effect, provided-whatever you want to call it-a shield or simply a buffer to other Southeast Asian countries. Over time, this allowed a number of states which were always viewed as being very weak to grow in strength to the point where they were able, not simply to survive, but to begin to flourish. Initially, during the period 1975-1978, the ASEAN countries alone were able to react and deal with what they saw as a Vietnamese threat to their security. So, in a sense, the question,, "Did our presence in Southeast Asia and the terrific cost of the war have any benefit"? The answer is "Yes."

Now, this leads you to ask another question. When you look at the immense cost of the war to the US, were the costs disproportionate to the benefits? Then, I think, one would have to say that they were. However, to say that there were no benefits or to argue that, in effect, if there had simply been a North Vietnamese communist takeover of South Vietnam in, say, 1963-1965, would that have been without consequence for Southeast Asia? I think that the answer is that it would have been of immense consequence. You just have to look at the situation. There was a different China then. Thailand was then viewed as having an inherent fragility. You would have had other countries which would have seen the necessity to make their peace with the Vietnamese communists.

So I would say, "Yes," United States intervention in the Vietnam War did buy sufficient time for the Southeast countries to become more viable than we ever would have expected. However, having said that, you're still left with the fact that the costs of the war, as it was fought, were disproportionately high. Now, whether there were different ways of fighting the war is another question. However, what is interesting to me, is that I came into Southeast Asia shortly after the Vietnam War. I then spent most of the next 12-13 years associated with Southeast Asia. I have noted that the Southeast Asian and East Asian countries put the Vietnam War behind them and dealt realistically with its consequences. You know what the results have been.

In the United States the Vietnam War is still a very emotional issue, constantly being replayed. The Thai haven't debated, and don't debate whether they should have done this or should have done that. They dealt with what they were left with. I think that for Southeast Asia the Vietnam War, aside from physical "scars" and cases where people lost their lives, is not something that they "refight." This is something that happened. There were consequences, and they dealt with them.

It is the Americans who seem to be constantly "refighting" the war. Over time the Vietnamese communists have used this with the French, certainly, in terms of "their Indochina war" and with the Americans, in terms of our "Vietnam War." In other words, if you still want to "refight" the war, the Vietnamese are quite willing to see how they can use this to their advantage.

However, for at least one generation of Americans, the Vietnam War was a central, passionate, emotional issue. Just look at the difference between the Vietnam War and the Korean War. The Korean War was over and finished. We went about our lives. It's not that the Korean War didn't have certain consequences. However, we dealt with those. In terms of the Vietnam War people are still often engaged in fighting the war itself. I found that, from 1977 on, when I first became involved in Southeast Asia, the Thai and other countries in the region were dealing with the consequences of the Vietnam War rather successfully. That was real. But they were not refighting" a war that was over.

Q: During this period, 1981-1982, when you were in EA as Deputy Assistant Secretary, Burma came under your sights. What were your views about it?

O'DONOHUE: Well, I visited Burma a couple of times. In 1977-1978, when I was DCM in Bangkok, we had a lot of contact with our Embassy in Rangoon, although I didn't visit the country at that time.

Burma was then, and you can still say the same thing about it now, was a backwater. Ne Win had pulled Burma out of the world, to an amazing degree. However, starting in the late 1970's, there were some changes in Burma. We were able to start the anti-narcotics program, which gave us a relationship with the Burmese military. We started a fairly small, economic assistance program. We were able to do a few other things. So actually, in 1981, and this was true of the period until the political "uprising" took place [in 1988], relations between Burma and the United States were improving. This is all stated in relative terms and in a place where there wasn't very many issues in which we were interested-outside of narcotics. As I said, there was a measured improvement in relations. The narcotics program was fairly big. However, more than that, it was the basis for relationships with the Burmese leadership that we couldn't have had without it. We were blessed with two, outstanding DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency] officers in the Embassy in Rangoon. For reasons which elude me, the two of them were probably DEA's best middle grade officers. They are both very senior DEA officers now. For some reason, in this "backwater," we had one after another, high quality DEA officers. This did not characterize the later years in Burma, when there has been one problem after another in DEA relationships in that country. However, during that period we were blessed with two, truly outstanding DEA officers in Burma. So we had a reasonable number of things going on, in Burmese terms. The Burmese economy was in terrible condition but was better than it had been. You could hardly call these improvements more than "marginal adjustments." You might way that for the Burmese themselves there was a sense that life was marginally getting a little better. There was also a sense of "waiting out" Ne Win. Now, Ne Win is still alive. However, there was a sense that things were a little bit better and he would soon pass from the scene. If you look at our relationship with Burma, the 1981-1987 period was, relatively speaking, a "golden age." I use that term in a very tenuous and limited sense. This also characterized the period when I was there in Burma as Ambassador [1983- 1987]. This all ended in 1988, with the beginning of Ne Win's truly "erratic" behavior, which really, I think, precipitated the uprisings. Then, of course, there were the large-scale killings and, unhappily, the generational change in the Burmese military when they put the uprisings down. Unfortunately, Ne Win is still on the scene. However, under him is a generation of younger, military men who were faced with what they saw as a threat to their position. In their own view, this was also a threat to the country. These younger military men stepped in, pushed aside Ne Win's old cronies, and a new generation of leadership simply took over. Unfortunately, this left the country under a younger more vigorous military dictatorship. When you look at the immense cost and upheaval, the change in Burma has been very marginal. Unfortunately, as I say, there has been a generational change, and the military men now in charge will outlast Ne Win. They are 20 years younger than he is.

Q: What about Indonesia? Were there any problems that you encountered during this period when President Suharto has been in power?

O'DONOHUE: This period of 1981-1983 was probably one of the better periods in our bilateral relationship. There seems to be a cyclical pattern to interest in East Timor, though the situation is hardly quiescent. Essentially, US relationships with Indonesia were pretty good. The status of East Timor remained an irritant, but not a major one. This is partially because neither the administration nor Congress was particularly interested in making it an issue which affected our relationship, although there was some concern. Secondly, I would hate to say that it was a better period in East Timor. However, after a particularly bad period, this was a time during which the Indonesians military were applying, relatively speaking, a "lighter touch."

As I said, on other issues, such as Cambodia, the Indonesians were "acquiescent" toward the efforts made by their ASEAN partners. Over time, on several issues, we had been helpful to the Indonesians, so this was actually a good period. There were no, immense, significant issues marring the US-Indonesian relationship.

This was a relationship that we tended carefully. In fact, I made one trip to Indonesia as the State Department representative with former Secretary of Defense Weinberger. The Indonesians were interested in buying F-16 fighter aircraft. Indonesian-American relations were not in bad shape at all.

I must say that, of all the ASEAN countries, I felt that dealing with the Indonesians posed the most intrinsic difficulty, in that Indonesia is an immense society and country. While the per capita income, even then, was not very high, they still commanded very significant resources at the national level. Indonesia is a very complex society. My own feeling was that, of all the ASEAN countries, the Indonesians were not necessarily the most difficult, because we did not have a whole lot of issues outstanding. However, when I was dealing with the Indonesians, I always had the impression that I was "walking on eggs." The problem was that they never told you when you broke one of the "eggs." So the management of our relations with Indonesia had its difficulties.

The Philippines, of course, were part of ASEAN, but their relationship with the United States was different. When I was Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, dealing with Southeast Asia during the 1981-1983 period, the dominant issue with the Philippines was the base negotiations. The continuing issues with the Philippines, of course, were the health of President Ferdinand Marcos, the emergence of Imelda Marcos [his wife] as a power in her own right, and the problems of Ninoy Aquino [a former Senator and one-time Governor of Tarlac Province] in exile in the United States. So operationally the focus was on the base negotiations. "Pervasive" isn't exactly the right word, but certainly there was a constant EAP concern about the direction in which the Philippines would go politically, and, increasingly, economically.

I thought that we handled the base negotiations during the 1981-1983 period exceptionally well. I had seen what had happened with Ambassador Bill Sullivan and the base negotiations in 1976. We subsequently entered into an interim agreement, which was well handled. We were determined not to repeat the fiasco of the 1976 negotiations. This was an issue on which the Bureau of East Asian Affairs took the lead. That is, we decided to start early, to have an agreed "game plan," to have the two key agencies, the Departments of State and Defense, integrated and working closely together, and to tailor our actions to support a successful negotiation. To an amazing degree, we succeeded in this effort. We started off, using the visit to the US of President Marcos in 1981 or 1982 to further our objectives. His brother-in-law, "Kokoy" Romualdez, was Philippine Ambassador to the United States. He played a key role in the negotiations.

Over the course of a year and a half, both in Washington and out in Manila with Ambassador Mike Armacost, we had an immensely successful negotiation. In contrast to previous negotiations, it ended up with only one formal meeting, which concluded the agreement, followed by a signing ceremony. Essentially, we started out early, designing and focusing on what we needed, and not necessarily on everything that we wanted. Secondly, there was close and constant communication, back and forth, with ISA [International Security Affairs in the Department of Defense in Washington], Ambassador Armacost and two JCS Vice Admirals, who did a very significant job.

Initially, there was a dialogue with Ambassador Romualdez, Marcos' brother-in-law, here in Washington. In this dialogue the Filipinos had come up with a "laundry list" of what they wanted. The approach that I took, and which, I think, most of us did, was to explain to them that their "laundry list" of demands was a recipe for failure. If President Marcos really wanted to have a bases negotiation with results which both sides could accept, we were never going to do it that way. We took the approach with the Filipinos that we took with ourselves. That is, what is it that we both need?

So first in Washington, and then in Manila, we engaged in informal negotiations, setting out clear positions. We ended up with some manageable problems with CINCPAC [Commander in Chief, Pacific]. On the Philippine side, Marcos' brother-in-law essentially took the same position that we did. He said, "You know, we don't want a political failure. You can demand what you want, but if the negotiation is a failure, this means that the Philippine Government failed." So, in effect, this worked.

It was interesting to see, throughout this period of negotiations, the "fecklessness" of the alleged Filipino "technocrats." When I first became involved in these negotiations in 1981, I was not handling the economics portfolio. However, I was struck by how the State Department and the US Government, as well as the American banks in New York, seemingly were basing their approach to the worsening Philippines economic situation on the grounds that these "good technocrats" would save us from the "bad Marcos family."

Q: When you say "technocrats," what do you mean?

O'DONOHUE: I mean the Philippine Prime Minister at that time. The Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, the Governor of the Central Bank of the Philippines-they had a whole "technical team," all US educated and usually highly educated. They were highly regarded internationally. I must say that I early came to the conclusion that the role in life of these Philippine officials was not being a "counter" to Imelda Marcos but to "throw sand in our eyes" obscuring the deteriorating economic situation. I couldn't see what else these people were doing.

Q: This is Side B of Tape 6 of the interview with Ambassador Dan 0'Donohue.

O'DONOHUE: Nonetheless, and for a very long time, you might say that the "warning signs" of economic difficulties or truly corrupt ineptness were obscured because the international bankers, at first realistically, and then in the sense of clutching at straws, kept looking at the Philippine technocrats to save the situation as if they were independent of the Marcos.

The Filipinos were absolutely feckless in another way. As I said, Philippine Ambassador "Kokoy" Romualdez, Marcos' brother-in-law, had been viewed as a buffoon by most of the educated Filipinos. He suffered the same odium as his sister, Imelda Marcos. However, he also acted almost like a bustling headwaiter. He didn't have style. He wasn't the brightest guy in the world but he had more political sense than the Philippine technocrats had. He also had enough sense never to mistake "blood" with reality. He was absolutely loyal to President Marcos. He never let his relationship with his sister color his subordination to Marcos.

Q: You mean Imelda Marcos.

O'DONOHUE: Yes. He never let his relationship with his sister color his relationship with President Marcos. So Philippine Ambassador "Kokoy" Romualdez was the voice of reason throughout this whole bases negotiations. Whenever the Philippine technocrats became involved, they were mucking it up with demands which were silly. We were talking about demands which no serious person could expect us to agree to. So the Philippine technocrats ended up being a "nuisance," not an obstacle, because Marcos had it clearly in his own mind in the spring of 1983, when we held these negotiations, that he didn't want a fiasco. So the negotiations went well.

The State Department had an immensely constructive relationship with the Department of Defense during these negotiations. In the Bureau of East Asian Affairs our relationship with CINCPAC-and this had been true in my experience for a very long time-was outstanding. More than anywhere else, I saw that the relationships between the EAP Ambassadors and CINCPAC were close. CINCPAC regarded the EAP Ambassadors as his allies. They looked on CINCPAC as a support. Invariably, the EAP Ambassadors and CINCPAC-whoever he was-tended to see the same situations in very similar terms.

The one exception was the Philippines. The US Naval Base in Subic Bay in the Philippines was a "throwback" to the past. That is where, time after time, CINCPAC then became a "sailor." It was the one area in which US Navy parochialism shared.

Q: This comes from sailing...

O'DONOHUE: What I meant was that CINCPAC tended to see Subic issues in terms of the impact on the US Navy ones. It's the only area that was handled in almost a "neo-colonial way." That is, the US Navy just couldn't comprehend that things had changed. We had problems about the silliest things, like operating taxicabs which functioned on the base at Subic Bay-outside the base on the streets of the city of Olongapo, the Philippine city which adjoined the base. It never even occurred to the US Navy that the Filipino taxicab drivers in Olongapo might object to this. This had CINCPAC involved and took months to solve.

Essentially, as we got down to the end of the bases negotiation in 1983 and were making various and sundry compromises, CINCPAC became more and more unhappy and increasingly negative. I've forgotten what the occasion was, but it was truly silly. The ISA and a Vice Admiral, who was the J-5 on the JSC Joint came over to see me at the State Department. They knew that I was right on the issue at hand. However, they had a problem, and the two Vice Admirals came over to see me about it. They listened patiently to my fulminations. Then they explained. They said, "Look, our problem is this. The Joint Chiefs have taken a position supporting CINCPAC. They took that position without reference to the issues. They said, 'We support CINCPAC.' Now, our problem is how do we get to your position within the context of supporting CINCPAC?'

Well, on the face of it, this seemed to be impossible. But we sat down to discuss the matter further. The two Admirals went through the whole problem with great patience. They developed the most specious rationale that I could ever imagine for announcing that, with some trivial changes, the Joint Chiefs would support the State Department position as being compatible with CINCPAC's views. In fact, they then instructed CINCPAC to go along with it. So CINCPAC was something of a nuisance in the negotiations. But CINCPAC was not a major obstacle, due, in this case, to ISA and the Joint Staff, which was fully committed and had been involved so deeply with us that they were on our side.

Q: What was the purpose of the bases involved in this negotiation, Subic Bay and Clark Field?

O'DONOHUE: There's always been a distinction. There was always one, basic problem about Subic Bay. You couldn't replace it, although you might find places where you could base ships. What you could never replace was the work force of highly skilled Filipinos. We were getting this extremely skilled work force for much less than we would have to pay workers of equivalent skills in the US Who knows-maybe the highest paid workers got $5,000-$8,000 per year. So Subic Bay had superb ship repair facilities and what was regarded as a truly irreplaceable work force. Then there was the location. By using Subic Bay we were saving several steaming days for operations in the Western Pacific, no matter where our ships were. Subic Bay always had an intrinsic importance.

We may have been more ready to give up Clark Field, where the 13th Air Force was located. Clark Field was important, but its retention didn't drive the negotiations. Subic Bay was the more important of the two. You ask why we had the negotiations on these bases? The answer is Subic Bay. Once we decided to retain Subic Bay, the rest followed.

When we looked at the negotiation, there were three considerations. My view, first and overwhelmingly, was the Filipino work force. You simply couldn't replicate it. You couldn't find an island somewhere...

Q: Guam was always full.

O'DONOHUE: Yes, but you couldn't replace the Subic Bay work force. Secondly, the facilities already existed at Subic Bay. Thirdly, there was the location. Any other location added time for deploying naval forces.

As I said, when I was Deputy Assistant Secretary in EA, you had the problem of President Marcos and the Filipino opposition. Marcos constantly outwitted the opposition. No matter what they did, he was just smarter than they were. For my part, when I visited the Philippines, I always spent an evening with the opposition, and the Embassy kept in touch with them. So we had a good range of contacts. The problem for the opposition was that, as long as Marcos was in office, he was just smarter than they were. Remember that, first of all, Marcos was willing to "corrupt" people. If that didn't work, he would try to coerce them. Violence was the final extreme.

However, Marcos' health became increasingly a problem. My impression was that if we had been dealing with Marcos alone, the Filipino elite would have been willing to wait until he passed from the scene. However, the prospect of having General Fabian Ver, a Filipino Army general, and Imelda Marcos succeed to control of the Philippines was too much for the Filipino elite to accept. Gen Ver was both dumb and brutal. The prospect that Marcos might be succeeded by this combination of Gen Ver and Imelda Marcos was appalling to many Filipinos-even those who supported Marcos.

My own impression was that the Filipino elite was less concerned about Marcos perhaps continuing in office for a few more years, than it was about the clear efforts of Imelda and Gen Ver to place themselves to succeed Marcos who was in failing health. So this process was going on, but the key element in it was Marcos' health. In other words, why did you have the events of 1983 which led to "Ninoy" Aquino's death on the tarmac at Manila International Airport and all the events subsequent to it? Marcos' ill health and nearness to death at that time was the catalyst which led to the tragedy. This was true for a couple of reasons. First, "Ninoy" Aquino was being urged to return to the Philippines and be on the scene, because Marcos was believed to be about to die. This is why Aquino, despite warnings, went back to the Philippines.

Q: Was Aquino killed when you were Deputy Assistant Secretary in EA?

O'DONOHUE: No, I had left the Department about a month or so before this happened. John Monjo was the Deputy Assistant Secretary at the time.

Indeed, Marcos was near death's door. I think that the sequence of events included Aquino being pressed to return to the Philippines and be on the scene when Marcos died. While Aquino, I think, had been no match for Marcos, he clearly was a far more popular figure than Imelda Marcos and Gen Ver were. I think that that is what led them to have Aquino killed on the tarmac at Manila International Airport.

Q: This became important after your time, but Marcos' state visit to the US established his relationship with President Reagan. This may have made President Reagan more of a problem than not later on.

O'DONOHUE: No, I don't think so. There was Marcos' inauguration and the statement of support made by Vice President Bush, which really reflected verbal "ineptitude." All Bush had to say was that we supported ASEAN and so forth. I have forgotten exactly what Bush said. However, he appeared to condone the political situation in the Philippines and Marcos. Maybe Bush described Marcos as a democrat. In effect, Bush got all tangled up in his words.

Based on what Phil Habib told me, since Phil played a role later on at the time of the fall of Marcos, his state visit to the US did not play all of that important a role. I think that President Reagan had a feeling that he did not want to "abandon" his friends. That is, governments that the US had worked with for long periods, not personal friends of Reagan. I don't know how well President Reagan knew Marcos when Reagan was Governor of California. I don't think that it was a matter of personal friendship or that Marcos' state visit to the US meant that much to President Reagan.

The state visit itself was interesting in a different way. It shows what happened when you are dealing with a near monarch. We were planning the visit with Ambassador "Kokoy" Romualdez in Washington. "Kokoy" was a person who spoke with great authority. Foreign Minister Carlos Romulo arrived in Washington three or four days before the state visit. John Holdridge, the Assistant Secretary for EA, and I met with Romulo to review the preparations for the visit. In fact, Romulo had nothing to do with the preparations, because they were being handled by Romualdez. So John Holdridge and I met with Romulo and were explaining it all. Romulo said, "Oh, where are people sitting at the dinner at the White House?" This seemed an innocent enough question. Romulo then said, "Where is my wife sitting?" John Holdridge pulled out the seating plan. Actually, the guests at the state dinner were seated in two separate rooms. There was the dining room itself, and then there was another, connecting room where the Deputy Assistant Secretaries and those at the next level sat. Holdridge started going down the list.

Of course, what Romulo knew was that his wife wasn't scheduled to be seated in the main dining room. She was off in the connecting room, where we were actually going to be sitting. It's fair to say that Marcos brought so many cabinet ministers that there were going to be three or four ministers in the dining room. Romulo said, "Oh, that's very embarrassing." John Holdridge, not knowing what we were getting into, said, "Oh, you're right. We'll take care of that." So we went back to the Office of Protocol. They said, "No." They pointed out that Philippine Ambassador Romualdez had said that Mrs. Romulo would sit in the second dining room.

So I went over to Ambassador Romualdez and explained to him what had happened. He was as mad as could be, because he knew that Romulo had arrived in Washington. I said, "Wait a minute, Kokoy, you have to understand something. You are President Marcos' brother in law. No matter how this works out, you'll manage your relationship. I want you to remember, Kokoy, that when Romulo goes through the line to meet the President of the United States, everyone will remember that he is the man who walked ashore at Leyte with MacArthur in 1944, who signed the UN Charter, and did a lot of other things. He is a 'folk hero' in American eyes. President Reagan will say, 'Oh, so good to see you. Too bad that your wife isn't here.' Romulo will explain that his wife is here but is sitting in another room. Kokoy, you may survive this, but I'm not going to survive it. So, Kokoy, Mrs. Romulo is going to be seated in the main dining room." Kokoy was incensed, but he finally agreed. What it meant was that they had to put another Philippines cabinet minister in the second dining room. Under Marcos these relationships were all confused. Everyone was at everyone's throat.

Q: Why not stop at this point? We'11 pick it up next time at this point. Is there anything else that you want to cover? We'll pick it up at the point where you left EA in 1983.

O'DONOHUE: In 1983 I left EA and went to Burma as Ambassador.

Q: Today is October 17, 1996. Dan, I'm not sure that we covered it, but how did you get to be appointed Ambassador to Burma?

O'DONOHUE: Well, by 1983 I had been back in Washington since 1978, so I had been there for five years. First, from 1978 to 1981, I had been the principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in Political-Military Affairs. Then I was in EA as Deputy Assistant Secretary dealing essentially with Southeast Asian Affairs. It had been a long and very tiring time for me.

The particular reason for my appointment as Ambassador to Burma related to the decision by Paul Wolfowitz, the Assistant Secretary for EA, to bring Bill Brown in as principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for EA-in effect, superseding Tom Shoesmith. Paul Wolfowitz indicated that he wanted both Tom Shoesmith and me to stay on in the bureau. At the same time there were three Embassies coming open-Malaysia, Singapore, and Burma. Tom felt, rightly, I believe, that it would be very uncomfortable for him to stay on as Deputy Assistant Secretary for EA, particularly as his expertise and that of Bill Brown somewhat overlapped. So Tom opted for the Ambassadorship to Malaysia. I had my choice of staying on as Deputy Assistant Secretary in EA or of going either to Singapore or Burma. I felt that five years had been a long time in Washington and that it really was time to move on.

Q: I asked this because there is a real problem of wearing out. The term, "burnout, "is overused, but did you find that too long a period in Washington at that level does things to you?

O'DONOHUE: I don't know if it "does things" to you but I think that for a Foreign Service Officer who, one assumes, enjoys and wants to serve abroad, there is a time when you feel that you should move on. In a policy and professional sense, the two-year tour as Deputy Assistant Secretary in EA was one of my most satisfying. Certainly, the only position rivaling that was that of Ambassador to Thailand. So, in one sense, service as Deputy Assistant Secretary for EA had covered a very constructive two years. I had a very high regard for my colleagues.

The Reagan administration was particularly interesting in that, if you were operating within the established policy framework, you actually had greater operational freedom. As long as you knew what you were doing, and it fit the established policy, you generally could "sign off" telegrams with minimum clearances.

Q: You're making reference to the time when George Shultz was Secretary of State...

O'DONOHUE: Well, first it was Secretary of State Haig and then Secretary of State George Shultz. This freedom of action certainly didn't apply to any areas where there were major Department of Defense, front office interests, where there were always very significant tensions and clashes at the highest levels. In the case of East Asia, the NSC staff, I guess Don Gregg was there first, saw things the same way we did and EAP had the policy lead. In the Department of Defense Rich Armitage went from Deputy Assistant Secretary to Assistant Secretary. He was a strong, positive figure. He was usually very supportive of Department of State positions.

As a matter of fact, in a bureaucratic sense, this tour of duty in Washington had been a very happy time for me. John Holdridge was the first Assistant Secretary of State under whom I served. He had a very light rein, which allowed me to operate with considerable freedom. He was very supportive of initiatives I took. Then Paul Wolfowitz came in as Assistant Secretary for EA and was more control oriented. Again, he was a good person to work for. So, in one sense these two years in EA [1981-1983] were a time which I looked back on with a sense of very real accomplishment. However, after five years in Washington [1978-1983], with all of the changes that I had gone through, it was really time to go back to the field.

Q: If you had your choice, or, at least, the presumptive choice between Singapore and Burma...

O'DONOHUE: They wanted me to go to Singapore, actually.

Q: Well, one thinks of Burma as being kind of "off in left field, "while Singapore was "more dynamic."

O'DONOHUE: Well, Singapore is not a more dynamic post than Burma in some ways. It is a "city state" and was completely dominated by Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew. Burma had with it a touch of the exotic. It had a larger Embassy for the Ambassador to run, and so forth, but it was certainly a backwater in policy terms. My impression of Singapore had been, and really it was several years before this situation changed, that it was a place where the Ambassador was not simply second fiddle. The American Ambassador was left on the sidelines as Lee Kwan Yew dealt with the American political leadership. Over the years Lee Kwan Yew had established his relationships at the highest level of the US Government. My own view, as I said before, was that this was partially due to the American tendency toward masochism. Lee was always belaboring and lecturing the Americans on their failings, which they seemed to love to hear. Nonetheless, my feeling was that Singapore was a very small post in a city state in which there were few issues. Mainly, the issues included Cambodia, which the Singaporeans were active in. The Singaporeans were constantly trying to get us "re-engaged" militarily in Southeast Asia. I felt that it was a fairly small canvas for an Ambassador, in which the head of government had far more weight in Washington circles than the American Ambassador did.

Q: I imagine that Lee Kwan Yew would have been "at one" with the Reagan people.

Q: It probably wouldn't have been a comfortable experience...

O'DONOHUE: As a Foreign Service Officer, I could have managed it, others have enjoyed the post. However, all in all, backwater though Burma was, Burma just seemed to have a little bit more to offer me at that time. Another officer might have felt quite differently.

Q: Did you have any problems with the confirmation process?

O'DONOHUE: No, quite the contrary. The confirmation process then was still one in which career officers generally had a fairly easy time of it-if there wasn't some extraneous reason that applied. I had to wait for Tom Shoesmith to get his "agrement" from Malaysia, so we sat around for a few months. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee only wanted to have one hearing. We went up to appear before the Committee, I think, in September, 1983.

There were a few questions. The Chairman of the Committee was disappointed that my wife, Mary, wasn't there, because he wanted to have her there for complimentary reasons. This, by the way, was utterly "pro forma." The hearing on my appointment to Burma was "pro forma." So it was all very easy, and I can't remember any substantive questions. The Committee had two career officers before them who were clearly qualified to be Ambassadors, and they were just holding the hearing that was required. That kind of happy period disappeared later on. But I sailed through on that.

Q: The only hearing lever sat in on was back in the 1960's. Somebody was going to Thailand, and I think that the major question at that time was, "Isn't that the place where they have white elephants?" That was all there was to it. It all depends on the spirit of the times and the people concerned.

You were Ambassador to Burma from when to when?

O'DONOHUE: I arrived in Rangoon in December, 1983, and left in March of 1987. So I was there for a little more than three years.

Q: Obviously, you'd been in the EA Bureau and had done your reading up on Burma and all of that. When you went out there, what did you carry in your mental portfolio in terms of what you wanted to do and what things...

O'DONOHUE: As the Deputy Assistant Secretary in EA, I had been responsible for Burma. I actually tried to get out to the area once every quarter, but the timing would vary. In addition to ASEAN stops, one time I would go to Laos, the next time I would go down to Burma or Australia, and so forth. So I visited Burma twice or three times and was responsible for our policy toward that country. I had a sense of the Embassy and our policy, having dealt with it in Washington.

When I went there as Ambassador, it was a matter of going out there and deciding what I would try to do. At that point in time human rights considerations were not a dominant problem. Burma was seen as a backwater. Patricia Byrnes, who preceded me as Ambassador, had done a fine job in terms of clearing out the "miasma" which historically had affected the Embassy in Rangoon, due to the isolation and the bizarre nature of Ne Win's rule.

From our perspective narcotics control and narcotics programs were the only, major activity facing the Embassy. They were significant. In the mid 1970's the Burmese military had agreed to cooperate with us on narcotics. So, over time, a program of some size had gotten off the ground. DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency] had gotten in, over the objections and opposition of the Burmese but had to operate under very heavy constraints. We had some programs. We had provided the Burmese with helicopters for the anti-narcotics program and we had other activities in that area. . Actually, the anti-narcotics program was of additional value to me because it made it possible to develop a different relationship with the Burmese and the Burmese military leadership than any other government could have done.

We had the resumption of an economic aid program there, which was relatively small. Nonetheless, we had an AID Mission which was doing things. As I went out to Burma, I saw the anti-narcotics and the aid program as two aspects of our relationship which, operationally, were promising. I had gone out to Burma with all sorts of advice. I was advised that you couldn't get close to the military leadership and couldn't do much in Burmese society as a whole. Those views posed challenges to me. I went out also looking to emphasize the economic aspect of our relationship.

At that point [1983] you hardly could call Burmese economic policy a rational one. However, the acceptance of our aid mission and a few other programs were measures of a change from the former, "Burmese Way to Socialism," which had been a disaster. So that reflected some change. Potentially, the country had a fair amount of natural resources. Considering the fact that Burma was as poor as it was, some improvement might be expected from almost any change in policy.

However, there wasn't much improvement on the economic side, during the three and one-half years that I was Ambassador to Burma. I had thought that there would be some improvement, but there wasn't.

In the struggle against the narcotics traffic we actually developed a fairly close relationship with the Burmese military. There were some significant programs which didn't survive the public upheaval and turmoil in 1988. I was military as second lieutenants when Ne Win began to run the country. They were products of his system and grew up within the framework of a structure with Ne Win as the center. They were so young and so much junior to him that they had really not had any contact with him until they rose in rank or served as his aides. These people were now in their '50s just moving into the top ranks of the Burmese military when I arrived in Rangoon. Indeed, they are the ones who are running the country today. They were of a different generation.

Q: How did you deal with him? At that time he had the reputation, and deservedly so, of being reclusive.

O'DONOHUE: Well, he was. The structure was set up in a manner in which both the civil servants and, even more so, the military were shielded from anything but the most minimal, outside contact. The military people had created a different caste. Literally, once they entered the Burmese military, they lived together-even had their own hospitals. They had done terrible damage to their own country, and this also led them to be more insular. So the military ended up, in effect, almost as a separate caste within this society.

When I arrived in Burma, it was really a question of how to come to grips with this structure. Rather consciously, I set out to do it. Interestingly enough, the South Korean Ambassador and I were the two foreigners who had the most success in developing an acceptance and ability to work with Burmese officials. You can hardly call this "normal." When I first arrived, I found that there were really no constraints on dealing with civilian society outside the military and the government. It was really a measure of your own energy in getting out. This was mainly because, at that point, the military were so confident, and the older people were so irrelevant politically, that they really didn't care. If I had spent my time associating with only minority groups, out of which one or the other rebellions had come, there might have been a different government reaction. However, dealing with the civilians, whom the Burmese military saw as no political threat, didn't bother them.

As a matter of fact, as far as contacts were concerned, I was able to manage my work load fairly easily-probably more so than anywhere that I had been. We were out in Burmese homes frequently. For my wife, in many ways, it was probably the happiest time she had in the Foreign Service, although, in fact, she liked all of the places where we had been. You could be very much a part of that kind of society-meaning the civilian society, which had been excluded from any significant political role.

As time went on, and this was really a reflection of the fact that they saw that we had comfortable relations with the Burmese military, civilian officials were able to deal with us more easily. For them the constraints were completely external. They would have liked to deal openly, but that wasn't the way things were. Civilians as well as military personnel needed permission from the authorities to attend a social affair. They could get waivers for dealing with certain people. If a Burmese was involved in some project, he could deal with the project manager without specific permission for each contact. So that aspect of making contacts worked reasonably well.

However, with the Burmese military there were problems, because the system was structured to keep you at arm's length from them. It was a combination of things. However, for example, we were able to use the narcotics program to justify different treatment for ourselves. No other country had such a program. The Burmese military therefore felt that, when they dealt with us, nominally on narcotics, or when they went traveling with us to visit projects up in the hills-let's say that we wanted to go to Lashio-they could justify that. They would just describe the purpose of the contact, "narcotics," even though the purpose of the Lashio visit was just to visit Lashio.

Q: That was the terminus of the old Burma Road, wasn't it?

O'DONOHUE: It was one of the links with the old Burma Road. It was the point at which the Burma Road went Northwards to China. It was in an area in which the Burmese military controlled the valley. They could go up into the mountains if they had enough troops, but the insurgents usually held the high ground. Trucks had to travel in convoy, so this was quite an isolated area.

The narcotics program was important in itself and, indeed, many of our discussions were concerned with strengthening the program. This gave us a substantive issue which was important to us and was useful to the Burmese military. This program made it possible for us to deal with the Minister for Home Affairs, who was a Major General; top police officials; and various and sundry others, in a way that no other country representatives could. That was one element.

The second element was the question of how to get closer to Burmese officials personally. Inevitably, this came out to be golf.

Q: I've heard this again and again.

O'DONOHUE: In looking at this question of golf, I have to admit that I'm a terrible athlete. However, no one ever got so much out of golf as I did, in both Burma and Thailand. There were two aspects. In Rangoon itself the only place that civilians met casually and in any numbers was at the two golf courses. There were no restaurants, to speak of. You did a lot of things in people's homes, but, by its nature, that was limited. The golf courses were the only places where you could go out, play with three or four people, meet others, have something to eat, and have more or less informal relations with them.

The only time that the Burmese military ever "let their hair down" was at the periodic golf tournaments at the military golf course. So, as a matter of fact, I took up golf, like medicine. In fact, I never improved. However, I remember that one day, during the rainy monsoon, I was standing out on the golf course, not in a rain, but in a drizzle. The golf ball was "teed up" on some mud, out of a puddle, with the water at times inching perilously close to my shoes. I thought to myself that if anyone had ever told me that I would be swinging at a silly golf ball in the middle of a puddle, I would have told them that they were insane.

Golf games became important because, outside of travel with senior Burmese military officers, these were occasions to meet and talk with the senior military figures and visit their homes or have them come informally to mine. Opportunities to travel were fairly rare-but they happened a few times a year. When we were playing golf, you might say, the rules were off for at least the Korean Ambassador and myself.

Q: The South Korean Ambassador played golf, too, I take it.

O'DONOHUE: Yes, he was a good player.

Q: I recall that when I was in South Korea-and I am a horrible player-a South Korean Lieutenant General kept dragging me out to play golf I play in the middle 140's for 18 holes. This officer was almost a "scratch golfer." However, he would drag me out. Our Ambassador, Dick Sneider, and the Political Counselor, Paul Cleveland, were very good golfers. They really used golf to contact people.

O'DONOHUE: In Burma the golf tournaments took place several times a year. There was one group of people we were very close to. The Minister for Home Affairs was an Army Major General. Other members of this group were the commander of the Navy and his predecessor, plus two or three other, senior people. During my time in Burma, they had switched over from being on active, military duty and had become senior cabinet ministers.

When we finished playing golf, we would go over to their houses, which was normally unthinkable. Now, they all drank. They all drank on the golf course, which I found amazing-particularly in that hot weather. By the time we were through playing golf, they were pretty high. In any event, we would go over to their houses for several hours.

Q: This is Side A of Tape 7 of the interview with Ambassador Dan 0'Donohue. You were talking about what your wife did.

O'DONOHUE: We ended up with very close, working relationships with certain Burmese military figures. Conversation with them covered a multitude of subjects. The most obvious area was the matter of narcotics. We went from mounting a major, aerial spraying program, which was just getting off the ground when the public upheaval and turmoil broke out in 1988, to persuading these Burmese leaders to put troops into the field. These were major operations. They put troops into the field, using information we provided, at least chasing and disrupting the activities of the narcotics traffickers.

Q: Well, that's also where the narcotics action was.

O'DONOHUE: The action was in Burma but, as I mentioned earlier, DEA had been allowed to station personnel in Burma only under great pressure from Washington. This deployment of DEA personnel was also opposed by the Embassy and the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] Station as the Burmese. The first DEA officer assigned to Burma spent his time acting as if he were "walking on eggs," with everyone in Washington waiting for him to "foul up." He did very, very little. There were lots of people who felt that they didn't want DEA personnel in Burma because this was too sensitive an area.

He was succeeded by a younger officer who was outstanding. Then he was succeeded by another fine officer. The Burmese Military Intelligence Service insisted that they had to treat our Defense Attachï¿½ in the same way as they treated all Military Attaches. That is, our Military Attache had only formal relationships with the Burmese military. The Burmese Military Intelligence Service had a friendly but very, very distant relationship with the CIA Station.

It ended up that these two DEA officers were my major working level conduits on a variety of issues, not simply on narcotics affairs. For instance, if I wanted a picture of what was going on along the Burmese-Chinese border, these DEA officers would go over to discuss the matter with the Burmese military. Their Burmese military intelligence counterparts had permission to meet with the DEA officers without having to get prior approval.

Q: For the record, what was the narcotics situation in Burma when you arrived there in 1984? Also, what was in it for the Burmese authorities to "play ball" with us?

O'DONOHUE: First, Burma and Thailand were inextricably linked along the Thai-Burmese border. Over time a variety of things happened. We had traditionally had close relationships with the Thai. Narcotics were always colored by corruption and the rest, but our political relationships with the Thai and the Thai military and police were all close. With Burma our relations were distant and difficult.

At first the narcotics refineries were on the Thai side of the Thai-Burmese border. Then we'd put pressure on the Thai, who would just push the refineries across the border into Burma. Now, these areas of Burma were not under the control of the Burmese Government. The Burmese side of the Thai border, at least nominally, was composed of areas controlled by groups which had risen up against the Burmese Government.

In Burma at that time there were insurgent, ethnic minority groups along almost all of its borders with Thailand. About 80 percent of the population of Burma lives in the valley of the Irrawaddy River. The people who live there are called, "Burmans." They are Buddhist and, historically, a very warlike and cruel group of people. They were very cruel neighbors. Thailand was always being invaded by the Burmese.

Then there are large areas which are not heavily populated and which belong to a number of ethnic minority groups. In the very North there is the Kachin State, which figured in the activities of OSS [Office of Strategic Services] detachments and of "Merrill's Marauders" in the Second World War. Outside the towns in the ethnic areas, Burmese troops could go where they wanted in the countryside only if there were enough of them. Otherwise, the various insurgent groups controlled the hinterland.

In the Shan State [northeast Burma] there was a bewildering variety of groups. The most famous group was not really an insurgent movement. It was essentially "cover" for a Sino-Burmese narcotics trafficker Khun Sa, the most famous of the narcotics traffickers. Khun Sa nominally led a Shan insurgency. However, in fact, he was a Sino-Burmese narcotics trafficker. His troops were there to protect him. You could call him a warlord. The other Shan State insurgencies varied. Some of the smaller ones were like the group led by Khun Sa. Some of the others, like the Karens, were involved in a longstanding insurgency against the Burmese Government. This had started out in 1946. Initially, the Karens carried the fight to the outskirts of Rangoon. Then there was the insurgency led by the Chinese Communists, which started after the end of World War II in 1945.

From the point of view of the Burmese military, they had successfully pushed all of these insurgent groups back into the hinterland, apart from occasional acts of sabotage in the Burman areas of the country.

These insurgencies and the narcotics traffic were inextricably linked, because most of the growing of opium poppies, their transportation and the refineries were in areas where the Burmese Government had only tenuous control, if any.

Throughout the period following World War lithe Thai and the Burmese had very poor relationships. There was corruption on both sides of the border, further coloring the situation.

In terms of the problems in these areas there were different priorities. From the Burmese military point of view, Khun Sa posed a problem which they would rather not have. They would rather control the area in which he operated. However, Khun Sa was not a threat to the Burmese state, so to speak. The true, ethnic insurgent groups were a target of first priority for the Burmese military-let's say, the Karens, because they were an insurgent group that had political ends. Khun Sa never had any political ends. From the point of view of the Burmese military-and the same was true of the Thai military-there was a tendency to find ways to ease pressures against their lesser enemies while devoting their limited resources to the relatively greater enemies. We would constantly have to "prod" the Burmese to do something about the drug related pseudo insurgents.

By the time I left Burma, we had in place a fairly significant, anti- narcotics program which was just about ready to take off. None of this survived the upheavals and the human rights issues posed following the disturbances of 1988 in Rangoon. The Ambassador who succeeded me in Burma also took a line that all of this was "show." Like anti-narcotics activity in any country, including Thailand, the other country where I served as Ambassador, this was true to some degree. However, we had had a fairly significant effort going in the anti-narcotics field at a rather modest cost.

From the Burmese point of view when they originally agreed to the antinarcotics program, it was the provision of US equipment that attracted them. They were going to get helicopters, some C-47 [twin-engine] aircraft, and some training. We're not talking about immense amounts of money. For an army like that of Burma, which was just scraping by, it was enough of an attraction to make them prepared to make some limited commitments to us. During my time in Burma, I think that we were able to convince them that they had something to be gained by cooperating with us. While we were providing some aerial interdiction of narcotics trafficking by aerial spraying of opium poppies, using spray aircraft and the rest of the program, these aircraft were of no great use for anything else. In fact, the equipment was usable for very narrow purposes. The major items in the program-the helicopters and the C- 47' s-had been turned over by the time I arrived in Burma. That effort was largely confined to maintenance activity.

In the field of intelligence cooperation we had the two DEA officers, who did a marvelous job. Subsequently, the DEA role became much more of a problem for the Embassy. There was a succession of significant problems involving the DEA. The DEA had clearly picked inappropriate officers for assignment to Burma. We had a couple of DEA officers who were kicked out of Burma. One has brought a suit against the Chargï¿½ d'Affaires in Burma, who was there for four years. So subsequent to what I might call the "happy era," there followed a sequence of incidents of bureaucratic turmoil and conflict.

The major event after I left Burma was the 1988 public upheaval and its brutal suppression by the military. Now, human rights dominate the relationship between Burma and the United States.

Q: We're really talking about "big money" in a very small place. Was the military almost insulated by having their own form of corruption?

O'DONOHUE: No. First of all, it wasn't really "big money." There were a couple of constraints on corruption in Burma which had nothing to do with morality. One of them is that nobody could live conspicuously. If you did, you were bound to get into trouble sooner or later. This didn't mean that the military in relative terms, didn't live well. Now I'm talking about having whiskey, food, and a car. But anybody who put up a palace was going to be in trouble. Now, there were some wonderful houses which the military occupied.

Corruption was a problem, but it was not as much of a problem as it was in Thailand. In Thailand the Narcotics Control Board, and the Police connected with it, were essentially uncorrupted, because the Police General in charge [Police Maj Gen Sarasin] was the second son of one of the wealthiest families in the country. His approach to corruption was that you insulated police from temptation by defending officers who were independently well off. However, this was in the context of a Police force that was utterly corrupt, outside of a few small units.

In Burma what you had was a widespread level of corruption-but fairly small pickings for all of that. When I was in Burma, despite a couple of allegations, there was no evidence of high level government corruption related to narcotics. This was in contrast to, let's say, corruption in an area controlled by Khun Sa, the narcotics trafficker. In that area Khun Sa would be in touch with the Burmese Army battalions and so forth. They would avoid each other.

Q: Could you talk a little about the staff of the Embassy in Rangoon? How did they live in this environment? How were the Political and Economic Sections? How did they get out and around, and what were you interested in?

O'DONOHUE: When I arrived in Burma, I found that my predecessor, Pat Byrne, had done a wonderful job in terms of Embassy morale and focus. When I was DCM in Bangkok in 1977, I was always struck by the "paranoia" in the Embassy in Burma. Rangoon was a very strange environment.

When I arrived in Rangoon, the Embassy was a fairly happy place to work. Ambassador Pat Byrne had had some objectives, which weren't the same as mine, but, nonetheless, they had given the Embassy a focus. She had been there, I think, during the whole period of the economic assistance mission. The DCM was Charley Salmon, who was a fine, outstanding officer. The AID Mission Director when Ambassador Byrne was there was David Merrill, one of the finest officers in AID and now Ambassador to Bangladesh. When I was in Burma, the AID Director was a good one. He was succeeded by an AID Director who was not very good at his job but was an amiable person. There were some people of excellence in the Embassy in Rangoon. They had credentials and ability.

Charley Salmon was a fine officer on his second tour as a DCM. Charley went on to be Ambassador to Laos and has now just retired. He was a good, solid DCM. We had a combined Political and Economic Section. I had brought out of EAP the Deputy Director for VLC [Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodian Affairs], David Halstead. David was an outstanding officer. As a matter of fact, in my view we had a fine group of officers-particularly the first group that I assembled. This was a particularly good group for a post which was relatively unimportant.

Ambassador Pat Byrne was great about getting out and around the country. She had very good relationships with the Burmese. They liked her. They thought that she was a very sympathetic figure who, on a couple of issues, had been very helpful to the Burmese. Since I had visited Rangoon a few times, I already had a certain amount of acceptance by Burmese Government officials.

When I arrived in Rangoon, there were two different problems. At the personal level I had a problem of "slowing down," having come from five years in senior level Washington jobs. When I came into the Embassy and during my first Saturday in the office, I had to come to grips with the fact that there was no conceivable reason why I should be in the office on Saturday.

Q: Being in the office on Saturday usually meant that some of the officers would gather together for a general conversation...

O'DONOHUE: Something like that. I didn't "force" anyone to turn up. However, the question that I asked myself after one Saturday was, "What am I doing here?" The second conclusion for me, and I had always been viewed as a "workaholic," was that there was no way that I could spend eight or 10 hours a day running that Embassy without driving the DCM and everyone else "wild.' I felt that it was inappropriate to leave the office at 4:30 PM, but by 5:00 PM, I left. Thirdly, I had to find other things to do outside the Embassy. That was another consideration that led to traveling around the country and golf. In an Embassy that size, and since I had always been fairly energetic, I just had to find some other ways to use up my energy. I always liked reporting and did a lot of it. However, I also had to develop new activities. From my point of view serving in Rangoon meant "slowing down" and reordering myself for a very different pattern and pace of activity.

With the exception of the AID Director, the DCM, and the Pol-Econ Counselor, it was also a matter of energizing the rest of the staff to focus on the achievement of specific Objectives. Burma, at the very personal level, was surprisingly comfortable. Government-owned housing was available, and for most of the people-the best housing situation I had seen in the Foreign Service. At the most superficial level, between our Embassy Commissary, the Embassy club, and the rest of it, if one's life was bridge, swimming, golf, and tennis with a small, but not uncongenial, foreign community, it wasn't a bad place to serve. This was so if you didn't have, say, a serious health condition, because locally available medical services were abysmal.

Many of the people on the Embassy staff may have chosen Burma because of the 25% "differential" and because it was a backwater. It may not have been obvious to them at first that they were going to have to have a little more energetic focus imposed on the mission. That led me to what I later discovered was a "rule of thirds." When a new Ambassador arrives at a post, what he will often find is that one-third of the staff will stress that he's just what the place needs and that the previous Ambassador was useless. Another one- third of the staff believes that he is terrible, that he doesn't understand anything, and that his predecessor was great. The remaining one-third just wants to be left alone. Whoever the Ambassador, they hope that he will never bother them! I think that the percentages may vary, but in any Mission you find these attitudes.

As I said, I was blessed with the key officers who were assigned to Rangoon. They were energetic and effective. Not that they didn't work hard. But, if there had been a couple of more people like me, even the self-restraint that I displayed would not have been enough.

Travel around the country was an important part of my life in Burma in many ways. First, I got to see the country, which is valuable. Secondly, travel was another occasion when senior Burmese officials could deal with me informally and as a person, rather than being surrounded with strictures and limitations. Thirdly, I was able to see what the patterns were outside of Rangoon. So I consciously decided to expand Embassy travel very significantly. This was not easy. Burma is one of those countries where Embassy employees needed permission to go beyond the city limits of Rangoon. If you were going to Mandalay and the "tourist spots," such as Pagan and Taunggyi, you could send over a notice of travel to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and you didn't have to wait for a reply. They would let you go to a few other places, but it would take you forever to obtain permission.

One of the places I visited was Myitkyina, the site of a victorious battle won by US forces during World War II, in which Merrill's Marauders and other US Army forces took part. It was a victory that was of some significance because it deprived the Japanese of the use of the airfields and allowed the airlift over the "Hump" to China to fly at much lower altitudes. As a result, the aircraft could carry far more freight, and the flights were much less perilous. It was one of the few ground battles where Americans fought in the British Southeast Asia Command area, Admiral Mountbatten's theater of operations. Secondly, Myitkyina was the center of some very, major OSS [Office of Strategic Services] operations. The Burmese let military attaches visit Myitkyina once a tour before they left the country. They also allowed Japanese to go up there because of the large number of Japanese troops who had been killed there. The Japanese were allowed to fly up commercially to Myitkyina, get off the plane, have a memorial ceremony to commemorate their war dead, and then catch the same plane and fly back to Rangoon. The Burmese ordinarily didn't let diplomats visit Myitkyina. I approached this question, noting that it was the 40th anniversary of the Battle of Myitkyina of 1944. I said that this was a reason for the Defense Attachï¿½ and me to go up so that we could pay our respects to the American dead still buried there.

Essentially, the Burmese Foreign Ministry view was that the reason I gave for going to Myitkyina was highly imaginative and a "nice try." However, they said that it wasn't going to work. But as a matter of fact, as can happen in Burma, on the morning we were to leave for Myitkyina, we were told that we had permission to get on the plane. However, permission had not yet been given for us to stay overnight in Myitkyina. Finally, they gave us permission to spend a couple of days there.

The historical perspective of World War II of the Burmese military is not the same as ours. This is because the Burmese military trace their genesis back to the Japanese occupation of Burma. You may remember the "Burma National Army," which the Japanese set up and supported. The Burmese had little interest in the Battle of Myitkyina. On the other hand they pulled together about 15 retired officers who had held British commissions and had fought alongside the Americans. So we spent an afternoon with them. I went out for a drive along part of the Ledo Road, which had been built by Merrill's Marauders. This Burmese Army had to put a couple of infantry companies into the area, since, once you leave Myitkyina, the countryside is unsafe because of guerrillas.

The Ledo Road turned out to be a road bed, not a road. After bumping for a mile or two on the rocks, I decided that having gone one or two miles, versus five or six, who would care? So we did this and were able to get a correct picture of the limits of Burmese Army control of the area. We also had some informal meetings to broaden our contacts. Beyond this, we traveled later to Lashio and Keng Tung in the Shan State. We went down South and to the Arakan State. So travel became important in terms of getting a picture of Burma itself. It was important in terms of developing relationships with the Burmese military. It was also great fun. The austere conditions of travel were more than compensated for by the sense of seeing the truly remote areas.

Q: It is one of the compensations of the Foreign Service.

O'DONOHUE: In 1962, when the Burmese military took over the country, they not merely "slowed" the economy, they wrecked it. The damage was done in a few years, but it is long lasting, if not irrevocable. As a result, you almost felt that you were in a "time warp." It's not a time warp that I would ever have wished on the Burmese. I always feel that the Burmese must cringe a little when people talk about how they preserved their national costume and the rest of it. What a price they paid for it! Nonetheless, travel in Burma was truly exotic. To go up to the Arakanese capitals, you got on a boat on the Bay of Bengal. The river at its mouth was about half a mile wide. You ended up five and a half hours later on a fast-moving stream in a district that had no outside communications. So I had these experiences for the sheer delight of it, as someone who joined the Foreign Service to see the world. Beside that, these trips were important. In visiting the Shan State, we encouraged the Burmese to move toward eradication of opium poppy production as a means of interdicting the narcotics traffic.

Q: Obviously, narcotics was a major focus of your time in Burma. What were Burmese relations with their neighbors at the time? Did we just watch them with a certain amount of disinterest? I looked at the map, and Burma has three major neighbors-Thailand, China, and India.

O'DONOHUE: When I was in Burma, relations with two of these countries were in transition. There was nothing much going on with the third country. If I start with India, when Ne Win took power in 1962, he probably viewed his "lasting contribution" to history as returning the economy to the Burmese, taking it away from the Indians and the Chinese. By this time the British had already faded from the scene. However, in fact, when Burma was a British territory, the Chinese played a very traditional role, similar to the one they played in Thailand and in other countries of Southeast Asia. The Chinese were closer to the Thai, in that they were not as distinct, there wasn't the same hostility toward them, and there was some inter marriage.

However, the Indians were different, because the British brought them in at every level. If you were a Burmese, you competed with an Indian dock worker, a lawyer, a civil servant, or a doctor. There were few native Burman entrepreneurs. Most local businessmen were either Indians or Chinese. As there were so many Indians, they were at every level of society. Indeed, before World War II, Rangoon was a British and Indian city, and the Burmese were a minority.

In effect, Ne Win was able to wrench Indian economic assets away. Now, the Indians in Burma were heartily disliked. They were seen by the Burmese as rapacious and, as I said, competed with the Burmese at every level. After independence in 1948, the Indians were progressively driven out of Burma. A few, wonderful Indians who loved Burma stayed on-I think, to their utter regret. There is an Indian "underclass" in Burma which is heavily Muslim and closely related to Muslims in Bangladesh. There are a few, wealthy Indians in Burma who obviously have found a way to bribe the Burmese and so exist. What happened in terms of Indian-Burmese relationships is that former Burmese Prime Minister U Nu, a civilian, always had close contacts with India. There was a close post-colonial relationship between the two countries for a time. However, in fact, with Ne Win's 1962 takeover directed so heavily against the Indians, the result was that relations were formal but distant and with little substance. And the Burmese didn't want these relations to have any substance. Later on, after the 1988 upheaval in Burma, the Indians were actively engaged in supporting insurgent groups. They were very aggressively critical of Burma for several years and took a much more hostile attitude toward Burma. However, when I was in Burma, what struck me was how devoid of substance Indian-Burmese relations were. This seemed to reflect a deliberate attitude by the Burmese.

Regarding China, there was a different situation. There was a Chinese- supported and Sino-Burmese led, communist insurgency, which was part of the general, insurgent situation in Burma. During the 1945-48 struggle for independence the communist were part of it. They later split from the Burmese in 1946 and began a program of insurgency. By the time I was in Burma, the Sino-Burmese communist insurgency had been driven to the perimeters of the country. They still existed, on Chinese sufferance. I don't mean that the Chinese ever saw them as likely to overthrow the Burmese Government. Ne Win always attached particular importance to China and to the Sino-Burmese relationship because of this insurgency. So China figured quite differently with the Burmese. There was a much more "active" policy, vis-a-vis China, in an effort, at a minimum, to counter Chinese interest in supporting the Sino-Burmese led, communist insurgency.

When I was in Burma, I saw the beginning of something which had already happened in Thailand. That is, the Chinese, in the interest of better relations with Burma, allowed the withering away, though not the complete disappearance, of the communist insurgency in Burma. Now, in the subsequent period, I think that the Sino-Burmese relationship is a very good and close one. The Burmese objective, with regard to China, was to keep them out of Burma.

Burmese relations with Thailand were very interesting, because the Thai, when they visit their ruined old capital, Ayutthaya, see this reminder of Burmese aggression against Thailand. Until recent years, in Thai history books, there was an aggressively negative view of Burma. Burma and Thailand historically had terrible relationships. After the fall of Chiang Kai-shek on the mainland of China, for years thereafter the KMT [Kuomintang] supported units of KMT troops in the northern Burma area bordering on Thailand. The CIA had fairly close ties with these Chinese. These units eventually wound up in Thailand.

As a matter of historical policy, the Thai tended to support other country insurgencies in the Thai-Burma border area-partially to keep these insurgent troops pointed away from Thailand. So there was a history of very bad relations between Thailand and Burma. Our efforts to get Thai-Burmese cooperation to halt the flow of narcotics out of the "Golden Triangle Area" (Burma, Thailand, and Laos) met either with refusal or often fiascos.

The Thai military, starting in the mid 1980's, embarked on a policy very consciously aimed at improving relationships with Burma. They worked on this policy steadily and were succeeding fairly well. When the riots occurred in Rangoon in 1988, the Thai military, who had invested so much effort in their policy of improving relations with the Burmese military, were most reluctant to abandon it. Thai policy was not that they supported what the Burmese military were doing. Rather, having invested so much effort in cooperation with Burma, they weren't going to throw it away on human rights grounds. So relationships between the Thai and Burmese military improved to the point where there is a reasonable amount of economic cooperation. Thailand is regarded by Burma as one of the Asian buffers against US and Western .European pressures. The frictions between Thailand and Burma these days relate to economic relationships, not to historical animosity.

For their part I doubt that the Thai completely ceased their support for the Burmese insurgent groups until later. In the case of the Karens, with whom the Thai had worked for many years, in fact, decades, the Burmese had moved very far in terms of weakening them. Also, over the past four or five years the Burmese military, one way or another, found an accommodation with various of these insurgent groups in Burma. So Thai-Burmese relationships are now much closer and much more constructive than anyone could have imagined 15 years ago.

Q: On the Burmese economy my understanding has been that Ne Win had turned his country very much "inwards." During the time that you were Ambassador to Burma, were we trying to do anything in the economic field? Leave the narcotics question to one side, for the moment. Or am I looking at it in an unrealistic way?

O'DONOHUE: I said that Burmese acceptance of our economic assistance programs was one of the measures of the Burmese realization that the program called, "The Burmese Road to Socialism" had been a disaster and that they had to change. However, we had a very limited economic program in Burma. As far as the Burmese Government was concerned, change meant avoiding real disasters-things that were unbelievably harmful to Burma. There was little positive change economically during my period.

Q: Could you give some examples?

O'DONOHUE: Well, the Burmese military had confiscated businesses and tried to run them. The production of rice, a major staple food for most Thai, had fallen sharply because of rigid agricultural policies. During the 1950's Burma had been the world's largest rice exporter-larger than Thailand. By the time I was in Burma as Ambassador, it barely recorded a nominal export surplus. This meant, of course, that rice was being smuggled out of Burma, though there was also a real decline in total production. The Burmese military inherited a relatively prosperous country and ruined it within a few years. They reduced Burmese living standards immensely. When we were in Burma, we observed an effort tactically to rationalize economic policies. Ne Win was still running things, and there wasn't going to be any big change. The small changes were showing up in marginally improved living standards. The country was immensely dependent on smuggling and the black market, for instance, which operated openly in Rangoon. There was smuggling into Thailand and back. There was a very limited economic dialogue with the UN agencies and the US In the real world during the period that I was in Burma, the actual change was very, very minor.

Then Ne Win embarked on the first of his bizarre experiments which, I think, led to the 1988 upheavals. When I was in Burma, there was a sense that Ne Win-whether it was one year or five years-was not going to be on the scene for very long. Conditions were getting a tiny bit better, and optimism was born of the feeling that Ne Win would be passing from the scene. Then the Burmese Government embarked on these bizarre, currency changes, which also had confiscatory aspects to them. They introduced bizarre denominations of their currency, issuing 75 "kyat" notes instead of 100 "kyat" notes. Allegedly, the purpose of these changes was to get the money held by the black marketers. However, this effort broke down, and it just showed once again how capricious Burmese economic policy was.

Q: In some countries you find that you can often trace it back to the Fabian socialists of Britain at the beginning of the 20th century. Was somebody sitting there and advising the Burmese?

O'DONOHUE: In 1962 there were a few "gurus" [teachers] who contributed to the disastrous policy of that time. But I think that what happened in 1987 and 1988, was 100% Ne Win. Ne Win would get up in the morning and decide this and that. The concept of the "Burmese Road to Socialism" was Ne Win's creation. At first he had a few policy advisors who were dropped along the way, as their policies failed. It was almost whimsical economic practices. Burmese economic policy had confiscatory aspects to it-it wasn't just bizarre. Then the Burmese Government had to back off somewhat. Later on Ne Win gave speeches that indicated further loosening, then he switched signals indicating tightening of control. I think that he introduced so many elements of uncertainty that this led to the buildup of pressure and then the blowup of 1988.

Q: So I take it that you weren't "pounding the drums" and saying, "Invest in Burma." In the first place, I don't suppose that Americans could invest in Burma.

O'DONOHUE: No. We had one American company that had a contract with the UNDP [United Nations Development Program]. There were other American contracts, but they were really trivial. One of the American shirt companies made shirts in Burma. We're talking about $2-3 million per year, a trivial amount.

Now, all of this changed significantly after my time in Burma. One of the results of the 1988 upheaval was that a younger generation of military men, whom I had known and who were, by then, occupying the senior military jobs- though not the most senior government jobs-in effect pushed aside most of the older retired Burmese military officers from Ne Win's coterie. The younger men saw the situation as so bad and serious that they put the demonstrations down brutally. Now, Ne Win was still the national strong man. However, this whole generation of his minions who truly had very little to recommend them, were all pushed aside. There was a generational change. For example, the current DDIS (Director of the Defense Intelligence Services) and the head of the ruling military junta were all in their early 50's when I was in Burma. They came into these positions while I was there and are now running the country. There is a group which focuses solely on the preservation of military control of Burma. It has no ideology.

However, these people are quite willing to deal with foreigners. Foreign oil companies came in, there are department stores run by Japanese, Koreans, and Thai. They have changed tourism into a much more aggressive industry. Now you have a far more extensive foreign presence and involvement. Indeed, UNOCA, if it isn't driven out, is caught up in the development of natural gas reserves. They are working in cooperation with the Thai.

Q: This is Side B of Tape 7 of the interview with Ambassador Dan O'Donohue. Dan, during your time in Burma, did you feel any pressure from the ecology people in the United States concerning "over logging" and that sort of thing?

O'DONOHUE: No, because there wasn't a major logging by the government. The logging areas were remote, the Burmese Government hardly controlled them, and you might say that ecological interests were being met simply by the very remoteness of the forest areas. It's one thing to smuggle gems, rice and opium products across the border. However, smuggling timber from remote areas, where you have to cut your way through the forest to get to them-that's something else. No, the ecological movement really didn't figure.

There was little concern about human rights. Indeed, I had more pressures in Thailand-both times I was there, as DCM and later on as Ambassador-on human rights issues than I did in Burma at any time. As I said, "placid" isn't quite the word to describe Burma, but this was a period when there was a certain Burmese expectancy that things would improve over a period of 5-10 years. This was shattered 18 months later.

Q: Is it U Nu's daughter who was active during your time in Thailand? Or whose daughter was it?

O'DONOHUE: U Nu was still alive when I was in Burma. I think that you are referring to Aung San Suu Kyi, who is the daughter of Aung San, a very youthful Burmese who led the first of the anti-British student groups Then he and a group of friends called the "Thirty Comrades" were smuggled out of Burma by the Japanese in the 1940-41's to establish the core of the Burmese National Army. They came back with the Japanese in early 1942 and, by 1944, were engaged in secret negotiations with the British to switch sides, which they ultimately did. In effect, Admiral Louis Mountbatten [commander of the Allied Southeast Asian Command] saw that there was no way to reestablish colonial rule and to set back in authority the people that the British might have wished to pick to run Burma. He saw Aung San and his associates, as the "wave of the future," and as people to whom he was quite ready to turn over the government. Aung San and his associates took over the Burmese Government, which remained under temporary British control as part of the "transition" period to independence. However, Aung San and several of his cabinet ministers were machine gunned and killed at a cabinet meeting in 1948, with results which were ultimately disastrous for Burma. So Aung San passed from the scene in 1948 and became a "national martyr."

He and his wife had one child, Aung San Suu Kyi. Ne Win had been a remote, older figure who focused on controlling the Burmese Army. He was not nearly the charismatic figure that Aung San had been. There were others who were active in the Burmese Government, while Ne Win stayed with the Army. Aung San's widow was given special consideration, but Ne Win found her "trying." She went to India as Burmese Ambassador at one point. She lived not very far from us in Rangoon.

Aung San Suu Kyi essentially grew up outside of Burma-in England. She was married to a British anthropologist. When I was in Burma, she would only come back occasionally to visit her mother. In fact, I only met her once. On this particular occasion she was only in Burma by accident. In 1988 Aung San Suu Kyi had come back to Burma to visit her dying mother. When all of these events referred to collectively as "the upheaval" unfolded, she just happened to be in the country. She didn't normally live in Burma.

So Aung San Suu Kyi at first became important as a symbol. Then, with her own forcefulness, she became far more than a symbol in terms of her leadership and courage. If "the upheaval" had happened a year before or a year after, she wouldn't even have been in Burma. At first she was seen and propelled to the front as a symbol. She spoke English and she is attractive. Beyond that, though, she has an immense amount of determination, courage, and firmness.

Q: She won the Nobel Peace Prize.

O'DONOHUE: At the time of the "uprising" of 1988 I think that Ambassador Levin saw her as a replica of the Philippines, where Cory Aquino emerged from the downfall of President Marcos as the major, national leader. The difference was that the Burmese military were really willing to resort to whatever brutality it took to maintain their hold on power.

Q: Let's move on. When did you leave Burma?

O'DONOHUE: I left Burma in March, 1987, and came back to Washington to be the Principal Deputy Director in the Office of Policy Planning.

Q: You were in Policy Planning from when to when?

O'DONOHUE: I started in there in about May, 1987, and left there in June, 1988, to go to Bangkok as Ambassador. So it was a brief interlude. It seemed particularly brief because by September, 1987, I knew that I was going to Bangkok. It was hard not to be focused on that.

Q: Could you talk a bit about policy planning at this time and the role it played, because this function waxes and wanes?

O'DONOHUE: The importance of the Office of Policy Planning (S/P) derived almost solely from the influence of the Director. That, of course, reflects the importance the Secretary of State attaches to it. When I was in S/P, George Shultz was the Secretary of State. Dick Solomon was the Director of S/P. At times the Secretary of State has put in someone very close to him as Director. Then S/P, at least to a degree and usually in specific areas-almost never across the board-plays a dominating role. Institutionally the Department of State has great difficulty in dealing with policy planning.

What I found in that job, having come from a whole background in a regional bureau where I was heavily engaged in policy at a given time and in a given place, was that the regional bureaus were very content to have S/P draft the Secretary's public speeches. They were even content to have S/P explain what we should be doing in their areas of concern 10 years into the future. Being so heavily oriented toward their own concerns, you could probably, though with increasing difficulty, move the time frame of what we should be doing to one year into the future. However, the regional bureaus have no interest in having S/P play any role in anything that is current and ongoing. That is the problem you always have with S/P. That is, to find some balance in this inevitable conflict between the regional bureaus which believe-usually rightly-that they know more about the area concerned than S/P does.

Officers assigned to S/P often include people of great ability, who might well know as much as, and have a deeper historical perspective, than officers in the regional bureaus. These officers are in S/P either because they are academics or officers who hadn't found a job somewhere else and are more or less "marking time" till another assignment comes up. So you have a whole range of people in S/P. What determines S/P's role is the importance and weight given to the Director. If the Director is close to the Secretary of State and has the Secretary's "ear," S/P can play a major role, usually in the areas where he and the Secretary are most deeply interested. The problem is that S/P then tends to be "operational," which is what the regional bureaus fear.

Q: Can you explain the difference between "operational" and policy planning, as perceived...

O'DONOHUE: The American military doesn't have any difficulty with this. They have the idea that "planning" is distinct from operations. The Department of State has a problem with this distinction. I think that this problem is ingrained in the Department of State. I do not intend this as a criticism. The Department of State is concerned with ongoing activities which must be dealt with and, therefore, have consequences for the future. Policy is viewed as inherently operational.

Q: You're talking about the time you were in the Department.

O'DONOHUE: No, I'm talking about right now. The Department of State has never been able to function effectively without the regional bureaus playing a major role in their respective areas. The regional bureaus sit astride communications, and so, with strong and effective leadership, they have unmistakable influence. The functional bureaus in the Department-and S/P was not a bureau-always have to come to grips with that problem. That is, the regional bureaus have an intrinsic influence which the functional bureaus do not have. The functional bureaus may be dominant in certain areas. For instance, PM [Bureau of Political-Military Affairs] under Les Gelb, Reg Bartholomew, and later Rick Burt, when I was there, "dominated" the most important EUR [Bureau of European Affairs] security issues.

As soon as these people left PM, EUR became dominant again. EUR was there forever, and the functional bureaus wax and wane. This was particularly true with S/P under Winston Lord, during the 1970's when Henry Kissinger was Secretary of State. Kissinger assigned certain roles which S/P played. They were not dominant, because Kissinger had Larry Eagleburger, Helmut Sonnenfeldt, and others in his immediate entourage. In other areas you had to deal with Winston Lord. When Tony Lake was Director of S/P, he had a very close relationship with Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and Deputy Secretary Warren Christopher. I don't think that S/P was very effective during that period, but Lake was undoubtedly a major player in the policy process. Paul Wolfowitz came in as Director of S/P under Secretary of State Haig. I don't know what his relationship was with him.

When I was in S/P, toward the end of 1987 and early 1988...

Q: We're really talking about the situation at the end of the Reagan administration.

O'DONOHUE: When I was in SIP, it had, I think, a fairly limited role. We prepared speeches for Secretary Shultz but we never had "great speechwriters." Shultz always knew what he wanted to say but never could articulate it very well. So that made it rather difficult.

The period when George Shultz was Secretary of State was one of the "golden periods" of the Foreign Service. In terms of the issues, at that point in time...

Q: This is what I get from other interviews.

O'DONOHUE: The other "golden period," in my experience, was during the time when Henry Kissinger was Secretary of State. However, the Department of State under George Shultz was "run" by the Foreign Service. When I was in PM [1978-1981], EUR [the Bureau of European Affairs] was comparatively weak. However, when George Shultz was Secretary of State, EUR was very, very strong. EUR ran Russian, or Soviet policy. The SIP role in those areas was limited to peripheral and carping comments. As it turned out, SIP didn't contribute a whole lot.

Charlie Hill, the Secretary's executive assistant, "ran" the Middle East, under Secretary of State Shultz. Charlie did look to NEA [Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs] for policy inputs. NEA had its own difficulties in these relationships, but that's where the focus was. We had a "super" officer, Dan Kurtzer in S/P. Because of his personal abilities, Dan played a major role in Middle Eastern Affairs, even though he was "housed" in S/P. I was more heavily engaged in East Asia policy as Deputy Director of S/P. We dealt with the Korean elections, Thai issues, the Philippines had things going on to which I could contribute. We probably played a rather active role in East Asian affairs, but it should not be exaggerated. Apart from these matters, my year in S/P was fairly quiescent.

Q: Where did Dick Solomon fit into all of this?

O'DONOHUE: Dick is very much a person who moves at his own pace and in terms of his own "clock." Secretary of State Shultz was meticulous in allowing S/P to play its role. For instance, we sat in on almost everything, and Dick traveled with the Secretary. You just couldn't complain at all about access. However, it wasn't an intimate role. Secretary Shultz turned to Dennis Ross or to Charlie Hill, as I said, on Middle East questions. So Dick Solomon didn't have a dominant role as a major policy adviser to Shultz. Dick, like me, mainly had East Asian experience. Personally, he hadn't had a lot of experience elsewhere. Under Shultz, S/P itself was a subsidiary, though constructive, player. However, it was not a dominating player in any area, including East Asia.

Now, this situation varied. Under Secretary Baker, Dennis Ross became Director of S/P. He had had experience with the Near East and he had experience with Russian affairs, and he was well connected politically. Then he had Bill Burns, who was only about 37 but was a super career officer, who had displayed such good judgment in all sorts of other areas.

So S/P has never been an "omnipresent" entity, because usually, when there is a strong Director of S/P, his agenda and that of the Secretary of State are the ones he is most active in. Also, there has always been difficulty with the concept of policy planning. Is S/P a "policy" entity or is it a "coordinating" entity? I mean "coordinating" in the sense of "operations." "Policy" means that you are more detached from specific actions. There has always been confusion in that aspect. For instance, as I said, Tony Lake tried to be the "resources management coordinator" when he was the Director of SIP, meaning that he did most of the negotiations with AID. None of this worked very well because the S/P staff at the time was not suited to deal with these kinds of issues. There was a fine AID officer on the S/P staff under Tony Lake, but S/P institutionally was not suited to this kind of bureaucratic coordination. By contrast, under Secretary Haig, James Buckley was suited to his job as Under Secretary of State for Security Assistance, followed by Bill Sneider. There they developed major roles because they had a clear operational orientation as did their office. They looked to the regional bureaus for input, and were then more effective.

I think that the first thing to say about S/P is that it is what the Secretary of State makes of it. Secondly, its major role and influence in the Department depend on the Director. Thirdly, there is an innate conflict, if not tension, between S/P and the bureaus the closer it becomes involved in ongoing policy- to "real world" issues.

Q: All right. Let's stop here, and we'll pick up the next time about your appointment as Ambassador to Thailand. We haven't talked at all about how you got the appointment to Thailand. We'll pick that up the next time.

Today is October 29, 1996. We are continuing with the interview of Ambassador Dan 0'Donohue. Dan, how did your appointment as Ambassador to Thailand come about? This is a major country-not one where the position of Ambassador just gets "tossed out" as a "reward," or something like that.

O'DONOHUE: As I mentioned, I had come back from Burma in March, 1987. I started in S/P as the Deputy Director. Within a few months, by mid-summer, 1987, I was approached about being assigned as Ambassador to Australia. As it turned out-I didn't know the circumstances then-the Ambassador to Australia at the time, a non-career man, had received a very bad inspection report, dealing with his personality. He was debating giving up his position as Ambassador to Canberra. The EA Bureau approached me. I thought that it was unreal in that no non-career Ambassador was going to go there. However, I said that if they wanted to put my name down on the list, go right ahead. Then it turned out that Mort Abramowitz, who was a close friend, was really interested in the post of Ambassador to Australia. Mort was worried about me if he threw his hat in. I laughingly told him to go right ahead, as neither one of us was going to be appointed to that job.

As it turned out, the incumbent Ambassador stayed on, and that assignment simply evaporated. Within a very short time after that, it turned out that the position of Ambassador to Thailand was coming open. Now, the post of Ambassador to Thailand should have been coming open in accordance with the three-year schedule for the summer of 1988. By this time or maybe by early fall, 1987, the EA Bureau had put up another officer. However, in those days the assignment of senior career officers was still very much a Foreign Service/Department of State function. The process was highly institutionalized. The EA Bureau had put someone else up as Ambassador to Thailand. The group that made the decisions consisted of John Whitehead, the Deputy Secretary of State; Mike Armacost, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs; Ron Spiers, the Under Secretary of State for Management; Mel Levitsky; and Charlie Hill, George Shultz's Special Assistant.

Q: Charlie Hill?

O'DONOHUE: Charlie Hill played a role. And then George Vest, as Director General was the Executive Secretary of the Committee.

Frankly, in the group of potential Ambassadors to Thailand, as far as three or four of these people were concerned, there was only one officer who could seriously be considered, and that was me. Armacost, Spiers, and Vest picked me. The others agreed quickly. So, as a matter of fact, as the process proceeded, it was a foregone conclusion, given my background. I had served in Thailand as DCM, I had been Deputy Assistant Secretary for Southeast Asian Affairs, and then my service as Ambassador to Burma added to the record. It ended up as a fairly straightforward assignment, unlike the way Ambassadorial appointments are now made, and I was assigned the job. This was about September or October, 1987.

This had its effect as far as my job as Deputy Director of S/P was concerned. After a few months in S/P my thoughts were heavily directed toward Bangkok. The formalities involved in this assignment proceeded quickly enough. I was always puzzled, not so much that I was selected, but that Charlie Hill, with whom I had a good enough relationship, was so easily giving up on Bill Brown. It turned out that this was because they wanted to put Bill Brown in Tel Aviv. So that's why the process seemed to ensure that I would be out in Bangkok in no time, since they were pressing Bill Brown to go to Israel.

Then it went even faster. Once you finish the selection process, which normally takes a few months, it turned out that in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee I had nearly no opponents, and they didn't see any need to have a hearing! So I thought that I would be out in Bangkok in March or April, 1988. Little did I know. There was a combination of factors. First of all, Bill Brown really didn't want to leave Bangkok early despite the pressure on him to move to Israel. On the Hill [Congress] I learned a few lessons from this process. Even though my hearing was waived-I did not have a hearing-I simply paid a courtesy call on the Chairman, Senator Claiborne Pell [Democrat, Rhode Island].

There were people on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, from both parties, who had known me. For slightly different but not conflicting reasons, they were all delighted that I was going to Bangkok. Senator Hatfield [Republican, Oregon] was at the time the ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He was deeply upset at what he considered Embassy Bangkok's inattention and insensitivity in the handling of Indochinese refugees. Actually, Embassy Bangkok was not particularly sensitive to the plight of Indochinese refugees at this time. Moreover, as I found out when I got out to Thailand, this was more a problem of perception than reality. Consequently Senator Hatfield wanted me out there in Bangkok. On the Democratic side at that time, the people who knew me were favorably inclined. So the view was that, since I had previously been approved as Ambassador to Burma, my qualifications as Ambassador had been established and no hearing was needed.

I thought that I was just sailing along. However, getting Bill Brown out of Bangkok was no easy task, as it later turned out. Also, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had weekly administrative meetings. For those meetings they had to have a quorum present. Those are the actual meetings which clear things for the Senate floor. Week after week went by, but they were never able to get a quorum for this meeting. By the time my nomination finally got to the floor of the Senate, something like 15 other Ambassadors had caught up with me. I waited for months, with nothing happening. When these nominations got to the Senate floor, Senator Dole [Republican, Kansas, and Republican Leader in the Senate] held them up for a couple of weeks. There was some kind of battle with the White House, so I wasn't approved by the Senate until the beginning of July, 1988.

My meeting with Senator Pell was truly a "throwback" to an earlier, quainter, and nicer age. Since the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had waived my hearings, they thought that it would be appropriate for me to pay a courtesy call on the Chairman of the Committee. I did this. I went up with a representative from "H" [Bureau of Congressional Relations]. Senator Pell had his staff of three or four people. They had prepared their briefing for him. As we sat down, Senator Pell asked me, "Whatever really happened to Jimmy?" His staff was baffled: they didn't know "Jimmy." Well, I knew what he was talking about. Indeed, I had met Jim Thompson's sister in Bangkok years before. So then I picked up and talked about Thompson's sister, whom I had met and had lunch with. Pell's staff was baffled. They wondered what we were talking about.

After a short time, I had mercy on them and got into the conversation the fact that Senator Pell was referring to Jim Thompson, who had been in OSS [Office of Strategic Services] during World War II and had gone to Thailand at the end of the war. He had fallen in love with Thailand, stayed there, and, among other things, was the man who recreated and established the Thai silk industry. He went out into the rural areas of Thailand where the weaving skill still existed. He started showing them new patterns and created a market for Thai silk. He started Jim Thompson's Silks Stores. He was an extremely well known, exotic figure on the Thai scene. Probably, the image was more than the reality. Nonetheless, here was this enigmatic figure and highly successful businessman, living in Southeast Asia. There were suggestions that he was in the intelligence game, and all of that. These things swirled around him and made him one of the more "glamorous" figures in Southeast Asia at a time when there were a lot of exotic figures.

Well, Jim Thompson went off to a holiday with friends at Cameron Highlands in the Federation of Malaya. He walked out of the house where he was staying one afternoon for a smoke and was never seen again. This created a whole aura of mystery about what had happened to him. He was never found-indeed, no remains were ever found. There was all sorts of speculation as to whether this was a result of communist activity, business rivals, or whatever. This was what Senator Pell was referring to. Jim Thompson had actually come from New England. As I said, I had met Thompson's sister, whom Senator Pell knew.

After we had that discussion, I explained that Thompson was obviously dead, but nobody knew how it had happened. The conversation then proceeded in a somewhat eccentric vein, ending up with Senator Pell bringing up the request of a retired Methodist Bishop of Rhode Island, whose son was in Bangkok, married to a Thai and who got into difficulty one night, trying to scale the walls of the American Ambassador's residence, because he wanted to see the Ambassador. Actually, the man had been distraught. His Thai wife's family had tried to "commit" her to an insane asylum. Nonetheless, because of that, Senator Pell was saddled with charging every American Ambassador who went out to Thailand to take care of this American, when the poor man would probably have wanted to have his experience forgotten, not remembered.

Q: So the system worked.

O'DONOHUE: It was the last vestige of the old system. Those who made the selection were officers with a fair amount of experience. It was still an "institutional" decision, although in this case not an EA Bureau decision. Deputy Secretary Whitehead had a view and presided over the selection committee, but essentially deferred to the others-not because of timidity, but simply because the other members of the committee knew the career officers concerned. So this system worked well. It's another indication that the last "golden era" of the Foreign Service was under Secretary of State George Shultz.

Q: I always like to get dates of assignments in at the beginning of these interviews. You were in Thailand as Ambassador from when to when?

O'DONOHUE: I arrived in Thailand at the beginning of August, 1988, and left in August, 1991.

Q: Before going out to Thailand-obviously, you'd been there. Nobody had to "bring you up to speed" on Thailand as such. When a Chief of Mission goes out to his post, particularly when he's been "around the block" and all of that, what did you bring in your mental "attachï¿½ case" of things you wanted to get done?

O'DONOHUE: Unlike Burma, where I had a very thin agenda, Thailand was almost the opposite. I've always contrasted Thailand and South Korea, in the sense that in South Korea you have a relatively small number of important but intense issues of major importance, whether this involves security or the political situation or major economic issues. These are important to the US and are intensely demanding and emotionally draining. In contrast, there is an effervescence to Thailand, and you have something of everything. We had the war in Cambodia, the relationship to Vietnam, refugees, narcotics, agricultural problems, civil aviation, and the domestic political instability. There is an inherent, institutional stability in the country, but the way in which Thai national politics function has a certain instability about it.

In addition, we had a detachment from the Department of the Army Tropical Medicine Institute. I suppose that this was the second or third largest single employer in the Mission. It had been called the SEATO Laboratories and had been in existence for a long time. When SEATO [Southeast Asian Treaty Organization] was finally wound up [in 1976], they couldn't figure out what to do with this tropical medicine detachment, so it was finally decided to attach it to the Embassy.

We had three different units from the National Center for Disease Control attached to the Mission, as Thailand became increasingly interesting from the disease perspective, both from the statistical point of view and the experimental, on AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome]. In Thailand we had one service or another involving almost the whole breadth of US activities abroad. There was a surfeit of programs. However, when I went out to Thailand as Ambassador, the dominant subject of concern were Cambodia and Vietnam. That is, the Cambodian resistance to the Vietnamese occupation of the country and the perception of a Vietnamese threat to the area. While I was in Thailand the perception of a Vietnamese threat was to be greatly tempered as its economic weakness became more apparent.

However, our principal concerns dealt with Cambodia and Vietnam in several aspects. First was the consideration of Cambodia as it related to the Thai. The Thai perceived our efforts as being intended to support them. In the same framework, were the ASEAN efforts in support of the Cambodian resistance and our support of ASEAN. Then we had two sets of "operational" programs-one covert, one overt in support of the non-communist resistance. For all practical purposes, I was responsible for the programs dealing with Cambodia. So, in a variety of fashions, Cambodia was important as a security issue of importance to Thailand, our ally, and, more broadly, as a major thread in our relationship with ASEAN. Then, there was a fair amount of "operational oversight." I was involved in dealing later on with Prince Sihanouk. This provided me with a series of stories that will last me for my lifetime.

As a subsidiary activity, and I only mean that in a relative sense, there were the Indochinese refugees. If you asked what was the most pressing public issue when I went out to Thailand, it was really the Congressional and NGO [Non Governmental Organization] criticism of the Embassy's handling of refugees. Some of the NGO' s played a major role in caring for these people. Some under our programs and others under the UN. Other NGO' s functioned entirely on their own.

The refugee programs involved major policy issues and also major, operational responsibilities. If you counted the employees of the contractor agencies as part of the Mission, the refugee program was the largest element in our activities. There were two sections in the Refugee Office-one managed the camps for Indochinese refugees and the other dealt with the ODP, the Orderly Departure Program, involving Vietnamese leaving Saigon to go to the United States to rejoin relatives there.

In 1988 there were more cases of the Thai pushing boat people off from their shores and otherwise treating them brutally.. Initially the Embassy had responded to this situation in a somewhat laggardly fashion. The refugee situation in its various aspects demanded my immediate attention, both because of the perceptions of it and, to a minor degree, the realities. You could have made a mild, though not a strong case, that the people dealing with refugees needed to be more "sensitive in handling them. Then there were the tensions which had crept into the relationships with the NGO's which were nominally under the Embassy. They had their headquarters back in the US, reflecting and amplifying their criticisms of the whole refugee program.

So those were the policy areas related to Southeast Asia. You couldn't call them "external" to Thailand, because they were so closely associated with Thailand. You might say that they were overwhelmingly related to Thailand, in a variety of ways. Then, if you looked beyond that, we had the MIA [Missing in Action] issue.

Q: Would you explain what MIA means?

O'DONOHUE: This related to determining what had happened to the military personnel who were "Missing in Action" as a result of the Vietnam War. It involved, in varying degrees, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. During my time as Ambassador to Thailand, Cambodia was really a battleground. In any case Cambodia did not figure prominently in the MIA issue. The MIA's and the refugees were our major concerns with the Vietnamese.

I dealt with the Vietnamese Ambassador, that is, the representative of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. He lived across the Street from me. For two years we had ongoing relationships on that issue. These contacts were very specific and did not involve secret diplomacy. Some people in the US would complain that we had no contacts with the communist Vietnamese Government. They would "blast' us and be critical of us in that connection. This made me laugh. On any one day, between our Consular and Refugee Sections, we always had people going back and forth to the Vietnamese Embassy. This was a fairly active, if limited, relationship. I would repeat that it involved not much more than contacts and activities related to specific issues. As to the narcotics issue, Thailand, like many countries which produce or are the transmission belt for narcotics, seemed to have an ebb and flow in terms of the tensions, frictions, suspicions, and criticisms involved in this matter. Somehow, I don't think that the underlying situation changes much. There seemed to be periods when the Thai were perceived as doing "better" and periods when they were perceived as being "hand in glove" with the narcotics traffickers. As I saw this "ebb and flow," in Thailand and elsewhere, it seemed to bear suspiciously little relationship to the ongoing reality-which, I suspect, doesn't change much.

Q: How about on the political side?

O'DONOHUE: In Thailand the political side always "bubbles along." When I arrived back in Thailand in 1988, I was in contact with the Thai military and what was then the last days of the government under Prime Minister Prem. As I have said, in my view Gen Prem was the outstanding Thai statesman of the 20th century.

Gen Prem was Prime Minister for about eight years, ending in 1988.

Q: This is Side A of Tape No. 8 of the interview with Ambassador Dan O'Donohue. You were talking about Gen Prem.

O'DONOHUE: Yes. I had met Gen Prem during the 1977-1978 period, when he was Thai Army commander in northeastern Thailand. He was brought back to Bangkok by the then Prime Minister, Gen Kriangsak. I met him then, as I met most of the Thai military leaders, and had a good relationship with him. He is austere in nature, particularly by Thai standards, so you wouldn't call it an intimate relationship that I had with him. Maybe it was as intimate as you got with Gen Prem.

When Gen Prem became Prime Minister, he presided over a period during which Thailand embarked on its version of the "economic miracle." Apart from its essential aspects, it bore little and only superficial relationship to the South Korea "economic miracle." This period of development was based on a strong figure, Gen Prem, who was not an economist but who provided an umbrella and support for the technocrats. They led the country first, through a very serious, economic crisis, and then into a period of impressive and sustained growth. Gen Prem also weathered a few "mini-coup" attempts. By the end of his period as Prime Minister he had created, in Thai terms, a relatively stable, political framework.

Q: He was Thai Prime Minister from when to when?

O'DONOHUE: I've forgotten when he took over as Prime Minister, because I had left Thailand when I served there as DCM. I think that he became Prime Minister in about 1979 or '80. Then he was in office for about eight years-something like that.

Q: Was he Prime Minister when you came back to Thailand as Ambassador in 1988?

O'DONOHUE: He had just resigned as Prime Minister. Among the things that he had done was to preside over a return to democratic rule. Anyone who had been in Thailand, even during the period that I was there, might have expected that this would take 20 years, not 10, simply because of the revulsion of the Thai public to the chaos of the three years [1973-1976] when the military had been forced to the sidelines and the civilian politicians were unchecked.

I arrived back in Thailand just after they had held elections in 1988. Prem could have stayed on as Prime Minister. However, his "protï¿½gï¿½," Gen Chavalit, was getting tired of waiting to become Prime Minister and was contributing to the criticism of Prem. As I say, Prem could have stayed on, but he decided that he would rather leave with his dignity intact. They had elections which, in one sense, were neither "here nor there," unless Prem and the Thai military agreed with their outcome.

So Prem resigned as Prime Minister. Gen Chavalit was not in a position to make his move yet. So they put in Chatchai as Prime Minister, whom the Thai military saw almost as a joke. Chatchai came from a military family. His father was one of the leaders of the coup d'etat of 1932, when the Thai military overturned the absolute monarchy. His family was very powerful until the late 1950's, when their power was stripped from them. Marshal Sarit, moved against Chatchai's family. At the time Chatchai himself was a lieutenant colonel in the Army. After his family was pushed from power, Chatchai had gone into diplomatic exile for 14 years. He served in the US, Argentina, Switzerland, and other places. He came back to Thailand at the time of this upheaval in 1973. He served briefly in the Foreign Ministry, then became a politician, and "floated" in and out of various ministries.

Chatchai was the leader of one of the many political parties. He was generally viewed as a lightweight. He was clearly picked to be a transitional Prime Minister after Gen Prem resigned as Prime Minister. The expectation was that he would be Prime Minister for a year or two. By then Gen Chavalit would have made the transition from soldier to politician. In Thailand diplomacy isn't conducted in exactly the same way as in some other places in the world. Chatchai came in as Prime Minister. He had around him his son and a small group of his son's friends. Many of his son's friends had been "leftists." The son, because of Chatchai's corruption and the rest of it, had at one time repudiated his father. The son had then rebelled against everything he thought his father stood for. But they had reconciled.

So Chatchai came in as Prime Minister with his entourage. In terms of Thai foreign policy it was a three ring circus, if you take foreign policy as involving ASEAN, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Prime Minister Chatchai and his son followed a policy of trying to reach an accommodation with the Hun Sen group.

Q: Who was Hun Sen?

O'DONOHUE: He was a former Khmer Rouge. He went over to the Vietnamese, who later installed him in office as their second puppet Prime Minister of Cambodia, following their invasion of the country in 1979. In Chatchai's cabinet was Foreign Minister Sitthi, who had been a long time good friend of the United States. He was following traditional Thai policy toward ASEAN. Then the Thai military was following their own policy along the Cambodian border. Life had its ups and downs as we tried to balance all three elements. As it turned out, we were able to maintain good relationships with all three.

It was mainly in terms of Cambodian and Vietnam policy that the major strains developed. The other areas of foreign policy were less of a problem. Chatchai managed to hold on exceptionally well as Prime Minister for a year. In fact, he did so well that the Thai military, which did not want to have a coup, felt impelled to engage in activities to destabilize the Chatchai cabinet, because the Chatchai cabinet was not likely to fall naturally of its own weight. Unfortunately, the Thai military succeeded in destabilizing the political situation. However, Chatchai was so smart, politically, that in the end, after two years, when the Thai military thought that they had him "on the ropes," they were approaching elections, and Chatchai was clearly going to come out better than he had done before. So they finally had to have a coup, which deposed Chatchai.

During my last year in Thailand as Ambassador, the Thai Government was a collection of outstanding talents. The coup leaders did only one thing right. In their first year, when they seized power, they put in a cabinet composed of the "intellectual elite." That group, led by Prime Minister Anand, were going to stay in the government for one year, to be followed by elections. They had no interest in politics, but they did an immense job. The Thai military coup leaders followed this by then having elections and deciding to move into power themselves. After a series of truly stupid political moves, they ended up being driven from power. That happened after I left.

Q: Obviously, we have a very full plate. So let's go after these issues, one at a time. Why don't we continue with the political situation? When you arrived in Bangkok, what was the perception of it within the Embassy and what had you gotten from the Thai desk in the Department? I take it that Chatchai had more or less just become Prime Minister.

O'DONOHUE: Almost literally.

Q: So what was the feeling?

O'DONOHUE: First of all, we'd had a very long run of highly constructive relations with Thailand. Narcotics were always a problem, and the refugee issue was a real irritant at the time. However, from the beginning of the Reagan administration the United States responded appropriately to almost every crisis that the Thai faced, whether it was with the Vietnamese on the Cambodian border, during the various, "mini coup" periods, or at other times.

Our assistance programs, and most particularly the military assistance programs, had gone up to levels which one could never have imagined after we had this tremendous, policy vacuum in the late 1970's.

So the late 1980's was a period during which the US-Thai relationship was a very comfortable one. Gen Prem is a man with a great personal presence, although he does not have a warm personality. On security issues we had a number of things to do with the Thai. The economic situation had steadily improved. Intellectual property rights issues were coming to the fore. These were initially "mismanaged" by the Thai until they became a major issue with us. When this happened, we found it difficult to work out a solution. There were civil aviation problems. However, overall, the situation was that those who dealt with Thailand had a great deal of respect for Gen Prem. We were doing lots of things-most of them fairly well, although there were always operational problems.

There was some "fraying" of the relationship. On the refugee issue there was an international perception of the Thai as callous. On narcotics there were continuing problems. As I said, the intellectual property rights issue was coming to the fore. Overall, I went out to Thailand at a time when specific issues and problems certainly existed. However, the basic Thai-American relationship was a very strong one.

Q: Was there any relationship, as developed in other countries, between either President George Bush or Secretary of State Jim Baker and their Thai counterparts? Were there Thai leaders whom they would call up on the telephone?

O'DONOHUE: No. In fact, those who dealt with Thailand had a problem in this connection. I had always felt-and this goes back to the time before I was there as Ambassador-that the Thai role in Southeast Asia and the Thai-US relationship had never really been appreciated. For one thing, this relationship didn't create a lot of difficulties. I used to tell people that this relationship needed very limited resources and only a little Washington high level attention. However, it did need a few resources and some attention, and we had to struggle to get that.

I first ran into this situation when I was working for Phil Habib, back in the period 1976, when he was Under Secretary. When South Vietnam fell to the communists in 1975, the reaction in the Bureau of East Asian Affairs was that, "We don't have to deal with the Thai any more." I had had no real connection with Thailand at this point. Phil and I really had to impress on the EA Bureau the importance of continuing to pay attention to the Thai and keep up a minimal assistance program. There was a "policy vacuum" under the Carter administration which had only begun to be filled, in a reflexive sense, after the Vietnamese communist invasion of Cambodia in 1979. You couldn't call this a "policy," but it reflected at least a slight increase of interest in Southeast Asia in general and in Thailand in particular. My view had always been that the Thai- US relationship had been consistently undervalued. Unfortunately, since we didn't seem to have to pay any penalties for this attitude, it continued.

A good example of this came out during the Gulf War of 1991. The Thai, being Thai, would probably have preferred to have no connection with the Gulf War. They had workers everywhere and liked to be on the sidelines. Gen Chatchai, then Thai Prime Minister, had never been a particularly close friend of the United States, in a country where we had many good friends. However, Chatchai was a "smart cookie" and knew that, in the end, there are some things that you line up with. This was one of them.

For instance, we wanted to move troops through the Royal Thai Air Force Base at Utapao [about 75 miles southeast of Bangkok] and to the Middle East. I was instructed to approach the Thai on this subject. This was one of those issues where you receive a cable from the Department and act on it. This happened on a Saturday. I called up the Foreign Minister, who was a friend, and made an immediate appointment to see him. I explained what we wanted. He picked up the phone to speak to Prime Minister Chatchai. Over the phone they agreed to approve our request! They had only one condition: we were not to announce this. Now, Utapao Air Base is near a main highway [Route 31, and its normal activities are visible from it. The Thai can manage anything with a straight face. You could drive by there, and there were aircraft everywhere. Nonetheless, that was their only condition, no public confirmation. The arrangements were made, and we sent about 7-8,000 American troops through Utapao. The Thai did everything they could to be helpful. They let the troops out of the aircraft, provided tents, and everything worked very smoothly. I think that Singapore let something like 300-400 American troops go through in the dead of night. Now, if you had taken that same period, you might have felt that, somehow, our military cooperation relationship with Singapore was a close and intense one. In Thailand, we were mounting military exercises and doing things like this. Even the American planes that went down to Singapore on TDY were going to have to exercise over Thai territory. We had an immensely close relationship, in fact. The Thai never said, "No" to one of our requests until a few years after I left Thailand.

So no matter how objectively you looked at the Thai-American relationship in terms of trade and the rest of it, Thailand simply never engaged the attention of senior levels of the US Government. It was not a problem for me, because I was on friendly terms with most of the Thai Government officials with whom I dealt. However, the Foreign Minister under a later Thai Government never forgot and resented his treatment when he was Ambassador to the US In fact, there were two of them in that government-Prime Minister [Anand Panyarachun] and this Foreign Minister-who had both been Ambassadors to the US but had never gotten to see the Secretary of State. Anand resented that treatment. The Foreign Minister saw this, and not incorrectly, as a sign of a basic US lack of interest in Thailand. Nevertheless, for the two of them, it didn't color our basic relationship, because, as they were Thai, they had a realistic view of Thailand's interest in this relationship. Moreover, I had known both of them, so they weren't going to inflict any resentment on a friend.

Nonetheless, I think that Thailand has never figured as prominently outside of the East Asian Bureau and, indeed, sometimes in this Bureau, as it should have. In part this is because Thai politicians, like the Japanese, tend not to be particularly articulate. The politicians shift jobs from time to time, but you rarely develop any close relationships with them. Organizationally, the EA Bureau has even put Thailand under the VLC [Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia] Office. I may be wrong, but I believe that Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia now get more attention in the East Asian Bureau than Thailand does.

Q: As Ambassador, did you find that you were trying to ring a little bell back in Washington to ask Secretary of State Baker...

O'DONOHUE: No. You never needed to adopt this attitude with Secretary Baker. There were different attitudes toward Thailand during two periods. Under Secretary Shultz, Mike Armacost was a good friend...

Q: Mike Armacost was Under Secretary for Political Affairs.

O'DONOHUE: Armacost had a great affection for East Asia. He ended up not being able to devote as much time as he wanted to this area. Of course, Mike Armacost had his own oversight responsibilities. Regarding use of the telephone, my tendency throughout my career was always to use cables. I never liked to do business with Washington on the telephone. I just found it easier to write out what I thought and send it in. This didn't mean that I didn't pick up the phone, but it was to "reinforce" the written word, rather than to use the phone to handle business in the first instance. I have always tried to outline what I wanted to do, to state what the issues are, and to send in my views accordingly.

We had a number of significant issues outstanding with Thailand. However, they were rather easily resolved. It was less that they were "win" or "lose" matters. The Thai accepted the direction in which we wanted to go. That didn't mean that we got 100% of what we wanted. However, we didn't have real contention on these issues. I would say that I usually had sympathetic interlocutors in the Thai Government to deal with. During the early part of my tour in Thailand as Ambassador, Dave Lambertson was the Deputy Assistant Secretary dealing with Southeast Asian Affairs. He was quite supportive of our efforts. I'm not sure that Dave agreed with me all the time, but he never undercut my position. He always made sure that on the major issues my views were incorporated and known. You could call this a good relationship.

The Department of State, under Secretary of State Baker, was more difficult to deal with. There wasn't the same rapport. This had nothing to do with Secretary Baker who, in any case, didn't pay any attention to Thailand. First, in the Department there was a certain contempt for Prime Minister Chatchai. I had to battle against that because we were doing business with him. Secondly, whatever his idiosyncrasies, I was the person dealing with him. They didn't affect the basic policy very much. It wasn't so much that I lost on given issues. It was just that the process was more difficult.

I must point out that on Cambodia about half of the US Government and Congress had about the same views as Prime Minister Chatchai. They weren't our views and they weren't the views that prevailed, but I couldn't understand why senior officials in Washington were treating Chatchai with such contempt for holding these views. I was dealing with these views in Congress and everywhere else. There was a problem in dealing with Prime Minister Chatchai, in that some senior officials in Washington saw Thailand as having an almost comic government.

Q: Here you were the Ambassador to Thailand. Where was this contempt for Chatchai coming from?

O'DONOHUE: I think that this situation is still true today. The principal US Government agencies dealing with Thailand included the East Asian Bureau in the State Department, the NSC [National Security Council] staff, the Department of Defense, and to a minor degree, the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], although the Agency at this time was not really involved with Thailand in the policy sense. The people working in those agencies generally knew each other and worked fairly well together, as these things go. Each agency might have its own views. I must say that this fairly negative perception of Prime Minister Chatchai was fairly widespread among these agencies. By the way, there was some truth to this. There are a million stories about him, some of them quite hilarious.

Nonetheless, when you got down to it, we were working with him, he was the Prime Minister of Thailand, and, in his way, he had an appreciation of what he was doing with us. For instance, I had a lot of success with Chatchai on our commercial issues, where we were running into problems with some of the Thai ministries. We had success for a variety of reasons. It wasn't simply because of my eloquence. The outcome had to fit Chatchai's own agenda. However, the point was that Chatchai was someone with whom we were accomplishing all that we could expect. We were better off treating him seriously than constantly "carping" or speaking of him with contempt within the US Government. In all of this I don't think that there was an issue that I lost on, but I found that I was working in a different environment. I didn't have the same feeling of comfort that I previously had.

Part of the reason for all of this is that Prime Minister Chatchai, his son, and the coterie of young advisors wanted to follow a different path on Cambodia than we advocated. This course of action was different from what the Foreign Ministry wanted, which was headed by a cabinet minister well disposed to the United States. A good part of the US Government wanted to go along this path. My point was that we were going along that course and we were managing it.

So there was a perception in Washington of a quasi comic opera Prime Minister and his "boy advisers." During my last two years in Bangkok as Ambassador, we were dealing with some very serious issues. Paradoxically, there were two issues which involved opposite considerations in those two years.

In the beginning, during the Bush administration in the United States, there was a drive to "unleash" the non-communist, Khmer resistance. In other words, this was a combination of the views of Congressman Steve Solarz [Democrat, New York] and some analysts of various backgrounds, all saying that we should arm the non-communist resistance and "unleash" them. Well, the non-communist resistance was being armed by ASEAN, including the Thai. I know something about this, as I spent much of my time keeping the noncommunist resistance alive. "Unleashing" them was the wrong word. In fact, what we were doing during this whole period was "preserving" the noncommunist resistance as a public factor. If peace was achieved, they could play a political role. They were, militarily, the weakest of the three entities in Cambodia. These included the Hun Sen Government, supported by the Vietnamese; the Khmer Rouge; and then two non-communist resistance groups. I was deeply and intimately involved with the non-communist resistance groups. Within the Embassy we used to have almost daily meetings on Cambodia. We would go over the various programs. By that time CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] was quite happy to let an Ambassador deal with it.

Q: In other words, CIA decided that this was not a winning combination...

O'DONOHUE: So they had no problem with my handling it. Except, from my perspective, here I was, having to spend much of my time holding these entities together and "keeping them alive." Then, all of a sudden, we were under pressure to arm them, which meant that the US would arm them. The view of some was that, once they were armed, they would have the strength to "turn on the Khmer Rouge" and defeat them. In my mind, this was utterly unreal.

In 1990, the issue of arming the non-communist resistance was less important than it seemed. A few years before it would have been a watershed issue as we had originally designed our programs to avoid our own, direct, military entanglement. In 1990, I didn't think that we should arm them or contribute to arming them since other countries were doing this, and they were just trying to shift their burdens onto us. That was not so much the issue to me as the misperception that we would then be able to unleash them after arming them.

I had very difficult discussions with Steve Solarz...

Q: Can you explain Solarz and his role in all of this?

O'DONOHUE: Congressman Solarz had been the Chairman of the Sub-Committee on East Asia of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. While not the easiest person to deal with, he probably had the closest and most constructive relationships with the EAP Bureau of any Congressman. He had very actively engaged himself in Cambodian affairs. He had gotten an AID assistance program through and he was strongly supportive of our other activities. He saw himself almost as a "father figure" of Cambodia. He was very definitely engaged on this issue. He was the major Congressional supporter of our Cambodian policies. He was certainly a major player on Cambodia.

Some analyst had figures that showed that the non-communist resistance was under armed. Therefore, Solarz believed that if we armed them, they could take on the Khmer Rouge. Well, they were never going to take on the Khmer Rouge. These were more unrealistic hopes. What was surprising was the way things actually played out. As I said, we and ASEAN were keeping the non- communist resistance in Cambodia in existence. They had to exist there and had to control territory. Our hope was that when peace was achieved, in the political process there would be some realignments, and they would be able to play a role. Hopefully, this would give the Khmer people at least the possibility of something other than what they had.

That is more or less the way the situation worked out. The non- communist resistance did split with the Khmer Rouge. There was one visitor after another to Thailand to discuss this issue. In the beginning Vice President Quayle came out and pressed the Thai on arming the non-communist resistance. As a matter of fact, my efforts were directed at trying to keep a picture of reality before us-what it was that we could reasonably hope for. The pressures from the Singaporeans, in my view, related to two considerations. There was entanglement and money. They just wanted to get the US re-engaged militarily in Southeast Asia and to make some money by shifting more responsibility to the US. The Thai really hadn't cared that much about our further arming the non-communist resistance. Nonetheless, it became increasingly clear that that issue was not the key to success.

The issue of arming the non-communist resistance faded from sight, because it was then being replaced in Congress and within the administration, on the part of some people, by an attack on our basic support for the non- communist resistance. So we had gone from one extreme to another within a year.

In 1990 and 1991, looking toward the 1992 presidential elections, a number of Democrats in Congress were looking for an issue and somehow thought that the matter of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia might embarrass the Bush administration. So the whole thrust of this group of Democrats in Congress was that we were really supporting the Khmer Rouge by dealing with the non-communist resistance! We started getting a lot of Congressional attacks and, eventually, legislation which called on the President to cut off aid if he determined the non-communist resistance was cooperating with the Khmer Rouge.

So we went, as I said, from the beginning with this argument about arming the non-communist resistance, which was an unreal course of action, to the opposite-really battling to maintain the programs that we had under way. We were fighting to stay the course. That became a very unpleasant period, because there was immense pressure for us to adopt the policy which, interestingly enough, Prime Minister Chatchai of Thailand personally wanted. In effect, this was to "dump" the non-communist resistance or to coerce it to support the Hun Sen government in Cambodia, on the ground that this was the "lesser evil."

Q: Who were in these groups?

O'DONOHUE: These were groups coming out of the US They were very respected people.

Q: I'm a bit confused. At first, we wanted to support the non-communist resistance to the Khmer Rouge. Then these groups advocated forcing the non- communist resistance to do what?

O'DONOHUE: There were two, overlapping threads. Actually, our policy remained the same. The attacks against our policy, in effect, advocated either supporting the Hun Sen, Vietnamese-supported government in Phnom Penh in Cambodia, as the lesser of all evils. Or, we should coerce the non-communist resistance to cooperate with the Hun Sen regime. So these two alternatives in fact were variants of the same theme. Of course, this was essentially Prime Minister Chatchai's view.

During the last year of my time in Bangkok [1991], this became a very difficult issue to handle. We had the question of whether to "abandon" the non- communist resistance on the grounds that they were, in fact, allegedly dealing with the Khmer Rouge. This difficulty eased when the Vietnamese and the Chinese "struck a deal." I think that this happened in September or October, 1990. Prince Ranariddh, Sihanouk's son, who ran his non-communist resistance group out of Thailand, told us that the Chinese and Vietnamese had agreed that there could be a political settlement. That agreement was the critical prelude to the next year, during which an international political settlement was negotiated.

You could say that the Chinese abandoned the Khmer Rouge. They didn't entirely walk away from them initially but, in effect, the Chinese and the Vietnamese accepted that there could be a political settlement, each disengaging from active support.

Q: What was your role in this? You were in Bangkok. We had no official representation in Cambodia at that point.

O'DONOHUE: There is a difference to be noted. The non-communist resistance was all located on the Thai-Cambodian border. I was much involved with them directly in our support. During the last year, when we reached the political negotiations, I did not have the same rapport with the Bureau of East Asian Affairs. As we went to the negotiating table, the EA Bureau did the negotiating with the other four countries which were members of the five power group, which consisted of the Chinese, the Soviets, the French, the British, and ourselves. They worked out the peace settlement which, I think, was signed in Bangkok about a month after I left Thailand.

The key to this negotiation was that the Chinese and the Vietnamese had agreed to disengage strategically. From that point they proceeded to a settlement. Then there were some realignments, with the Khmer Rouge becoming isolated. Our problem-today as then-is that the non-communist resistance, or the non-communist component of the Cambodian Government, is a very fragile entity.

Q: Did you have any dealings with Prince Sihanouk?

O'DONOHUE: Yes, I did, though more usually I dealt with his son, Prince Ranariddh, and the resistance leadership in Bangkok. Of course, Prince Sihanouk spent most of his time in China. He came back to the area from time to time, and I would always call on him. These meetings would vary in substance. We were always delivering "messages" to him from Washington.

On one occasion the message I was instructed to deliver had to do with the Khmer Rouge. The message was addressed both to Prince Sihanouk, who was in Beijing, and to Prince Ranariddh, in Bangkok. The Department had at least written different "talking points" for these two presentations. The talking points prepared for the presentation to Sihanouk in Beijing were not as untactful as those for Prince Ranariddh in Bangkok. But for some reason our Ambassador in Beijing, used the same "talking points" with Prince Sihanouk as I did with Prince Ranariddh. Well, Prince Sihanouk didn't know Ambassador Lilley when Jim called on him.

Anyhow, Jim Lilley presented these talking points to Prince Sihanouk, who was furious. Shortly after that, Prince Sihanouk came down to Thailand and was staying at Pattaya [beach resort about 75 miles southeast of Bangkok]. I thought that I should go down and pay my respects to Sihanouk. I telephoned one of his aides and said that I was just coming to pay a courtesy call. I said that I had no "business" to handle. So they agreed, and I went down to Pattaya.

Predictably enough, I was subjected for about an hour and a half to two hours of a diatribe against the United States in Southeast Asia, going back to the 1950's. Sihanouk's eyes literally "bulged." At one point I thought to myself, "He's going to have a stroke right before my eyes!" That went on for nearly two hours, as I say, with Sihanouk just pouring out all of his accumulated outrage over his contacts with the United States. Then, the clouds lifted. He had gotten it all out of his system. He finished. We then had champagne, which he always used to serve. He went on, and we had a very pleasant conversation.

I had to deal with Sihanouk on a number of occasions. Then, when we left Bangkok, we had a farewell dinner which he hosted. All in all, he was the one figure who was central to a settlement in Cambodia. Whatever his idiosyncrasies, of which there are many, and whether, ultimately, he was a serious person, I'm not really sure myself. Nonetheless, to the average Cambodian he was still King. Without him it would simply not have been possible to reach a settlement-because there was no one else who could claim the central role he played.

Q: How did you find dealing with these two, non-communist opposition groups? Were they opposed to each other?

O'DONOHUE: When I was Deputy Assistant Secretary in EA, when we started our support for the non-communist resistance, the Sihanouk group was the less significant of the two. It was viewed as a collection of "odds and ends" -almost like an expanded "royal court." It was unlike the other group. This group, the KPNLF, was a much better educated, "middle class" group. However, by the time I returned to the Southeast Asian scene, the KPNLF led by Son Sann, had been broken by factionalism and was by far the weaker of the two groups. The Sihanouk group was the more dominant at that point.

However, to the end, there were always these elements of a "court" around Sihanouk-maneuvering, scheming, and the rest of it. Prince Ranariddh was always concerned about his "enemies" undermining him with his father. When I returned to Southeast Asian affairs, the Sihanouk group was politically the more important, because of Sihanouk himself. The Son Sann group had become factionalized and had nearly splintered apart.

Most of the serious contact work was with Prince Ranariddh. Also, Son Sann was a very difficult person to deal with-not in a personal sense but in terms of his rigidity.

Q Did you have officers in the Embassy in Bangkok who would go out and work with these groups?

O'DONOHUE: First of all, we had two sets of programs going on, one under CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and one under AID [Agency for International Development]. So there were Americans in the border area and others traveling to the border. The political headquarters of the non-communist resistance groups were in Bangkok.

Q: This is Side B of Tape 8 of the interview with Ambassador Dan 0'Donohue. Dan, you were saying that the headquarters of the non-communist resistance groups were in Bangkok.

O'DONOHUE: The refugee camps on the border, were dominated by one resistance group or the other. However, the camps were operated by the Thai, with the NGO's [non governmental organizations] of various kinds working there. Those camps were not the bases where military activity went on. In the real world the resistance fighters would put their families in the camps and drift in and out of them, going to and from Cambodia.

This also meant that our officers going out to the refugee camps were running into the same, overlapping leaderships. We had a pattern of relationships in the camps. At no point did we ever deal with the Khmer Rouge. There was charge after charge that we were doing so, but none of that was true. We had no dealings with them. Now, obviously, some Cambodian refugees were in contact with the Khmer Rouge, including some of the people in the refugee camps.

We had officers in the field, including a highly qualified AID officer, who visited the military camps where our aid went.

Within the Embassy I dealt with the leadership. Skip Boyce and Victor Tomseth, the Political Counselor and DCM, also dealt with the refugees. Then the CIA and the AID officers who ran these programs also dealt with them. There were the same patterns on dealing with the Thai side. As far as the Thai side was concerned, we tried to keep them and ourselves roughly on the same path. I had a fair amount of contact with Foreign Minister Sitthi until he was pushed out of office. When he was pushed out, his replacement as Foreign Minister didn't play as big a role. But then other officers dealt with other "players," including officers from the Thai Special Forces.

Q: You saw the non-communist resistance as being essentially a weak force. What did the "think tanks" and others in the United States think...

O'DONOHUE: It wasn't so much "think tanks" as some non-governmental organizations, congressional critics and a few "experts" of varying standing.

Q: Did they get caught up in local Thai politics?

O'DONOHUE: No, it was their view that the Khmer Rouge were so appalling that this justified dealing with the Hun Sen regime. To my mind, as we've seen recently, Hun Sen struck a deal with Ieng Sary, who is the second most horrifying figure among the Khmer Rouge. The point is that, from our perspective, or at least in my view, and this is the way things worked out, Cambodia is a country which never had strong leadership. It's a country that would have disappeared in the 19th century if it hadn't been for the French. It was being progressively absorbed by Thailand and Vietnam. Then the French set up Cambodia as a protectorate. It was not independent, but it at least kept its separate identity as a country.

First of all, it's a small country, with a population of 6.0 million or so. As I said, it never had strong leadership. Then, the Khmer Rouge killed or drove into exile what leadership Cambodia had had. So in the real world the remnant of the intellectual and trained leadership is actually in the United States or France. For instance, when I was there in Thailand, I was struck with the thinness of the veneer of educated and trained Cambodian leaders. It was a thin veneer. It really was a situation where you couldn't predict with any great confidence how things would unfold. In any case, the one hope that we had was that there was at least a non-communist, leadership element which attracted these small groups of people and that they would play a role in the political dynamic once peace returned. This is how the process unfolded. The leadership group is still weak. Hun Sen has never given up control of the government apparatus.

However, arguments were advanced by other observers that the Khmer Rouge are so appalling, that the non-communist resistance were "pawns" of the Khmer Rouge, that Hun Sen was in power, and that we could work with him. However, if you asked what was their rationalization or justification for dealing with Hun Sen, it was somehow that Hun Sen was the "lesser evil." They felt that it was the Khmer Rouge that would seize power once again. These critics ranged from those who would argue that we "knowingly" supported a course that would bring the Khmer Rouge back into power to those who would argue that, de facto, we were promoting a return of the Khmer Rouge into the government.

Now, a part of this view was based on an exaggerated sense of the power of the Khmer Rouge. At the time I left Thailand [in 1991] we were certainly describing the Khmer Rouge as less strong than we thought they were a year or two before. Part of that conclusion was based on the fact that the Chinese were already cutting back their support for the Khmer Rouge. It wasn't that these critics of our policy were being disingenuous. As I said, I think that by 1991, as I recall it, we were describing the Khmer Rouge as being significantly weaker than they had been, and that turned out to be correct. So the justification and rationalization underlying the views of US critics of our policy, one way or the other, were that the Khmer Rouge were threatening to take power and that our relationship with the non-communist resistance was appalling and morally indefensible.

During the last year of my tour in Bangkok, the emotional attacks on our policy were significant.

Q: What was the UN doing during that time?

O'DONOHUE: The UN role was heavily "operational" in Thailand. It was deeply involved with US power negotiations. It was not particularly controversial. A variety of UN agencies were active along the Thai-Cambodian border. There was a special UN agency set up to handle border matters. Their people were very "operational" and very sympathetic to the refugees. Their attitude was non-ideological.

Q: Sounds like the way the UN should be.

O'DONOHUE: Yes. Now, in the negotiations in which we were not involved, the UN played a role there and, of course, played a major role in running the country and organizing the elections after the political settlement. Clearly, the UN didn't "complicate" things. My impression was that the UN role was that of a constructive agent of all of the parties to the settlement.

Q: We have a lot of things still to cover. Maybe we could finish this session with some of the idiosyncrasies of Prime Minister Chatchai. These helped color the perceptions of him back in Washington.

O'DONOHUE: First of all, Chatchai was a very "worldly" man. This doesn't mean that he was particularly sophisticated, but he liked to have a good time. The kindest thing, perhaps, was to view him as a 70 year old "playboy." In his own mind, he knew where he was going. However, the way he expressed himself was less clear. He had a shrewd sense of reality. In fact, after talking to him on many occasions, we became pretty good friends. On one occasion, we were driving somewhere together. We passed the State House, which was a former palace. He talked about living there as a boy. As I said, his father had been a senior officer in the 1932 coup which overthrew the absolute monarchy. In the 1930's his father was later assigned up to northeast Thailand as military commander. Well, the Prime Minister and dictator, Phibun, kept Chatchai with him as a guarantee of his father's loyalty. When the Thai generals would get together to eat, drink, and talk, Chatchai would wait on them, as they just had family in the room. So when you talk about Chatchai, you're talking about someone who, from very early in life and, indeed, throughout his whole life, dealt with the real world of power and politics. He saw the inside of things. He was widely known, and all of the hotels knew him. He would visit them in the afternoon and spend time there with a "popsy" [prostitute or call girl]. You might wonder how he got as far as he did.

Certainly, like many Thai politicians, there was an aura of corruption about him. However, in spite of this he had an innate shrewdness about him which served him well in a very cynical, political process. Chatchai had a charming manner, and people could like him.

Gen Prem was the opposite. He was a man of great austerity who attracted tremendous respect from his contemporaries. Since I had known him from a previous occasion, when I was DCM in Bangkok, he always used my first name.

However, some of these social occasions where Gen Prem was host were difficult, because he had no "small talk." Nobody felt free to talk unless spoken to. There was one Thai doctor who had been a boyhood friend of Gen Prem. The doctor and I were the only two people who could carry on a conversation with Prem. This meant hours of effort. Gen Prem would say something to someone, and they would answer. However, the doctor and I, in desperation, were the only ones who could introduce a new subject. With Gen Prem there wasn't much of a response. You introduced a new subject, he answered you, and that was it.

Gen Chatchai was the opposite. People had very little of that kind of respect for him, but, on the other hand, he was a lot of fun to talk to.

Q: Well, why not stop at this point? I'd like to put at the end what we've covered. We're now in Thailand, when you were Ambassador. We've talked about Cambodia and Vietnam at some length. We want to come to the major refugee problem when you came out as Ambassador and how you dealt with it. How did we view the Thai economy? Also, what were American commercial and business interests, and how did you promote them, including intellectual property rights, civil aviation, and so forth? Obviously, we want to talk about narcotics and what you did about them at that point. Can we talk about the AIDS problem and all of that, because this was a growing problem? Perhaps we could talk about the problems faced by Americans stationed in Thailand. Bangkok was then and perhaps still is known as the "sex capital" of the world. Then there was a coup while you were there.

Perhaps we could start with the Embassy and how you ran this huge Embassy in Bangkok. Then we can move to one of the other subjects.

O'DONOHUE: At the time I was Ambassador to Thailand, Bangkok was our second largest Embassy in the world, in terms of numbers of Americans assigned to the Mission. Embassy Cairo at that time was significantly larger than Bangkok. Indeed, Cairo had things like a large MAAG [Military Assistance and Advisory Group] and a very large AID Mission-at levels reminiscent of 20 years before.

As far as the Embassy and Mission in Bangkok were concerned, we had about 500 US Government employees from various agencies. Then there were another 100 Americans working under local contracts. So there were about 600 Americans. Depending on how you counted, we had anywhere from 1,000 to 1,500 Foreign Service Nationals (FSN's) or local employees. Some were employed under contract. As I think I mentioned earlier, Bangkok or Thailand presented a more effervescent situation, unlike other countries that I knew well, such as South Korea. In South Korea there was a finite number of immensely important issues which engaged the US In Thailand the depth and intensity of involvement was less than it was in South Korea. However, the Mission was involved in almost the whole spectrum of US Governmental activities abroad.

In Thailand there was the Embassy itself, which had a large, political agenda. There was a medium to large, consular function and a large administrative operation, reflecting the overall size of the Mission. The Embassy was also involved in a whole series of economic issues. Beyond that, on the commercial side, we were dealing with a rapidly burgeoning economy. There was a growing American commercial involvement in Thailand, as well as rapidly growing imports and exports.

Within the Mission we had the JUSMAG and the long standing military relationship with Thailand. There was the USIS [United States Information Service] and the Foreign Agricultural Service [FAS]. Thailand was important in terms of US agricultural exports. Thailand was the world's leading rice exporter, while the US was second or third largest. Our customers were somewhat different, so we were somewhat less than competitors in rice exports than one might imagine, but we were overlapping rice exporters, nonetheless. Then, there was the whole intellectual property rights issue.

We had a large DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency] operation, as narcotics were a major issue in Thailand. Indochinese refugees were a major aspect of the work of the Mission. Indeed, in terms of contract employees and Foreign Service National employees, you could argue that the refugee operation was the largest activity coming under the broad overview of the Embassy. It was an important refugee office, dealing both with immense numbers of refugees within Thailand and also handling departures from Ho Chi Minh City or Saigon, under the Orderly Departure Program.

The Secret Service had an office in the Mission, dealing with counterfeiting and other issues like that. We had an Armed Services Tropical Medicine Laboratory under Embassy aegis. It was formerly known as the SEATO [Southeast Asian Treaty Organization] Laboratory. When SEATO was disbanded, it was decided to place the Tropical Medicine Laboratory under the Embassy. We had about 12 or 13 Army scientists and 80 or so personnel working for this agency. We had an office which came under the Center for Disease Control. It was originally focused on communicable diseases related to refugees and immigrants. Then, when AIDS emerged as a major problem in Thailand, the Thai were fairly flexible in terms of what we could do in the way of research. Accordingly, the Center for Disease Control undertook a series of major studies in Thailand on this disease. The US Army also embarked on a project with the Thai military involving research on vaccines.

These are just illustrative of the activities across the board in which the US Mission became involved in Thailand. It was a major effort. In addition, there was the program of support for the Cambodian resistance. So, in addition to our regular programs, we had two programs related to Cambodia. There were two POW/MIA (Prisoner of War/Missing in Action) offices located within the Embassy. In addition, we had a variety of other, regional offices. The Embassy in Manila had moved out the Regional Marine Guard Company, which supervised Marine Security Guards at our various missions in the region. It was relocated at our Mission.

In dealing with the Thai Government, we were concerned with the Indochinese refugees, Burma, and Laos. Furthermore, there was a whole variety of US Government agencies represented in the Mission. They were pursuing, in their various ways, things that were important to those agencies or to the United States in different arenas.

Q: Dan, here you were. You had a letter from the President saying that you were responsible and ultimately in charge of these various activities. However, most of these people you have been talking about obviously have "other masters" back in Washington. Technically, it was you and the DCM who were trying to coordinate these various activities. At that time, when you were in Bangkok, how did you handle these matters from the executive, management point of view?

O'DONOHUE: I had given a lot of thought to how you organize and operate a large Mission like that in Bangkok. I had previously served as DCM there and I knew the Embassy. I knew the issues, as I had been Deputy Assistant Secretary in EA and Ambassador to Burma. In a sense, I came to Bangkok on this occasion with a considerable familiarity with these matters, whether they involved the Embassy and its operations or the issues themselves.

Also, there was another factor in Thailand and Bangkok which cannot be ignored and must be taken into consideration. That is, the amount of time I had to spend out of the office. In part, this involved representational activity, which included dealing with the Thai leadership in a "hands on" fashion. The other part was the traffic. On a given afternoon I might set off to the Foreign Ministry, allotting a half hour for the meeting. Then, on the way back, I would find that I would never get back to the Embassy on time. This consideration, of course, applied to every officer in the Embassy. There were real problems in how to manage your time when you have, not only expected but unexpected developments, such as traffic, to deal with.

I considered it important that the Ambassador convey two things. First, his own expectation that all the other agencies should have the sense that they were working for broader US purposes. And, in an executive sense, that their efforts were reflected in the Ambassador's activities and his agenda. Secondly, though, and I stress this just as much, as Ambassador I had just as much responsibility to contribute to the success of the activities of each of these entities and the achievement of their objectives as they did in supporting me. So I stressed that this was a "two way street." I would say that during all of my time in Bangkok I had no difficulties, either in executive direction or leadership with the agency having action on a given issue. Whatever problems we had related back to Washington and Washington agencies, but not to the Mission in Bangkok. I don't believe that I had officers and heads of different agencies working at cross purposes. There might be disagreements with their head offices in Washington.

I kept a "hands on" hold on events. My view was that in Bangkok there was an immense, executive load which I could not allow to absorb me completely. My job was external. Bangkok was also a delightful post in a Foreign Service sense, in that the Ambassador, the DCM, the Political Counselor, and the Economic Counselor all have great jobs to do. It happens at some posts where, say, the DCM ends up being pushed to the side because he handles everything that the Ambassador doesn't deal with. Or the Political Counselor is so subordinated that he doesn't have a sense that he is responsible for anything. From my point of view, when I went out to Bangkok, I had to keep in mind, first of all, that we must never lose sight of the fact that we were there to handle a very heavy, substantive agenda. Secondly, it was essential to maintain a sense of firm control in such a diverse Embassy in terms of executive direction.

My approach was two-fold. First, I paid a lot of attention to specific programs. Indeed, in some cases I think that I paid more attention to programs than the agency concerned, and, perhaps, more than my senior officers wanted, when they found out that I took these seriously. I had fine DCM's, whom I expected to handle most of the operational matters. I had a great Administrative Counselor.

Q: Who were your DCM's and your Admin Counselors?

O'DONOHUE: Joe Winder was DCM for a year, and then Victor Tomseth was DCM for the rest of my time in Bangkok. Victor had a strong background in Southeast Asian affairs. Joe Winder had come up on the economic side. The Political Counselor was Skip Boyce, whom I had brought out after a lot of arguments with the Personnel people. Skip certainly had a broader role than merely Political Counselor. In fact, he was like the third and junior member of a triumvirate which held the Mission together-myself, the DCM and Skip.

So I expected that the DCM would deal with the various agencies on all sorts of issues. No agency head resented that. On the other hand I had a strong view that the senior agency heads should feel that they had a personal relationship with the Ambassador. So my approach, which took a lot of my time early in the morning, was to structure, first of all, four meetings a week.

One was a limited Country Team meeting. I had a small group that met including the DCM, the Political and Economic Counselors, the CIA Chief of Station, the USIS PAO, and the Defense Attachï¿½. We met for about a half hour, right off the bat, after the people attending this meeting had had enough time to read their cables. So that was my way of being sure that these key people knew what I was doing, while I knew what they were doing. I patterned this meeting after those held by Ambassador Sam Berger who, I think, got it, in turn, from Ambassador Ellis O. Briggs. I had just watched how this was done. So the small Country Team meeting was the mechanism for "serious business." That meeting was held four days a week.

Larger Country Team meetings in Bangkok, where we had something like 23 or 24 different agency entities represented, with perhaps 40-45 people in the room, tended to be "theater." I would go in, and at those meetings I would use them to describe the framework in which I was operating at that time and the major issues that I was dealing with. I would leave it to the DCM to take up mission operational issues, so that we would both have a role in the meeting. Then, inevitably, we would go around the room for individual agency presentations. In a group that size, because I had other structures available to me, this was really for the smaller entities, so that they could feel that they had a role. At those meetings I always took about five to 10 minutes to give a sense of where the Mission, as a whole, was heading.

Then I had a series of "cluster" meetings. I had one commercial meeting a week which was attended by the Economic Counselor, the Agricultural Attachï¿½, the Commercial Counselor, the AID Mission Director, the DCM, and myself. We addressed commercial issues at this meeting. I think that every Ambassador now spends an immense amount of time on economic affairs, which we can talk about later.

I had a narcotics meeting at which I had the DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency] head, the Embassy Narcotics Officer from the State Department, and a CIA Station representative. The purpose of this meeting was to ensure that there was coordination, that I knew what was going on, and that I didn't have any internal, factional "fights" going on under me. This was never a problem, although historically it had been a major problem in Bangkok. In the 1983-87 period, there had been very difficult, almost ludicrously abrasive relationships between the various narcotics "players." By the time I arrived in Bangkok as Ambassador, that situation had eased. I don't take any credit for having resolved that issue, because it had eased before I got there. I always had keenly in mind that narcotics affairs was a high priority matter and that this was an area where various intelligence and law enforcement agencies tended to be contentious competitors.

I met privately once a week for about 20 or 30 minutes with the AID [Agency for International Development] Mission Director. We would meet on other occasions as well, but I would reserve about 20 or 30 minutes each week when the AID Mission Director and I met. Interestingly enough, of all the US agencies in Bangkok, I would say that AID wanted most to be left alone. It wasn't that, by that point in time, the AID Mission had immensely sensitive issues to resolve. Indeed, like most of the agencies, they needed me more than I needed them. The AID Mission, in a sense, was a minor economic player although, because of its past contributions, the Thai "technocrats" had a high respect for it. I wouldn't say that the AID Mission had a disproportionate influence with the Thai economic agencies to the relatively small programs that it had. So the AID Mission director and I would have our 20 to 30 minutes to make sure that he had a sense of where AID was going.

Similarly, I met with the Peace Corps Director. There, it was almost the opposite. The Peace Corps loved attention from the Ambassador. So they always prepared themselves carefully for those weekly meetings. They loved to come in and tell me what they were doing, and I always showed a very real interest in what they were doing. When I went on trips in Thailand, I always arranged to see the Peace Corps volunteers. After their arrival in Thailand and their "swearing in," I'd always have the new volunteers over at the residence on a social occasion because they had come from spending about two months in Thai villages. They hadn't had Western food for some time. Just watching what would happen to the food on the table was interesting. Everybody in the Mission attended social events at the residence at one time or another. You couldn't manage the large number of Americans for dinner, but, one way or another, we had functions so that everybody in the Mission was invited to the residence-hopefully, at least once a year. Certainly, there was no one at that Mission who hadn't had a couple of opportunities to be at the residence. Of course, if you were in the Political Section, you were there frequently. If you were in the CDC [Center for Disease Control], or the laboratory people, we consciously worked to be sure that they were at the residence to create a sense of cohesion, as best we could. The JUSMAG officers would also be included.

Meanwhile, the DCM was doing his job with these senior officers from the different agencies. My private meetings were not an effort to cut him out. I just believed that an agency head should be able to come in and spend 15 or 20 minutes talking about different issues with the Ambassador and getting my views. My approach was different from that of some other Ambassadors. My view was that if an Ambassador and DCM are in "lock step," this takes up an immense amount of both their time, doing the same thing. My view had always been that the DCM's time was not well spent when he just sat in on meetings. I tended to use my Political Officers as note takers to cut down the amount of time the DCM spent in meetings with me. In Bangkok the DCM had more than enough to do. He had his own series of contacts in that whole, diverse Mission. This was never a problem. I don't think that the DCM ever felt left out. My view was that there was a mutual responsibility during the day. The DCM and I would get together two or three times during the day to talk about various issues.

So that was my approach. I think that it worked well. I held a meeting once a week on the Cambodian programs, to be sure that they were coordinated. Then, since I am fairly gregarious, I would from time to time call up someone from one of the more obscure Mission entities and ask him to drop by my office. This would give him a sense of my interest, and also give me a sense of what was going on. So it was a lot of work and took an immense amount of time. As I said, in my view, at a post where your external and personal contacts were overwhelmingly important, and because traffic often took time, the Political Counselor was really more than that. As I said, he was a junior partner of the executive direction at the post.

For instance, if I was caught out in traffic by, say, 5:00 PM, or had called into the Embassy from my car, the DCM would take my "in box," and take action on whatever was important and had to be transmitted. Similarly, if he was caught out in traffic, I'd tell his secretary to bring me his "in box." I would sign off on whatever messages had to go. If both of us were caught out, the Political Counselor would come up to the front office and take a look at our "in boxes." He had less freedom, but, nonetheless, he would also go through the "in boxes," and the things that obviously should go were transmitted. It was a very cohesive system. For an Embassy or Mission that size we had a very small front office. We had the Ambassador, the DCM, a staff assistant, and two secretaries.

Q: You had this huge Embassy entity in Bangkok. This means that it's not just the people working for the US Government but their families and all. Then you're sitting in the middle of what is probably as difficult a place as any to work in. I'm talking about the "sex trade." Maybe things will change in years to come, but for decades Bangkok has been a place where airplanes full of European men have come there for nothing else but sex. Then there also was the narcotics problem. You have families, young people-that must have been a problem for you.

O'DONOHUE: Well, first I was in Bangkok as DCM. Narcotics-related problems at the International School of Bangkok were subsiding, although there were still some problems. However, they did not have the same dimensions as a year or two before then. This was mainly because the American community was shrinking in size, following the end of the Vietnam War. While I was there as DCM, narcotics problems just didn't figure all that prominently. Within the resident, American community it was not a major factor. However, you always had to be on the alert. When I was in Bangkok as Ambassador, our children weren't with us for the first time in my career in the Foreign Service. However, in the case of many American families in Bangkok, their children of high school age often went down to Thai discos, taking cabs to the places. That was a relatively higher level of sophistication than they would be exposed to here in Washington. While there were occasional problems, these did not seem to be unmanageable.

Regarding the active "sex industry" in Bangkok, and I'm talking about the Mission now, the problem there was not so much with the senior people as with the various and sundry other agencies. There were certainly temptations. There were marriages that broke up in a social environment which was sexually permissive.

In fact, Bangkok is one of the world's greatest "sin cities." Prostitution is at a horrifying level. In the rural areas children were being sold, and there was "white slavery." Thailand is so far away from the US. While it was a European single man's "sex stop," Thailand was too far away for most Americans living in the US. There certainly were Americans involved in such activities, but this was by no means universal. Where sex showed up as a problem was when US Navy ships came to Thailand for port visits, particularly in Pattaya. There might be a visit by a carrier and four or five other ships. The ships would be putting 8-10,000 young men ashore at any given time. The prostitutes would pour into Pattaya during the period of the ship visit.

Prostitution is pervasive in Thailand, but the Thai have a growing sense of embarrassment about it. The AIDS issue also increased this sense of concern. Thailand is essentially a permissive society, and that applies to the whole range of human activities. On the male side, Thai society is promiscuous. I don't blame this on Buddhism-indeed, the Thai have a keen sense of personal responsibility. However, when you get away from the personal aspect, the Thai do not have a high degree of social or institutional responsibility. This is now changing, but partially because of embarrassment, rather than out of a deep sense of moral concern. I was always struck by the very small number of Thai who, at great personal cost, had thrown themselves into various social programs. My own view is that the Thai are often belabored and denigrated in societal terms. The Thai certainly have their share of human frailties, but I never thought that they were more corrupt than elsewhere at the personal level.

Q: This is Side A of Tape 9 of the interview with Ambassador Dan 0'Donohue. Dan, not to belabor this "sex" issue, but I find it interesting, as I am fishing in troubled waters. From my experience and your experience in South Korea, we know that the South Koreans used bribery and sex to corrupt Congressmen and others. Did you have problems with official visitors from American Government agencies of one kind or another, when they came to Thailand? Was this a problem?

O'DONOHUE: No. First of all, the relationship is a very different one. The Thai-American relationship is a very good one, and both the Thai and the Americans have benefited from it. Regarding Congress, there have been Thai aid programs, but they have been relatively small and non-controversial. There never were PL480 rice programs, which were the genesis of the "Koreagate" scandals in South Korea. Thai Governments have never focused on Congress in any meaningful sense until recently. Regarding the Executive Branch of the US Government, there undoubtedly were people who became entangled sexually in Thailand. Corruption certainly exists in Thai society. However, it hasn't really shown up as a serious problem in our governmental relations.

Q: It's not pointed toward...

O'DONOHUE: The governmental relationship was not an intensely "dependent" one, as was the case in South Korea. The Thai just didn't have the same experience. So I think that when we had visitors coming to Thailand, the whole range of social activities including sex were available to them, but it was a much more personal thing. Corruption was far more related to businessmen and business contacts.

Remember, even with Congressmen, while we had a lot of them visiting Thailand, they usually came on weekends, as part of a trip to other places. Outside of narcotics issues, and then Congressman Steve Solarz and a few others who were interested in Cambodia, Congressional visits to Thailand were an interlude and generally did not involve a lot of serious business to be handled. I myself always thought that these visits were helpful. I never understood why Foreign Service people railed against Congressional visits. I felt that, whatever the problems they might pose, in general Congressional visitors formed a high opinion of the State Department and of the Foreign Service as a result of such visits. I can't see why people would dismiss Congressional visits with these silly criticisms. I've always taken Congressional visits very seriously. However, in doing this I also had keenly in mind that there were certain things that made up a Congressional visit. By the way, before the visits occurred, I always sat down and went over each visit with the "Control Officers" and others involved in them to make sure that I was satisfied that we had all of the necessary arrangements in hand.

One aspect of these Congressional visits was a briefing by the Ambassador. This was essential to the Committee's showing that they had met their purpose. I also realized that these visitors were in Bangkok for a variety of reasons, including a visit to Bangkok as a city. My view was that what we should do was to measure the program against their interests, rather than our interests. I used to offer to come down to their hotel and brief them there. I'm not talking about all Congressional visits. However, this offer made things easier and made the Embassy's reception of them that much more appreciated. I always told the my officers, "Remember, we're standing between them and Bangkok. In many cases they will have their own agenda items. Our briefing should be concise and to the point. Nobody should ramble on. We can let the questions and answers determine the direction in which the briefing goes."

Now, when I give lectures to my staff on "terseness" in briefings, which I did frequently, there would be a certain, glazed look on their faces. Their view was that the person who rambled on was ME! I can remember one Congressional delegation that was going to Vietnam. It was headed by Congressman Mickey Rivers, who later died in an air crash.

Q: In Ethiopia, wasn't it?

O'DONOHUE: Yes. Anyhow, they were going to Vietnam. First of all, we arranged for the meeting with them. As I always did, I offered to give the briefing at their hotel, and they were delighted with that. They had some interest in Vietnam and no particular interest in Thailand. So even with my own strictures in mind, after about 15 minutes I could see that the eyes of this Congressional group were somewhat "glazed." So I quickly "wrapped up" the briefing. Congressman Rivers was delighted. He was a wonderful man. He appreciated that we weren't going to take up a lot of their time. He also felt "honor bound" to ask two or three questions-solely for the record.

Now there were other Congressional visitors, like Steve Solarz, who would come out, intending to discuss Cambodia or Burma. He would be very serious and intense-altogether different. Congressman Bill Richardson [Democrat, New Mexico] also used Solarz's method, although he was a very different kind of personality. Again, he would be quite serious. Then, when Congressman Charley Rangel [Democrat, New York] came out to discuss narcotics matters, he had a mixture of interests. Rangel is very typical of Congressional visitors. He had his own agenda, which focused on narcotics. But he was quite ready to pick up any agenda items that I had. Also, in the end, he was very careful that he didn't leave a whole lot of "broken crockery" for the Embassy to pick up.

This was true of most Congressional visitors. We understood what their purposes were. Consequently, they were more than ready to follow my lead. For instance, if we had an intellectual property rights issue, the Congressional delegation was interested, but it wasn't exactly their "bag." I would just bring up with the head of the delegation the fact that this or that issue was something that we were pressing. We wouldn't like to have a Congressional delegation come through Bangkok and not "highlight" it for us. I would say, "Could you just bring this matter up with the Thai officials whom you might meet?" And they would do it. They would say that this was a serious matter and that Ambassador O'Donohue would explain it further.

Among Congressional delegations that traveled a lot, such as groups led by Congressman Charley Rangel and others, there was a sense that, no matter how critical they might be, they wouldn't leave a lot of broken crockery for the Embassy to pick up. They wouldn't leave damaged relationships with the Thai. Overall, I had a fair amount of respect for the leadership of these Congressional delegations. My own view was that, instead of carping about having them on weekends, which often happened, we benefited significantly as an institution from the professionalism that we showed and how things worked. In any case, if they were traveling to Vietnam or South Asia, where were they going to spend their weekend, if not in Bangkok? But when you came down to it, having Congressional visitors did not present immense burdens, because they did not want us to be hanging around them. I never hung around them. They were in Bangkok, after all. We had some Foreign Service National employees who arranged things for them, told them where they could shop, and all of that.

The Thai Government was a gracious host for these Congressional visitors. However, it never handled them as the South Koreans did. There wasn't that intensity in Bangkok that there had been in Seoul. The Thai didn't have an "aggressive agenda" of their own which they were pressing. I don't recall that there were any economic issues that Congress was particularly concerned about. There were some economic issues that Congress acted on and which affected the Thai, like rice and things like that. However, that just wasn't the way they did business.

Q: Did you have any Presidential visits?

O'DONOHUE: When I was in Bangkok, no-both when I was there as DCM and later on as Ambassador. While I was there as Ambassador, there was one visit by Prime Minister Chatchai to Washington, and Vice President Quayle visited Thailand.

Q: How did that visit go?

O'DONOHUE: It went pretty well. It accomplished all that the Thai wanted. President Bush was charming, and we accomplished all that we wanted. Prime Minister Chatchai simply wanted to make the visit for the record. It was a measure of the fact that Thailand had sufficient importance that we were able to "sell" this visit to the White House. However, it didn't have a high, substantive content. Neither side had a whole lot that it wanted to press, consequently issues were touched on but not pressed.

Q: Well, Dan, why don't we turn to narcotics?

O'DONOHUE: Narcotics in Southeast Asia is an ongoing, major issue. I had seen this issue both as the Deputy Assistant Secretary, as the Ambassador to Burma, where most of the opium poppy fields were, and twice in Thailand, where the Thai-Burma border areas was the major point of transit for narcotics. There were problems of trafficking. Depending on where the pressures were coming from, the refining "laboratories" were on the Thai side and then they would be pushed into Burma.

Narcotics in Southeast Asia is essentially controlled by Chinese. They are either Sino-Burmese, Sino-Thai, from Hong Kong, or wherever. Starting in the mid 1970's, narcotics caused significant frictions and criticism of Thailand. Narcotics has been a continuing threat to a healthy Thai-American relationship. We had a large DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency] office in the Mission in Bangkok. The CIA devoted significant resources to this problem. We had significant programs on the State Department side in INL.

There was an almost cyclical situation. Things never changed dramatically, but typically we ranged from having a relatively benign or positive view of cooperative efforts with the Thai, to taking a negative view of Thai efforts. The underlying situation didn't change much.

Essentially, the narcotics problems in Thailand were the same as those in many of the countries in Southeast Asia. Corruption is a significant part of the narcotics problem. Among Thai businessmen corruption is regarded as a fairly benign "tax" on what is essentially a free enterprise system. They're going to make money, anyhow. Nonetheless, corruption is already present in Thai society. Then there are these borders which were quite porous. During the time that I was in Thailand, the Burmese didn't really control their side of the Thai-Burmese border area. Various insurgent, or pseudo-insurgent, trafficking groups were, in fact, in control of the border area. There were longstanding relationships across the border. There was a steady flow of narcotics into Thailand. The "precursor" chemicals and other products essential to refinement of opium into morphine and heroin were going up in the other direction, into Burma.

The narcotics financial and distribution network, to a great degree, was impenetrable. Ultimately, the narcotics traffic was controlled by the Chinese. The flow of narcotics into Thailand and out of Burma, which is intrinsically linked with Thailand, presents massive problems.

Within the Thai establishment, those who dealt directly with narcotics matters for almost the whole period that I was there, were personally impressive. At one point in time, going into the Thai narcotics police as a commissioned officer was a perfectly acceptable choice for the well-born in Thai society. The man who dominated Thai narcotics control activity [Police General Pow Sarasin] was, as I said earlier, the second son of one of the wealthiest families in Thailand. They paid the most taxes which, again, is a measure of the family's integrity. He placed around him other well-born Thai persons. This was about the only way that they could not be corrupted. The Thai Police as a whole were utterly corrupt. However, the top Thai narcotics police officers were not. This meant that our narcotics people could work with them.

So the DEA had good working relations, at the operational level, with the senior Thai narcotics police leaders. DEA officers were allowed to operate reasonably freely. The Thai didn't let DEA officers "break in doors," or things like that. However, DEA officers could collect intelligence and went along on raids with Thai narcotics police. They coordinated with the Thai narcotics officials. So, as part of the general Thai, "laissez faire" approach to life, the DEA office in the Embassy was allowed a fair amount of freedom. They could work together pretty well on individual cases, including serious ones. Indeed, the Thai were particularly cooperative in getting big narcotics traffickers pushed up out of the country. The Thai liked nothing better than to cooperate in an effort to arrest a trafficker somewhere else-such as Hong Kong. At that level there was a reasonable amount of cooperation.

We battled long and hard on one aspect or another of the narcotics traffic. One of my main efforts was getting the Thai to pass "money laundering laws." This was moving toward completion when I left.

Q: Could you explain what "money laundering" is?

O'DONOHUE: The object is to secure the passage of banking and other legislation so that you can trace money. We labored long and hard in this area. We also pressed very hard to encourage Thai-Burmese cooperation, which had a very checkered and essentially unsuccessful history. The Thai-Burmese relationships have changed now.

From the United States point of view we put a significant amount of resources behind the effort to discourage the narcotics traffic. Thailand was one of the major focuses for our activities in this respect.

My own view is that narcotics is an area where you always describe programs as "successful" but the problem gets worse. However, I think that in Thailand, in a narrow sense, the situation has probably gotten slightly better, because the narcotics traffickers have Cambodia available for their activities. Cambodia has a much more "porous" system for controlling the flow of narcotics. Nonetheless, narcotics was a continuing, abrasive issue in Thai- American relations. It was an excellent example of balancing what you want with what is achievable and, secondly, doing this in the context of a whole variety of other priority issues.

Various charges have been made that we have "sacrificed" narcotics control for other political objectives. I never felt that this was the case. We pressed the Thai as hard as we realistically could. However, the realities of the situation were such that there was no simple answer. Indeed, what I found after 10 years of looking at this issue is that there is no single answer. I remember that once we thought that the answer was to cut out the refineries. Then it turned out that the narcotics refineries were easily replaceable investments. When we were able to "hit" these big refineries, all the narcotics traffickers did was to set up more, small refineries. While you can say that this causes an increase in the cost of business to the narcotics traffickers, a refinery that consists of a few pots and pans and some Chinese "chemists" is not a big expense.

When I left Thailand, I felt that the programs we had implemented had had some success. However, we were left with the reality that we had had little effect on the money flow in narcotics trafficking and on the areas involved in the production of heroin. Many of these areas are not under government control, particularly in Burma. Narcotics trafficking is an enduring problem which you work at all the time, but there was no sense or prospect of finding a single "key" to success. If we did succeed for a time, we had to keep in mind that the traffickers had already begun to adjust to handling narcotics production and distribution in a different way.

While I was in Thailand, and very publicly later on, we had one major problem. One of the major Thai political figures from northern Thailand, who had a fair number of ties to the United States-he had attended the University of Kentucky-was certainly part of a group viewed as politically corrupt. He was not known as a narcotics trafficker. There were reliable reports that, behind the scenes, he had been engaged in narcotics dealings. So we had a problem when he became Minister of Agriculture. At first we had been able to "block" him from entering the cabinet, but then the Thai Prime Minister had to include him, for factional reasons.

Subsequently, unbeknownst to us, he was put on the visa "Lookout List" in Washington. This had been done in a very routine way. So, out of the blue a short time before I left Thailand, he came in to get his visa transferred from his old passport to a new passport. We had originally checked with the DEA representative and had found that, while there were these reports of corruption, which we took seriously, then didn't oppose the visa. However, because of the look out list, we put the matter up to Washington, and the Department refused to issue the visa. So we had a very quiet, intense period in which I had to explain this matter to the person concerned. Of course, he denied the accuracy of the reports. We reported his denial, but that was that. He was rejected for a visa, but this was done quietly and without publicity.

Months later, the coup group was determined to succeed the interim government of outstanding technocrats when elections were held. They formed an alliance with this man and were going to make him Prime Minister. At this point his enemies leaked our visa refusal and the Embassy "went public" confirming it. In effect, the military had to withdraw his name from appointment as Prime Minister, because the US Embassy wasn't going to give him a visa because of his narcotics connections. This episode was one of the considerations which led to the unraveling of the coup group. When this man didn't become Prime Minister, the coup group leader put himself forward. Then followed public disorders and ouster of the coup leaders.

This case is still current. The man is still around and has protested that he is innocent of the charges made. The TV program, "60 Minutes" considered running a segment on it. There was a whole series of news stories on this subject. A former CIA analyst claimed publicly that the source of the negative reports on the politician had supplied false information. By this time I was out of it, so I'm only giving a second hand account. Apparently, in fact, one of the sources of the negative report had provided false information, but the various US Government agencies all maintained that there was still sufficient, credible reporting to bar him from obtaining a US visa.

In that sense we had had a very public identification of one politician as "corrupt." There were two or three others who were notoriously connected with corruption. They have also been barred.

Q: Was there any "pressure" within the Embassy, with some people saying that we should not refuse the visa to these persons because we have "political fish to fry"?

O'DONOHUE: I don't know. It was after I left that the other politicians were put on the Lookout List. In this case our view was that, while the reporting was "serious," since we weren't prepared to discuss the sources of it-and he wasn't a narcotics trafficker-we raised the question whether it wouldn't be easier to let him have the visa. But that wasn't the Washington decision. This wasn't a particularly controversial matter. We made our views known, but the Department's answer was, "No." We did not challenge the substance of the reporting or try to put the matter in "political' terms. Rather, we thought that, since we can't explain our basis for refusing a visa, we might get more headaches than we want if we refused it.

This decision to withhold the visa was made when the man was out of office. We had no idea that he might be appointed Prime Minister. When this surfaced publicly, that was quite a different consideration. But all of that came after I had left Thailand.

Q: Let's turn to the refugee problem when you were in Thailand. Can you talk about that and what it involved?

O'DONOHUE: If you took 1977 as the point of departure, up to 1990 or 1991, Indochinese refugees were a major thread in United States policies in the region- -including Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The numbers of Indochinese refugees were large. In Thailand alone there were about 400,000 in 1988. When I was in Thailand as DCM in 1977, the refugee problem and the outflow of Vietnamese refugees was just beginning. We thought that the numbers then were large, but a year later the figure had increased tenfold. When I arrived in Thailand as Ambassador in 1988, I found a situation in which the Embassy was being castigated for its handling of a series of incidents in which the Thai authorities had "pushed off" boatloads of refugees.

Q: Could you explain what a "push off" is?

O'DONOHUE: The Thai would refuse to let the refugees land in Thailand. A ring of smugglers came into being-something like an "underground railway-which moved refugees from Vietnam to Cambodia. Then they would take a short boat ride and end up in Thailand. The Thai, who were embarrassed to find this out, started reacting in a very rough way.

The Embassy at first was castigated by the NGO's [Non Governmental Organizations], including mainly those which were under contract either with the US Government or with United Nations entities to provide services to the refugees. These services might include food, medicine, or assistance in case processing. There was a whole variety of services which these NGO's were providing. They were critical of the Embassy for its alleged "indifference," and a really ugly situation had developed.

The NGO' s were attacking the Embassy. One, very senior official of an NGO acted in a very cavalier manner. When I reviewed the matter, it did seem that the refugees suffered from relative indifference for a brief period of time initially. The reason for the initial Embassy behavior was "hypercaution" in handling this matter. Consequently some of the NGO's were really "blasting" the Embassy for its handling of the refugees even though the Embassy was, by the time I got there, doing a good job.

These refugees were mainly Vietnamese. Later, there was a second theme in the charges of Embassy indifference. There was criticism for the way in which the Embassy, and INS specifically, handled Cambodian refugees who, by that point in time, were by far the largest component in the refugee population. I've forgotten the statistics on the matter. Let's say that, by that time, there were perhaps 300-400,000 refugees in Thailand. There were, perhaps, 300,000 Khmer or Cambodian refugees. At one point in the screening process, in the view of the NGO's, the INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service] representatives on duty at the Embassy had "screened out" too many refugees-charging them with involvement with the Khmer Rouge. The essential point was that the Embassy was very "embattled" on the subject of the way it had handled the refugees.

When I arrived in Thailand, my first order of business was to sit down and find out where in the hell we were on this matter and how to get this matter under control. The first thing I found was that, while the Embassy probably deserved some criticism at the very beginning for not having reacted promptly to the reports coming in about "push off' SI' and maltreatment, the Embassy had responded. The criticism by the NGO's was exaggerated. Secondly, we had some very real problems with the Thai regarding Vietnamese refugees-in this case with the behavior of the Thai military-which had to be addressed. There were major problems with the Thai handling of the Cambodian refugees which also had to be addressed.

The next consideration was that the relationship between the Embassy and the NGO's was "bizarre." In one case there was a briefing of some Congressional staffers, during which NGO representatives started using abusive language in castigating Embassy officers sitting there.

There were a couple of considerations. First, I was blessed with a good reputation on refugee matters. Senator Hatfield [Republican, Oregon] and others looked on me in a very positive vein in this connection. So, from their perspective, I was going to go out to Thailand and would solve the problem. In that sense, part of the problem had dissipated simply by my appearance on the scene. Secondly, I paid a lot of attention to the refugee problem at several levels. In the first place, I paid serious attention to how we could handle these problems. They had been festering too long. Then, publicly, we needed to reply to the criticisms that we paid no attention to the refugees and the rest of it. Thirdly, we needed to deal with the relationships with the NGO's, which were in poor shape.

Most importantly, I set in motion clear efforts to deal with the issues affecting the refugees. There was the long term problem of what we could do with the Cambodian refugees who had been "screened out" of going to the United States. Secondly, what could we do to show that we were concerned in dealing with this whole question-especially the "push offs." The next problem really dealt with what the Embassy had done in the past. Then we needed to show that the Embassy placed a high priority on resolving the refugee problem. Publicly, I was very much engaged in refugee issues. This eased the problems everywhere.

I also made the point that American Government officials have to accept criticism. What they don't have to accept is verbal and personal abuse and that I didn't want Embassy officers sitting there and taking personal abuse. In the case of the particular incident I previously referred to, I made it clear that if this kind of thing happened again, I would deal with the person who behaved in this abusive way. Somehow or another, this never happened again, whether it got back to the individual concerned or for whatever reason. A much more professional relationship developed.

Q: When you say, "handle the problem, "I'm just thinking of the 400,000 or so refugees you mentioned...

O'DONOHUE: What we're talking about is the situation earlier on. It's hard to imagine, but this problem has almost completely disappeared now. The Cambodians are back in their own country. We were talking about the apparently unending problem which the Thai faced then, regarding the acceptance of Vietnamese refugees. The Thai view was that no Vietnamese would be permitted to stay. By the way, I think that our handling of the Vietnamese refugee issue is one of the most creditable chapters in American refugee history. From the Thai point of view, it was time to end this problem. As a general matter, the Thai considered that no Indochinese refugees should remain in Thailand. Now, we had gotten the numbers of refugees in Thailand down and were implementing programs to reduce the numbers of refugees in Thai camps. Our problem was that, in the end, there was always going to be a residual group. We just couldn't help that.

Nonetheless, in this case the problem was to persuade the Thai to resume accepting Vietnamese "boat people" and letting them back into the camps, where they could be processed. This was the problem. We needed to have done with this whole business of "push offs" and maltreatment of the refugees. As I said, in the real world the Thai military really ran refugee policy.

As far as Cambodian refugees were concerned, the problems were twofold. In the first place, we had problems with the Thai which I have mentioned. Secondly, we had significant, internal divisions within the US community. This involved the American NGO's working with the Cambodian refugees. These NGO's played a major role back in Washington, as well as in Thailand. The problem there was coming to grips with how the Cambodian refugees could undergo another, "pre-screening" process. The view of the INS people was that we had screened them once, it was done seriously, they were turned down for entry into the US, and that was that. The NGO's who, by the way, all worked for the US Government under contract, were critical of this process, but, then INS believed they were prepared to let everybody into the US, whether they were Khmer Rouge or not. The view of the NGO group was that the interviews conducted by the INS were not in sufficient depth; there was misinformation provided on the matter; and the whole situation had been badly handled. For this the NGO's blamed the INS people.

The INS people weren't about to admit that. The NGO people, from the point of view of the INS, were just a bunch of "wild men" who wanted to let everybody into the US The view of the Thai military was that they didn't mind anybody leaving Thailand. However, they had gone through this screening process once and they were tired of all of the upheavals and trouble this had caused them. So we had a triple-faceted problem, in which the Thai were the easiest to handle.

We approached the problem in the sense of, "How would you want to do it?" The Thai expressed perfectly reasonable conditions. It turned out that we were trying to force the Thai to handle the screening the way that we wanted to do something, rather than letting them explain their views. So they were not a problem once the Thai explained their conditions.

I was blessed with the people in the INS Bangkok office. The INS Regional Director and I talked about this issue. He said, "Look, if your approach is going to be that we made a lot of mistakes in handling the 8-9,000 refugees whom we screened, the answer is that we're not going to get anywhere. That's not the way it works." However, he said, "If you approach it from the point of view that there's new evidence to be considered, that's a different issue." They do reopen cases, after all. He said, "New evidence, in my view, is provided if a responsible, State Department officer reviews the file and comes to a different conclusion. That would be a basis for reopening the case. However, we won't accept having a contract NGO officer come to that conclusion." So that is what we did. It actually turned out to be a kind of "love fest." The NGO's found this procedure perfectly acceptable. We brought out some Khmer-speaking, State Department officers to review the files. They went through them. I can't remember how many files they reviewed. However, a year later, this most exacerbating Cambodian refugee problem had largely been resolved-not that we still didn't have problems of one sort or another. This outcome was in good part due to the Thai and in good part to this INS Regional Director, who found a way to handle these cases which was perfectly acceptable.

From that point on, refugees as an abrasive, highly public issue lessened. However, refugee problems remained very significant. The problems that we encountered with the Cambodian refugees were more manageable. This was because the large Cambodian refugee presence was a function of the hostilities in Cambodia. This meant that they were always going to be part of the settlement of the war. Once a settlement was reached, they would return to Cambodia.

By the time I left Thailand, we were so close to a settlement in Cambodia that planning for the return of the refugees was proceeding steadily. There were several issues involved in this, but they fell more into the hands of my successor. We also went through another process of "shrinking" the numbers of Vietnamese refugees. So these issues, were real enough, but they were highly "operational." We always had a situation where there was this problem or that problem.

We also ran into problems with the Hmong refugees.

Q: These were tribal groups from Laos.

O'DONOHUE: They still had very strong ties to a leadership that was in the US and, to a degree, that still controlled the Hmong refugee camps in Thailand. The problem there was coming to some resolution, which involved getting the ones who could do so to leave. They were being kept in Thailand as a body. So that became a problem. Operationally, in terms of Embassy activities, the refugee issues were always very significant. However, the immense, emotional aspects which the refugees had generated had been eased to a significant degree.

The other, major program under the Office of Refugees was the Orderly Departure Program [ODP] from South Vietnam, This was, in effect, an effort to keep people in Vietnam from taking boats to Thailand and instead processing them in place in Vietnam. This program expanded immensely and, indeed, became the basic vehicle...

Q: Could you explain what it was?

O'DONOHUE: By the time I left Thailand, this program really was analogous to a relatively normal visa activity. By that time so many Vietnamese refugees living in the United States had become American citizens that many of the people applying for entry had their own visa status. The ODP program had started as an effort to process applicants to give them, in effect, an escape without the dangerous boat journey. It was intended to give them refuge, and later "immigrant status" in Vietnam, so that they wouldn't risk their lives on the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand.

In the beginning, it was a program fraught with political problems with the Vietnamese authorities. At one point they suspended it. By the time I arrived in Thailand as Ambassador in 1988, we were moving from a modest to a really expanded program. This meant that we would send Foreign Service Officers and contract NGO [Non Governmental Organization] personnel based in Bangkok to Saigon on a TDY [Temporary Duty] basis, where they would process these cases. They would conduct interviews in Saigon and process the people, arrange their departures, and the rest of it. So, without a permanent, ongoing presence in Saigon, we shifted this tremendous workload to Saigon, although it was being supported out of Thailand, with Bangkok as the base.

During my period as Ambassador to Thailand the officers running the ODP program deserved immense credit for their ability to expand and run a program which was surprisingly free of difficulties. Any problems would have been on the side of the Vietnamese government. There were some difficulties, but our officers managed the program very well. In effect, this program became the major vehicle for Vietnamese leaving Vietnam. The problems in the other areas with the Vietnamese related to the "residue"-that is, those who were in Thailand and other areas in Southeast Asia already and what was to be done with them. They had already gone through program after program and still had not been accepted for resettlement elsewhere. So they constituted a "residue" of the refugees.

For the Thai the bottom line was that they considered the Vietnamese residual presence had to be "zero." With the Cambodian refugees, the problem was related to...

Q: It was a "holding action."

O'DONOHUE: Well, these refugee camps were amazing. They varied, but at Aranyaprathet, on the Thai-Cambodian border East of Bangkok, the camp had anywhere from 140,000 to 180,000 Cambodian refugees, depending on when you did your count.

In the beginning the camps for the Lao refugees had been very large. Indeed, at one point when I was in Thailand as DCM in 1977-78, some four- fifths of the Laos medical profession were in these camps near Nong Khai, in northeastern Thailand. Those groups, who were composed of ethnic Hmong, and "lowland Lao," had already left. There was a different dynamic there in 1988-91. These camps for Lao Hmong refugees were linked to the Thai military's policy toward Laos.

Q: This is Side B of Tape 9 of the interview with Ambassador Dan 0'Donohue.

O'DONOHUE: There weren't the same pressures in terms of closing out these camps for Lao refugees. The Vietnamese were numerically the smallest number among the refugees in these camps, but the Thai military were always the most sensitive about what to do with them any time there was an inflow of Vietnamese refugees.

What I described was the beginning and the end of the refugee flow. However, during the period when I was either Deputy Assistant Secretary for Southeast Asian Affairs or not connected directly with the refugee problem, a variety of really immense issues came up. For instance, there was "piracy." This involved mainly Thai fishermen attacking the refugees on the South China Sea or in the Gulf of Thailand. At best, these pirates stole what the refugees had. At worst, they engaged in raping and killing.

This was an issue where the United States took the lead in getting other countries to help, through a combination of pressures, programs, and the rest. I can't say that we ended this problem, but, effectively, we reduced what had been a very large problem to a relatively small one. Granted, the numbers of refugees were also dropping significantly. This also was a result of the Orderly Departure Program. All of these things helped.

In this aspect, as in others related to the refugee program, I think that the United States deserves immense credit. I was involved in a support role in Washington during that period but I wouldn't take any credit for it. It was others who handled this effort.

Q: Dan, I would like to make an historical note for anyone reading this segment. When I came into the Foreign Service in 1955, my first job was as what was called a Refugee Relief Officer in Germany. There we were dealing with the "residue" of refugees who had been caught up in World War II. They had previously been "screened" and more or less found not eligible for visas under the Displaced Persons Act. Also, we were getting new refugees coming into West Germany from the Cold War-from the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe.

We were handling the second "go around" of people, or the "residue" of refugees. The Federal German Government said, "This is fine, but get them out of Germany." So this is one of the ways that the United States has been populated and, on the whole, has come out ahead.

O'DONOHUE: I was under that same program in Genoa, Italy. My entering group came into the Foreign Service in 1957. The Department of State was given the money to send us out under the Refugee Act. We all had to go, I think, either to Greece, Germany, or Italy. Now, in the course of time we issued immigrant visas to a trickle of refugees coming down to Italy. However, this allowed me to have my period of, what was it, 18 months in Italy.

Q: Many of us during this time in the history of the Foreign Service served at various posts under the Refugee Relief Program. I even had some Vietnamese "boat people" in South Korea when I was there. They had been picked up at sea by a South Korean ship. Well, would you like to stop at this point? The next time around we'll want to talk about the Thai economy; commercial, business, and intellectual rights; and also about AIDS. We have talked about this before, but perhaps we could talk about it a bit more. Then we can talk about the Thai coup d'etat. There may be other subjects we will want to discuss.

O'DONOHUE: That's fine.

Q: Today is November 29, 1996. Dan, we were talking about the time during which you were Ambassador to Thailand. We might begin by talking about the economy of Thailand.

O'DONOHUE: During the time I was in Thailand as Ambassador [1988-1991], the country was in the midst of a tremendous, economic "take-off" that started in the mid 1980's. Then I arrived in Bangkok as Ambassador in 1988.

Actually, Thailand had faced a very difficult economic situation during the period 1983-1985. Thailand surmounted this and then, under Prime Minister Prem, the Thai "technocrats," in effect, created the framework within which the economy is now moving. Now, in Thailand the business community is essentially Sino-Thai. They are people who, in most respects, are culturally Thai, but their grandfathers or great-grandfathers were Chinese small businessmen. Their families became the major business families in the country. There also were Chinese who came to Thailand after World War II and even later. Their children were essentially absorbed into Thailand, but these people were essentially Chinese.

So in the business community there was this entrepreneurial class that, in some ways, you found throughout Southeast Asia. In Thailand this community differed in the sense that, fairly quickly, these families became part of Thai society, rather than remaining a very distinct and recognizable element in the country. The Chinese community in Indonesia, for example, suffered to some extent from this circumstance.

The thrust of the economic policies brought in by the "technocrats" was aimed at the creation of a less corrupt and less regulated atmosphere. On the side of regulations, they largely succeeded. Corruption is an issue which is always caught up with regulations. Nonetheless, when you look at Thailand, what you had was a free market society in which corruption, and regulations with attendant corruption, were viewed by most businessmen as costs of doing business, in what was otherwise a rather untrammeled free market economy.

When I arrived in Thailand [in 1988], the country was in the midst of a period of rapid, economic growth, and this situation continued throughout my three years in Thailand as Ambassador. Thailand was considered one of the "New Asian Tigers," following after South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore. This rapid economic growth was spurred by inflows of capital from Japan and Taiwan. By the time I arrived there [in 1988], there were the beginnings of very significant, new American investment.

In Thailand there were several longtime American companies. For instance, ESSO Oil Company arrived in Thailand early in the 20th century. ESSO competed with Shell Oil Company as the two major petroleum product retailers. They both had refineries and gasoline stations. Then there were smaller companies, Shell which had very long connections with Thailand. A group of American entrepreneurs came to Thailand after World War II who fell in love with Thailand. The most famous one, who passed from the scene in 1987(?), was Jim Thompson. He had served in OSS [Office of Strategic Services], had fallen in love with Thailand, and revitalized the Thai silk industry. There were others like that.

The Thai were fairly relaxed about these foreigners working in Thailand. One of the largest Thai law firms was established by an American. The Thai were fairly relaxed about their participation in elements of the economy, which was not the case in other countries, for instance, Korea. So you had American groups in the services sector. Then you had the American companies, like "3M" [Minnesota Mining and Minerals Company], which came to Thailand in the 1960's. There was an American business presence in the energy sector, including oil and natural gas, which was major. In the 1970's an American company had obtained licenses to explore for offshore natural gas. This was a major find. Some 80% of the country's energy comes from this offshore field. There was a small French involvement in this, but it is essentially an American company, UNOCAL.

By the time I arrived in Thailand in 1988, there was a significant American business community established in the country. However, when you talk about the tremendous, economic growth in Thailand during the 1980's, this was initially spurred by the Japanese, and then East Asian more generally, including China, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong. These East Asian investments were usually made in conjunction with these Sino-Thai families I mentioned previously.

The new American investments in Thailand had begun previously but increased steadily during the time I was Ambassador there. We also had the growth of an American airline presence, which led to problems second to intellectual property rights as a major issue in Thai-American economic relations. We can talk about both of these matters. The American airline companies, including Northwest Airlines, were booming in East Asia, essentially based on intra-regional passengers. Within the East Asian region, they were carrying a disproportionate share of the passenger traffic from, let's say, Tokyo to Bangkok. This was essentially because the Asian-based airlines were largely or significantly owned by the respective, national governments and charged higher prices for their tickets. The American airlines were just selling cheaper tickets. There was a tremendous growth of flights by American airlines, in and out of Bangkok, essentially based on Japan travel. This was an increasingly acrimonious area in which we had to negotiate.

So the commercial aspects of my job as Ambassador, as well as the other work of the Embassy, were significant.

Q: You may want to develop this theme, but I would like to ask a question first. You mentioned the "technocrats" moving into the Thai government. Where did these "technocrats" come from? Where were they trained, for the most part?

O'DONOHUE: They were mostly trained in the US However, this was a somewhat different phenomenon from the other country which I knew, South Korea, in that there never was a "tabula rasa" that you had in South Korea. South Korea was a country which was devastated by war. Before that, it had been subjugated by the Japanese. There was a very small, entrepreneurial class. Only a few South Koreans had been able to go beyond the lower ranks of government. In fact, none of them reached the highest levels of government. In a lasting sense, advanced technical training was an American contribution which South Korea could not have dispensed with. In the long term it was the training by AID of a whole class of Korean "technocrats" who played a very special and identifiable role.

In Thailand there was nothing like that. Here was a country which had avoided colonialism and the ravages of World War II. It was a rather stable society, although its politics, as I think I mentioned before, were notably unstable. When you look at Thai society now, it has changed somewhat. However, previously you could identify the military, who saw themselves as the ultimate arbiters of power, and the civil servants, who played a distinct and dominating, guarding role. The "technocrats" were one group of civil servants and not something unique. The senior civil servants in the various ministries held immense power. In traditional Thai society you didn't have politicians playing a key role in policy formulation. The emphasis of the Thai military's interest was simply on their place in society. They were more or less "content" to let the civil servants run the society as long as the military exercised ultimate political power and preserved its economic perquisites.

The civil servants had a major large role in the ongoing management of public affairs. So the "technocrats" largely dealt with economic matters, but their role was not a unique phenomenon. Also, most of the "technocrats" were well born and most of them were from Sino-Thai families, if you look at their origins closely. They would as likely have come out of their own universities and then have gone overseas for graduate studies as they would have gone overseas as undergraduates. However, it was really a case of these people choosing the civil service as a career field, rather than the case of South Korea, where we were sending thousands of South Koreans to the United States to study. In a sense, we created the "technocratic" class in South Korea. In the case of Thailand, United States programs played a useful, subsidiary role, but US programs were not the principal reason why these "technocrats" emerged in Thailand.

For their own part, though, the Thai "technocrats" always had a very fond appreciation for their relationships with AID [Agency for International Development] In Thailand AID never had the crucial role that it had had in South Korea. Our AID programs were adjuncts to our Southeast Asian security interests. Nonetheless, we had rather "largish" AID programs in Thailand in the 1950's and '60's. We sent large numbers of Thai to the United States for training. After World War II, the Thai educated classes went to the United States, rather than to Europe.

When I was in Thailand, the AID program was progressively shrinking. However, the Thai were always comfortable with, and, indeed, welcomed, an AID presence. United States' influence on technocrats was quite disproportionate to the size of our economic assistance programs. By this time, the Japanese were pouring large sums of money into Thailand as part of a general effort to advance Japanese economic interests. By comparison, our assistance programs were relatively trivial. Certainly, the most important ones were in the military field, related to the Thai border, the refugee program, and things like that. At that time our aid programs were not very large. The Thai appreciated AID's contributions. However, as they were Thai, they realistically didn't see AID as having "remade" their country, but regarded the AID programs as having been a very useful contribution to the country's modernization.

Q As Ambassador, what were your prime, commercial challenges?

O'DONOHUE: As Ambassador, the most pressing and difficult issues on my agenda were intellectual property rights and civil air problems, in the generic sense. We had the special problem of apples and "Alar". Do you remember "Alar," a pesticide sprayed on apples at one time in the US?

Q: Oh, yes.

O'DONOHUE: That was something on which the Thai moved fairly quickly to ban imports of apples which had been sprayed with Ajar.

Q: This started out where? In the State of Washington?

O'DONOHUE: It was used in the US generally but particularly involved apples shipped from the State of Washington. That was a very special problem.

Q: Would you mention that, and then we can get on to the other issues.

O'DONOHUE: In the United States one of the consumer or environmental groups came out, charging that Alar was a danger to public health.

Q: It was a pesticide.

O'DONOHUE: I think that it was mainly used in the State of Washington. This charge quickly resonated around the world. In this case Thai medical "technocrats" in the Ministry of Health moved very quickly to ban imports of US apples which had been sprayed with Alar.

We in the Embassy were trying to get some reason into this matter and get the Thai to lift the ban and develop some more systematic approach. Consequently, when I dealt with Minister of Health Chuan, who later became Prime Minister, this was an issue on which he had nothing to gain by listening to me. All he could do was get political "brickbats." In fact, he was eminently reasonable on this issue. We went through the matter. He listened and came to the conclusion that the Thai Government had acted hastily. In effect, he took a fair amount of "heat" when the Thai Government moved in a more systematic way and let things get back to normal.

Q: This whole problem, as I recall it, turned out not to be really based on any scientific evidence.

O'DONOHUE: No, the campaign against Alar really didn't have any scientific foundation. However, that came after all of the economic penalties had been exacted on the apple exporters. I think that the apple producers finally stopped using Alar. The point was that this was much ado about nothing environmentally, but the economic cost of the flap was significant.

Another area of difficulty which we had, and which was much more sensitive and has become more prominent, in retrospect-indeed, in the last few weeks-involved cigarettes. In the course of my three years as Ambassador to Thailand we dealt with the cigarette issue. There the United States stated position was that Thailand, like other countries, could take any decision that they wanted. They could bar the use of cigarettes. However, we insisted that the Thai could not have rules which barred the import of American cigarettes, while the Thai continued to produce their own. The Thai government, like many countries, had a monopoly on the production and sale of cigarettes and other tobacco products. The Thai objective seemed to be to keep American cigarettes out of the Thai market legally, because of the competitive, not the health, aspects.

In Thailand you can find American made cigarettes anywhere. There were very significant, illegal imports. This was an issue on which we had instructions from Washington to make representations. Over time the Thai accepted that they had to loosen the regulations on the import of American cigarettes. Like anything in Thailand, it was much more a matter of economics, than public interest.

When I was Ambassador to Thailand, I think that everyone who dealt with cigarettes found that it was an uncomfortable issue to handle. In the US Government I have yet to find anyone who admits that they support smoking. In a public sense, consciences were eased by the fact that we weren't endorsing cigarettes. You just stated what the US position was. Any restrictions would have to apply to all cigarettes.

After I left Thailand, our position became much more "aggressive." During my time in Thailand we were discussing various aspects of the legal importation of cigarettes. Apparently, from the latest reports that I have read, this question of aggressive, cigarette advertising has come much more to the fore.

An element in the cigarette controversy which has now appeared is that Thailand has begun to be seen as the "David" who stopped the American "Goliath." When I was there, this aspect didn't appear. Certainly, there were Thai who did not want to see the import of American cigarettes for health reasons. However, for most of the Thai that I was dealing with, those arguments were either amplified or put forward in a fashion which really related to the protection of their own market. As is the case in Europe, also, cigarette smoking by the population and especially among the "elite" is still more common than it is in the United States. They hadn't had almost the revulsion for cigarettes which we have in our society. So cigarettes were not as sensitive an issue in Thailand as in the United States, in the sense that many senior Thai officials smoked. Now, apparently, attitudes on this issue have been changing, and there is in Thailand a public health sensitivity and pressures against smoking, focusing on advertising. So the issue is not the same as when I was in Thailand. This is probably the most uncomfortable issue I had to deal with.

Q: Did you have "soul-baring" discussions within the Country Team on this issue? Were you accused of being "merchants of death"?

O'DONOHUE: No, at the time I was in Thailand as Ambassador, cigarette smoking wasn't that sensitive a public issue. That is, it was not a broad-based, public concern. Secondly, the issue of cigarette smoking was one of several matters which I was dealing with. It was not the major issue. I was surprised to find that Thailand today has adopted the attitude it has. When I was dealing with this matter, I was essentially concerned with the Thai tobacco monopoly trying to protect its market. The monopoly was interested in selling Thai cigarettes-not opposed to the smoking of cigarettes, as such.

Q: Bob Duncan was Economic and Commercial Counselor. He is the only one of my friends who is a "chain smoker." He can't go more than 20 minutes without a cigarette.

O'DONOHUE: I would describe this issue as one of a variety of matters, all of which had a certain similarity. That is, we were trying to break into a "closed market." I think that any government official who does not himself smoke is uncomfortable in dealing with a matter like this. Smoking is bad for your health. Whether this rationalization of the matter is utterly correct or not, I would rather not deal with a question like this. However, this was a matter on which our stated policy allowed me at least to subdue my conscience. Our own position is that the Thai could have any restriction that they wanted, as long as they applied to everybody.

Q: May we move on to the intellectual properly issue?

O'DONOHUE: Thailand is actually a very open society. It is unlike South Korea, where the success of any business "outsiders" is often the prelude to pressures to take them over. Thailand is quite an open market. The two largest, gasoline distributors were ESSO and Shell. Caltex was smaller but was also to be found around the country. In addition, there were government-owned oil companies. If you went into the Thai department stores, you could find Gillette razor blades or other foreign goods. There were foreign made goods all over the place. On the whole, Thailand is an open market. Years ago, the Thai had even "grandfathered" as the largest, domestic insurance company, the AIG [American International Underwriters Insurance Group]. AIG had been in the Thai market for so long that it was given special status. You had American lawyers operating in Thailand.

In other words, Thailand was an open society, with generally open markets. However, there were some pitfalls, for instance, all sorts of regulations which usually could be surmounted. Nonetheless, there were certain areas in which there was either "piracy" or, in the case of pharmaceutical products, outright ignoring of patents justified because of lower prices. In fact, the two, most sensitive issues in terms of intellectual property rights were economically minor issues.

One of these issues was in the field of pharmaceuticals. There we had the most constant and aggressive pressures by American pharmaceutical companies to force the Thai to honor their patents. Regarding pharmaceuticals, we were resisted the hardest by the Thai, on the grounds that we were trying to increase the costs of medicines. We made incremental progress on pharmaceuticals, but the atmosphere was very, very bitter. In fact, in real dollar terms, this was a small problem. The initial estimates were that the American companies might be losing about $15 million per year. When they realized that their losses were so small, they somehow got it up to-I forget what the estimated loss figure was.

Q: Can you explain what you mean by "losing."

O'DONOHUE: They were calculating their losses by totaling the estimated sale of equivalent Thai pharmaceutical products.

Q: Were the Thai pharmaceutical manufacturers "pirating" these medicines for the Thai market, or were they selling them elsewhere?

O'DONOHUE: It was for the Thai market. And it was not a big loss to the American pharmaceutical manufacturers. The other area of high sensitivity was the pirating of tapes of music and other trade mark items. Thailand is a country where a lot of these companies which pirate tapes of music operate. In the case of the pharmaceuticals the company representatives were very aggressive and pressed very hard, because, in effect, they had very little to lose in Thailand. In other words, Thailand wasn't an important market.

There was a similar problem with video tapes. Frankly, Thailand was singled out by the American trade groups to make an example of it, in great part because it didn't pose much of a risk in retaliation.

The Thai deserve much of the blame for the constant abrasiveness of this issue of trade "piracy." At the beginning you could have had a non-acrimonious and reasonable settlement of the issue. However, the Thai engaged in such evasion and delay that it permanently "soured" the negotiating atmosphere. As a result, the American negotiators never, ever, trusted the Thai in these negotiations. They were prone to believe the worst of the Thai because, at the very beginning, the Thai had dragged their feet, had thrown up one obstacle after another, and had been so clearly reluctant to settle these issues. As time went on, and our pressures became much, much stronger, and the Thai started moving toward a solution, a double problem emerged. First, the American negotiators were "disenchanted" with the Thai and were suspicious of them. Secondly, NAFTA was emerging.

Q: NAFTA means the North American Free Trade Agreement.

O'DONOHUE: As we moved toward the end of this negotiation on pharmaceuticals, we were dealing with the government headed by Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun, which had entered office after the military coup. He and his cabinet weren't politicians and were ready to move on this issue. Because NAFTA was coming up, the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) was most interested in placating the major US pharmaceutical and trade mark associations. The USTR wasn't going to agree on anything in Thailand that didn't represent a clear "victory." No compromise was acceptable, from the point of view of the USTR. They could have accepted a compromise the year before. However, to get the support and acquiescence of the major pharmaceutical and trade organizations for NAFTA, the USTR wasn't about to appear to have "compromised" on the negotiation in Thailand.

At this point we were dealing with a Thai Minister of Commerce who appeared willing to agree on a compromise settlement, and the Thai went off to meetings to negotiate this issue. The signals we originally received from Washington indicated that we could work things out. Unfortunately, at the last minute, the signals changed in Washington, and it became clear that the USTR wanted "victory or nothing." So that was an embarrassment that cost me somewhat.

Q: What was your analysis of why the Thai, who are initially pretty forthcoming in coming up with a compromise, were initially unwilling to compromise and this intellectual property negotiation turned into such a mess?

O'DONOHUE: From the Thai point of view there was a combination of considerations. First, it was a sensitive, public issue-particularly the pharmaceuticals. Secondly, there was the practical matter that the owners of the Thai pharmaceutical companies were very well placed, politically. Thirdly, there was the attitude that we run into often in other countries, that Thailand "is such a small country. Why are you 'dumping' on us?" All of these considerations resulted in the Thai doing what they had done before. The Thai generally try to avoid formal agreement. Rather they try to find an accommodation. The Thai feel that an agreement commits you permanently. In the case of an accommodation, you can adjust to changing circumstances. So there was a combination of circumstances which resulted in their making a bad mistake in these negotiations.

If you look at overall American interests in Thailand and the amounts involved in this matter, this was almost a minor issue. However, due to a combination of factors, including, as I said, the American companies looking at Thailand and feeling that we should exercise leverage and make the Thai an example, these considerations had a disproportionate weight on the American side. On the Thai side, this issue was something which had high visibility. If they wanted to retreat, it was difficult. However, they did retreat, and we eventually got an agreement, but it was reached after I had left Thailand. Throughout the whole time that I was in Thailand, this was the most difficult, long term issue. The civil air issue was the second, most difficult issue.

Q: Well, let's talk about the civil air issue.

O'DONOHUE: As I said, over the years the American airline companies had been charging lower fares on intra-regional flights within East Asia. However, in effect, the East Asian airline companies had followed a different practice. I don't know whether "cartel" is too strong a word, but they had established what was almost a cartel. The fares they charged on intra-regional flights-that is, from Tokyo to Bangkok or Seoul were really quite high. When the American airlines came in to pick up passengers and travel onward within or from the East Asian area, they were picking up a major amount of business.

All of the East Asian airlines resented this situation for two reasons. First, the real and ostensible reason was that our agreements basically covered flying from the United States to East Asian countries and not picking up "disproportionately" large numbers of passengers for onward intra-regional travel. However, the real problem, of course, was that the American companies were breaking into an East Asian market where the local airlines had rather "cozy" arrangements. In Thailand the US carrier traffic growth was not based on Americans coming from the United States to Bangkok but involved picking up Japanese and others traveling to Bangkok. That was the basis of the problem. Royal Thai Airlines is a national airline. The Minister of Transportation sits on the Board of Directors. The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is an ex officio member of the Board of Directors. There are also Thai military representatives on the Board of Directors. After a long, "golden" period, Royal Thai Airlines was running into serious management problems at that time. So, on the part of Royal Thai Airlines and with the Ministry of Transportation there was an effort to limit the number of American airline flights into Bangkok, which the American airlines resisted. In economic terms all of this travel into Thailand was of benefit to the country, because the Thai got far more from the increased number of tourists coming to Thailand than Royal Thai Airlines might or might not have been losing.

Q: This is Side A of Tape 10 of the interview with Ambassador Dan O'Donohue. Did you try to make the argument that Thai tourism interests were more important than the problems of Royal Thai Airlines?

O'DONOHUE: This was an issue where you had a sense of "a pox on all of the parties concerned." We did have the strong argument that you just mentioned. However, the Thai Ministry of Transportation was very much "caught up" in the problems of Royal Thai Airlines. The Thai military had representatives on the Board of Directors, and so these special interests were playing their role. Secondly, of course, there were the other East Asian airlines and their governments quietly interested in the Thai standing up for their own interests.

From the US point of view we started out by refusing to negotiate seriously. Our view was that we had the rights. However, as we proceeded in these negotiations, it was an issue which on two occasions I thought that I had resolved. On both occasions the American airlines wound up pulling the rug out from under us. The American airlines went from being very defensive to becoming rather arrogant, as soon as they thought that they were winning.

I had gone to the Minister of Transportation, and we went over these issues at a private lunch. There was the economic aspect of this issue, which he accepted. He went back and began, in effect, undercutting his civil servants. I felt that we were making progress but the US side dragged its feet.

Earlier, a State Department officer headed a team which came out to Bangkok for this negotiation. The airline representatives came out with the US negotiating team but sat in another room while the negotiations went on. They were not part of the negotiating team but, in a sense, they had to approve whatever was being negotiated. The negotiations were held in Pattaya [beach resort 75 miles Southeast of Bangkok]. As I remember it, they outlined the three issues involved. I felt pretty good, because I felt that on all three we were in a good position. So after the negotiation, the US side came into the Embassy. It turned out that they had worked out these three issues. Then it turned out that another issue had been introduced by the American side, and those negotiations broke down again.

It was an ongoing, frustrating experience, as I said. You certainly couldn't give the Thai negotiators very high marks for doing anything but defending their national airline. On the American side it seemed that, no matter what, we were always running into a point where US airlines didn't want to concede this issue, because it might be a precedent in another negotiation or, after that was resolved, you would find that something else had come up. As I said, it seemed that with the American airlines it was a case that whenever they thought that we were "winning," they wanted more!

When I left Thailand [in 1991], we had come twice to a point where I thought that we had informally reached an agreement on what we wanted, only to find that, both times, the American airlines either wouldn't go along or wanted more, and we were back to the drawing board.

All in all, those were clearly the two most difficult issues I was concerned with in Thailand. The intellectual property rights issue had a visible, political dimension. It was not so much the amounts of money involved for the Thai. The issue was a very difficult one, politically. At the beginning the Thai handled the issue badly and paid the penalty for that throughout the negotiation.

The civil air negotiation was different, in that, when we were through with it, I think that the American airlines were right, in the sense that, by any standard, freedom to travel is better. What we were dealing with was the protection of another, national airline. There was an effort to maintain unduly high airline fares on the part of the East Asian airlines.

Q Dan, you were Ambassador to Thailand from when to when?

O'DONOHUE: From 1988 to 1991.

Q: Was there any concern on your part regarding the loss of jobs in the United States which went to Asia? Did that issue raise its head?

O'DONOHUE: Not really. There was some shifting of jobs, like AT&T opening up a factory in Thailand. However, the 3M manager in Bangkok...

Q: 3M is Minnesota Mining and Minerals Company, which turns out all sorts of products...

O'DONOHUE: Like Scotch tape and other things. Their manager in Bangkok pointed out that their involvement in Thailand created jobs in the US. It didn't "move" jobs from the US. That meant that they created markets for the products worked on in the US So they really weren't "losing" jobs in the US Now, whether that is true in every instance is another matter. Nonetheless, Thailand has a significant, American presence. There were no specific sensitivities on this matter. Furthermore, there wasn't anything in Thailand which hadn't already happened, to a larger extent, in other places. Thirdly, by any standards, the attraction in Thailand was less the "offshore" aspect than it was the Thai market as such or the Thai workforce.

Another aspect is that, depending on whose figures you use, there wasn't an immense imbalance in exports. While Thailand was a big and growing market, by the time I left it imported about $l0-12 billion in US products. For these reasons, it didn't figure that prominently.

There were these manifestations of world trade, which were unbelievable to me, at least. At one time I visited a small, Christian college, in a small town in Thailand. While I was there, they took me to visit a wood products factory on the edge of town. The manager happened to be a Sino-Thai who didn't speak a word of English. However, his son, who was also present, did. They made various wood products for three American department stores. They made book racks, butcher boards, and things like that. They had containers at the factory site where they packaged these products for the three department stores. They turned out these wooden products, packaged them, and shipped one container full a week to the three department stores. I don't think that this small manufacturer sold his products anywhere but to the United States. He had never visited the US nor spoke English.

Q: And to three department stores!

O'DONOHUE: I'm talking about a small manufacturer in a small town. It was not a huge operation. The other extreme was in Chiang Mai, where we visited an American who made "flies" for trout fishing. He made these for his family's company in the US It was not huge but it was the closest thing I had seen in Thailand to an American operation run on Asian lines. It was on the second floor of an unprepossessing building. You went in and found that he had 85 young Thai women, very carefully assembling various and sundry fishing flies, under the supervision of this American. His wife and child were living there. It was a family operation, producing fishing flies of all varieties.

Q: Dan, did the question of "child labor" ever come up?

O'DONOHUE: Not relating to American companies. First of all, the American companies themselves did not approve of child labor. This practice was not found among the American companies. In fact, they often hired young women from the villages at very modest wages but slightly above the normal for wages. The Thai educational system turned out excellent students at whatever level. In this case you were talking about people who had attended primary and middle school. The people hired by the American companies could read, write and they knew how to learn. So the labor force available to the American companies was a big "plus." You didn't have child labor with the American companies.

But, you had "everything" in Thailand. There was child prostitution, and the working conditions were sometimes appalling. My wife, in particular, worked with Thai women and one of the missionary priests, often going down into the slums of Bangkok. The living conditions were terrible-something like the slaughter houses in the US at the turn of the century. The Embassy had contracted out various work, such as gardening services. We found out that we were "closing our eyes" to labor abuse in that connection. There were appalling situations in terms of living conditions for people hired by Thai contractors who cared for the grounds at the Embassy. We got the services of the lowest bidder, who had to "squeeze" his profit out of the workers. The reason we found this out among the gardeners was that one of my houseboys was feeding the gardeners. So I found out how little the gardeners were getting. We forced the Embassy to "police" these situations-assuring at least minimum legal conditions were met. However, at least the worst conditions were avoided.

In any case, child labor wasn't a problem with the American companies in Thailand during the time I was there as Ambassador. It is a terrific problem more broadly. There is child prostitution, and there certainly are child labor problems.

My background had been political reporting and policy matters. However, the charge that the Foreign Service doesn't pay attention to commercial issues and subordinates them to political matters is generally not true today. Based on my own observation of American Ambassadors, including myself and my peers, there is almost no foundation for this view. In an earlier period, Ambassador Phil Habib in South Korea and other Ambassadors devoted an immense amount of time to commercial interests and local firms working for American interests.

I found that in Thailand, certainly by the end of my tour of duty there, if you looked at my working day, 50% of it was spent on commercial issues. Either these involved basic issues or what we haven't touched on at all-fighting for individual American business interests. In one case this involved an effort by Caltex Oil Company to get Thai Government approval to build a refinery. I pressed and pressed this issue. I pressed Prime Minister Chatchai to revoke the decision not to give Caltex permission to build the refinery. I wrote him a letter and was then charged with "interference" in Thai affairs by Shell Oil Company which was the competitor.

Then there were issues on which we approached the Thai Government on behalf of American companies to get approval for various projects. One of them involved the Guardian Glass Company. In that case the Prime Minister's brother-in-law, who was a politician of major influence, had invested in a Japanese-Thai company which, in effect, had a monopoly on the glass manufacturing business. By the end of my time in Thailand I was involved either in "generic," or across the board commercial issues and some involving individual companies. As I said, by that time I was spending 50% of my time on commercial issues. At least you would say that commercial issues had as great a priority as anything else.

My view had been that the Foreign Commercial Service, under the Department of Commerce, had not been a success since it had been separated from the Foreign Service under the Department of State. When you looked at the matter closely, all of the important issues were being handled by the Embassy, not the Foreign Commercial Service. This was true in Thailand. The officers in the Commercial Section were useful, but the basic effort on anything important was made by the Ambassador. In certain areas, like civil aviation, the problems were handled by the Economic Section of the Embassy. The people in the Foreign Commercial Service were helpful but simply couldn't operate at high enough levels to be effective.

Later, I changed this view when I joined the Inspection Corps. I traveled to Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other countries. I saw a completely different 'breed' of senior, commercial officers who had been "pushed forward" by the then Director of the Foreign Commercial Service. These officers really were exceptional.

Q: Who was the head of the Foreign Commercial Service at that time?

O'DONOHUE: I think that it was Susan Schwab. She left at the end of the Bush administration.

By that time I had completely changed my view. I had seen the work of some very effective, senior Foreign Commercial Service Officers who have been in several instances strong lieutenants to the Ambassador. There is no substitute for the Ambassador in the field of Commercial Affairs. The Ambassador has to be the primary Commercial Officer. If the other side sees that the Ambassador is not interested in commercial affairs, it's going to have its effect. The Ambassador has to be involved in commercial affairs. I found that, in almost every case, career Ambassadors realize this and are deeply involved in commercial questions.

Q: Let's turn to the coup d'etat of 1991. You talked about the Thai Government and said that various things had happened before or after the coup. How did the coup occur?

O'DONOHUE: In Thailand, coups d'etat were an established means of changing civilian governments or getting rid of them. I remember one well known Thai politician giving a speech, in which he said that people were always telling him that what Thailand needed is a democratic constitution. He said, "That's not our problem at all. I myself have personally participated in drafting 12 constitutions!" On occasion and for brief moments civilian politicians have exercised actual power. However, generally, the Thai military decided who would hold power. There were all sorts of political alignments which ultimately were based on the Thai military. The military were not tremendously interested in government policy, outside of procuring supplies and equipment for the Thai armed forces. They were more interested in the "fruits" of government, along with their own role as the ultimate determinants of power.

The first time I was in Thailand, when I was DCM [1977-1978], coups were generally "peaceful,' meaning that they took place with little or no bloodshed. There were minimum penalties exacted, outside of the loss of office by one political figure or another. They didn't carry out retribution or things like that. There was a mini-coup when I was in Bangkok as DCM. It probably involved no more than a company of Thai troops. This coup disposed of the then civilian government.

However, when I came back to Thailand in 1988 as Ambassador, I knew almost every, major figure on the Thai political scene fairly well. Gen Prem had stepped down as Prime Minister, perhaps a few weeks before I arrived. In my view Gen Prem was the outstanding Thai statesman of the 20th century. He is still on the scene as the King's loyal right hand. He had presided over Thailand as Prime Minister during a very difficult period. First, he was dealing with the problems associated with the changes in Vietnam and Cambodia. This had started before he became Prime Minister but was accentuated during this period. He had dealt with economic difficulties. To everyone's mild surprise, he also presided over the return to civilian rule.

When the Thai military "ruled," this didn't mean that there was a military government. The Thai Governments were composed of politicians and "technocrats." When I say that Gen Prem handled economic issues, what I meant was that he supported what the "technocrats" were doing. For a long time he gave them a strong role. However, the power of even the strongest figures tends to erode. The power of Gen Prem was eroding. One of the strongest of his generals, Gen Chavalit, wanted to become Prime Minister. Chavalit had been waiting for a very long time for Gen Prem to retire as Prime Minister. He was Prem's protï¿½gï¿½. For a combination of reasons, including the machinations of politicians who wanted to get back into power and Gen Chavalit's "chafing" to become Prime Minister, Gen Prem decided that it was time to resign. He could have held on as Prime Minister for another year but he decided to step down.

The problem was that there was no one immediately available to replace him. Even Gen Chavalit really wasn't in a position to civilianize himself and become Prime Minister. He simply wasn't prepared to take over that office so soon. So, as they looked around, they picked a Prime Minister who, they thought, would clearly be a temporary phenomenon. He would be a transitional figure of no great weight, because the return to civilian rule did not mean what the Thai military wanted.

So they picked Maj Gen Chatchai who at the time was in his early 70's. He was viewed as a 70 year old "playboy" and essentially a "lightweight." His father was one of the original coup plotters, when the Thai intellectuals and military deposed the absolute monarchy in 1932. When his family fell precipitously from power in the mid- 1950's. Chatchai served for about 15 years in various diplomatic posts, in a form of political exile. He came back after the student revolution in 1973. His family had money, and he became a politician. He was chosen to be Prime Minister in 1988, not because he was a respected political leader, and not because he had a military background, but because he was viewed essentially as a "lightweight" who, at some point in time, would inevitably be swept aside.

In fact, Chatchai was a shrewd politician who was utterly "worldly." He had a very cynical view of politics and people. However, on the other hand, he had a certain amount of charm and good political sense. He took over as Prime Minister and didn't do badly the first year. After Chatchai had spent about a year in office as Prime Minister, two things happened. Gen Chavalit, who had waited so long, had based his power in the military on a younger group-all classmates at the Military Academy from a class several years after him and his factions at the military academy.

Q: Like the US Military Academy.

O'DONOHUE: However, no one wanted a coup. When the Thai military didn't want a coup, this didn't mean that they supported the government or were going to wait passively. It just meant that, in a variety of ways, they tried to push the serving Prime Minister out of office. So an erosion of Chatchai's position and a disintegration of the political situation began. This process was essentially conducted largely, but not completely, by the Thai military. Thai politicians out of power were quite capable of joining this themselves. So the military had Chatchai "on the ropes." He had growing problems, and his position weakened.

As the process of undermining Chatchai continued, I was actually getting along with him pretty well. He was cynical but realistic. For example, during the Gulf War of 1991, he agreed to let us send troops through the Royal Thai Air Base at Utapao, Southeast of Bangkok. I was also instructed to ask him for Thai formal support in connection with the Gulf War, which he gave us. On other issues, like the civil air and Caltex Refinery matters, where there was a convergence of his and American interests, he was helpful. On the issue of Cambodia, he was very difficult.

However, the Thai military finally had him "on the ropes" by the end of 1990. You could have predicted that Chatchai would be out of power by the end of 1990. However, in the course of early 1991 he was consolidating political power and moving toward new elections, which his coalition government might well have won. So the military finally reached the point where they could only get rid of Chatchai by staging a coup. Political tensions were high, and we knew that there were problems. "Crescendo" is the wrong word, but one thing after another was happening, instigated by the military. Chatchai was going to fly down to southern Thailand and went to the airport in Bangkok, got on the plane, and then the Thai military pulled the coup. By the time the coup occurred, the Class 5 Thai Military Academy class group controlled everything-the Air Force, the Navy, and the Army. So the coup plotters took Chatchai and his party and put them under arrest.

By then, although Chatchai had outwitted the coup plotters politically and was theoretically in a strong position, his reputation had been so eroded that there was no great regret at his fall from power. But there was no enthusiasm for the Thai military, either. The coup happened on a Saturday morning, Bangkok time. By that time the Embassy had prepared its analysis. The Director of the Office of Thai Affairs in the Department had also previously served in the Embassy in Bangkok. He telephoned us, but, by that time, it was "over." So we sent in our analysis of the coup which, I think, turned out to be 100% correct. If you summed up our recommendations, they were that the coup group really didn't want to change anything. Indeed, over the short term, the coup group might even let somebody else run the country. We should condemn the coup publicly but we should continue to do business with the Thai Government as usual. The King continued to reign.

That evening, though, I got a call on the secure phone from the Office Director. He said that the Department had received our cables, which he thought were probably just about right. He said, though, that the Department was probably going to be more "condemnatory" of the coup than the Embassy had recommended. Otherwise, everything was all right. Remember, that we were about 12 hours ahead of Washington.

By 10:00 PM Bangkok time we learned that the Washington agencies were considering all kinds of options. The CIA was discussing various aspects of the situation, but, remember, the coup was over. In Washington the Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs and representatives of the NSC [National Security Council], the Department of Defense, CIA, the Human Rights people, and others were meeting to discuss how to handle the situation. The discussions were completely "irrational," and no one was playing the role that one would have expected. The Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Department of Defense was so concerned about the coup aspect of this event that he was advocating "strong measures" to reverse the coup. The DAS [Deputy Assistant Secretary of State] in charge of Southeast Asian Affairs was also advocating "strong measures." The DAS who was not in charge of Southeast Asian Affairs, the Office Director of Thai Affairs, and the Special Assistant to Assistant Secretary Solomon, all of whom knew a lot about Thailand, supported my position. The NSC person who attended that meeting, who didn't know Thailand, was siding with those who wanted to take "strong measures."

It was only some time later that I realized that this was happening. My view was, "Why get excited?" This group was talking about recalling me for consultations and taking "draconian measures." Well, as I understood it, if you had taken a consensus or a vote, the majority of those attending this meeting would have supported taking very "harsh measures" against Thailand. There were people at this meeting in Washington, worrying about "bloodshed" and so forth. However, the group that supported my position was prepared to continue to sit indefinitely at this meeting and oppose the views of the other group. So, as Saturday in Washington wore on, those favoring "harsh measures" started to drift off home or to whatever else they wanted to do! They had drafted a cable which wasn't going to go anywhere. That became the pattern for the next few days. At the end of each day there would be "agreement" on a cable setting out a "harsh course of action." However, this draft would not be transmitted and would be diluted on the following day. I think that it took five days before the Department arrived at the position which I had recommended in the first place.

Q: Did you feel that this discussion was purely a "Washington generated event"? How about the CIA representatives and the DAS for Southeast Asian Affairs? What about our military attachï¿½s?

O'DONOHUE: It was completely and utterly a Washington "hot house" event. Indeed, it was "nutty." The NSC man at this meeting normally didn't follow Thai affairs. The next day [Sunday, Washington time] his boss, who was very close to Thai affairs, came into the office. He couldn't believe what had happened. On the Department of Defense side, I called up CINCPAC [Commander in Chief, Pacific, in Honolulu] and asked him to get on the phone and try to get the people in the Department of Defense to be more reasonable. The Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, who thought that he knew what the reaction would be on Capitol Hill [Congress], felt that he had to take this "firm position" because he anticipated that the pressures from the Hill were going to be "immense." Well, the Hill wasn't particularly concerned. Indeed, this discussion was entirely artificial. It was limited to all these people in a room.

So, at the end of five days, we ended up about where we should have been. There weren't any great penalties paid for this. In the absence of instructions to me to pack my bags or take one unrealistic step or another, we just proceeded, and the Thai-American relationship continued without change.

I had a very good relationship with the King of Thailand. Through the King's secretary I learned that the King essentially had no respect for the coup leaders. However, the coup had happened, and the King's immediate concern was that the country should get back to normal as quickly as it could. Remember, the King has never played a major role on a day to day basis. His dominating role has always been during a time of crisis and uncertainty. For instance, in 1992, he was decisive in forcing the same coup leaders to leave power. However, that was a different situation, in which there was turmoil. His role was essentially to be a stabilizing influence. In the case of the 1991 coup I have been discussing his position was different; the coup was a fait accompli and was not reversible.

Initially, the coup leaders, as I had predicted, set up an appointed government composed of some of Thailand's best talents. The coup leader, Gen Suchinda, had been an Army Attachï¿½ in Washington in 1975 when Anand Panyarachun was Ambassador to the United States. They knew each other, of course, but had virtually nothing in common and weren't close friends in any sense. Because of his respect for Anand, Suchinda appointed him Prime Minister. Anand went on to be an outstanding Prime Minister. He knew that he was going to be in office for only a year. So an outstanding, civilian government came into power, following this coup. The Thai military kept the offices of Minister of Home Affairs and Defense. However, they allowed the country to be run by former Ambassador Anand.

The only right thing that this coup group did was to appoint the government under Prime Minister Anand. Then, a year later after the elections, they made the mistake of trying to perpetuate themselves in power. First, they tried to put in a Prime Minister against whom there were all kinds of allegations. Then they tried to put in Gen Suchinda himself as Prime Minister. They fell from power shortly after this as a result of public turmoil and political pressure.

The coup of 1991 itself was a perfect illustration of an old time Thai coup d'etat. Also, I was on record as having earlier advised them against staging any coup. So we were active during this period of time. I was at a party on a Friday night, about a week after the coup. The nominal head of the coup group saw me and said, "Dan, we're going to release Chatchai tomorrow. We're all going to go over and have breakfast with him. We're going to apologize for the coup and then release him." So I called up Dick Solomon, Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs, and told him what the coup group leader had told me. Dick couldn't believe it.

Q: Dick Solomon was a China expert.

O'DONOHUE: The idea that the coup leaders were going to have breakfast with Prime Minister Chatchai, the man they deposed, apologize for having deposed him, and then let him go home was hard for Dick to understand. They actually intended to let Chatchai go home to pack and then leave Thailand in a couple of days. That is what happened. The amazing thing is that when Chatchai left Thailand, nearly everyone was at the airport, including Prime Minister Anand, who had been a protï¿½gï¿½ of Chatchai's in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. So the new cabinet, put in office by the Thai military, all turned out at the airport to say goodbye to Chatchai. The old cabinet, which had been deposed, was also at the airport, and the military leaders were there. This was truly a Thai-style coup.

Later on the South Korean Chargï¿½ d'Affaires, who was a younger man, commented to me about the differences between Thailand and South Korea. He said, "You know, we 'tough' Koreans have much to learn from the Thai." He said that in South Korea, if something like this had happened, the first thing is that no one who knew the person who had been deposed would risk being seen with him. They would be in fear of arrest and would have nothing to do with the deposed leader. Secondly, the "deposed person" would be very, very bitter. Thirdly, it would all be done with harshness. The idea of having the new Prime Minister, his cabinet, the coup leaders, and the new cabinet on hand, with everyone saying goodbye to the deposed Prime Minister-would be unthinkable in South Korean terms.

Q: Dan, is there anything else that we should cover about Thailand?

O'DONOHUE: With regard to the coup which overthrew Chatchai, I would say that we have problems in handling events like this because of our legal strictures and our avowed commitment to democracy. More flexibility is needed in dealing with specific country situations. In effect, the Washington discussion of the event was handled almost solely as if it were a domestic, US event. People in Washington see such an event only from a Washington perspective.

Now, there were penalties after this happened. For instance, under the law assistance was cut off to Thailand. This had no economic effect, since the amounts involved were small. However this proposed legislation did serve to sever bilateral aid relationships, although, in effect, the Thai were back to outstanding civilian leadership under Anand. I was struck with how "unreal" the Washington perception of this event was, although we managed the transition well.

Q: Did you find that you had to "mind your tongue" as far as reporting to Washington was concerned, so that at least your reporting would meet the minimum standards of righteous indignation about a coup, and all of that?

O'DONOHUE: No, I wouldn't say that that was much of a problem. My assessment of the coup had been very blunt and realistic. What I didn't do was recommend that we shouldn't deal with the Thai leaders. What I said was that this coup was carried out by a group of Thai military people in the traditional way. They simply wanted power and there wasn't any real justification for the coup-it was a "harsh" assessment. My conclusion was that this happened in a country where this kind of thing had happened before, and it was not going to be reversed. So, I believed that we should pick up the pieces-which is not too difficult-and proceed. Then you work to get back to having a civilian government. What you shouldn't do is to get more caught up and upset about the coup than the country or society that you're in, particularly Thailand where society and other institutions play such a large role, not simply politicians. In other countries the situation would be different. For instance, South Korea.

Q: This is Side B of Tape 10 of the interview with Ambassador Dan O'Donohue. Dan, please continue.

O'DONOHUE: The situation in Thailand was different. In the case of the overthrow of the Chatchai Government, there was an emotional reaction in Washington that the coup, in a country like Thailand, was a setback, which it was. As a matter of fact, there was a year of good civilian government. However, the coup leaders tried and failed to perpetuate themselves in power. Thai society took care of the coup leaders when they overreacted.

Q: When did you leave Thailand?

O'DONOHUE: I left in August, 1991.

Q: You were saying that this was, oddly enough, a period of good government in Thailand. The government headed by Anand Panyarachun was supposedly to remain in power for a year. What was your impression of where Thailand was going?

O'DONOHUE: When I left Thailand, the Anand government was in power. It was a government of the "well born" and well educated. They had no interest in remaining in power. Indeed, the members of the Anand government set about "clearing up" the backlog of needed legislation and administrative reforms and deregulation. They did as well as they could. When the time came, they left office, with a fairly significant body of achievement.

Unfortunately, the Thai political dynamic did not essentially change. So the Anand government left office, and Gen Suchinda and the military group tried to perpetuate themselves in power. That effort collapsed, because of general revulsion, violence on the streets, and the King's intervention. The figures that sparked the violence on the streets also had a role in what happened. So, you might say, all of the "culprits" paid a political penalty. Until the next election was held, Prime Minister Anand was returned to power but in a clearly caretaker capacity. Anand and his government refused to do anything but manage another election. This was not a "reprise" of the previous, Anand government agenda.

After the elections, came a politician who was among the more honest political figures. Chuan entered office, but it didn't change the dynamic of the system. So it was in power for a couple of years. Thai Government was not bad, although it fell because of charges of corruption. In effect, the democratic, political structure in Thailand was basically in the hands of corrupt, regional politicians. In that sense, one has to look at the prospects in Thailand with a little bit more pessimism than I would have had in 1988 or 1990, because previously there had been a "balance" between the Thai military, the civil servants, the business community, the politicians, and the King. All of these groups were interacting and providing some checks on each other. Unfortunately, we are moving toward a situation where, I think, the military could come back and play a major role. The civil servants unfortunately seem to have lost their former power. The politicians have significantly eroded that.

This leaves the King who has immense authority which at least can be used in time of crisis. His likely successor, the Crown Prince, will not have this authority. This King is now the longest reigning head of state in the world. He started young, in 1946, but he can't go on forever. So in some ways you are left with the fact that Thailand has not yet been able to create a political framework that ensures a durable and reasonably honest government. In some ways, it is a little worse than it was previously. This doesn't mean that the country is in a state of chaos, because, as I said, there is a situation of social stability. However, politically, you are left with a situation which is far from encouraging. There have been reports that the most recent elections have been the most corrupt in Thai history.

Q: So you left Thailand in August, 1991. Then what happened?

O'DONOHUE: Well, I spent a year at Howard University [in Washington, DC] as a diplomat in residence. I taught one course each semester. I was trying to find a broader role. Essentially, in the Howard University community the black students just didn't see the Foreign Service as a potential career. It wasn't even a matter of hostility or anything other than the fact that, if you were a bright student, you had other alternatives. The Foreign Service was very alien to what they were thinking about. For the most part the students had no exposure to the Foreign Service. So that was a problem.

I enjoyed the teaching very much and the association with the students. As far as the choice of the Foreign Service as a career for students at Howard University, neither faculty nor students could see it. There were large numbers of students in the Political Science Department, most of them planning to go on to Law School. Only one of my students, and he was a former Marine Security Guard at one of our Embassies, was seriously considering the Foreign Service-because he knew what it was.

It was a good year and one which I enjoyed. At that point I was hoping for another ambassadorial assignment. I was at least on one of the "lists," but being on a list doesn't mean much. South Korea or the Philippines would have been two countries where I would have liked to be assigned. While waiting, I accepted that I might be in the Department for a time and accepted an invitation to join the Inspection Corps.

Q: What was your impression of this 1992-1 994 period in the Inspection Corps- its strengths and weaknesses? Are there any examples that you can think of?

O'DONOHUE: I guess that one can look at the inspection process in one of two ways. One, if you look at it from the point of view of when we first came into the Foreign Service, compared to now, there certainly is an amazing continuity. On the other hand, it has changed.

When I came into the Inspection Corps, Sherman Funk was still the Inspector General.

The inspection process bears a lot of resemblance to the past. Sherman had some influence on the Hill [in Congress]. He was a man of good, practical judgment. So he had an importance which gave some weight to the function. However, in the inspection process, you looked first at policy formulation. This means, technically, how well are we doing in terms of our policy objectives. You look also at the executive direction and how the Embassy is being run. Then you look at the "nuts and bolts." The "nuts and bolts" of the reporting plan or the "nuts and bolts" of the Consular Section. There are those three aspects.

What you find, predictably, is that in terms of the "nuts and bolts" operations and how you operate, the recommendations of the inspectors counted fairly significantly. When you found things "wrong," you generally got a good response. When you came to the running of Missions, that was more sensitive, in that you were inevitably criticizing the Ambassador or the Assistant Secretary of the relevant bureau. Recommendations in this area certainly had their impact. When you come to the field of policy, if you were critical, quite understandably they felt, "What are you doing, commenting on our policy?" There you would have mixed results.

I was pleasantly surprised that the inspectors' recommendations in the two areas of Ambassadorial or executive direction and policy orientation were taken as seriously as they were. I don't mean that we often "won." In fact, on the most sensitive issues, particularly personnel matters, one year the relevant bureau would fight you to the end. The next year it would adopt the recommendations itself. However, I found that the inspection process worked surprisingly well. There was a quite high level of acceptance of the inspection process.

On the inspection side, I found that there was a tendency to ride trends. One such sector, and this was good, was in the commercial area. There we focused very heavily on the role of the State Department element. I thought that this was a big "plus." We identified the significant contribution our missions were making on behalf of US commercial interests.

Overall, my view is that the inspection report is the only objective serious look a Mission gets. The relevant bureaus have only a general idea of what is going on at a given Embassy. A regional bureau had very little knowledge of what was going on. When I say "going on," I mean in terms of embassy internal operations.

Q: I know.

O'DONOHUE: Really, nobody knows. I can't say that they don't really "care." So I think that the inspection reports are extremely valuable.

Q: Well, Dan, why don't we stop at this point?

O'DONOHUE: Okay.

End of interview