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

RICHARD E. UNDELAND

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Introductory Explanation:

In taking another look at this oral history more than a decade after the original version came out, I have decided to revise this document. Why?

I felt I could and should be more pointed in talking about people with whom I interacted, to include much more the naming of names, letting the chips fall where they may. This "reform" brings, to my mind at least, greater context, moment and verve. There are still a very few cases where I have on purpose held back on direct identification, mostly foreigners, out of the wish to avoid any potential embarrassment. And, alas, that doesn't count the all too many names I have forgotten.

More is to be said, more vignettes to be told, more meat to be added to what is already there, so as to present a fuller and rounder picture of situations throughout my career and how I fit into them. In the interviews, too much seemed to be slighted, incompletely handled or overlooked/forgotten. While the initial editing let me fill in many of these gaps, I now find the job I did back then more than a little inadequate.

I realize I could have written another document that expands on what came out originally, but I like the give and take of the interview formula. Thus, expansion made more sense to me. It somehow facilitates my saying what I want to and keeps an informal, often quite personal, character that appeals to me. I ask, is it too personal?

I believe the time and distance of an added decade plus lets me look back at my career in a fuller, more focused and, frankly, clearer way. I find that my memory has not flagged with the passage of the extra time.

At a few places, I did not, on reflection, say exactly what I wish I had, and then did not catch and correct these instances in the editing done back then. Some of it was due to over-telescoping my responses. In other cases, I just did not get it quite right on the initial go-round.

And a couple of purely personal considerations. I have had the time and, obviously, the inclination to take on the task, and, secondly, it is a record, as I want to leave it, for my children as much as for the Foreign Affairs Oral History Program. Dunno, but maybe some colleagues and friends will also be interested. If so, it will be out there for them.

Richard E. UndelandMay, 2006

Beginnings:

Q: Could we start this off by your giving me something about your parents, your early background and schooling?

UNDELAND: I was born in 1930 in Omaha, where I attended the same grade school and high school that my parents had gone to, Saunders' and Central High respectively, although in their earlier days it was Omaha High School. My mother was also born in Omaha and my father arrived there as a baby. In the real estate/property appraisal business for himself throughout his adult life, he was at one point the president of the National Association of Real Estate Appraisers. He threw himself into getting housing loan guarantees for black veterans after World War II, and to the end of his life looked on this as professionally his finest hour. The family lived all their lives in Omaha. It is where they are buried, as are three of my four grandparents.

Q: Is Undeland a German name?

UNDELAND: No, it's Norwegian, and whereas I had earlier assumed it meant the ancestors had lived in the lowlands, I have now learned its origin is far more complex. Tied up in the complexities of the Hardanger dialect, it probably denotes the family took on the name of a remote area up in the mountains, which seems to be what the name means, though there are a couple of other possibilities. It lies above Ulvik, at the uppermost reaches of Hardanger Fjord.

My grandfather immigrated in early 1881from the family homestead at Undeland. After a couple of years in Illinois, where he worked in a watch factory, he settled in Omaha. He opened a barber supply business, but was at heart a technical person, a self-taught engineer, if you will. He invented the hydraulic mechanism, which to this day is used to raise and lower barber chairs. When he died suddenly in 1932, he was working on an electric shaver. A flawed businessman, his shop burned down three times, but he never saw the need for fire insurance; he never made any money from his inventions. In 1905 he became the Norwegian consul for Nebraska and environs, a position he held until his death 27 years later.

My mother's family was quite well off. Her father was vice president of the largest wholesale dry goods company between Chicago and the West Coast into the 1920's. Among other things, he was a pioneer in developing new ways of handling commercial credit. When the Depression struck, my parents and so many of their friends, their "class" if you will, were not made destitute, but the means to maintain their former status disappeared. I had a modest upbringing. There was not enough money for many extras, but we were well clothed and fed and never in real want. They were happy years for me.

Q: At that time, were you developing any interest in foreign affairs, or anything like that?

UNDELAND: Not specifically, at least nothing hinting at where I would end up, although I was an avid reader, and a lot of it was history, historical fiction and biography. My interest in the wider world dated from World War II, which held for me a consuming interest. I still have the scrap book of photos and articles I clipped from newspapers and magazines to trace the course of the fighting. That war dominated our thinking in a way and to an extent that no other single world event had or has since. I, my parents and many of our friends took to heart the news on each American and British defeat and victory, being saddened by the former and welcoming the latter. We looked on Americans and Brits almost as one, for they were representing the good and defending themselves and others against evil.

In 1948, I entered Harvard, where I majored in English literature, but took nearly as many courses in modern history and government, as political science was called there in those days. It was at Harvard my real appreciation of the whys and hows and whats of the world seriously came forth, although this interest had begun earlier. In thinking back on it now, yes it was at Harvard, my internationalist focus and outlook took hold. My 1949 summer in Norway strengthened this outlook.

Q: You graduated in 1952, correct?

UNDELAND: Spring of 1952, yes. In autumn I entered the Stanford Business School, though I am still more than a little befuddled as to why I went there. I saw it through the normal two years and got my MBA, but by the second year I was pretty thoroughly bored with marketing, finance and the rest of the SBS fare. Looking for something more stimulating, I found it at the Hoover Institute largely through the colorful and dynamic professor, Christina Phelps Harris, who was its resident scholar on the Middle East. An intrepid Englishwoman, she had flown airplanes over much of the Arab world in the 1930's. She came to the U.S., got American citizenship and in the immediate post-war years, worked in the Department of State, from which she resigned in protest over the U.S. recognition of Israel. She, remarried to the noted historian David Harris, then joined him on the faculty of the Hoover Institute. In those days it was not the bastion of the right it was later to become. Though I was lacking in the required background, she accepted me for her graduate seminar on modern Egypt.

My second Middle East awakener was an Egyptian professor, Mohammed Kafafi, a Cairo University librarian, who was spending a year at Stanford on a Fulbright grant and with whom I developed abiding ties. He was my de facto advisor for my term paper on the early emergence of the Egyptian nationalist movement.

Though my interest was much aroused by these persons, I was by no means yet hooked on the Middle East, and, on getting My MBA in spring of 1954, I went to work for Shell Chemical in San Francisco, a stop-gap job, while awaiting my draft number to come up. Unbeknownst to me, Christina Harris had put forth my name for a scholarship offered by the Egyptian government for one year of unrestricted study in Egypt. I was elated, though thoroughly surprised, when she tracked me down and informed me I had the grant, if I wanted it. With Stanford, State and the Egyptian embassy in Washington all weighing in, my Omaha draft board gave me an academic extension, and, at the beginning of 1955, Joan, my wife of less than six months, and I were on a South African Airways flight into Cairo. It was the first scholarship the Egyptians had given to an American, and it carried the magnificent stipend of 30 Egyptian pounds a month, the pound being worth something like a dollar. We had to pay out of our own pockets for our plane tickets.

Q: What was the scholarship...what did it entail?

UNDELAND: As I said, it was unrestricted. After being in Cairo a short time, I began a study of a rural reform and development effort, which was off to a promising start. It was an imaginative and realistically modest scheme jointly developed by Ahmed Husseilater Egypt's minister of social affairs and its ambassador to the United Stateand Dr. Cleland, a professor at and later president of the American University at Cairo (AUC).

My study took me outside of Cairo a good deal, particularly to villages in the Nile Delta. I worked closely with an impressive young Egyptian social worker, Kamal Hosny, who was deeply involved, became my mentor and more than anyone else drew me to think of having a career centering on the Arab World. However, I had to break off my project, for a nasty bureaucratic struggle for control of rural reform broke out between the ministry and Fuad Galal, the disastrous leader of a higher council also dealing with reform in the countryside. A foreigner poking his nose into things became no longer acceptable, let alone welcomed, and the formerly open doors at the Ministry were abruptly closed, though I kept in close contact with Kamal.

In addition to my research project, I taught an English literature course at Cairo UniversitJoan taught severaalthough we both lacked the stipulated advanced degrees. All British professors had been summarily kicked out from Egyptian universities in the aftermath of clashes between Egyptians and British forces along the Suez Canal, leaving huge staffing gaps, particularly in English language and literature courses. Another job for me was the final editing of the government's monthly English language tourism magazine. Joan played a central role in developing a series of textbooks for teaching English in the state run schoolin fact she wrote most of theand did a lot of private tutoring. We both tutored some Indonesian students at the American University. We took these jobs partly because opportunity knocked, partly to keep busy, but also because we needed the money; 30 pounds a month didn't go very far, even in the inexpensive Egypt of those days.

We lived in small apartments, in lower middle class parts on the island of Roda and then in Dokki, where our neighbors were entirely Egyptians, except for a British student couple, who had an apartment in the same Dokki building. He was Gil Morris, who became a talented Arabist, rising high in the British diplomatic service. We were warmly greeted and received at every turn, with numerous offers to help if we ever needed it. We didn't, but greatly appreciated the welcoming attitudes behind these offers. Egyptians could not have treated us better. My pocket was picked on a crowded city bus, which is how we got around the city. The thief only got away with my tobacco pouch, but other riders on the bus saw him take what they thought was my wallet, grabbed him and gave him a good beating before returning the pouch, with apologies that this had happened to me in their country. Such experiences went far in convincing us that we wanted to remain in Arab milieus. The scholarship was renewed, so we remained one year and a half.

Q: From your vantage point outside the official American apparatus, how did you see the political events of that time? How did Nasser's Egypt seem to be working out?

UNDELAND: It was a time of great optimism. Egyptians felt that in throwing off King Farouk and those around him, they had eliminated the corruption and favoritism that had typified royal Egypt and, in their view, had been the main reason for the country's backwardness in general and specifically for its defeat in the 1948 war that created Israel. They were proud at having gotten rid of British forces everywhere, except along the Suez Canal, which they saw as ending the colonialist/imperialist era and paving the way for the blossoming of the new, truly independent and ultimately prosperous Egypt. At nearly every turn we found an immense, heady wave of nationalism, and central to it was belief in the Nasser regime, in him personally, in the Revolutionary Command Council, and in the army as an institution.

We got to know quite well Ahmed Kafafi, the brother of the librarian at Stanford, who was an army major in the second echelon of the RCC and, specifically, its representative in the Foreign Ministry. The RCC had assigned its members or people allied to or trusted by it to watchdog roles in various ministries and in important institutions and organizations to assure that the new Egypt would not be undermined and the old ways returned. We did not see him all that often, but when my passport was stolen and I needed a replacement visa, I turned to him. He personally took me across Tahrir Circle into the labyrinths of the huge government office building, the Mugamma, and I had the visa in 20 minutes. I thought it was fantastic, but Caireens were not surprised. Knowing the right people in the right places could work wonders in Cairo. Of course, it has also been able to do it in Washington.

There were a number of events at that time, which loomed large in shaping the country's future. Nasser went to the Bandung Conference and entered into the non-aligned game, in which he played a leading role that demonstrated to many Egyptians the significance and importance of him and the revitalized nation he directed. One key event in gaining local popularity came with the assassination attempt against him in Alexandria, either real or, as some believed, staged, which led to banning the Muslim Brotherhood and the trial and execution of some of its top figures. It solidified him as the leader. In incremental steps, Nasser's absolute rule was taking shape, though few foreigners or Egyptians then saw clearly how far it would go, let alone the reality of what it was leading to. Its dark, repressive side had not yet emerged, at least not to the extent the public was much aware of it. However, not many more years were to pass before the euphoria we saw among so many had almost wholly disappeared, although Nasser personally kept his high standing. In looking back on those times, I cannot recall hardly any, let alone numerous and significant, demands for democracy, participation in decision making or other aspects of an open society. No, the emphasis was on nationalism and esteem for their nationalist leader, who had made himself the identity they so largely sought.

Cairo was a city of some three million people, and the country's total population came to only seventeen million. By 1992, it numbered more than sixty million, with Cairo alone having over seventeen million. We didn't hear a whole lot about overpopulation in those earlier days, although anybody paying attention to the birth rate, and there were some who did, could not avoid seeing where things were headed. Egypt was a poor country, as it always had been for the vast majority, but with the new confidence and supposed mastery of its destiny, the common view was that lives of everyone were going to get a lot better, except for the old rulers and those around them, and what they got was what they deserved.

Thinking back on another matter, there was a pervasive sense of shame over the defeat at the hands of the Israelis in the '48 war, but it was looked on not so much coming from the army's incompetence and the nation's political failings. No, it was rather due to the corruption, the royal regime and the influence of the evil foreignerthings that the revolution had gotten rid of and no longer obtained. I often encountered the claim that the Israelis would have been decisively defeated were it not for the faults of Egypt's and other Arab rulers.

Q: Well, what about being an American? We recognized Israel first, and they never let you forget it in the Arab World. Did you find that you, as an American, were put on the spot over Israel?

UNDELAND: The United States was criticized, roundly criticized, for its support of Israel. This has been a constant refrain in all places I have been in the Arab World, beginning then in Cairo and continuing ever since. It of course came up in conversations, but as a student without official ties, I was less subjected to these sentiments, sometimes diatribes and outbursts, than those in the embassy or USIS. Most Egyptians I met saw little reason to "take me on" on this subject, but I was of course aware of how deep their feelings ran.

What I more often encountered in public arenas and found in the media was either the hard line or, occasionally, silence. Privately, there was a little bit more flexibility and moderation, but the public and private views were not far apart, although in friendly, social settings, Egyptians usually didn't either did not want to or didn't feel obliged to speak out and make a big deal of it.

Arabs, including and maybe especially the Egyptians, have always wanted much from us, and have admired us for so many things that have made America the place it is and Americans what we are. Thus, the Israel factor almost never created a clear-cut case of them against us. I think it is an aspect of the Arab World that some Americans find difficult to understand, because we all too often don't operate like that ourselves. I frankly liked their ability to separate out this contentious issue and treat it as something apart from other things. To me, it is a sign of maturity and I sometimes wish we Americans were ourselves better at doing it ourselves. Arabs can hate their enemies like anybody else, but in my long time in Arab lands, Americans were rarely put in the position of being the out-and- out enemy, however much our policies and actions relating to Israel have been disliked.

Q: Were you there when Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, or had you just left?

UNDELAND: The canal nationalization and the '56 war occurred after we withdrew our loan offer to help construct the High Dam and Egypt turning to Czechoslovakia, read the USSR, to acquire modern arms, that is, once we had refused to sell them ours. I left Egypt just before the nationalization and subsequent British/French/Israeli invasion, so those events are outside my experience, although I followed them closely as I could, albeit from afar.

Q: As a student in Egypt, did you have any contact with the American embassy in Cairo or its operations, and if so, how did you feel about it?

UNDELAND: Joan and I developed some firm friendships with those in USIS and the Fulbright office, and we saw them often. They were helpful to us, treating us much as they did American Fulbrighters. Able, involved and interested are three adjectives summing up my impression of the USIS officers, starting with the PAO Bill Weathersby, who, more than anyone else in Cairo, led me consider and then decide on seeking a career in USIS. It was an impressive, active and wise post under his leadership. I must add he cautioned me to ponder carefully about becoming a Foreign Service officer, for he warned me that if I did I would lose much of my independence. I admired him for this frankness.

I met, but really did not get to know well, people in the embassy. I would add that I did not go out of my way to delve into what they did and how they went about it. At the outset and ever since, I was drawn to USIS, not to State.

Q: At that time, how did one get into USIS?

UNDELAND: I wrote to USIA expressing my interest, while still in Egypt. The response was encouraging, and I filled out and sent in the standard application form. When back in the U.S., California to be precise, I got a telephone call from the recruitment office inviting me to Washington for an interview. The written Foreign Service exam was not used by USIA in those days. The interview lasted over two hours, and at the end of it I was told I was accepted, pending my security clearance.

I was questioned by a panel of three on my knowledge of many things and how I would handle situations. At one point I recall an examiner broke in on a discussion of an entirely different subject and said, "tell me about Lucas Foss." Another asked, "if someone in Indonesia wanted you to recommend a novel by an American that gives a true picture of the United States, what would you tell him?" Also, "how did NATO get started?" Then, they set up situations, including, "what would you do if you were the only officer at the USIS center in Jakarta and learned a hostile mob was marching on it?" While I was in mid-sentence, I was interrupted by, "why has the U.S. taken up the imperialist mantle from the British and French?" These surprises and rapid shifting of gears aimed at trying to see how I reacted to the unexpected or to being caught off guard. Would I get rattled? I look back on the give and take as rather fun and came out of it feeling I had done quite well, that I had presented them with a pretty fair idea of who I was, what kind of background I had and perhaps something about what I might be capable of.

Q: Do you offhand recall what novel you recommended?

UNDELAND: I remember well my answer. I said I couldn't think of a single one that did what the question asked, adding that everything I knew of Twain, Faulkner, Hawthorne and others dealt with some kind of a problem, be it personal or cultural or social or whatever and didn't even try to present a rounded picture of the country or society. I threw in that I couldn't think of anything more boring than such a novel, if it existed.

Q: Of course.

UNDELAND: So I then shot back at the questioner, did he have one in mind he could recommend, one perhaps I didn't know about? He smiled and said he didn't.

Q: I used to give the oral exam, and often we'd bring up Huckleberry Finn, and ask, "well, what about...?" I sought to feel them out on how they reacted to black-white relations and all that

UNDELAND: Fair enough. To my thinking, every applicant should have read Huck Finn and remember enough of it to comment on its treatment of this relationship. So, I think it is not just a question of reaction, but also of knowledge.

Let me digress and say that the kind of an lengthy interview I had may well have done a better job in determining talent for USIS than the written exam, which came into force not long thereafter. A lot of top rate officers entered in the old way, who I am convinced were just as good as those admitted through the standard test and follow-on orals. Indeed overall, I have the sneaking suspicion they may well have been just a tad better, having a flexibility and an openness, a dynamism and dedication I have not always found in later years in young State and USIS officers. The more formally tested lot were intelligent enough, often very smarthough in my humble view no more so than we werbut all too many were overly academic or analytic or in some ways lacked the people skills all USIS officers should have. By my lights, must have. I do not understand how it can be acceptable that USIS officers not be truly interested in people, in hearing out the other fellow, in understanding where he comes from and why, in seeking those two way streets that are absolutely essential for meaningful dialogue. Relatedly, training and rating this talent or skill should have carried far greater weight than the system has in fact given them.

Q: So you came in when in 1957?

UNDELAND: In March. It took a long time for me to get my security clearance, because of my time in Egypt and the dislocations caused by the '56 war. The agency's security types tried to have the tremendously reduced Cairo embassy staff run the usual checks, but were told to go fly a kite, for with all they already had on their plate, there was no time for this routine, essentially police work. Ever resourceful, USIA security came to me, seeking names of some people I had known in Egypt who were back in the States. I mentioned three or four, who were duly interviewed, so the requisite boxes could be filled in. I was amused that in considerable measure I had orchestrated my own clearance.

After a short period as a junior officer trainee in Washington, a matter of a few weeks, I went to Beirut. I was in USIA's third or fourth JOT class, I believe.

Q: How big was your group?

UNDELAND: We were twelve and came from all over the States, but geography apart we were a pretty homogenous bunch. There was one woman, no blacks. In Washington, we had lectures and discussion sessions, and we observed the workings of the various USIA offices and services. I found it a pretty worthless time, making so little impression on me that I can remember hardly any details, except for Chuck Vetter's play acting sessions of confrontation, i.e. arguing with communists. They were stimulating taken by themselves, but of little use as a preparation for the real world. Overseas I almost never encountered such arguments. Then we went to the field, I to Lebanon. The usual time for that portion of the training was nine months, although circumstances could make its length vary considerably, and for me worked out to be nearly a year.

Beirut: Junior Officer Trainee

Q: Before we turn to Lebanon, what should I say, USIA or USIS?

UNDELAND: It's USIA in Washington and USIS overseas. Two reasons. In many places the word agency is taken to refer to spying organizations, which was hardly the image we have wanted to project. Secondly, in the States, the United States Immigration Service got there first and had locked up the USIS acronym rights. So it's S overseas and A at headquarters.

Q: Was Lebanon your choice, or was the fact that you had been in Egypt relevant to it?

UNDELAND: I had requested the Arab World, but not Lebanon specifically. My time in Egypt was, I suppose, seen to have bearing in the determination, but this is only my guess.

Q: What was the situation you found? You arrived in Beirut in 1957. The Suez crisis of October-November, 1956, was over, but the aftermath still must have been around.

UNDELAND: It was of very much present, and yet only secondarily. Although Beirut was a place where virtually every aspect of inter-Arab politics was part of the landscape, the rapidly growing Lebanese crisis was essentially Lebanese and not fundamentally connected with Suez, though it was very much there in the background. The fighting that took place in late1957 and1958 stemmed from President Chamoun's efforts to have a second term in violation of the country's constitution. He was vigorously opposed by most Lebanese, except for the strong Maronite faction that backed him. The then downtrodden Shia remained largely on the sidelines, but most of the other sects got, in varying degrees, involved. At its height in early to mid-1958, there was nightly fighting in the streets, punctuated by the sound of gunfire and explosions. Casualties were few, as most firing was aimed up into the air and the explosions did little real damage, but it was a noisy place after dark.

During our first months there, we traveled quite freely around a fair portion of the country, but quite rapidly more and more places were put out of bounds, until by the end of 1957 or early 1958, we were limited as to where we could go. Wandering around the countryside was a no-no. Then came the nightly curfew. Our oldest child was born in June,1958, and when my wife urgently had to go back to the AUB hospital, getting the required special authorization to permit the ambulance to come to the house at night was touch and go. That was the tensest personal moment in my more than 35 years abroad.

We used to have evening parties almost every evening on Ain el Marisi Street, where we lived in the upper floor of a traditional house, with its red tiled roof and three high, arched windows overlooking the sea. No central heating and a Rube Goldberg system for hot water, but what a picturesque place. To visit our neighbors on the street, we had to "bribe" the Lebanese policeman assigned there ostensibly to enforce the curfew. We promised him not to leave Ain el Marisi; he in turn let us go freely from house to house, provided we first paid the "bribe" of a large bowl of chocolate pudding, of which he passionately fond. Typically, he saw himself as much more our protector than the curfew enforcer and made no bones about his primary interest being our safety. Let me add we encountered a lot of this human warmth and concern from the Lebanese families living near us, with some of them offering to take us in at any time, if we were worried or felt insecure. This was only the first of several occasions this has happened during times of crisis in the Arab lands. No one in Beirut, well no one whom I knew of, wished harm to Americans or any other foreigners.

Q: Now, as a junior trainee...let's start in 1957, before things began to fall apart. First, what was your impression of the embassy?

UNDELAND: I don't really have that much of specific recollections of the mission as a whole, that is, outside of USIS. Although I had some dealings with different offices, I didn't get to know well anyone in the embassy. The ambassador was autocratic and rather pompous, the source of numerous anecdotes. As I recall he wasn't taken very seriously by either Americans in Beirut or Lebanese.

Q: Robert McClintock?

UNDELAND: Yes. I personally shook his hand a couple of times and exchanged a platitude or two, but nothing more that comes to mind. He loved to parade his two dachshunds along the corniche, surrounded by his security entourage. Whenever he was driven anywhere, his car flew an outsized American flag, the Lebanese motorcycle escort, with sirens wailing, forming a V in front of him. It was like in Ottoman times, when the kawas, that richly caparisoned embassy official, would walk in front of the ambassador, waving his stick or sword and calling out in a loud voice that his excellency was coming.

Let me go back to USIS, which was an ideal place to start my career. I was fortunate in having John Nevins my first PAO. He knew how to size up and bring along a young officer as well as any officer I have ever met. His successor, Ed Brooke, was quite different in his style and ways, but also a good developer of talent, at least with me. Another useful mentor was Granville "Red" Austin, the assistant information officer, whose mind was never at rest, and never let mine or anyone else's be either. It was the agency's loss when he resigned to become an academic.

The cultural affairs officer suddenly had to go home for medical reasons, so I was put into his job, which was far better than being in training status, i.e. doing and being responsible for things, rather than helping and observing. I handled two large projects. The first was the visit of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, which arrived one midnight from Kuwait in two full DC-4s. There was a tense moment, when the Lebanese Foreign Ministry official sent to the airport to greet and escort them discovered that some 60 percent of the musicians were Jewish. While we chatted, he briefly hesitated over what he should do, but then regained his composure and graciously welcomed them and took them through the entrance formalities. On the way to the hotel, he told me he had spent four years at the University of Minnesota and wasn't aware he had met a single Jew while there. I replied he must not have traveled in musical circles.

The conductor, Antal Dorati, and Anis Fuleihan, the Lebanese-American director of the Lebanese National Conservatory (and close friend of Chamoun, who loved classical music), had long been at loggerheads. Fortunately, both put aside their differences and were on their best behavior towards each other throughout the visit. I was aware of their contentious history and breathed a sigh of relief. The two performances came off as planned, but audiences were pitifully small, as the civil strife was hotting up, making many Beirutis fearful of being out after dark, away from their children and homes.

My second big project was the "Family of Man" photography exhibit, which we mounted in the hall of the main UNESCO building. Chamoun, surrounded by his ever present gun toting guards, attended a special pre- inauguration showing. The government, perhaps him personally, then determined the situation had become too dangerous to permit it to be opened to the public, so that one showing was it. All we could do was take it down and repack it to be sent it on. Even that wasn't simple, for the crates had arrived with Hebrew written all over them telling that it have previously been to Israel. Major negotiating, though I wasn't personally involved, was needed before the port authorities would let it in. We had to spend a lot of time repainting the crates before we could take them to the port for onward shipping. A further complication in that Washington didn't see why they should be repainted, but finally relented. Both of these projects provided a heady beginning for a young officer just starting out.

Other things I handled included a number of exchange programs and a visit by a folk music singer. I worked closely with the superb regional librarian, Ralph Secord, and the Lebanese library staff on both its activities and the collection. I have been big on our libraries ever since, not that I wasn't a believer in them before. But if I had to single out one thing I valued most, it would be my interaction with our clientele. I became convinced that personal contacts would lie at the heart of how I would go about conducting a great deal, if not most, USIS business. It is a view that has never changed.

Plans were brewing to open a one American branch post in Tripoli, where we already had had for several years a Lebanese manned reading room. We had good relations, we thought, in the city and encouraging prospects for extending our reach out into northern Lebanon, an area we had hitherto not paid much attention to, and I might add, neither had the Lebanese government. I made a number of trips there and with each one increasingly liked what I saw. It was thus my great satisfaction to be in line to be the officer to be assigned there, but my euphoria did not last very long, for the plans were scratched when disturbances broke out in Tripoli and the reading room was trashed. We never reopened it. I regretted then and throughout my career that I was denied that experience.

However, the embassy maintained a close but unlikely tie with that northern city through the labor attachï¿½. He was a friendly, gruff railroad union man out of Chicago, whom I never saw in anything but chino pants and a white t-shirt, with his considerable paunch hanging down over his belt. I once had a memorable trip to Tripoli with him. Our car was greeted by a sizable delegation at the cement plant several miles south of the city limits. After welcoming hugs and short speeches, we formed a processions and headed north to the accompaniment of honking horns.

It was like a wedding. A banquet awaited us, at which pro-American and pro-labor attachï¿½ statements flowed without stop. My report back on this welcome lent considerable support for the branch post idea.

The story. All 15 of Tripoli's non-communist labor uniontwo others were communist and kept their distanctold the attachï¿½ of their constant frustration at the hands of governmental authorities and company managers, who would not even to listen to them, let alone pay attention to their plaints and proposals. What did he have to suggest, they asked? He heard them out, slammed his fist on the table and said, "you strike". But how do we do it, they asked? With another blow on the table, he shot back, "I'll show you." He did just that, personally organizing and directing it, down to the smallest detail. The result was that they got a fair amount of what they wanted, certainly more than they had ever expected, and a hero had been born. As always, unabashed and impolitic, he told this story at an embassy staff meeting to the uncomfortable squirms of some of his listeners. I wasn't present, but that's the way it was told to me.

Q: Did you and your colleagues think in terms of the various groups in Lebanon. I mean, this goes to the Maronites, this to the Sunnis, this to the Palestinians and so forth?

UNDELAND: We looked on and, to the extent feasible, treated Lebanon as a unified nation, but we were fully aware of its sectarian reality, which usually loomed larger than its unity and presented us with complex situations. We could not favor or seem to be favoring one group at the expense of others. We were constantly being watched for signs of real or suspected partiality among the various divisions, the Maronites, the Greek Orthodox, the Greek Catholics, the Protestants and the rest of them on the Christian side, as well as between Christians and Muslims, the latter split into Sunnis and Shia, with internal political factions as well. And there was that other influential sect, the Druze, who were ever vigilant to assure they were not slighted. For the exchange programs, we had to make sure that no disproportionate number if grantees came from any one of these groupings. If we visited a Maronite school, we soon would be at those of other sects. If we gave books to one, we also gave them to the others. There was this constant balancing act, and those who felt left out let us know about it pronto and in no uncertain terms. I should add that in the Lebanon of those days, we were sought out by everyone.

You mention the Palestinians. They were mostly in refugee camps, although a fair number lived outside them, largely in the predominantly Palestinians communities that had over time taken on that separate character. With few exceptions they could not get Lebanese nationality, even when they wanted it, though most did not. Palestinians were then not a significant political factor and didn't become so until 1971, when Arafat and Fatah and the other Fedayeen were expelled from Jordan and established themselves and their families, and of course their organizations, in Lebanon. We in USIS had nothing specific aimed at them, although we welcomed them at our center, to our programs and the like. A key point. If we had been seen trying to reach out to the Palestinians specifically or separately, all Lebanese factions would have reacted with sharp displeasure. It could well have been a reason for them to coalesce against any such moves by us, and although we liked the idea of more Lebanese unity, we certainly didn't want it at that price or on that basis.

We have had a long history in Lebanon, the American University of Beirut and other missionary institutions, mainly educational, which, with their fairly broad, inclusive reach, had served to mitigate, even in calm times override some of the sectarian baggage, although never getting at the heart of that divided reality. Times of crisis clearly brought out the fact that the divisions trumped everything else.

AUB was usually seen as being independent of the U.S. government, even though it got significant AID money, indeed was largely kept afloat by this funding. We in USIS did a lot of programming with it on the campus. Simply stated, it had well established over many decades its character and cachet, so it was rarely taken as an appendage of official America. That it wasn't speaks to the positive kind of standing both we and it had. Still, it suffered some from its American connections in times of stress.

One should not, could not ignore the local impact and influence of the large Lebanese-American community in the States, also split along the same sectarian lines, which maintained close ties with the homeland. That was particularly true, though far from exclusively, of the Maronites, whose U.S. based Lebanese League was for decades politically the single most influential Arab organization, at least in the States. Despite their rivalries, the family, community and religious ties in the two countries were overall quite positive from our standpoint. They reinforced, at times quite powerfully, much of what we were trying to achieve and were ever there to demonstrate the importance of American to Lebanon.

Let me back off here for a moment and address a few words on why we held Lebanon to be important. The ï¿½migrï¿½ ties and American institutions located there are a part of it. Also, so are Cold War considerations, although in that regard I would note that the local communists were of little consequence or concern to us. As a publishing, media and cultural center for the Arab World, its influence spread widely throughout the region. It was the most open Arab country, that is, with the fewest restrictions of any in the area, and therefore a meeting place for factions, ideas, movementand conspiracies. Money flowed in from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Iraq and other countries to promote their agendas and influence. Western Europeans, Russians and others from outside the Middle East were also active. Of course, we were among the players, and in a sizable way, though acting with, we liked to think, with a bit more subtlety and regard for the Lebanese and their ways than was true with many of the others. We believed, even in instances when we found it uncomfortable, that our interests demanded we be part of this mix.

Q: Was there a sectarian problem in the social life of the embassy. I have heard this was true at a later time concerning the Maronites. But, how about in your time?

UNDELAND: Maybe not a problem, but it was always a consideration. However, it must be remembered that social life was severely limited due to the worsening political crisis, and what there was tended to be small and fairly intimate. I can only recall one large function at the ambassador's residence during my tenure, at least only one I knew of. When Lebanese invited us to their homes, the others there were usually related or close friends, which is another way of saying that more often than not they were of the same sect.

Q: What was your perspective of the events leading up to the mid-July 1958 American landings in Lebanon?

UNDELAND: Modern Lebanon has been a country of weak central government, where real power was divided among the various religious communities, so that ruling demanded delicate interplay and balancing. Still, the Maronites were clearly on top, for they always had the presidency and controlled the army and security services. And they had the most powerful militias. Had they been unified, that is had they had no internal splits, the other groupings would have been at an even greater disadvantage in competing with them.

The commanding issue of that time, as I've said, was President Chamoun trying to extend his term in office. He sought American support, and while we got along well with him and were sympathetic, we recognized that problems stemming from the constitutional crisis could complicate lots of things for us in Lebanon and perhaps throughout the area. Remember, it wasn't just turmoil in Lebanon. The Hashemites in Iraq were overthrown in the bloody coup led by Colonel Kassem and the threat to King Hussein in Jordan induced him to seek British help. You will recall they deployed the Red Devil division. So, when Chamoun asked for our help, we responded by agreeing to send in the marines. But it was not without a certain drama, for at the last minute the ambassador tried to have them called back to their shipI don't know all the details or reasons behind this plebut the commanding Admiral turned it aside, saying that they were already in the landing craft heading to the beach and having them turn around was not an option. In they came in full battle gear, being greeted, so I was told, by bikini clad young Lebanese women and the ubiquitous boys selling peanuts wrapped in cones made of old newspapers.

I and my family had departed two days before these landings on a direct transfer to Tunis, so I not only missed it, but didn't definitively know it was coming, although there were rumors about to that effect.

Others who were actually there can better talk about how these forces were received, but I was later told how after being fired at in desultory way, the marines pointed tank guns at the places from which the pop- pops had come, and that was the end of those challenges. This made the point we were not to be fooled with, and we weren't. Everyone seemed to know that we were there only temporarily. That is, there was next to no fear of an extended American occupation. Years later, a Lebanese professor told me he could never have been sure the French or British would have left, unless forced to do so, but he was certain the Americans would go, as they had promised they would. He added that a number of Lebanese he knew were sorry to see them leave quite so soon, out of fear that without their stabilizing presence, sectarian fighting might well again break out. The upshot of the crisis was that Chamoun dropped his bid for a second term, was replaced by a popular general, and the immediate problem was taken care of..

Let me switch the subject. You haven't touched on it in your questions, but there were a number of lessons I learned during this training assignment that stayed with me throughout my career, indeed have been central to how I looked on USIS work and how I would go about it.

The first was the extraordinary importance of the Foreign Service Nationals on USIS staffin Lebanon naturally all were Lebanesand how forthcoming they were in providing their insights and knowledge, once you showed real interest in them and respect for what they knew and had to offer. The chief librarian, whose name has slipped away from me, Annie Gunjian in the cultural side, the chief Arabic and French language press section FSNs come to mind. I learned so much from them about the job and environment and also enjoyed so thoroughly my time with them. And what incredible loyalty they showed time after time.

The second came from a Lebanese judge, Antoine Thabet, whom I met by chance and then visited a number of times in his home. These were lengthy sessions, with our discussions centering on Lebanon, how that complicated, fragmented country and society worked and why. Thabet emphasized that no one can come to grips with the reality of the place without giving full weight to the importance of the matter of identity and the extremes people are wiling to go to in order to achieve it and then to manifest it. He felt that all too many foreigners living in Lebanon, even some of the brightest and best intentioned ones, including diplomats, tended to see the country in simplistic, unrealistic and often just plain incorrect ways. He wondered why the outsider in strange surroundings was so often such a poor listener, why his mind and eyes were not more open, why he did not seek to understand what he found around him with a depth that mattered, but instead was satisfied with the superficial, the surface and, unfortunately, that which was all too often just plain false. I have over the years gone over in my mind those extraordinary conversations and have been ever grateful to the good judge for the interest he took in me, but also in his own country.

A third and not unrelated aspect was the importance of curiosity about my places of assignment and what makes them what they are. I had felt that way when a student in Cairo, but here there was one key difference, in that I took it over into the job. I found that by showing this desire to know, all kinds of positive reactions from my interlocutors emerged and from them valuable insights into what we should and could do, but perhaps still most important what we couldn't and shouldn't. We had our objectives and agenda, but how to get these across depended so much on being able to foresee the likely receptivity and to design our approaches accordingly. A corollary to curiosity is that the well placed question can be a most effective communications tool.

The cultural officer and popular novelist of westerns (Fury at Furnace Creek for one), David Garth, had no use for trying to get inside the culture and society and more than a few times I found myself at loggerheads with him. He had not wanted the Lebanon assignment in the first place, and it showed, which is perhaps another lesson. However, his obtuseness did not pose much of a problem in our all too common disputes, as I could invariably count on being backed up by Ed Brooke.

I trust it comes across that I got a lot out of my JOT assignment that stood me in good stead ever since.

Tunis: Radio Officer, Assistant Information Officer

Q: What did you do next?

UNDELAND: I was transferred to Tunis as the assistant radio officer, in fact the assistant information officer, for it was apparently easier to justify this new position if it were somehow tied to producing or acquiring radio programs for the Voice of America. I spent the next four years there, mid- 1958 to mid-1962. Later I became officially the assistant information officer.

Q: What was the situation in Tunisia at that time?

UNDELAND: Tunisia had obtained its independence in 1956, although the agreement permitted French military forces to keep the air base at the Tunis airport and the naval base in Bizerte, both extremely sore points to Tunisians. The United States was first country to recognize its independence, and in 1957 our economic aid program began, followed in about 1960 by military assistance. It was, almost in turn, the first Arab country to accept the Peace Corps, in 1963 to be precise, though the volunteers didn't arrive until 1964. Thus, we developed from the outset very close ties, which in fact had roots going back earlier.

In 1942 while jailed by the French, Bourguiba sent his famous letter to Habib Thameur, one of his key colleagues in the liberation struggle, who was questioning whether it might not be best to line up with the Germans, the unknown factor, in order to fight the known enemy, the French and their colonialism. Remember that at that time Tunisia was formally and in fact occupied by the Germans. Bourguiba replied with an absolute no, and he presciently predicted three things that would come to pass. (1) Relatively soon after the war ended with Germany's defeat, Tunisia was going to gain its independence, but it was still going to want and need a close relationship with France, for many needed things would come from this tie. (2) However, reliance on France alone would be risky and almost assuredly it would not always be in Tunisia's interest to be under the French thumb. (3) There thus had to be an alternative, and it could only be the United States, in whose good intentions Bourguiba had confidence and which would emerge in the post-war world, the most powerful country. Tunisians must see to it that the U.S. became a close friend, and going with the Germans, even temporarily, would be a disastrous move. He was so right on all counts. Bourguiba, that bigger than life figure, forcefully and carefully played the U.S. card, so that he, his leadership and the new nation benefited mightily from the ties that ensued. But it was a two way street, for the U.S. also profited greatly from him, his moderation and the directions he took.

Q: There was an American diplomat before your time, Homer Doolittle or something...

UNDELAND: Hooker Doolittle, a colorful name and a colorful person.

Q: Hooker Doolittle was the consul who befriended Bourguiba when he was...

UNDELAND: Absolutely. He was our consul general in Tunis after World War II and played a significant role in the independence struggle, not hiding his pro-Bourguiba feelings and urging Washington to do the same. Tunis now has a Hooker Doolittle Street, which speaks to his importance in Tunisian eyes. Personally sympathetic to Bourguiba and certain that he and his cohorts would achieve independence, Doolittle helped give the Tunisians a confidence they might otherwise not have had, at least not the same extent. He was a diplomat who grasped the opportunity and made a difference. As a sidelight, my office as head of USIS when I returned for a second assignment there 30 years latein the center of the city directly across from the French chancery and looking out on the main square, formerly named after that arch imperialist politician Jules Ferrhad been Hooker Doolittle's. (I was told this office also has its unsavory past, for it had been that of commander of the Gestapo during part of the six month German occupation of Tunis in 1942-43, but that is another story, the veracity of which I have not tried to track down.) From this prominent place just across a small street from the French command center, the Doolittle thorn in their side must have been a never ending pain. All reports have him prickly, stubborn and never wavering, and furthermore reveling in these character traits. Traceable at least in part to him were the early American recognition, the economic assistance program and Bourguiba's sense of kinship with America.

Q: What was the Tunisia like that you found, and how did we fit into it?

UNDELAND: I stepped into a very welcoming and otherwise positive official atmosphere. The U.S. was respected and wanted by the new Tunisia, which needed to do so much and so rapidly. Independence required many new or altered institutions and priorities, which had to be quite different from those of colonial times. Very little was in place, that is, where all you needed to do was change the name on the door. Tunisians not only had to accomplish much, but also to stamp their mark on these efforts. Their nationalism and pride demanded it. It was a heady time for those who had worked for liberation and yet daunting, and even humbling. They, and particularly Bourguiba, believed they could succeed in what they set out to do on their own, but they also wanted and required outside support, especially from the U.S., to back up their own activity, optimism and dedication. We were that key player.

In a large sense, our assistance was essential to getting that then very poor new country off the ground. Visits to villages and city slums readily brought home just how badly off the vast majority of Tunisians were. Foul smells and ugly sights accosted and offended the mind and senses in both cities and the countryside. Many of the children were shoeless and dressed in rags, almost none from poor families going to school. Unemployment was rife. Smiles were not often to be seen among these desperately poor people, young and old. I will never forget viewing a group of bare footed, shivering, glum faced children silently standing by the side of the road in Le Kef as the snow came down.

Our AID mission, generally called Point Four back then, was large and immensely important, indeed the most effective one I have encountered anywhere, though the ones I saw in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Syria also accomplished much. We were deeply into nearly every facet of economic developmenagriculture, industry, finance, credit mechanisms, urban and rural decentralization, tourism, infrastructure construction and more. The Food For Peace Program provided wages in kind for useful projects all over the country. When its director, George McGovern, came to Tunisia, Bourguiba showed how important he held it and the ties with the U.S. in general by personally escorted him everywhere and insisting they be photographed together at nearly every stop. We were in fact and were seen as that important.

A couple of assistance stories. The tireless efforts of poultry expert Boyd Ivory led to chicken and eggs becoming regular, everyday staples in the diet of Tunisians. The group of young officials working with him became so committed to him personally and to his work that they arrived at his doorstep at 5 AM every morning and did not leave him until late at night. When customs held up chicken vaccine at the port, they accosted its head at his home and wouldn't leave until he ordered the medicine released. They won; he did. They similarly perched at the door of the home of the minister of agriculture when imported poultry feed was not distributed on time, and with a similar outcome. They were impressive and insistent in dealing with the often hide bound farmers, providing the backbone to get that part of the extension service functioning smoothly.

Another local hero was Brian O'Brien, the pottery expert, whose knowledge and tenacity led to vast improvement in the quality and output of pottery, tiles and bricks all over the country. I accompanied him on a visit to Nabeul, the justly famous traditional pottery center and was amazed by the enthusiasm that greeted him at ever turn. Speaking not one word of French or Arabic, he nonetheless made dedicated converts of those with whom he toiled, just as Ivory had.

I personally got deeply involved in one development effort, "managing", if that's not too strong a word, the making a film on the large reforestation scheme outside Le Kef, in a nearly denuded and particularly poor part of the country near the Algerian border. While the trees were important for the future, what mattered most was the employment provided for the hundreds, maybe thousands, who prepared the terraces, dug the holes and put in the threes. Two thirds of their wages came in the form of wheat and cooking oil from Food For Peace Program. What they received but their families didn't need, they sold, so this aid also put money in their pockets. This resulting documentary, "That the Mountain Shall Bloom" was repeatedly shown all over the country, in the Arabic version of course, and was sent to other Arab World posts. I was treated as something of a hero by the governor and his key staff, a rather heady experience for a young officer.

Maybe this is the place for a few sentences on Tunisia's importance to the U.S., beyond Cold War concerns and its influence on some African independence movements that had local offices. We wanted to see Tunisia succeed economically and become an example to the world, particularly the Muslim World, of an ex-colonial country with few natural resources, but blessed with moderate, dynamic leadership, that was making it in steady, if not dramatic, fashion. A sub, but key, theme was that we could and wanted to play a decisive role in its development, that we were forthcoming, and that a young nation could deal easily with us, if it used our assistance wisely. It was a time when we felt frustrated that there were not more Tunisia's In Africa, Asia and Latin America.

In an entirely different area, Tunisia's lead in seeking Arab accommodation with Israel provided a strong political argument for our investment of money and effort in it. We well knew this was not because the Tunisian people felt positively about Israel or didn't really care, but because this was Bourguiba's position, which was sufficient reason for them, in the main, to go along with him. He said that the Arabs had the choice of accepting it in their midst or continuing to suffer defeats at its hand and lose more territory. We looked on this as a refreshing contrast with the views of leaders in most other Arab countries, particularly Nasser in Egypt.

Tunisia was the first Arab country to openly accept American Jews being assigned there, including in the Peace Corps. While they were not permitted in the army, top government positions and undoubtedly some other places, there was a lot of the live and let live attitude on this matter. The Jewish community was visible, active and thriving, with strong representation in commerce, finance, the professions, the media and parts of education. Their synagogues, graveyards and businesses were well protected. I might add they were well represented on the USIS staff.

Turning to how we fit in, I have noted the closeness and warmth of our official relations. These, however, did not carry over nearly as much as one might have expected, and we would have liked, into cultural, social and personal arenas. I'm not sure I understand all of the reasons, but some of the wariness and negative views of the U.S. we often encountered from the French educated Tunisian elite went back to ideas acquired during their days in France, mostly as students, and their taking on the coloring of the anti-communist French left, which, in all but perhaps security terms, resented and looked down on America and Americans. It was particularly prevalent in education and media circles, which is where we in USIS were most concerned. This dichotomy was galling, although in retrospect we perhaps afforded it more weight than it in fact merited. It was an anomaly that affected the kind and caliber of relationships and worked against developing the close human ties that we wanted for professional as much as personal reasons.

At the same time, it must be admitted that we profited from the talents of these critics, whose ease with Western ways helped in communication and often in cooperation. With a backward view of decades, I am more understanding and now tend to down-play the significance of some of the negative attitudes towards the U.S., but I must recall how much we then disliked them and how powerless we felt to do very much of anything about them. It seemed so absurd to hear from Tunisians that American had taken over the leadership of Western imperialisin the face of our support for Bourguiba and his independence struggland that the U.S. was a country without culture or couth, that Americans were brash and unsophisticated, ill equipped for world leadership and all of that garbage of a nation washed over with Coca Cola.

The result was we worked closely and usually well with Tunisians and Tunisian institutions, but saw very little of these persons outside work or official situations. I remember a Tunisian trying to explain this phenomenon to me, saying that these officials and others didn't have money for restaurants and their small homes and apartments were not suitable for entertaining. They felt uncomfortable coming to our places and not being able to reciprocate. Fair enough, but that was only part of it, and we both knew it. Anyway, the result was that we largely went our own ways outside the office. When I returned as PAO 30 years later, these attitudes had changed 180 degrees, with the slightest trace of this earlier drawing apart nearly impossible to find.

We and most of the rest of the mission resided in the outskirts of Tunis, in the coastal suburbs, Carthage, La Marsa, Gammarth and Amilcathe PAO Harris Peel wanted us therwhich made for pleasant living, but in retrospect was a mistake, for it physically removed us from the life and people of the city. Maybe our personal relationships would have been better, and I would have tempered the comments I just made, had we lived in Tunis proper.

On the other hand, having our home in Amilcar did give me the chance on several occasions to meet informally, albeit for only a minute or two, with Bourguiba. He loved to walk over the fields of Carthage, which he could do by merely stepping out the door of the presidential palace. I was also given to tramping over the same area with my three/four year old son, David, and when our paths crossed, we stopped and chatted before heading our separate ways. His question was always how were we getting on, did we need anything, did we like being in Tunisia? A magnetic personality, you could not but be captivated by him, although he did have the unfortunate practice of reaching down and patting children on the head. My son didn't like it and shied away, but Bourguiba just went on talking, not seeming to notice this reaction. He always had an aide or two with him for companionship, but no security of any sort. None of us thought anything about his total lack of guards. It was natural, the way things were, back then. What a far cry from what we came to find everywhere in the world only a few decades later, including in Tunisia.

We felt USIS operations were significant, that we were doing important things, which were for the most part well appreciated. Our various exchange programs sending people to the United States and bringing Americans to Tunisia, were not only very popular, but perhaps were given too much credit for helping with development and strengthening of ties. Habib Motemri returned from a grant to set up an institution for orphans, in large measure based on what he observed at Boys Town just outside Omaha, which had so deeply impressed him. A journalist reported on his trip with a light hearted brochure titled, "Across the United States Whiskey By Whiskey" which amused many and helped provide, at least for some, a human face to the States.

Using AID money, USIS was central in establishing the Bourguiba Institute of Languages, which became the country's main English teaching facility. It later became a section in the national university.

In Tunisia, of all countries where I have served, our efforts to get the activities of the AID program better known were generally welcomed, though frankly they didn't make very many ripples. It was a main part of my job, and in addition to the film, we did annual booklets and almost daily press releases. I was less happy with these efforts than anything else I did, for I wondered if we were not sometimes pushing too hard. Ever since then, I have had my antennae up for negative reactions to our tooting of our assistance horn.

Q: How were the French seen? You mentioned the troops stationed at the airport and Bizerte, and they must have been in many other places.

UNDELAND: No, only in those two, and one of them not for long. One evening, while driving home after work, I pulled over to the side of the road, just opposite el Aouina Airport, i.e. Tunis' airport, and watched the French forces lower the tri-color at their base there for the last time. They then piled into their trucks and drove off to the Bizerte naval base. The Tunisians were elated, but were impatient for a similar departure from Bizerte. However, that was not to come easily or without pain. They started a campaign of harassment, whether the party or government were behind it remains a mystery, but certainly officialdom didn't stop it, which was not wise. It had no chance of succeeding, while so infuriating the French that they replied by unleashing their troops on a rampage through the city of Bizerte. Taunted and provoked, yes, but nothing that should have brought about this kind of response. Unspeakable outrages were committed against the civilian population. To drive home their point and cause maximum humiliation, the rape, killing, pillage and destruction of property were committed largely by troops from Senegal and by the harkis, i.e. Moroccan, Algerian and perhaps some Tunisian soldiers in the French army. Sickening stuff.

We had problems with parts of the Tunisian government at this time, because they had called on us to make the French stop, and we did much less that they expected of us. The French seemed to go out of their way to use American munitions, leaving shell cases and such lying around clearly marked "Made In USA". We felt certain this was done intentionally to embarrass if not implicate us.

Individual Tunisians were also unhappy with us. An official at the radio station told me he and his colleagues now felt they could never again count on the United States as a completely reliable friend. He went on saying, "we'll cooperate and work with you, but only when we know it is in our interest to do so." I remember replying by asking if that were not really best for the both of us? He thought for a moment, calmed down and agreed that probably it was.

You asked how the French were seen. There was all too much of the colonialist mentality among those resident, particularly the long time ones, which kept cropping up, along with little slights and other things that thoroughly bothered the Tunisians. These were in the main nothing more than slurs and pin-pricks, but they occurred often enough that Tunisians were always on the look out for them, indeed, some times seeing devils when there were none.

Still, there were also serious problems. A young Tunisian returned after getting an advanced engineering degree in the States and was hired by the phone company, a government entity. In looking over the system, he noticed some additional wiring that didn't make sense. Tracing it, he discovered it led into the basement of the French chancery a couple of blocks away, feeding into a sizable, covert listening operation. The French were blatantly tapping the national system. Tunisians were, as would be expected, irate, and let off a storm of indignation that was all over town. fueling talk that, whatever else, that the French could not be trusted, however much one might deal with them. I was among a group at a reception, who heard this story directly from Interior Minister Driss Guiga. Another time I met one of the hired listeners, who without hesitation or embarrassment told me there were at least 40 persons at all times with earphones on, sitting at rows of desks, while monitoring the phone calls to and from selected persons.

One huge bone of contention came from the Catholic religious order, known as the White Fathers who had their world headquarters and the cathedral atop Byrsa, the high point of the ancient Carthaginian and Roman city, the Carthage of then and now. In 1929, the colonial authorities had twisted the Beylical government's arm to get it to pay entirely for an international conference of the order, which was held in the cathedral. Bourguiba was outraged, and from the moment of independence went after the White Fathers and their considerable holdings, nationalizing their farms, churches and the cathedral itself, but with his usual moderation permitted the order to remain, to run a couple of schools and convents and monasteries and to hold services.

Q: To get more of a feel about the Bizerte crisis, had the French not seen the writing on the wall and been thinking of pulling out of there too?

UNDELAND: Not at all. For them, the Bizerte base was a vital link in their military position in the western Mediterranean. Remember this was during the Algerian War and anyway, France had historically held the predominant military position in that large area, which it was striving to maintain. Along this same line, there were a number of French in both France and North Africa, who felt strongly that they should not have given up their control of Tunisia and acceded to its independence. Indeed, I ran into a couple of them, who were long time Tunisia residents, still holding this view 30 years later. I went over this ground with the French military attachï¿½ during my second tour, and he confirmed what I've said about the Bizerte mess and also that France had for long had had no inclination to give up its naval base, that is, until it felt it could no longer sustain it.

Turning to the French and Bourguiba, they never figured out how to deal with him, while he understood them very well and expertly played on their psychology and weaknesses. French educated and married to a French woman, he not only had native-speaker command of the language, but was bi-cultural as well. It's amazing how fully at home with the French and French ways a significant number of educated Tunisians of his generation were. Bourguiba's tactics were very simple and repeated over and over. After a protracted, often heated, political struggle, for the most part non- violent, he would finally agree to something, but hardly was the ink dry on the page before he was back insisting on more.

The French were nonplused by these tactics, and they tried to deal with him in all sorts of ways, toughness, the nice guy act, jail, banishment, exile. However, nothing really worked for them. In that era, Bourguiba waof course you have to think first of all of Gandhone of the handful of Third World leaders who made the independence campaign at heart non- violent. His achievement was all the more remarkable, for I am convinced it was harder to wage it and succeed against the French than the Britislook at the sad histories of Algeria and Indochinbut Bourguiba pulled it off. He was truly a great visionary and national leader.

This may be an appropriate place for a few words on College Sidiki, the elite Tunis school that produced Bourguiba and many of those around him. In the 1870's, Tunisia's formidable reformer and prime minister, Khereddine, saw to the founding of this remarkable school, which insisted on the highest of standards, while demanding that the students fully master both Arabic and French. In reality, it was a joint Tunisian-French institution. Imaginative and dedicated Tunisians and Frenchmen worked jointly to develop its challenging curriculum. The idea was that most would go on to higher studies in France and most did. When independence came, the country was very fortunate to find its direction and administration in the hands of Sadikiens. If memory holds up, at least three-quarters of the ministers were that school's graduates.

Q: It must have been a difficult position for the Americans there in your type of position, but also for the rest of the embassy. We had a commitment to keep France in NATO, which was a major element in stopping Soviet expansion, and yet we were all for newly-emerging nations, particularly friendly ones such as Tunisia. Were you under restraints about reporting on the French, on how we dealt with them in the situation there?

UNDELAND: The French looked on Tunisia as their preserve and resented our presence and active role. They saw us as trying to replace them, the "us" being the Anglo-Saxon, English speaking, bogeymen, but it was much more the Americans than the Brits, for we were the main actors.

We in USIS had little contact with the French, partly because they didn't want it, but also we did not see them as important to our aims and activities and therefore didn't make much effort from our side. Maybe we should have done more. Some Tunisians were amused by this French defensiveness concerning us and would regale us with stories of French pique. As to reporting, we in USIS were under no restraints, but we rarely did any of it, because we were engaged elsewhere and, anyway, we didn't have a whole lot of note to pass on about this subject.

Your question, however, seems to relate more to the bigger picture. I didn't know details about embassy relations with the huge French counterpart in Tunis, but they saw much more of their chers collegues than we did. I never heard of our political officers and others being under any restraints, reporting or other, but then I was the junior person in a separate organization, located at the center a couple of miles from our chancery.

Despite the many tensions in Tunisian-French relations, some of them serious, the French had a great deal going for them. Many of the Tunisian elite had been educated in France, a surprising number, as I have noted, being bi-lingual and bi-cultural. They maintained major schools in Tunisia. In those days, their vast rural property holdings had not yet been nationalized, though they knew they soon would be, for their big houses and best agricultural land, the wheat fields, orchards and vineyards, could not long be permitted to remain in the hands of foreigners. Commerce and industry were largely French. They owned and ran the leading hotels. In fact, the foremost hotel in Tunis was the Hotel Majestique; in Kairouan it was the Hotel Splendid. How much more French can you get? Probably most important was Bourguiba's fundamental commitment to the French relationship, however much it was tested by events. The French felt that whatever independence might bring politically they could and would hold on to their dominant economic and cultural position and that Tunisians in leadership echelons would first look to France, almost as it were their second home.

So far as I knew, no important difficulties the U.S. had with France and vise versa were to any meaningful degree played out in Tunisia.

I was personally caught up with one bizarre brouhaha involving France. A couple of CIA operatives accompanied the body of the revolutionary, Franz Fanon, who had died in the U.S., back to Tunisia. The CIA obviously had had him on its payroll and had brought him to the States for medical treatment. He had wanted to be buried on Algerian soil, which in fact was done with these Americans present, having gotten through the Morice Line, that up to 50 km. wide open free fire zone just inside the Algerian border, set up by the French to prevent infiltration from Tunisia. A photo was taken of the Americans at the grave site, which got into the hands of the AFP correspondent in Tunis. I knew him well, and he came to me for verification and/or the embassy's comment. The information officer was away, the ambassador and DCM couldn't be reached and the PAO refused to have anything to do with it. I therefore went to the political counselor, who told me, indeed ordered me, over my objections to confirm the story. I did as orderewith more experience under my belt I would have refused and left it up to hionly to see the whole thing categorically denied the next day by the department's spokesman in Washington. The French lodged a formal protest, and the foreign press, mostly French journalists, was hot after us. Ambassador Walmsley put the blame squarely on the political counselor and not me and decided to handle the affair by making me the only one authorized to answer queries. He then ordering me to disappear completely for several days. A lot of bird life around Lake Ichkeul and other places got watchea hobby I got seriously into during my Tunis assignmenwhile the USIS office and Joan at home gamely fielded the spate of phone calls. When I had returned to circulation, it had already largely blown over and was no longer of much interest to AFP or any other news organization.

There is a sequel. Decades later on a visit to Tunisia when I was in retirement, a professor friend from Tunis University mentioned in passing he was preparing a program on Fanon, his ideas and the revolutions he had supported. He was aghast when I related the above incident, most of all that Fanon had been working with the CIA. He of course went ahead with his plans for the program, sheepishly telling me on a subsequent visit to Tunisia that much as he regretted it, he had had no choice but to suppress what I'd told him, partly because it wouldn't have been believed, but also because it would have cast doubts on Fanon's revolutionary reputation that the seminar aimed to enhance.

Q: How about the cultural side, dealing with the situation that seems to occur anytime we come across the French, as you have just mentioned? How did you try to counter their looking down on Americans as "cultural barbarians" and that sort of thing? Or did you?

UNDELAND: We found their cultural haughtiness unpleasant and demeaning, but, as I've said, we were not paying all that much attention to them. It just wasn't that big a deal for us. What did bother us, however, was when it came from the mouths of Tunisians, as happened with some frequency. They were our focus, not the French.

Q: I have the impression that while the French are always aghast at the popular, commercial standing of the United States in movies, music, things like thaAmerican cultural imperialism as they sometimes call ikind of takes over without any involvement of the American government. How did that fit into the Tunisian experience?

UNDELAND: You have a good point. It happened in Tunisia, and nearly everywhere else I've been stationed. Films, television series and other programs, popular music, rock and the rest of it, that have been popular with Tunisian youth, at least among the better educated in the cities, were not an American monopoly, but certainly the United States was and is the leader and has long been so recognized. A highlight of my Tunis assignment was Willis Conover's triumphal visit, when, to our surprise, he was treated as something of a conquering hero. Conover did the "Jazz USA" program on the VOA and had a far wider Tunisian audience than any of us in the post had realized, but as the fulsome local welcome he received clearly showed. As a general statement, American popular culture had become more easily available to Tunisians, and they had become accustomed to and appreciative of it. Films, TV and radio were the main vehicles. Universal education created a far larger number of young people attuned to popular Western culture. French attitudes and reactions towards the Americans in this area did not, I believe, have much of an effect on young Tunisians, i.e. the generations that were entirely or mostly educated inside Tunisia.

Q: What would you say were probably the most successful things that you were involved in at that time?

UNDELAND: First and foremost were the various programs that brought Tunisians and Americans together, that is, into face-to-face contact. The Fulbright exchanges both ways, American speakers, the then Leaders and Specialists exchanges, now called International Visitors, and a host of others. This has been where the greatest long term impact has best been made, and in Tunisia or elsewhere, we have never come up with any real substitute for direct interaction. Out of these came ongoing personal ties, but also institutional ones and the willingness and desire for more transfer of information and meetings. You can't measure it, like counting the numbers of bars of soap sold or dollar profits, but I am absolutely convinced the effect has been over time more than merely considerable. And it is not just with the person who has had the usually happy and profitable experiences, but also with others in his or her circle, with whom he/she has shared experiences, observations and the like. The multiplier effect has been immense, though we have usually heard specific examples of it only much later, if at all, and then often by chance. These are the activities, which have most affected, most often changed, attitudes. I don't mean to say that such awakening or transformation has been the normal result, but how often Tunisians and others back from their visits to or studies in the States have offered up instances of where previous negative impressions have been altered or laid to rest. Exchanges have paid us big dividends.

A second area of major impact, again in Tunisia and elsewhere, has been our involvement in English teaching, whether directly, which we have not done in Tunisia, or through working with the ministry of education, local institutions and the teachers, which was the case. Closely related are our libraries, where the main clientele has been students, the products of English teaching efforts we have run or supported. For Tunisia's growing English proficiency, our library and that of the British Council have been the main sources for reading and audio visual materials. In recent years, satellite TV has brought in CNN and other English language programs, and before that the VOA and BBC had language learning impact, and, I should add, they have continued to have it.

Essential to our task was and is providing complete, reliable and timely information on public expressions of American foreign policy and the politics and climate behind it. In the Tunis of the '50s and '60s, getting this information was a cumbersome affair, with often garbled radio reception which had to be cleaned up before our French and Arabic translators took over. The transmissions were entirely in English; thus, everything had to be translated. Our daily bulletins went to governmental offices, the media and some selected individuals, professors, lawyers, and others we wanted to have access to this information and to those who sought it from us. Important perhaps today and forgotten tomorrow was often the case, but we had the duty to be the reliable source for the public side of the American government, what it said and providing, to the extent we could, the context.

I have never been a particular fan of press placement, but we had a lot of it in Tunisia, although nothing of an overtly political nature or even with political overtones. Yet, I remember the post and Washington looked on it as something we did commendably well. We also were big in showing documentary films around the country, in villages and cities, and in distributing publications at the same time. I cannot measure just what effect they had, but I recall that when Washington ordered us to cut back on them, and then eliminated them, we received cries of protest. My hazard is they were more useful than we realized or our headquarters was willing to admit. For USIS, is popularity a worthwhile aim in its own right? Not a meaningless question, as far as I'm concerned, although Washington not only didn't agree, but usually wouldn't even consider it.

I must mention personal contacts, on which in retrospect I realize we did not put enough emphasis, but nonetheless it had considerable bearing. We were welcomed almost everywhere and were over and over again asked to come back for return visits. From these sessions came program ideas and adjustments, but even more important, our understanding of Tunisian realities. I am sure I will say it again, but real communication on someone else's turf is well over 50 percent just listening to what the other fellow has to say, and then seeking ways to respond that answer to his and our concerns.

The post went from the active, hands-on, try anything leadership of PAO Harris Peel to the literal abdication of his successor, Bill Krauss, who was rarely in the office and then doing god knows what behind his closed door. He did keep the ambassador happy, which is something, but he paid no attention to the planning, designing, executing and evaluating of what we were up to, leaving that to the capable IO, Don Gilmore, and CAO, Bill Gresham, plus myself, I the junior member of the triumvirate. We worked collegially and well, little if at all missing Krauss' absence, but in my 35 year career, I never encountered anything like this abandonment of duty. Personally, he was a stimulating and likable sort; it was just he didn't do anything. How he got by in his previous Paris and London assignments was a mystery, although he wrote ambassadorial speeches, which I suppose could explain it.

We were inspected during this period of abdication, and before the inspectors arrived, the three of us agreed we would answer fully all questions posed, but would not to proffer on our own what the real situation was. While we would hide nothing, it was up to them to see that something was very wrong and to query us to find out what it was. They never did, and I have had a low view of inspections ever since.

Given my ties with the FSNs, I found myself in the midst of often wrenching discussions with those who were not Tunisian Muslims, i.e. citizens of France, Italy and other countries or Tunisian Jews, on whether there was a likely future for them and their families in independent, ex-colonial Tunisia, or whether they should be among the many foreigners and Jews who were reluctantly but definitively leaving. Uncomfortably, I took on this task, but I was unwilling to be anything short of totally candid. I put my remarks largely in terms of what I thought I would do were I in that position and, in at least most cases, concluded I probably would bite the bullet and depart. That is what most of them did, although with many regrets, for Tunisia had been their home, for some of them for generations. I was disturbed, yet flattered they had wanted to seek me out. During my tour, the make up of the Post lost most of its international staffing character.

Q: Talk a bit of the embassy. You had two ambassadors, G. Lewis Jones and Walter M. Walmsley. What was your impression of how they operated? Did you have any feel for them?

UNDELAND: I was no great fan of G. Lewis Jones, who did what I considered some pretty despicable things, although I was far down in the pecking order, and they did not affect me personally. Still, in representing U.S. interests and promoting American-Tunisian ties, I think his record must have been at least adequate and perhaps more. He, so far as I knew, got along well with Bourguiba and those around him, although I don't believe he saw the president or his coterie all that frequently. The relations between the two governments were excellent and becoming broader and deeper. Jones was the key American figure on the scene, and it is on this that major judgments about him should be made.

The highlight of his tour was the 1959 visit by Eisenhower, the only American president ever to have come to Tunisia while in office. It lasted only a few hours, but was seen by Tunisians as a big deal, helping build up their confidence and sense of importance. Indeed, I encountered favorable references to it when again assigned to Tunisia three decades later.

Walmsley also got on well with the leadership. He had a reputation of being temperamental and difficult, but I found him attractive, often amusing, and felt his views on Tunisia were well founded and, when he spoke about them, ably presented. He loved a good story, if slightly blue, so much the better. For some reason, he took an interest in me, although my job dealings with him were not numerous, outside of the Fanon incident.

Q: What didn't you like about Jones? I'm trying to figure out the style of ambassadors and all that.

UNDELAND: He tried to recruit his "agent", in every section of the mission, one who would report only to him, both on its operations and personnel, and particularly pass on any scuttlebutt and rumors. He loved any hint of scandal or impropriety, anything titillating, though whether only for self amusement or as a menacing tool I do not know. PAO Harris Peel, rightfully would have none of it in USIS, when he targeted Gresham to be his man, and this confrontation got pretty messy before it was over. This was the only time I ever encountered such shenanigans in my career.

His vanity knew no limits, his jokes and stories demanded laughter. He could only be photographed on his "good side". He loved being kowtowed to. However, Jones later became the director general of the Foreign Service, so my view of him were obviously not shared by everybody. I might add an immense sigh of relief went through the mission when his tour ended. At the airport as the plane carrying the Joneses taxied down the runway to take off, Station Chief Frank Coolidge clapped his hands in Arab fashion, waiters rushed out bringing glasses and bottles of champagne, and he led us in saluting the event by raising his glass towards the departing plane and gravely intoning, "the ambassador is dead; long live the DCM", who by the way, was the much liked and respected David McKillop. For all his comings a goings, Jones demanded everyone of the staff be at the airport to salute him.

Q: I take it Walmsley, then, was an easier person to deal with.

UNDELAND: I wouldn't use the word "easy", but I, from my junior position, vastly preferred him. Although I found him likable, humorous, approachable and for the most part considerate, he had a temper and did not like to be in any way challenged. For me, a friendly autocrat perhaps best sums him up. He got along very well with Tunisians. Military assistance began during his tenure and steps were taken that would be leading to Tunisia being the first Arab country to admit the Peace Corps. In a sense, it was perhaps more testing for Walmsley than Jones, for the reality and complexity of the knotty nation building tasks lying ahead had largely replaced the euphoria of independence and its immediate aftermath.

Q: Could we go back to the Bizerte thing. How did it affect us?

UNDELAND: We were not hunkering down or avoiding contacts or otherwise acting as if we were threatened. We refrained from some overtly public activities efforts, but the library remained open and was as well frequented as usual, and we were seeing people very much as we always had. The Tunisians welcomed this stance, although we were criticized for not more strongly and openly opposing the French. We must remember the Bizerte crisis didn't last very long, and while the lingering bad feelings against the French sometimes also touched us, they quite rapidly lost their immediacy.

Q: Did we have any USIS operation in Bizerte?

UNDELAND: No. We were only in Tunis, but we had outward reach through our touring film van, and accompanying publication distribution and an occasional special program we put on outside Tunis. As I said, when USIA, in one of its more narrow minded moods, eliminated the film vans for "not reaching our target audiences", we got a number of strong complaints. Deservedly so, in my view then and ever since. Every year, we put together modest exhibits, sometimes embarrassingly modest, for the annual fairs in Sfax and Sousse.

Q: How about the Algerian situation? You were there until 1962. Was that bubbling at that time?

UNDELAND: Very much so.

Q: Were we under constraints not to talk about Senator Kennedy's speech of support for Algerian independence, and things like this? Was our embassy divided in its views? How did we treat the whole Algerian thing?

UNDELAND: We in USIS had no official dealings with the Algerian provisional government, known by its French initials GPRA, except to provide it quietly, and at its request, with our information bulletins and our publications. I didn't seek out these Algerians, but by chance got to know a couple of them reasonably well. With the embassy, it was a different affair. I was aware that specific officers were designated to have in depth contacts with them, but knew nothing beyond that simple fact.

The GPRA had its headquarters in Tunis, with the blessing and yet apprehension of the Tunisian government. There were areas near the border completely under Algerian control, for example, around Ghardimaou, which were closed to all others, except for the farmers and villagers who had long lived there and I suppose also some local officials. I once tried to visit the antiquities site at Chemtou, which is located in that region, but was politely turned away some kilometers before reaching there by armed, uniformed Algerians. The Tunisians, officially and popularly, supported the GPRA, which for them was a bone of contention with the French. At the same time, the Tunisians sometimes found the Algerians overbearing and didn't like being cut off from parts of their own country, which had become in reality Algerian territory, if only temporarily.

You mention Senator Kennedy's speech; I don't remember our putting out the text, but if we received it in our wireless file, I am certain we did. An American senator speaking out on North Africa was always grist for our mill. What the French thought about it would have had no bearing for us.

Q: In your meetings with Tunisians, did you find yourself guarded in discussing what was happening in Algeria?

UNDELAND: Not at al. It was a subject that came up all the time, but I was not privy to intelligence and other information that some of the embassy officers had and therefore didn't have much of note to say. But neither did the Tunisians I saw. I fear these conversations didn't contribute much to the sum total of human knowledge. Far more front and center in my talks were American-Tunisian and, to a lesser extent, Tunisian-French connections.

The negative attitudes towards the Algerians were almost always quite different from the resentments against the French. A Tunisian information official summed this up to me by noting that he could never justify what the French were doing in Algeria, period. Though he often didn't like what the Algerians were up to in Tunisia or how they were going about it, still he might well have acted in exactly the same way, were the Tunisians and the Algerians to trade places.

Q: Did our ties with Israel play somewhat differently in Tunisia from the way they did in Lebanon?

This might be a good place to bring up how Tunisians looked on themselves and where they saw that they fit in. It is fair to say most of them wanted to strengthen their Arab relations and assert an Arab identity, but they realized they were not numerous, were far away from the Arab heartland, had other interests and, perhaps most tellingly, were not taken very seriously by Middle Eastern Arabs. They recognized they could not be more than peripheral to MidEast Arab concerns, which wasn't satisfying, but had to be accepted as a reality. They were obviously not European and couldn't be, though some of the elite came close. Certainly, they were not black Africans and scorned the thought. If you did not want to get a sharp reaction, you'd better be sure to call them North Africans and not just Africans. Yet, this designation was also not satisfactory, for it is such a divided, small, inhomogeneous area, that were it were their basic identity, it would automatically marginalize them. The best they were and are able to come up with was Tunisian Arabs, unsatisfactory as it was and is.

Q: Nasser, was he a factor?

UNDELAND: Nasser was a player everywhere in the Arab World, but for Tunisians loyal to Bourguiba, as the vast majority were, he was far less important than in most other Arab countries. In fact, he made a mistake in taking on the Tunisian president and waging a vigorous radio and press war against him; Bourguiba responded forcefully and most Tunisians lined up solidly behind him.

The more traditional south, but not Sfax, and conservative Kairouan in the center had problems with Bourguiba's outspoken and unrelenting modernizing push. There, Nasser made some inroads, but never enough to pose a serious threat. Bourguiba didn't like his bombast, his seeking an Arab unity but only under him, his challenge to the West, and what he saw as Nasser's boorishness and lack of sophistication. It should be remembered that Ahmed Ben Salah, who had openly challenged Bourguiba, had not only been given refuge in Egypt, but been warmly welcomed there. That didn't help Nasser's standing with many, particularly Bourguiba loyalists.

A far bigger challenge to Bourguiba came from his being considered by some as insufficiently Muslim, particularly when he went after the sun-up to sun-down fasting during the holy month of Ramadan. He said he didn't care whether anybody did so or not, whether they caroused and feasted most of the night, so long as they were on the job at the usual hour in the morning and worked effectively. He could not accept that Tunisia, a young country just starting out and with so much to do in so little time, lose a month of serious work to maintain this tradition. Often expressed in a scornful, preachy way, this was taken by some as an attack on Islam, and there were serious disturbances in Kairouan and places in the south.

Q: Were we playing any role in the opposition to Nasser or were we just pushing American policy and not getting involved in this quarrel?

UNDELAND: There was nothing I was involved in or knew of that would indicate such a role for us, but we were far happier with Bourguiba than with Nasser and, when appropriate occasions arose, made few bones about it. I've neither heard nor read anything that indicates Bourguiba ever asked for our concrete help against Nasser or that we, at our own initiative, offered it.

Q: You left Tunisia in 1962, is that right?

UNDELAND: Summer of 1962, yes. Before we move on, I want to say what a satisfying tour it was. I felt when I finished my four years there, I was ready to take on considerably more responsibility with confidence. As to the country itself, I felt certain that Tunisia, with all its limitations, was destined to succeed, with its capable and hard working people and its forward looking leadership. It is nice to leave a place with that sense of optimism over its future.

Q: Still not going back to the United States. You spent far less time in the United States than anybody I've interviewed.

UNDELAND: That may very well be. In my 35 plus year career, I was assigned to Washington for only six years. After Tunis I went to Alexandria, Egypt, as the branch public affairs officer, an assignment I eagerly sought. I would be on my own and, although I had only visited that city a few times, the prospect of being again in Egypt brought out a warm glow.

Alexandria: Branch Public Affairs Officer

Q: You were there from 1962 to 1964. What were you doing?

UNDELAND: I directed our operation in that city. It was my enjoyable task to install USIS in the glorious, 42 room mansion, built by the Baron de Menasce in the 1920s, which had been located by my predecessor, Marshall Berg, and purchased by the embassy, using our almost unlimited PL 480 generated Egyptian money. I oversaw its transformation physically and aesthetically into the finest USIS center I have seen anywhere. We even had gamboling, bare breasted nymphs painted on the skylight over the huge main hall, a detail not wholly without appeal. It housed our active English-teaching program for some 600 Alexandrines at any one time, a sizable and growing library, a fine film projection room, lots of exhibit space and offices having an opulence reminding one of an earlier age, overall, a splendor to which I found no problem in becoming nicely accustomed. Fearing sequestration, to be undoubtedly followed by nationalization, the owner, Pierre Tawil, who had made a vast fortune gathering scrap metal from the Western Desert after World War II, almost gave it to us.

But I did have one problem with the building. Try as I did, I could only find 38 of the supposed 42 rooms, including the 2 wine cellars, which alas were joined together to become nothing more than an ordinary English teaching classroom. Assuming that the sale document was correct, the other four must have been hidden or secret rooms which never came to light, at least not during my tour.

In no assignment of mine, did the role of the USIS FSN staff loom larger, although I benefited from the same in Cairo a couple of decades later, as well as in Damascus, Riyadh, Tunis and elsewhere. I inherited an able crew, and was able to strengthen it, by adding the wives of the head of the Alexandria Bar Association, of the director of the Greco-Roman Museum and of a leading engineering professor at Alexandria University, all highly competent, who gave me and the center not only their excellent talents, but also vital knowledge of and entrï¿½e into Alexandria society (both small and large s) and local institutions. I cannot overemphasize just how important these employees were in virtually everything we did. Beginning at this time and in subsequent PAOships, I always started my work day by meeting with these key staff members, who kept me current and provided a main focus for determining what we would do that day, as well as over time.

My predecessor, Marshall Berg, had viewed what we could and should be doing, almost exactly as I did, so, although he had left before I arrived, it was a seamless changeover. I had another inherited advantage, for the center was widely accepted as an integral part of the Alexandria landscape, despite its cramped, unappealing quarters before the move, which gave us proper space, facilities and location that were in keeping with our presumed importance. Indeed, we were often given more credit for what we stood for and were doing and than I fear was, in all honesty, deserved. The pond was small, but we were deemed to be big fish and tried to live up to that reputation.

The midnight move to the palatial quarters had rare panache and is a good story. Fearing the owner of the former center would get a court stop order to back up his claim in a long standing rent dispute, which went back to before the time I arrived, we packed everything up to be ready to clear out on a Thursday night, for the courts were closed on Friday and therefore could not issue an injunction before Saturday. We hired from the port four large carts, with iron rimmed wheels, each driven by six horses. It was illegal that these vehicles be allowed on the city streets, but the price was cheap, our Egyptian staff thought it was the way to do it, and a little baksheesh to the police en route from the port and along the half dozen blocks or so between the old and new centers easily overcame that problem. The carts arrived shortly before midnight. The furniture, equipment, file cabinets, cartons of books and our other stuff were quickly piled on them, and off we clattered through the cool night, with the horses hooves and iron shod wheels raising an incredible din. It is unimaginable that anyone along our route was not awakened as we rumbled past. Alexandrines in droves threw open their windows and stared at us, but nobody shouted out, at least not that we heard, nor, to my knowledge complained later to the police or municipal officials and certainly not to us. What an experience it was to ride atop these carts. I loved it. More than a few told us afterwards that they found it splendid fun and a great joke, commending us on this excellent publicity for the center. A couple of persons asked how I'd thought of it. When I said the idea came from our Egyptian staff, they reacted with a "but of course", one noting that it was too Egyptian to be thought up by a foreigner.

It was with some consternation, when, after we had become quite well settled in the new quarters and I returned from a vacation abroad, I learned the name had been abruptly changed by Jim Halsema, the PAO in Cairo and my boss, from the American Cultural Center to the Thomas Jefferson Center. I protested to him, but he cut me short, saying it was the right move, for he had discovered while I was away that Jefferson was virtually a household name in Alexandria, and we should capitalize on this fact. I knew he was talking utter nonsense, and it took but little detective work to find out the truth. During a visit of a Virginia trade delegation, Alexandria's governor, Hamdi Ashur, gave a fulsome address, praising all things Virginian, and singling out Jefferson as the greatest man from that great state, as Egyptian students were taught in school and Alexandrines in all walks of life well knew. Halsema was present and swallowed it hook, line and sinker. Of course what had really happened was that an aide of the governor came to the center seeking what should be put in the governor's speech. He and our Egyptian head librarian, Mr. Ghamri, cooked up the Jefferson line and all other good words to be said about Virginia. Once Halsema, never an easy person for anyone on his staff to deal with, had made up his mind, he would almost never budge, and the center's name was no exception. Officially, Thomas Jefferson was doggedly kept, but to everybody, starting with me, it remained the American Cultural Center. I went on using ACC letterhead stationery, typing in Thomas Jefferson in small letters just below the old logo.

To digress further, accustomed and familiar names were not easily changed in Alexandria. After the 1952 revolution, the city's main street was renamed Al Horeya (freedom), but a decade later most Alexandrines still called it King Fuad Street, and I met a couple of old timers for whom it was still l'Ancien rue de Rosette, as it was called before the1920s.

Attitudes about the U.S. were in some basic ways the opposite of what I had encountered in Tunisia, for although the Nasser government had by then become stridently anti-American, the vast majority of the people, with whom we were in contact, could not have been warmer, more friendly, more favorably disposed towards the U.S. and more welcoming to the center and to me. They of course didn't like our Israeli policy, period, but didn't let it interfere with other things. A few Nasser loyalists I encountered had mixed views concerning our ties with his Arab enemies, but there was almost none of those snide comments I had encountered in Tunisia from the French educated left. And yet, some of them had also been educated in France and used French, as readily as Arabic. The psychiatry professor, Sami Ali, the archaeologist Ahmed Fikry and the chairwoman of the French Department at the University of Alexandria, all of whom I saw often, come to mind.

The optimistic, relatively open Egypt I had known in 1956-57 had in less than six years become a grim, in many ways ineffectual, police state, and while Nasser remained personally popular, on the whole highly so, the police and security service were dreaded and despised, and with good reason. Agricultural and industrial production was declining, nationalization of all major sectors was well underway and creating numerous economic disasters, personal restrictions were growing and freedom was in ever increasingly short supply. The mukhabarat and informers were everywhere. We found ourselves in a highly antagonistic political atmosphere governmentally, although individual officials were usually not only accessible and polite, but also friendly. We developed warm and close professional and personal relationships, including a number of friendships that have endured to this day. Despite official opposition and a foully anti- American media, I was eagerly welcomed almost everywhere, with the inevitable, come back and see us/me again anytime, and when I did, facing the almost inevitable question on why I hadn't come earlier.

A vignette to indicate some of the anomalies. I decided to give a small collection of donated books to one of Alexandria's two foremost secondary schools for boys. I was, as always, warmly received, and the formal presentation before the administrators, teachers and students went forward without a hitch, but then came the speeches, the first of which contained jabs at the U.S. I found unacceptable. I whispered the school's deputy head that if they continued I would have to get up and walk out. He immediately passed this on to the speaker, who abruptly stopped the flow and afterwards took me aside and apologized profusely, saying it was a public event and he had had no choice but to say what he did. Surely, his explanation went on, you understood he wasn't speaking for himself or the school. Then we went outside to watch the boys parade. They marched in to the rousing strains of "Stars and Stripes Forever" a record we had undoubtedly given them sometime earliefollowed by a school song with a couple of phrases on how they would destroy the American imperialists and their Israeli lackeys. Afterwards, tea and cakes, more thanks for the books and kindly words on the valuable services being brought by the center to the people of Alexandria, and the inevitable invitation that I must visit the school again soon. How do you take such situations? Frustrating, maddening, ridiculous, amusing, stimulating, worthwhile? I say yes on all counts.

Q: What were the constraints put by the Egyptian government on your activities?

UNDELAND: A member of the mukhabarat, was assigned full time to our library, from where he noted who came to the center and especially who saw me. He became part of our landscape and, when promoted and transferred to Upper Egypt, openly cried. I invited him into my office, where, over coffee, he told me he would always admire our openness, the services we provided and the courteous way we always dealt with people. Who else in Alexandria, he continued, would trust people on nothing more than their own word to return the books they had borrowed? When one of our attractive library assistants was groped, he picked up the offender bodily, carried him outside, threw him down in the street and told him in unmistakable terms never to return.

At least some of the staff were regularly called in by the mukhabarat to report on what the Center and I were up to. Maybe we were better off that this happened, for I'm pretty sure the suspicions harbored about us bore little resemblance to the reality. I went about my business ignoring this reporting and surveillance, and, though I did not like it, I found it no more than a minor nuisance. I was not aware of a single Alexandrine who stayed away because of it.

Some two or three times during my two year assignment, police orders went out that university students and professors were not to visit the American or other foreign cultural centers or otherwise be in touch with them, their staffs and certainly not their directors. My reaction was the same each time. I called on the university's president, Dr. Ali Shoieb, with whom I had developed close relations, and ask "what's this all about?" He at first feigned no knowledge, but when I pressed him, smiled and said, "don't worry, it doesn't mean anything. Have our students stopped visiting your center?" I admitted they were still coming, and he would reply, "come back and see me again if the order has any real effect. Then we'll do something about it." Over coffee, he would add that both of us knew how silly it all was but not to worry; the order would be ignored and then forgotten. I never was able to find out why they were put out in the first place.

When a similar dictum was issued on not having any contact with Americans, a professor with an American PhD in agricultural economics phoned the head of the secret police in Alexandria, who later became the Minister of Interior, and said that he just heard that those on the university staff must have nothing to do with Americans and he needed some advice. He went on, "I'm married to an American and we're getting ready to go to bed; what should we do and not do?" Delightfully irrespectful of the authorities, he told me this typically Egyptian story with great relish. Others like it in their spoofing nature were legion.

On two occasions, carefully organized student protest marches came past the center with the usual anti-American banners, although we weren't the main reason for either. You just couldn't have a political protest and not somehow include the Americans. I had gotten to know reasonably well one of the senior university security officers, who was accompanying the procession both times, as he said, to make sure all remained peaceful. I seized on both these opportunities to join him for a couple of blocks of friendly chit-chat, in which he good naturedly reassured me we had no reason for alarm. On one of them, he asked me to visit him in his office. I did so and learned the university wanted to send a few of its police officers to the United States to study how we maintain security and order on our own campuses! They just couldn't believe American or any other students would remain in line without police controls firmly in force. He had trouble with my saying nothing would make American universities blow up faster than a strong, obvious police presence at them. I, of course, didn't considered for a single moment pursuing this idea. When later the university's top administrator came back from an International Visitor grant and assured this police officer that what I had said was indeed the case, his admiration for the States and Americans soared, but he sounded a cautionary note by remarking it would be very unrealistic to be so lax in Egypt.

Another one. Alfred Lilienthal who wrote WHAT PRICE ISRAEL was to deliver a talk at Alexandria University, as usual lambasting American support for Israel. Shoieb, called me personally to invite me to attend. I knew what was coming, did not want to go and told him that, as always, if the anti-U.S. verbiage went too far I would have to get up and walk out, adding that it was something neither of us would want. However, he insisted and I reluctantly agreed, though refusing to sit on the stage. The show barely missed crossing my walk-out line...

Q: It was this Lilienthal who so strongly opposed the creation of Israel, wasn't it?

UNDELAND: Indeed, it was...

Q: He was sort of the Arabs' favorite American Jew.

UNDELAND: Yes, but he wasn't a stupid person. However much you may or may not agree with him, he made his case forcefully and, if you accepted his premises, did it fairly effectively. I think it was a huge mistake from his standpoint to have accepted money and invitations so freely from Arabs, for by doing so he lost credibility and standing with the audiences he should have most wanted to reach.

Q: Go into this question of language and relationships a bit more.

UNDELAND: To operate effectively in Arab milieus, you have to be able to deal with both the public face, which is ruled by prevailing official policies and opinions/attitudes put out for general consumption, and the private sphere, in which persons are much more inclined to express what they really feel, particularly when it is controversial or runs counter to aspects of governmental dicta. Also, you must always be wary of flattery and ulterior motives, all too commonly encountered when someone wants something from you. I don't intend these as an anti-Arab comments, for you can get your full share of them right here in Washington, but given cultural differences and the nature of Arabic, at least Arabic usage, and the role of language in Middle East politics, context and culture can be as important as the words themselves. Chances for misinterpreting true intent are considerable, particularly in translation.

The problem in public is more than just posturing and rhetoric, for it is all too often accepted that you can say one thing to one audience and something quite different to another and believe you can keep the two entirely separate. A lot of it in Egypt went back to decent, reasonable people feeling forced to toe the government's line, i.e. to get along by mouthing the official, often extremism public policies of Nasser's Egypt, where presenting the U.S. as the main enemy was a given. I was constantly intrigued with the ways and means of communication in this society of friendly personal relations and often abysmal official ones. Its ins and outs have provided me and others, who have dedicated much, if not most, of their careers to the Arab World with never ending fascination and challenge on one hand and frustration and exasperation on the other. However misguided the Alexandria University president's reasoning behind his desire to have me present, I think it meant something to be trusted and sought out.

Maybe I'm tooting my own horn a tad much, but everywhere I've been posted, I've sought to develop understanding and culturally close relationships, so that I am welcomed, sometimes requested. It has helped me immensely in getting across the messages I want to and directing them to the desired audiences. Part of it is knowing and caring where the other fellow comes from and taking the time to listen to him, but equally important is establishing and maintaining your own credentials, your own integrity and objectivity. And it helps if you know what you're talking about, but if you are only a parrot, you are never taken seriously. No, you must adapt the message so that it finds common ground. This all lies at the heart of trying to bridge cultures and communicate, which after all is what USIS should be all about.

There is another kind of relationship I have sought in most places where I have been assigned as PAO, and that is to have a well placed police contact, to whom I could go, when and if problems arose. Alexandria was certainly one of these posts. Shortly after arriving, I learned that in the past we had presented a copy of the each edition of the World Almanac to a major in the mukhabarat, but for some reason had stopped doing so. This gave me the opening I wanted. I arranged a call on him with the WA in hand and was cordially greeted. I noticed on the wall behind his desk three framed pictures, the inevitable large one of Nasser in the center, flanked by two group photos, one of his graduating class from an Egypt police or military school and the other of an AID sponsored group at the Virginia Police Academy, with him standing in the front row. He told me his two months there were a highlight of his life and he wanted that picture on the wall to remind him of it every day. Back to business, he assured me of his desire to help out if any problem came up. I was given a private phone number and told to use it without hesitation any time of the day or night.

Well, a nasty problem did arise all too soon. A sad affair of the wife of a Fulbright professor, assigned to the University of Alexandria's Mathematics Department, who was nightly sleeping around with university students, including the son of at least one minister and creating enough of a stir that it, as we learned later, got all the way up to the presidency. Although first ordered by consul general, Harlan Clark not to go to my police contacl of course had told him about my initial visithe matter escalated to the point I finally got his OK. Once with the major, I was greeted by, "yes, I know very well you have a problem; so do we. Why has it taken you so long to come to me?" A lengthy story, but the upshot was the Egyptian authorities quietly canceled her residence permit and firmly, but quietly and courteously, saw she was on the next boat out of the Alexandria headed to Europe.

Q: You mention a Fulbright professor. Was the Fulbright program under your auspices?

Cairo handled all Egyptian students and professors going to the U.S. on Fulbright grants, with only minor inputs from us in Alexandria, though we worked hard to see that that good candidates from Alexandria made application and that we got our fair share.

In short, there were no Fulbright jurisdiction problems stemming from USIS involvement, at least none while I was there.

Q: Going back to the case of the wife of the mathematics professor, why couldn't we take care of it on our own? That is, why didn't the Fulbright Commission, you, or somebody else say either this has got to stop, or your time is up.

UNDELAND: As I have said, I personally would have moved earlier and only reluctantly bowed to the initial don't-do-it dictate of Harlan Clark, until finally given his go ahead. The Cairo Fulbright office, of course, knew about it, but, as I recall, did not want to get involved, at least didn't. I talked informally with both husband and wife, individually and together, but that didn't lead to a solution. I, indeed all of us, felt that to involve USG machinery could well have started a long process with an uncertain outcome, and it was a matter that couldn't wait. Could we have forced the issue by just cutting off the Fulbrighter's stipend? I don't think so, for the grant was to him, and he hadn't done anything wrong. Moreover, taking such action against him, even if we could have, would have bothered me. As played out, it was as much, if not more, an Egyptian than an American matter and needed an Egyptian solution. Very shortly, the Egyptian police would have had to act, and without us in the picture, they might well have done so in a rougher, less pleasant, more precipitous way that was all too often their practice. What was done was the best, if not only realistic, way out of the messy affair. Years later I had some in ways a similar difficulties with another Fulbrighter professor and some students in Damascus, but this one in Alexandria was the toughest "police" case, in which I have ever become enmeshed.

Q: There's the story that I heard when I was in Saudi Arabia just a couple of years before about the Arab boycott of products of companies dealing with Israel, and for some reason IBM got into it because it had a small operation in Israel. So they put IBM on the prohibited list until the Egyptian military screamed bloody murder. It seemed their entire mobilization plans were based on IBM. Was that true and were there other things like it in Egypt?

UNDELAND: I had not heard this IBM story, but know of an analogous case. Ford had been on the boycott list for a long time when I arrived, but this was only on civilian cars and trucks, for Arab armies, including Egypt's, had Ford jeeps and other vehicles. With the boycott, you could always get an exception if there was compelling, especially military, reason for doing so. Indeed, production in the Ford assembly plant in Alexandria was sufficiently important to the Egyptian army, that it required a full time American representative be stationed there. I knew the Ford story in detail through him.

Still, the boycott was fairly thoroughly enforceno Ford passenger cars, no Coca Cola, no Xerox and, going back to what you said, probably no civilian IBalthough there could be ways around it, sometimes absurd ways. At the Egyptian documentary film festival, for which I had surprisingly been selected to be a judge, an Egyptian film maker told me about American films with boycotted actors, directors and producers being regularly shown in, of all places, Iraq. When questioned by the Egyptian on how this could be done, the Iraqi blithely replied, "it's OK; you see we obtain these films from Switzerland, not the U.S." And so it went.

Q: Let's go back to relations with the U.S., how the Egyptians showed their displeasure and where they saw us fitting in.

UNDELAND: An American visitor once shook his head shook his head about this and used the adjective "wacky", as I well remember. True, but the central fact was that all except personal relations with common citizens but also officials, were bad and getting steadily worse. What was wacky were the ways this displeasure was sometimes manifested. Two examples. The acting consul general organized a large garden reception for a visiting American delegation, but no Egyptians showed, until finally a professor arrived to deliver the message that the party was being boycotted to protest the sale of Hawk missiles or some other major military equipment to Israel. I knew him. He made his statement, rather sheepishly greeted me then left. A couple of days later, he came to my office to assure me it was a one time affair, and asked me to pass on to those in the consulate that they were to go ahead with all of their activities as usual, for the point had been made, and that was the end of it. He said that Egyptians would again freely come to our homes, as they always had, which is precisely what happened.

The second one. At this time of burgeoning Soviet-Egyptian ties, all stops were being pulled out for Khrushchev's side trip to Alexandria, with several major exhibits mounted, banners with slogans stretched across the streets, crossed Egyptian and Soviet flags all over the city, newly constructed "friendship" arches, the works. The centerpiece of the festivities was to be a gala performance by the Bolshoi Ballet. By lucky chance, one of our sports presentations, a professional basketball team, headed by Red Auerbach and including Bill Sharman, Bob Cousy, Bob Pettit, and other NBA stars was in Egypt at the same time. They had not been originally slated to come to Alexandria, so I wasn't paying much attention to them, when out of the blue I got a call from the Egyptian Sports Federation's local office saying we must meet urgently to plan the important game now scheduled for Alexandria, you guessed it, on the very night of the Bolshoi performance. Leave all promotion to them, the phoner said, but they needed American flags to put up around the city. "How many do you have?" I didn't even have one at the center, and there were only two or three at the consulate. The Egyptians were dismayed to learn that Cairo and Alexandria combined could only come up half a dozen, some going back so far they didn't have the proper number of stars, but we urgently went to the Sixth Fleet, which came up with two or three dozen. They were, as promised, conspicuously flown around the city, along with hundreds of posters that promoted the game plastered on walls all over the city.

The team arrived and was greeted with fanfare. The night came, and the sports arena was jam-packed, with everybody who amounted to anything politically at the game, not at the ballethe governor, commanders of the Northern Military District and Egyptian navy, ministers from Cairo and the rest of them. The welcoming statements said only nice things about America and American sport, and expressed appreciation for our bringing the team to Egypt. We were never more publicly loved than on that night in that place. And the American team laid off and didn't beat the Egyptian all- star squad too badly. We had provided the Egyptians a wonderful way to say to the Soviets, "yes, we're friends, but don't take us for granted, for you don't have us in your pocket. We also have the option of going to the Americans." Egyptians were masters at playing those games.

Back to grimmer political reality. The TIME magazine correspondent in Cairo told me of an interview with Nasser, during which he attacked the United States relentlessly, up one side and down the other. At the end, this correspondent asked if there were not anything positive he would like to say about the U.S. or Egyptian-American relations or hopes for the future. Nasser paused for a moment and said, no. He didn't openly express it, didn't need to, for we knew his political position required an enemy, and he had decided on America for that role. He wasn't about the dilute this stance, for he obviously felt the uncompromising line best served his political purposes.

Q: To sort out the disconnect between the people's feelings and the official attitudes of a nasty regime, how popular was Nasser? He seemed to do so much to turn them against him. Even with the U.S., there seems to have been at every level, but the official one, good relations.

UNDELAND: As I've said elsewhere, Nasser had widespread popularity, particularly among the poorer and less educated Egyptians, but nearly everyone took pride in Egypt's emergence as an important player on the world stage, and most felt that the Egypt headed by Nasser was rightfully the Arab leader in many spheres. It deserved to be the dominant Arab country and force. Nasser stood for this, indeed not only represented it but personified it. On the internal plane, he had forged his unique contract with the vast majority of the Egyptian people, according to which there was the trade off of the people giving him unquestioning loyalty and obedience in return for the state taking care of thejobs, housing, social services, etc.

Nonetheless, discontent and criticism of the situation, the system, of those around the president and of the police abounded. The economy was in shambles, as demonstrated and symbolized by the mountain of rotting, stinking garlic piled up near the shore of Lake Maryut in the southern part of the city. I have never seen anything like it, the pile rising more than 50 feet high and stretching over 200 feet long, from which shimmering fumes rose, emitting a smell still overpowering nearly a kilometer away. The explanation was simple. The newly nationalized onion and garlic marketing organization had failed to sell the annual crop abroad for the first time. Having been purchased by the government and brought to near the port for supposed outward shipment, there was nothing to do but leave it there to decompose.

Much the same was true of the cotton crop that was supposed to be exported to world markets, although they succeeding in getting rid of a lot of it in barter deals with communist countries. The bales stacked up on piers inside the closed off port didn't make the same public impression. But Nasser wasn't personally held at fault for either failure. No, that fell on those around him. It was their incompetence, not his.

What else? The war in the Yemen was not going well and though news about it was greatly censored, it was highly unpopular. Also, the arbitrary arrests and brutal treatment in prison. The sequestrations and nationalizations. The growing corruption. It was just a very bad time, where the regime was all too much sustained by a combination of force and rhetoric in the face of many damning facts, but they were not determining, for its base and power were in place. It was impossible to mount a serious threat or challenge, despite the pervasive discontent over a number of things. To repeat, little if any blame fell on Nasser's shoulders.

The head of the AL AHRAM office in Alexandria disappeared one day. Shortly thereafter, I learned from one of his colleagues he had been arrested, but no one knew for what, nor did they or his family have any idea where he was incarcerated. Six months later he was back in the city and let me know it in a fairly common way. He somehow learned of a small reception Joan and I were giving at our home and he just appeared at it. He never offered any explanation, but whatever had caused his arrest, it was over, and he was letting me know he was not only back, but fully back in circulation. Our USIS administrative FSN, Adel Sawaris, was taken into custody not long after I departed and while there miserably tortured. When I saw him several years later, after he had immigrated to the States, he told me he never knew why he had been hauled in, what he had purportedly done or what they wanted from him. Egypt had become a nasty police state and entered its darkest era in modern times. How often I heard the honestly held belief that Nasser must not have known what was going on in the prisons, for had he, he would never have permitted it.

We sent the director general of the Alexandria Port Authority, with the rank of admiral in the Egyptian navy, to the U. S. on and IV grant. While in New York, he visited the Brooklyn Navy Yard, whose commander offered to give him a better view of the facilities by letting him see them from a helicopter. The already amazed Egyptian was further dumbfounded when asked if he had a camera with him to take any photographs he wanted. He didn't, so the commander assigned a navy photographer to shoot whatever he pointed out. The admiral related this to me with great admiration once back in Alexandria. In a subsequent phone conversation, the love feast continued, only to be abruptly ended when he opened up a strong attack on U. S. policy and all the bad things we were doing in the Middle East. When I next saw him, he said I must have realized that someone he did not trust had come into his office while he was talking to me. Profuse apologies and the inevitable "you understand the situation here."

Perhaps somewhat analogous was my call on the head of the local scouting movement. I hadn't previously known it, but he was a glider buff. After our session ended, he offered to take me up then and there in a two place craft. My hearty yes led to a flight of more than hour, soaring over the city, including our wafting near the port and seeing a couple of Egyptian naval vessels tied up at a pier. When we landed I asked him if it hadn't been dangerous to get so near the port, let alone the warships. He said he was amazed at my question. Perhaps I was the one being overly sensitive. Parenthetically, let me add that I loved such surprises that come out of the blue like the glider flight. It keeps the vital juices flowing not knowing what will crop up next, but being pretty sure that there would be something, although it was rare that they were of such a dramatic nature.

I mentioned the war in Yemen. Egyptians losses were staggeringly high in the local view. At the outset, they brought back the dead for burial by their families, but soon stopped this practice. With so many bodies being returned, protests broke out in the mosques and during processions to the cemeteries. There was absolutely no mention of war casualties in the tightly controlled media, but the losses, the demonstrations and unrest were widely knownever underestimate the Arab grapevinand hit the regime where it counted most, at its popular level of support. A feature of the Egypt of that time was that no protests or manifestations were permitted that were not organized and orchestrated by the authorities. These had challenged that dictum.

Let me go back to Nasser. If his standing suffered in some circles of importance to him, and frankly it was surprising how little it did, it was never sufficient to constitute a significant threat or be otherwise seriously destabilizing. There was the police role I have talked about. Also the cult of personality that was actively and effectively promoted. But there was another factor. He benefited from the tendency in the Arab World not to blame the ruler personally, at least not until things get so bad that the people see the only satisfactory solution lies in getting rid of him. With few, outside the ancien regime was this point reached. What Nasser achieved in both personal and political terms with the Egyptian people cannot be gainsaid or easily passed off. His popularity was huge and genuine, permitting him to withstand challenges and face issues that would have gravely imperiled lesser leaders.

Q: It's been a major problem to interpret what people and leaders in the Arab World say, to put across accurately their words and intended meaning. They so often emerge as extreme, little more than bombast. On the other hand, translations also seem often open to misinterpretation. Do you agree?

UNDELAND: You have put your finger on a problem area, which we took up in part earlier. Arabic spoken in public situations relies much on adjectives, rhythm, cadence, alliteration and this sort of thing, and, as used, often has an emotional impact far greater than do Western languages similarly employed. It can seem inaccurate and even threatening, with emotion and flowery oratory predominating over content and fact. Of course, it also can be dry and precise, but that is not the way it usually comes across in the hands of Arab political figures. One must therefore be very careful in translating to make sure that what emerges is not culturally more extreme, less temperate, than in the original. But we must also consider the listener or reader or viewer, what he expects, what he takes away from it, and try to insure the person receiving the translated version gets an impact that at least approximates what the Arab takes away from it. Indeed, translation from Arabic is very much a subtle, cultural affair, not merely words taken from one language and put into another. A purely literal translation of a political speech in Arabic into, say, English or French is often off the mark in conveying the intended meaning and intensity, all too often way off the mark.

I have often wished Arabs would pay more attention to how their important pronouncements, which are bound to be put into other languages, are going to come across, but this may not be very realistic on my part, for they have their own audiences to consider, which are almost always paramount in their consideration, and rightly so. But, as I say, they and perhaps even more we face language problems that can and do impede understanding and dialogue and exacerbate differences.

I recall talking with a bi-lingual, bi-cultural Egyptian, who had lived for many years in England. He answered a question I had posed and then told me that if I had asked it in Arabic and he had responded in Arabic, his answer would have come across quite differently. Context, he added, is everything.

Q: You're speaking about Arabic. How did you learn and use it?

UNDELAND: I studied it first in Egypt when I was a student, as I've said in talking of my days in Cairo back in the '50s, and of course picked up some of the colloquial as I went along, but I was far from the level where I could use it easily or very effectively. From the time I joined the agency, I sought formal training, but did not get it until 1970, when I had seven months at the Foreign Service Institute's language school in Beirut. I came out of that with a 3-3 rating, which could be called not good-not bad. I used it some in Jordan and Kuwait, but most of my dealings in those countries were in English. With me, it has always been a matter of choosing the best language for the two or more of us, and in the main it has been in English or French. Looking ahead, I had a couple of months of brush up in 1979 before going to Syria, where I spoke Arabic much of the time and got considerately more proficient, bringing my command of it to a level where I was usually quite at ease in it. I must admit that learning that language never came without a struggle, and I never achieved the Arabic competence I would have liked. The Damascus tour was very much my Arabic high point.

For me, an acid test of spoken Arabic ability, or any language for that matter, lies in whether you can spend an afternoon or evening entirely in it and not emerge from that experience dead tired. If you can, you probably are communicating with reasonable effectiveness. I used Arabic some, but increasingly less, in my last assignments, Riyadh, Cairo and Tunis, although it was still an important tool for me in all of these posts. I always found reading easier than speaking, though with French, which I spoke all the time in Tunisia, it was just the other way round. I admit freely that anyone who has spent as much time in Arab lands as I have should have gained a far better command of it than I did.

I am not alone in that, for it doesn't take too many fingers on too many hands to count up all the FSOs, in State and USIS, who learned Arabic as adults and could handle it well enough to be reliable in important conversations, let alone in conducting negotiations or anything that linguistically demanding, such as lecturing on or discussing policy/politics in public situations, where audiences tend to be challenging, if not hostile, and are ever trying to turn the tables on you. Still, it has been for me a valuable tool in every Arab World assignment I've had. By my estimation, the most effective PAOs in this area have had Arabic training, however competent they were in speaking and reading it and however much they used it.

Q: President Kennedy was assassinated when you were in Alexandria. I happened to have been in communist Yugoslavia at that time, and the whole country went into mourning. It was a rather remarkable occurrence in many places. But in Nasser's Egypt with our strained relations, what was the reaction?

UNDELAND: In one word, immense. I have never experienced anything like it. The center had neither mast nor flag, but, at the insistence of our Egyptian staff and friends, we managed to rig up the former and get one of the latter from the consulate, albeit a flag going back so far it didn't have enough stars, to fly at half mast, an absolute requisite these Egyptians told us. What followed was the most personally taxing week in my career, for I did little other than receive an unending stream of visitors, sometimes singly, other times in small groups of two to five. At least half these persons I had never set eyes on before. They were ushered into my office, where they solemnly expressed their condolences. I responded in kind and offered them a cup of coffee, which they without exception politely refused. It was all very ritualistic. Then, they remained sitting, and we looked at each other for some ten or a few more minutes, rarely saying anything, before they rose, again expressed their sympathy and departed.

Q: Oh God, how awful.

UNDELAND: I came home at the end of these days so drained, so tired I could barely do anything before flopping into bed. Out at the university, students in many of the classes asked, rather demanded, there be a time of silence before the lectures began as a mark of respect for Kennedy. He had made that great an impression on educated Egyptian youth. The Egyptian government stated it was going to issue a Kennedy commemorative stamp. The officially controlled media ran article after article expressing regard and sympathy.

Then, all of a sudden everything stopped, and from that point on, Kennedy was totally ignored, as if he had never existed. The university's police were mobilized to enforce no more moments of silence on campus. The media clammed up. The stamp was not heard of again. It was on everyone's lips that the presidency suddenly woke up to the fact that, popular as he was, there had never been outpourings of such fervor and magnitude for Nasser, and therefore it could not be permitted. This about face showed just how touchy the authorities were. The fact it concerned an American undoubtedly increased their sensitivity. If the official side was turned off, I kept hearing individual Egyptians, particularly young people, talk fondly of Kennedy the whole time I was in Alexandria. They felt a personal kinship with him, a kind of mystic bonding. Kennedy and the United States under him represented a view of the future that took hold of them and fit in with their own aspirations, however little they really knew about him and what he had done and stood for. It was a personality and image thing, and its extent and depth were amazing. That you could not point to specifics lying behind it did not make it any less real. Somehow, to juxtaposition of Kennedy and Nasser did not seem to pose for them any intellectual or psychological contradictions or anomalies.

If you tried to put it in terms of what Kennedy had done for Egypt, Egyptian-American relations, and those with the Arabs in general, there was not a whole lot of basis for these sentiments, although he had initially put considerable effort into trying to establish friendly ties with Nasser, and, failing in that to craft a workable accommodation. As we well know, neither succeeded.

Q: In Yugoslavia, where we had good relations, though not really that close, I was astounded because, frankly, most of us FSO's there saw Kennedy in mixed ways. But even down in peasant villages, you could buy little plastic pictures of him. Of course, of Tito as well. Kennedy was a phenomenon, and I am interested to hear about Egypt, where we had bad relations, and yet he did touch them. He was a universal star for that generation.

UNDELAND: The Kennedy impact was at least as great abroad as it was at home, and probably greater, but there are other things you have to take into consideration, when you talk about our ties with Egypt. True, they were clearly not good and getting worse, but at the same time we had much going for us outside of the political and foreign policy spheres. Bonds were long standing and ran deep, even though you wouldn't know it if you looked only to the media and official statements. My point is not to overplay the "bad relations" card by extending it to everything else. The American University at Cairo, a major educational institution, goes back to about 1920. Perhaps even more influential on the local scene was the American Girls School in Cairo, founded and run by American Presbyterians, which had educated several generations of Egyptian women, including many in that country's professions and social and cultural elite. There were important missionary schools in Mansoura and in Upper Egypt. In addition to the schools, American missionaries were at the forefront in bringing medicine and particularly nursing to Egypt. And the reputation of the Anglo-American Hospital in Zamalek was huge. One of the strangest American presences was NAMRU, the Naval Area Medical Research Unit, located in the heart of old Cairo, in Abbasia, right smack in the middle of Egyptian military institutions. Spick and span, with its gleaming white buildings and green lawns, it had since the 1940s conducted major research on diseases plaguing the area, bilharzia, onchocerciasis and others, and had always been welcomed by the Egyptian government and Egyptians, whatever the political climate or state of our bilateral relations. American archaeologists, historians and other scholars had long been active, forging deep ties and interaction, as well as contributing to knowledge about Egypt through the results of their studies.

Late in my tour, members of the committee formed to undertake the project of rebuilding, rather building from scratch, the Alexandria library that was destroyed in antiquity. They wanted to know both what Americans had discovered about the ancient library, but also American ideas on what the new one should be, from architecture to contents to facilities to aims. I responded to their requests by having a lot of stuff pulled together, which I passed on, although personally, I was skeptical about its usefulness when completed, but liked to think through my skepticism helped focus attention on who would use it, how and to what end. Still, it was not lost that they came to us first, before going to others, even to UNESCO.

Hundreds, rather thousands, of Egypt's best and brightest had studied in the United States. A couple of years after the World War II, the Egyptian government, at its own expense, sent more than 200 of its top students to the U.S. to study in American universities. This was only the beginning. Afterwards, many others followed in their footsteps, mostly on U.S. government scholarships granted by AID and Fulbright programs. They returned with their MAs and PhDs to become professors, technocrats and later ministers, university leaders and top doctors, engineers and so forth. Other exchange programs, administered by USIS, AMIDEAST, the Ford Foundation and the Fulbright office provided professional introductions to the United States. Leaving MidEast policy, non-alignment and Nasser's whipping boy considerations apart, I met few Egyptians, not just those highly educated but others as well, who did not look favorably on America. It was no rarity, as with the library scheme, that they turned to things American as the most desired models for what they aspired for their country.

To look ahead, I am convinced the basic, though far from complete, switch away from Nasser's statist ways, well at least partially, and his view of the world to the dramatically different orientation of Sadat could not have been brought off had he had not been able to turn to and rely on these many talented Egyptians professionals, who had been profoundly influenced by their American experiences educational and other.

Q: What was the impact of Egypt's ties to the Soviet Union, through exchange programs, etc.? How did we observe them, were we keen to counter them, and if so, how?

UNDELAND: The Soviets understandably gave Egypt very high priority, targeting it for major efforts on a wide variety of fronts. Equipping and training the Egyptian army and funding and constructing the Aswan High Dam were the two largest, most dramatic undertakings, but there was much else. They left few stones unturned and seemed to have endless money to finance almost everything they wanted to do. This subject has many ins and outs, but I'll restrict myself to things of more or less concern to USIS.

I have mentioned the Bolshoi Ballet fiasco in Alexandria. It was just one of many cultural presentations, some of which struck responsive chords among Egyptians, but less than one might have expected, at least among the people I knew. There was often heard criticism that the Soviets rarely sent their best, a charge also sometimes leveled at our far more modest efforts, but we came under less fire, partly because Egyptians liked us better and respected us more. They felt the Russians looked down on them and assumed that they, the Egyptians, wouldn't know the difference and would, therefore, be content with the second rate. Exceptions undoubtedly existed, but the Russians never really understood the Egyptian psyche and mind set, and they all too often displayed an arrogance that riled and offended.

Exchanges for them were very big, groups and delegations going both ways and also individual visitors traveling to Moscow and other places in the USSR. They had their version of our IV program and on a huge scale. Ruling party and governmental delegations, labor unions, professional societies, artists and people from the Egyptian film world, journalists and on and on. They put on Egyptian art shows and film weeks in Soviet cities. But all in all, these efforts did not work out very well for them, at least in influencing attitudes. Many Egyptians I knew returned from participating in these activities in the Soviet Union under-impressed, often wholly turned off.

The Soviets heavily subsidized Egyptian tourist groups. The country's leading neural surgeon, Dr. Samuel Boctor, for whom I helped get a fellowship from the Harvard Medical School, went out of curiosity on one of these tours. I saw him shortly after he got back and was caught up short when he opened the conversation with a surprising, "you Americans are just plain stupid." He went on, "you're trying to turn us against the communists by sending us off to the United States, which is OK, but if you really want to influence us, you should ship as many as you can off to Russia. I was astounded to find that in comparison with the Soviet Union, Egypt, poor backward Egypt, is miles ahead. Their hotels aren't any good. The restaurants are awful. You can't buy anything. The people are all badly clothed, downtrodden and unhappy. It's a terrible place. You should show as many of us as you can how bad it is."

The Soviets, and to a lesser extend Eastern Bloc countries, were educating thousands of Egyptians in their institutions, who came back with advanced degrees. But the authorities so looked down on these credentials, they would not accept Soviet PhDs as qualifying the holders for assignment to Egyptian university staffs. They could only teach in higher institutes, which were a notch down in the Egyptian education hierarchy. The reason given was that Western doctorates were clearly the best, followed by ones acquired in Egypt, with those from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe being so much inferior they were barely acceptable. Perhaps a bit of prejudice here, but the Egyptians were convinced. One of them put it, "who ever heard of a foreign student not getting his degree from a Soviet university, however bad his academic record?" I must admit I did not know of so much as one case of failure by an Egyptian in even a single course. The Soviet embassy worked hard to try and get this university restriction lifted, but by the time I left had made no headway whatsoever.

I got accustomed to Alexandrines' readiness to denigrate the Soviets, but still was caught off base on a couple of occasions. An architect told me, "of course the Israeli army is much better than ours; they have American equipment, we have only Soviet stuff." A professor with a Ph.D. from the U.K. said to me he had never believed the Soviets were in fact building the High Dam, didn't believe them capable of it...

Q: This is the Aswan High Dam?

UNDELAND: Yes. He said, "I'm dumbfounded. I've just been to Aswan and seen with my own eyes the Russians are actually doing it. I had thought it was just propaganda put out by our government." This says as much about how Egyptians viewed the word of their own government and controlled media, as it does on how they felt about the Russians.

They didn't help their cause by being so distant and heavy handed. In Alexandria, they lived in a compound with a high wall around it. They rarely emerged, except en masse, whether going to work, to shop, to the beach or wherever. You never came across a Russian by himself in the souks, or at a museum, the antiquities sites, anywhere, but you could run into 50 of them, although that didn't happen very often. The gregarious Egyptians enjoyed making fun of them and their ways, and they delighted in regaling us with belittling incidents and examples. The Soviets were also criticized for never spending any money in the local economy; merchants were openly contemptuous of them. In sum, there was a strong anti- Russian feeling nearly everywhere. Egyptians didn't like our MidEast policy, but they liked and respected us. With the Soviets, their Middle East policy was OK, but it seemed there wasn't a single thing about them or their society or outlook that struck a responsive chord. I kept hearing stories about the unsympathetic ways of Soviet advisers, how they only gave orders and expected to be instantly and automatically obeyed, how they not only had no knowledge of or interest in Egyptian society and culture, but how they brazenly ignored local ways and institutions and were downright contemptuous of them. The Egyptian surgeon was right; we Americans looked very good by comparison, and in the long run, such positive attitudes were, I believe, significant, whether they affected prevailing political attitudes and actions or not.

Q: How about our embassy, how it operated and its personnel?

UNDELAND: Let me start by saying a few words about Alexandria, where USIS and the consulate general had reasonably good access to and relations with the authorities, so long as we stayed away from places where we knew we would not be welcomed. In personal terms our meetings with officialdom were cordial, even friendly. The military and police/secret services were, with a few exceptions, off bounds, but we took that as a given. It must be remembered that major decisions and real power were concentrated in Cairo, so our governmental plane dealings were on the provincial, or executing, rather than policy forming level.

On the public, that is non governmental, side, we were considered by many Alexandrines an integral part of the local scene and society. We were everywhere welcomed and widely sought out.

Another part of my answer gets at what se were trying to accomplish in Alexandria, or more bluntly, why we were there. It was Africa's second largest city. It had a number of institutions of interest to us. It provided another, at times different, perspective on Egypt from that presented by the capital. We took its importance to us as a given. We looked forward to times of closer relations and thought we were helping keep that aim alive. We had been in Alexandria for a long time, with relations stretching back to the early 1800s. The fact that we were widely accepted and wanted cannot be ignored. And never forget our Cold War concerns and the fact of Egypt's emergence as a non-aligned leader, which politically almost always lined up along side the Soviet Union on world issues, but yet maintained its independence. Some, including those at the consulate, but not me personally, saw particular merit in Alexandria looking out to the north and, as a consequence, its more cosmopolitan nature, contrasting with Cairo's more inward and Arab World focus. And finally, I guess, was the fact that the center's programming was blossoming.

Turning to the embassy in Cairo, I had relatively few dealings with the FSOs there, although as appropriate I saw them on my regular visits, particularly at the outset of my assignment, to pass on my take on what was going on and what Alexandrines were saying and thinking. These sessions were almost always at my initiative. When they came to Alexandria, they rarely visited the center or showed any real interest in our activities or contacts. Consequently, I came to look them up less and less on my times in Cairo. The one exception was the ambassador, an extraordinary individual, who when in Alexandria almost always came by and often stayed on long beyond the planned time...

Q: John Badeau.

UNDELAND: Yes. No other ambassador I've known has had the contacts and knowledge of the local scene that exceeded Badeau's or who put this wealth of information and understanding to better use. He even was able to develop fairly close personal relations with Nasser. It didn't make our government-to-government ties meaningfully improve, for that was beyond the ability of anyone, a diplomat or other. Still, I am convinced Badeau slightly slowed down the pace of their deterioration, for Nasser liked him and apparently found it somewhat difficult to cross swords with him. The discussions of these two, at least usually in Arabic, were larded with stories and bits of local folklore that both of them pulled out to illustrate their points. This recounting of their relationship came to me mostly from Egyptians I knew, but also was something I inferred from Badeau talking about these meetings. He was far too modest a man to have made any such claims himself.

Q: Badeau had been what?

UNDELAND: First a professor at the American University at Cairo and then its president, reputedly the best one it has ever had. He had been at AUC for more than ten years and had made it his business to know Egypt well, its institutions, the people and the language. His visits to Alexandria were a joy, for he was outspoken, sharing his views with us candidly and at length. Our senior FSNs were always included, which both he and I wanted, he because he wanted to hear their views and reactions. Badeau admitted he was frustrated by his inability to bring about better relations, and ruefully concluded it was a period we must all work to get through with as little damage being done as possible, preserving our presence and making sure we did not provide ammunition for making things worse. He urged us to do all we could to expand and strengthen our contacts with Egyptians at all levels, which he felt would pay off in the long run. He was remarkable in his listening to FSNs, the only other ambassador I know of who came close to him in this being Frank Wisner two decades later in Cairo.

He pointed out more than once when we were together that the more open, inclusive, tolerant Egypt that we wanted to see evolve was moving the other way, but we should be patient and never forget that the Egypt and Egyptian-American relations we sought were in the interests of the people of both countries. We were standing for the right things, and he expected history would in the long run bear us out. This was music to my ears. More important, how right he was.

I recall him using the example of AUC to show the things we had going for us. Some education and political authorities wanted to take it over and turn it into another campus of the University of Cairo. But this never got very far, because so many AUC defenders quietly took up the cudgels to defend it, largely but not exclusively its graduates and students, and perhaps most important of all, the prominent families from which they came. Even Nasser had at least one of his sons educated theras did later Sadat, and Mubarak's wife is a AUC graduate, not that these last two fit into the story at this time. Thus, the threat to AUC's separate existence was met and bested, and it continued to play a significant educational and American role in Egypt, in many ways a remarkably independent one, but perhaps equally important, it stood as a symbol that could be held up to show that all was not lost under Egypt's increasingly onerous and repressive statism.

There was an analogous case in Alexandria, the Ennasr Girls' College, directed by the redoubtable Mrs. Khalafallah, the strong willed British wife of a university professor. Attempts to nationalize it, and failing that to dictate all curriculum content, were repeated repelled, due to her tough minded defense, but even more to the unstinting efforts of graduates and the important families of students past and present. Education standards were rigorously maintained. The name almost always used was its former one, the English Girls' College or EGC, making it possible for the patches on the girls jackets to keep the same logos as before. My point here is that there was still a lot to defend, and Egyptians in significant numbers were doing so. The Victoria College for Boys (King Hussein's alma mater) was not quite as impressive as the EGC, because its leadership was weaker, but it also was looking both backward and forward to better times. I saw to it that the center provided EGC every support we could, which wasn't much in concrete terms, but still counted large in local circles. We as an institution had that kind of standing.

Q: Nasser had the ability to get under the skin of John Foster Dulles and Lyndon Johnson. His rhetoric, as reported, drove Washington right up the wall. At the time, did you think some of the Americans in the mission were acting as a cushion or somehow softened the reactions of the American president and others? Was the embassy trying to keep Washington from overreacting, or even from knowing what the situation really was?

UNDELAND: In the reporting I saw out of Cairo, I found no such sugar coating. The embassy was trying to tell Washington what was happening in the country and to explain it, not to excuse or apologize for it, but rather to reflect accurately not only the content, but also the context, and to provide interpretation. That is the diplomat's reporting job; it is why he must develop particular knowledge of the place, its people, institutions and leaders. From what I saw, the embassy of John Badeau did that extremely well, combining candor with understanding. I do not recall seeing any messages that I felt were toadying to Egyptian sensitivities or trying to explain away some of their government's conduct or the horrible stuff being put forth in the controlled media.

I say this from the vantage point of a branch post, where I early on wrote some not purely USIS reports, but then was told to stop doing it by my boss, Halsema, who said with a touch of asperity that my task was to run the center and its activities, developing and strengthening contacts in fields of USIS interest and conducting outside programs as appropriate. My reporting, he went on, should not go beyond these confines, which to me was an overly parochial outlook, moreover one that did not make best use of what I knew.

Attitudes of others have always intrigued me, so I little took to heart this Cairo diktat and went on doing a lot of reporting, but informally, putting some of it in memos, but more often transmitting it orally. It was what Harlan Clark wanted, and I was, after all, part of his team. I should add he was a strong, if sometimes flaky and hesitant, supporter of the center's activities and of me.

I did get embassy kudos for one bizarre bit of reporting. We had rented a summer place at the popular Agami beach to the west of the city. In its large garden were two crumbling wells that needed pointing up, so that our young children wouldn't fall in. With the High Dam construction in full swing, cement was a very hard item to come by, but an Egyptian civilian guard at Agami told me he could get me a couple of bags of it. I should bring my personal car, which was a VW bug, and the two of us would go together and pick them up. We drove west for quite a distance on the coast road, until he instructed me to turn right on to a track past a sleepy army guard behind a hillock, who, after a few words between them and a couple of piasters, raised the barrier and on we went. There amidst the dunes a lot of serious, large scale construction was going on. We got the cement, I paid the surprisingly low asked price, and we returned with our loot. When I orally reported this story, I was with some excitement directed to the military attachï¿½ in Cairo, who thoroughly debriefed me, for I had stumbled onto a major missile site, which the embassy knew about, but had not been heretofore able to locate precisely.

Along the same line, my bird watching on Lake Maryut, which stretches over a large area directly south of Alexandria, led me to happen onto a military base, encampment or installation on its southern shore that was not previously known by us. At one point, while rather excitedly checking out a group of red necked phalaropes, heretofore unrecorded in Egypt, I raised my binoculars slightly to discover an Egyptian soldier standing on a knoll looking down at me through his binoculars. I promptly, albeit reluctantly, departed the scene and thereafter left that part of the lake alone during my bird watching expeditions. Once more the military attachï¿½ had more than passing interest.

I had been using Army Map Service maps covering the lake, which I got at the consulate, and, after being transferred back to Washington, requested from the AMS another set, having left the ones I had been regularly using behind, only to be told that they were classified and I couldn't have them. But when I offered to correct and update them, for they were based on information decades old and anyway contained a number of errors, a major from the Map Service visited me at my VOA desk with two sets, one for me to correct and the other for me to keep, the latter with all classification marks cut off. Things can so often work out nicely when the price is right.

Before leaving Alexandria, I want to say it was one another highly satisfying assignment, both professionally and personally. I was on my own and found that, however small the pond, being my own boss appealed mightily. More than once I went ahead and did what I wanted to without informing Cairo, using the excuse that I couldn't get through on the not very reliable phones. I've said some negative things about Halsema, but want to add that in fact he for the most part let me go my way and liked what I was doing well enough that I enjoyed his visits and was not displeased by his positive annual performance ratings on me. The challenges there, with many friends but an in part basically uncooperative local officialdom, made designing and running the activities all that much more interesting. I cannot overlook the often amazing tolerance and acceptance, and just looking the other way, that was quintessentially Egyptian, and particularly Alexandrine.

I have done so much story telling that I don't want to leave the impression that it was all these fun and games. I have always been a political and cultural animal in roughly equal parts and in Alexandria I worked to create opportunities, and used others when they arose, to talk about our policies and aims, our culture and society and, yes our problems and issues. In this regard, I want to mention two factors that stood out time after time. The first is that I was on the other fellow's turf, which put particular importance in hearing him out, of being a sounding board, for once you have established yourself in that capacity, he is almost always not only agreeable to listening to you, to our ideas, but welcomes doing so. How often this led to calm, real exchanges of information and thinking, even on subjects where the both he and I were not in agreement. And what a contrast this is with argument or aggressively trying only to get your points across, which almost always results in the other person not really listening and both of you just talking past each other, if not getting mad at each other in the process.

The second factor is that you have to put forth thinking and interpretation, along with facts, that are germane to your interlocutor, and he sees them that way. This usually gets back to being a serious listener, to having bothered to find out what is meaningful to him at that place in that time. I mention this here in relation to Alexandria, but it was the way I tried to operate in all my assignments.

Saigon: Field Operations Officer

Q: Dick, I see you served next in Saigon, from 1964 to 1966. How did that assignment come about?

UNDELAND: Feeling that two years in Alexandria was too short for an assignment that was so stimulating, and in my view worthwhile, I had in my typewriter a request to be extended for another year, when the morning traffic arrived from the consulate, containing a cable addressed to me personally which read, "USIA urgently requires its best young officers for key field positions in Vietnam." Blah, blah, blah. "You are transferred immediately." More blah blah blah. So much for the extension. When once in Saigon, I found that there was a slight variation in text that went out to the eight of us in that batch, to wit, you merited the word "young" in your telegram, if you were 38 years old or less. After that, I guess, you were over the hill, but still eligible to be tapped for Vietnam duty. Anyhow, I hurriedly made a round of farewell calll have never encountered kinder wordJoan and I put on a large farewell reception, the morning after which the two boys and I flew back to Omaha, where I left them with my parents before returning to Washington for a few days briefing. Joan had just given birth to our third child; she and the new daughter followed shortly, also going to Omaha.

I arrived in Vietnam in mid-summer, with the family following a few months later. To continue in a personal vein, we were together in Saigon for about six months, but after the Viet Cong attacked the American installation in Pleiku, all dependents were evacuated. The only choice was to where. We chose Bangkok, i.e. as nearby as possible, so I could more easily make trips there, and I did get over every six weeks or so. Others went to the Philippines, Hong Kong and Malaysia, as well as Thailand and, of course, the U.S. That was in spring of 1965.

Q: What was the situation when you arrived in Saigon?

UNDELAND: Bad and steadily getting worse. The Vietnamese army was suffering one defeat after another and had by then pretty well lost control over much of the countryside. The Viet Cong had nearly cut the country in half and in much, if not most of it, moved about with little opposition, particularly at night. Defeat clearly loomed when the American forces arrived, the marines going into the Danang area in the north and the First Infantry Division into the central part of the country. Political confusion in government circles abounded, and there seemed to be a steady diminishing of will to struggle on, both among officials and the populace at large. A similar defeatism was rife in much of the military. More and more the Vietnamese army, or as we called it ARVN or the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, was not seriously fighting, or at least not doing it effectively enough to win many battles, let alone turn the tide. American troops arrived in the nick of time; if they had not, it was pretty generally concluded that everything would have been soon over, the war lost, the Viet Cong completely in charge.

Q: What were you doing?

UNDELAND: I was a field officer in something called JUSPAO, the Joint United States Public Affairs Office, which was headed up by one of the more colorful characters that USIA/USIS, has ever had, Barry Zorthian. It was called joint, for it contained both American army and USIS officers, though more of the latter, with those from USIS in general calling the tune. We had two main functions, to beef up the Vietnamese government's feeble information efforts in the boondocks and to promote psychological warfare activities, working with American military advisers and Vietnamese province and district chiefs, all of whom were military officers. Trying to gain the allegiance and loyalty of the people, particularly in the countryside, was a daunting challenge. To begin with, we sought to see this accomplished in many areas where no central Vietnamese authority had ever held effective sway. How do you do more than go through the motions in places where your enemy has or shares control, or at least has enough power and presence to deny it to anyone else? Add to that a much dispirited and defeatist government cadre, who saw their main challenge as staying alive and in other ways just getting by. You could hardly blame them for having this attitude. Trade shoes with them, and you'd likely find yourself acting in the same way.

Still, it was a time when many Americans, particularly in Washington, but also in Vietnam, believed we were going to prevail, because we had decided to do so and would throw enough resources into the fray to gain decisive victory. They saw it in terms that simple, if not simplistic. We were in a never-never land, following the dictates of the Johnson administration, trying to impose our will on people who marched to a different drumbeat and who understood us as little as we did them. A central problem, which we never really comprehended, let alone solved, was that it was their country, where their ways were bound to prevail in the long run. We could put in and use such massive force to make a purely military occupation perhaps work, but even then only for a short while in limited areas. We would never have sufficient manpower or staying power to apply this kind of occupation strategy to the entire country. Put another way, we unrealistically looked for military answers to an essentially political problem, albeit one with a huge military component.

I started off as the JUSPAO representative in the five provinces surrounding Saigon. They were the capital province of Gia Dinh, plus adjacent Ben Hoa, Long An, Hau Nghia and Binh Duong. I found the Information Ministry people in these places dispirited, their facilities deplorably run down, their operations pathetic. This whole show was ineffectual, a view I discovered that was shared by our field representatives elsewhere in the country, but JUSPAO's management thought we somehow could make things better by providing products, urging and prodding these officials to get out more among the people and by sharing the effort with them. We at least had rightly concluded we couldn't do it by ourselves, even using our talented Vietnamese employees, who showed amazing dedication and ability. I rapidly concluded there was no way these Information Ministry types and what they were doing or not doing were ever going to amount to anything worth while and therefore concentrated my attention on working with district chiefs and in two cases, province chiefs. They were ARVN majors and lieutenant colonels, pretty well motivated, thoughtful and active. I was pleased that some of them came to seek me out as much as I did them. Whatever accomplishments anyone could point to, and in the larger picture, there weren't that many, I found they and I were usually on the same wave length. The other component was the American military advisors, about whom I'll have more to say, but here would note that a fair number of them, captains and majors, were dealing with political and psychological as much as military matters. I came to admire them for their dedication and rapid grasp of the real situation and problems being faced. At least that's the view from my vantage point, for whatever it's worth.

Before I get further into anything, I want to talk about the tremendous importance of the Vietnamese employees working with us in the field. We could have done so little without them and indeed in case after case were deeply dependent on them. It was the, at times almost unbelievable, dedication and loyalty that they brought to the job, but more than this, it was their taking us in hand and sharing their knowledge, perceptions and ideas with us. Remember that we were thrown into a war in an area in which few of us had any background or insight, nor were we given any time to acquire even a smattering of it. In no place I've been have the FSN's played a more key role in educating American officers. It wasn't easy or without stress for them, for they knew they were daily putting their lives on the line. A few insisted their salaries be paid to them in cash, for which they refused to sign a receipt, and that all records about them be kept under lock and key. Nearly everywhere I went, FSN Mr. Thanh or surveying team trainers were with me. Once stopped before a narrow, one way bridge in Long An waiting for the traffic to pass going in the other direction, a couple of shots were fired at us from a clump of trees. Mr. Thanh grabbed me and we jumped into a ditch, from which he opened up with his rifle at the trees. So did I. We waited for a while, heard no more shots, saw the bridge was clear, hopped back in the jeep and sped off. From the conte you see they not only educated us but also protected us.

My most challenging job came with helping devise the concept and program and then be in charge of training Vietnamese government rural survey teams. Operating under province and district chiefs, they went into villages to sound out public opinion in a simple but structured way. The resulting reports had two main aspects. The first lay in the information they contained, for although these responsible Vietnamese officials in the countryside and their deputies already knew pretty well what the surveys came up with, they nonetheless often added useful details and specifics, and provided a way for keeping updated, for precision on the questions and concerns the villagers had on their minds and in providing hints about matters not out in the open. From comments made in passing to the surveyors outside of the survey questions, gripes were voiced that a couple of district chiefs found more important than the reports themselves. And on one occasion, intelligence emerged, which led to the ambush of a Viet Cong military unit.

However, the most important usage, though we hadn't foreseen it at the outset, was that the surveys created of a body of organized information that could be used up the line to back up requests to Vietnamese authorities and Americans in Saigon. When justified by the survey data, whatever was being sought or proposed became more than just the request of, say, district chief X. The reports proved especially useful in getting funding for projects from AID, which had seemingly endless amounts of money. Still, the system demanded justification, and in more than a few cases, the surveys provided it. We developed survey teams in Binh Duong, Long An, Ben Hoa and whatever the province is called just south of Danang, whose capital is Hoi An. Maybe also in other places after my tour was up, although I haven't heard of them. I'm not sure how well they fared over the long run or even whether they were continued, but it was something that got off to quite an encouraging start. And there was so little in Vietnam at that time that was going right.

Q: Could you describe how you went about this. What would you do in a typical day or week?

UNDELAND: The first steps were to seek out likely places, drawing on many sources, where the security situation was not too bad and we thought the district and province chiefs would react positively and be supportive. Then came the initial visits by me and a couple of the FSNs to explore and explain and to be assured there was not only real approval and agreement, but also available local cadre, who would be on the team or teams to be formed. We also made sure the American advisors in that area were on board. For example, we delayed in one part of Binh Duong province, when at first they balked, though they soon not only came around but became whole hearted backers.

With these preliminaries out of the way, our training team would arrive, we would rent a house, have more sessions with the authorities, meet with those chosen to be on the team, spending as much time with them in convincing as in instructing, for they were the key element and had to be truly willing to take on this at times exposed and dangerous job. It was never easy, though surprisingly few backed out. They were mostly minor officials and security types from the area, without much education and with considerable wariness. It was a perilous, insecure world out there, not a place where commitment and sticking out one's neck were the rule. And what they were being asked to do would take them at times into places where they needed military protection, as well as being armed themselves. It is a credit to the superb JUSPAO trainers, all being Vietnamese of course, that initial reservations were usually overcome.

We went over the questionnaire with them until they understood it welit had been approved, often emended by the district and/or province chiehad practice sessions interviewing first the Vietnamese trainers and then officials before heading into the field. Once there, they were brought along gradually. As they got better at it and found it really working, their confidence rose, and often they became not only competent but quite enthusiastic. I was surprised how effective our trainers were in motivating as well as teaching and how rapidly they could do it. I don't want to oversell what we did, but there was the case of a team formed in Hoi An that, after we had left, got mixed up in a fire fight, in which one team member was killed and another wounded, but the next day the others were back in the same village continuing the surveying.

As to a typical day, it depended where in the roughly three week training cycle we were, but let's say fairly well along. We would meet, usually at the house we had rented, early in the morning for breakfast and discussion of where we would be going, review once more the questionnaire and then move out, more often than not with armed escort, although that depended on the degree of risk in that specific area. Once there, we would meet with the village leaders, go over what we were up to, and then begin. We would hire a villager to fix a lunch for uabsolutely splendid food, I can't remember a single mediocre meal in a villagafter which we would continue, but by three PM or so we would pack up and leave. The late afternoon and early evening were favored strike times for the Viet Cong. Once back to home base, the trainers and trainees would go over the results, tabulate them and jot down other information they had picked up. The training team and I usually had dinner together, and often after it, I would schmooze with Vietnamese officers and American advisors.

I mentioned going out often with security, local defense forces or the Vietnamese army, and once when we went into a village in a hairy part of Binh Duong under escort provided by a company of Vietnamese rangers. We ourselves were armed with a variety of different weapons, I personally with a couple of grenades, a 9mm pistol and often a semi-automatic, folding stock carbine. The trainers were all armed.

One ridiculous part of this job was the immense difficulty I had in getting weapons for the surveyors being trained. The province and district chiefs couldn't provide them. They could not draw on Vietnamese army stocks, I've forgotten just why, so I the took on being the gun procurer myself. I never dreamed it would be so complicated, but after jumping through more hoops than I had thought existed, I finally broke loose some CIA weaponry and then quietly got a regular supply source from a U.S. army depot.

I had, at the outset, wondered if the presence of guns and escort might not be so intimidating that the information the surveyors got from the villagers would be false and/or worthless, but I soon became convinced these fears were unfounded. From all I and the training team could tell, the surveyors were talked to quite frankly...

Q: You're saying that they tended to be quite open. Why is it that if you come in with guns, taking a poll, or the equivalent of a poll, or finding out things, that you didn't get only what they wanted you to hear, or what they thought you wanted to hear?

UNDELAND: I once had one of our trainers ask a villager elder why it was he and others spoke out so calmly and openly about his village, the attitudes of its inhabitants, the role of the Viet Cong, and so forth and did it in great detail. He replied in a matter of fact way, "I always tell the complete truth to people with guns." Not to be truthful to either the government or Viet Cong and be found out was to ask for rapid and usually violent retribution. I am sure we were not told everything, but I felt what we did get was basically accurate and what was left out was, well, that's another matter. The answer I have just cited says a lot about Vietnam in those days, and maybe other times as well.

Back to your question. Remember the people being trained were not going out into these villages in a vacuum. They were Vietnamese, who lived in the area. The trainers, on the other hand, were bright, experienced, skilled, who had seen it all come and go. So when answers or comments came up that seemed off the mark, at least widely off the mark, warning bells would go off. I don't think they got fooled very often.

The Vietnamese of the countryside basically just wanted to be left alone, as we heard in various ways and time and again. At heart they had little use for the government, and, if anything, less for the Viet Cong. They disliked the exactions of both sides, which was mainly manpower and taxes, but even more basic was the fact that neither side could provide them with reliable security. Many of these places were controlled to varying degrees by the government during the daytime hours and by the Viet Cong at night. The villagers had no choice but to make their peace with both. How could you expect loyalty to one or the other unless it was in control all the time? I recall another conversation, in which a villager told us exactly where the Viet Cong had entered one recent night, the meetings they had held, their other activities and from exactly where and when they departed. We asked him whether he would tell the Viet Cong everything about our day in the village and got the simple answer, "of course".

Let me expand on this question of loyalty, apart from the surveying project, with a vignette which indicates what a rare commodity it was. In my field representative capacity, I spent a fair amount of time in Go Vap district, which is a rural area in the northwest corner of the capital province, Gia Dinh. Its chief was Major Vy, an educated, sophisticated, dynamic man and one of the Vietnamese whom I came to admire and like most and, indeed, with whom I came to feel quite close. (To insert a personal note, Vy wanted to come to the airport to see me off, when I definitively left Vietnam, but I talked him out of it and instead had a lengthy lunch at his home a few days before, at which was one of the most conversations of any during my tour.)

Go Vap under him became the first district in the country declared completely pacified, with local defense forces in place and supposedly control and with all kinds of economic progress already achieved, while still more was being constantly made. Vy was proud of this and delighted in showing off these accomplishments. It was a place selected for visits several times by McNamara and Westmoreland. It seemed to show what could be done given dynamic leadership and adequate support.

A short time after I had left Vietnam, I heard that Vy had been killed, shot by mistake while riding in his jeep on a back road. I was shocked to hear this, but much more so when I learned the rest of the story. In going through his papers, the authorities were aghast to discover the price of Go Vap's pacification. Running through the uninhabited corner up against Hau Nghia province was the main north-south Viet Cong supply route, which fed men and material into the Mekong Delta. That route was untouched and, in return, so was Go Vap. I wondered how many other talented and commendable Vietnamese had made their arrangements, indeed probably saw no way out, except to make them, that is, to come to terms with both sides. Perhaps, who stood where only became clear only after the North Vietnamese/Viet Cong took over and started meting out punishment. But more likely, not even then.

It's getting away from your question, but let me go on with what I did in the latter part of my tour, when in addition to the survey team training and continuing to be the JUSPAO representative in five provinces, but on a much reduced scale, with others picking up most of the responsibilities, I participated in a number of sessions and study groups dealing with pacification planning, execution and evaluation. This grew out of my work with the rural surveys, and it was therefore perhaps logical I became the JUSPAO pacification specialist, but a more fundamental reason was undoubtedly the fact that no one else in the organization wanted it. This was not a happy job for me, for after I had been in Vietnam six months or so, I came to the conclusion that pacification, as it was conceived, designed and practiced, was fatally flawed, was conceptually at fault, could not accomplish what it was supposed to. Maybe there was no other choice, that is, that what was tried was the best thing possible, but it was disturbing to be involved in something, in which I had no confidence. It became for me a case of soldiering on. I voiced my reservations and doubts in some instances, but without openly challenging the system or making a big time fuss. That would have led to my being summary separated from the service.

The pacification idea was likened to a spreading oil spot, where the center area is first controlled militarily, then effective government is installed, a local defense force is recruited and trained, all kinds of development and social projects are put in place, and voila the loyalty of the people is gained, with no place remaining for the Viet Cong to insert itself inside the pacified area. At this point, the oil spot spreads out from a secure center to begin the same process in adjacent areas. It was neat, simple, tidy and perhaps logical on paper at the Saigon headquarters, but fundamentally out of tune with the reality and complexity of the Vietnamese countryside.

Many of these areas had never had an effective government or been under more than temporary, raw military control, so it was trying to build where no groundwork existed, where almost all of the young men had been drafted or gone over to the Viet Cong or moved away to avoid both, where suspicion of both sides was deeply ingrained, and where the personnel needed to make things work, could they have been found, and rarely were they, had to be formed from the ground up. Persons in the area had been making deals or accommodations with both sides, inculcating a frame of mind which would have to be changed. The idea was fundamentally flawed that claimed or was based on the idea that physical progresschools, roads, drainage, agricultural credit and the likwere going to be determining in a political sense, among people who had never been honestly and reliably loyal to the central authority. I could go more deeply into the faults, but I trust this is enough to make my point.

Still, I got a certain satisfaction from my involvement, in no small degree because of two others with whom I worked most closely on pacification matters, Dick Holbrooke and Bob Montgomery, the former we all know of and the latter a highly perceptive Army colonel. We three did not always agree on every detail, Bob was a tad less skeptic than I, but in general we were much on the same wave length, at least operationally.Now to the military...

Q: Which military?

UNDELAND: Ours. The MAC/V of General Westmoreland, with whom I spent several informal evenings. Bob Montgomery was among a group of officers who moved in to share his house, after the families were evacuated, and it was through him I was included. An admirable man, wholly dedicated to his mission and devoted to the welfare of his men, Westmoreland felt Vietnam was where history was being made and could not understand how any serious American would not want to a part of it. He spent nearly an hour one evening trying to convince me that JUSPAO should take over all parts of the chu hoi program, that is the effort to induce Viet Cong defections and then their re-education and indoctrination. I told him I'd take his message back, but I was sure it was way beyond the scope, ability and mandate of the in fact USIS led JUSPAO. He replied, "But we in the army don't know how to do it at all. You at least understand it better than we do. We'll pay for it entirely and provide any backing needed." I need hardly add that that idea went nowhere.

It was in these sessions, I came to feel he had little comprehension of the essential guerrilla nature of the fighting and war in a political sense, which, in those days, it still very much was, or of the people fighting it, or of the vast majority of the Vietnamese in the countryside, who only wanted to be away from it. Maybe, this judgment is too categoric and harsh, for I liked and respected him. It's just, as I saw it, he was seeing things almost totally through an American military otic, with the emphasis on fire power, big unit operations and so forth, in so many ways divorced from the on the ground reality, both the military and political reality. I don't mean to try to set myself up as a military expert, which I clearly am not, but I had trouble putting much faith in anyone, who couldn't or wouldn't bring the Vietnamese viewpoint, rather viewpoints, into the equation and treat it/them as central. In my presence, he never did. I must add that I was slightly put off by his calling the country VEET-nam.

I had two other encounters with Westmoreland worth mentioning. The first was in his office, where, on Montgomery's initiative, the three of us were describing to him the survey teams. Just as we had finished, a captain was ushered in, an advisor, who had survived a battle in which the ARVN unit he was with had been badly mauled and suffered large casualties. For some reason we stayed on. Westmoreland listened sympathetically to the advisor and then broke in, telling him that before going any further in recounting what had happened, he was to use the phone on the General's desk and call his wife in the States to let her know he was OK. I was moved by this human touch.

The other was in an area north of Danang, which a marine unit had cleared the Viet Cong forces out of, and the question remained on how to secure it permanently. I was there as part of my pacification involvement, when in came two helicopters, one carrying Westmoreland and Krulak, the marine commandant. By being there, I attended their briefing by the marine unit commander, Lieutenant Colonel Clement. The visitors wanted to know how pacification was going and were bluntly told, "Gentlemen, there is no pacification." They were visibly taken aback and replied it was at the heart of our whole policy for winning in South Vietnam. He continued by saying that, "perhaps this is the case, but we have nothing to pacify with. There are no young men here to put in a defense force. We have only women, old men and children. The people are scared. They give us no problems, but are unwilling to commit themselves to anyone, the government or Viet Cong...As long as we keep sufficient force in place, this area will remain relatively secure, although even now we can't guarantee 100 percent control of it 100 percent of the time. The moment we move out, the Viet Cong will be back in. Maybe they won't occupy it, but they will make sure we don't have it." Silence followed that exposition. As the visitors boarded their helicopter to leave, I wondered what impressions they took with them and fear it was little more than a mixture of disbelief or confusion. It was quite a performance by Clement; I would like to think he got the credit he deserved for his realism and honesty, and perhaps most of all his willingness to speak out to high authority, but I have doubts that he ever received this recognition. I never heard anything of him later, nor did I ever return to that place. That afternoon I drove back to Danang.

On the marines, I got to know fairly well a number of officers, captains, majors and one lieutenant colonel, in the Danang area. I found in them an understanding of the nature and dynamics of the conflict that was to me rarely paralleled among others I met in the military. They were almost as one in realizing that the only way to fight the essentially guerrilla war was to take into serious account the country, its people, their reality, their apprehensions and their limitations and capabilities. You had, in other words, to assume part of the guerilla mantle yourself. You could impose only so much from the outside and expect anything more than temporary achievements, if those. The marines had some degree of success in putting this thinking into operation, albeit in a limited way in the area around Danang.

Q: You were saying the marines, you felt, were the most in tune with the actual problem. I would have expected the opposite, for one thinks of them by their training and outlook as being warriors in the most basic sense and probably not having the subtlety that some other units might have. Do you have any thoughts about why the marines seemed to be adapted to this type of thing?

UNDELAND: I don't have a ready answer, but those I'm talking about were bright, on the ground, away from the Saigon or headquarters mentality. Maybe there is something in their training; I can't speak to this. I've never been in the military myself, so I can't fall back on that benchmark. It is true they looked on themselves, and with justice, as an elite fighting force, but I found them much more than that. Sophistication and open-mindedness are two words that come to mind. It's neither here nor there, but I spent a long evening with a light colonel in Danang, discussing the Vietnamese people and what the war was really about, interspersed with listening to his records of Mozart, a mixture that made sense to us both. He and the others I met had inquisitive and open minds. Maybe it has something to do with their being a smaller organization, a more field oriented one. These reasons I'm hazarding don't seem to offer all that convincing an explanation, even to me; all I can say is that this is what I found.

Q: Well, they had a different approach. They broke themselves down into small units in the I-Corps area if I recall. They would go out in small units, rather than sending out battalions...

UNDELAND: That is part of what I referred to. They were more into small scale operations, developing the concept of mixed Vietnamese- marine units, some of which I'm told became closely knit, with a sense of camaraderie, of belonging together, that brought out the best in the Vietnamese soldiers. Isn't there something about developing a sense of reliance on the fighter next to you? I leave it to others to pursue this further. My information on this aspect was obviously second hand, though I have no reason not to believe it reliable.

There was another side of the Vietnamese equation that cannot be ignored, which just so happened to involve the marines. While our survey team was training the local team in Hoi An, I attended a morning briefing given to the American military advisors by a Vietnamese colonel. All of a sudden a soldier burst into the room and whispered something in the colonel's ear. He, the colonel, rapidly left the room, but soon came back with a big smile on his face and said, "Gentlemen, it's nothing really. There has just been a little fist fight, nobody seriously injured, between some marines and Vietnamese rangers...I must tell you the result is two Vietnamese slightly hurt and ten Americans." The Vietnamese present roared with laughter, pleased the Americans had had the worst of it. So, while we were needed, in many ways respected and liked, while we had prevented the country from falling to the Viet Cong/North Vietnamese, our presence was so large, so widespread, so domineering, we were at the same time resented. We shouldn't be surprised they applauded when we got the short end of the stick. Nor that any little way of getting back at us pleased them.

Q: Did you run up against other resentments of the American military? I would have expected there were lots of such stories.

UNDELAND: I heard reports that the vast differences between what American and Vietnamese soldiers were paid was vastly resented by the latter, perhaps particularly the cases of some bar girls being available only to the rich Americans, but I don't have specific incidents that come to mind.

But there is one which involved me. I had gotten to know and liked the III Corps commanding general have forgotten his namand he invited me to his headquarters in Bien Hoa for lunch. There, he sat me on one side of him and the American colonel, who was the III Corps chief advisor, on his other side. He then talked almost exclusively to me, ignoring the colonel, speaking only in French and asking me to do the same. The advisor happened to be one of the most unpleasant persons with whom I had ever figuratively crossed swords, for in visits to Ben Hoa in my field representative capacity, I had found him crude, rude and little short of impossible. Thus, I had no problems in playing a role to give him a bit of come-uppance. At the end of the lunch, the Vietnamese general turned to the colonel, saying in English that he had just invited me to come back another time. When I did, the advisor, to nobody's surprise, was nowhere to be seen. (I later had a ride in his helicopter with him, and he used this occasion to seek a kind of retribution, with a tree hugging, swooping up and down sort of thing, but I told him that if he could take it so could I.)

Americans who paid no attention to Vietnamese pride and ways did us no service, whatever their military contributions and competence might be. Their all too common penchant to order the foreigner around, almost as a lesser being, went down very badly. I could not but think back of stories I had heard in Egypt of the negative reactions there to Soviet advisors throwing their weight around. Maybe it wouldn't have been such an issue had there not been so many Americans there, but even then, let alone with the way things were, it would have helped tremendously, had there been a lot more cultural sensitivity and respect shown to the Vietnamese. I hasten that many American officers did have it, particularly in the lower ranks and advising at the district and province levels.

Speaking of French, mine was serviceable and highly useful with a number of Vietnamese, both civilians and military officers, whose command ranged from getting by to bi-lingual. Some of these persons liked it because they were more at home in it than in English, but also I think they welcomed the chance to get away from their usual mode of dealing with Americans, even if they were talking to one. Having it in French seemed to put things in a different context, at least for some of them.

Q: What was your impression of USIS operation in Saigon?

UNDELAND: It was very large, but I didn't have anything to do with most of it, for those of us in field operations were quite off by ourselves and away from the more or less usual USIS components. There was a huge, active bi-national center, with its library and English teaching classes in which more than 7,000 were then enrolled. We ran the gamut of exchange programs. Also a large printing operation, a book translation program. We dealt with the local media, placing much material. So, while there were the traditional things, which seemed to be functioning relatively smoothly from all I knew, the heart of the operation lay with the war related aspects, i.e. field operations and handling the American and other foreign press. The daily press briefings were given in the JUSPAO building, usually by Barry Zorthian and a senior American military officer. I personally more or less kept my distance from journalists, but could not be unaware that they were very skeptical about the truth and completeness of the information being provided them. They felt, as did I, that if they were not being misled outright, they certainly were being fed information and half truths that could not be relied on. Knowing that much bad news was toned down or omitted, their skepticism and at times outright disbelief was hardly surprising. What else could you expect when they were getting one thing from American officers and officials in Saigon and seeing a hearing what was quite different in the field. And it wasn't isolated instances, but was happening much of the time. I should add that unlike being embedded, as they were much later in Iraq, they wandered all over the country accompanied only by Vietnamese in their hire. Many got to know it well.

We had lots of money in the JUSPAO budget, and what we did lacked, we could almost always get by glomming onto AID money that was a bottomless pit, the milk cow that never ran dry. I have never been in a situation, let alone post, where the cash flowed so freely that budgeting, let alone cost effectiveness, wasn't ever a real consideration. So long as we could buy it, we got whatever we wanted. Of course, paper or formal justification had to be given, but little imagination or effort were required to get past this barrier.

I guess I should now tell the story of my venture into law breaking. The weirdest job in my 35 year USIS career lay in being part of the scheme to obtain over $100,000 of bogus receipts. It happened this way. A large amount of Vietnamese money, from AID of course, had been put in the hands American captains and majors stationed at the district and province levels, to be dispersed without questions asked for small development projects, school supplies, good will activities, whatever. It was a highly useful resource in their hands, giving them exemplary flexibility. To fight counterfeiting, which had become a serious problem, the Vietnamese government, with little advance warning, changed its currency. Many of these officers did not get around to converting the old bills into new ones and were left personally responsible, literally holding the bag. The coordinator of field operations, Joe Fourt, brought it to my attention, and the two of us decided to take remedial action, using the rural survey team trainers. I put it before them, and they gladly agreed to join in. For nearly two weeks during an interregnum between training assignments, they fanned out in Saigon and elsewhere to gather a couple of cartons full of predated receipts for tires, painting of information centers, drainage pipes and I hate to think what all else. Anyhow, their "work" was accepted without demur, we got the new bills, had them distributed to the concerned officers, with firmest of instructions they were to burn the old ones pronto. End of story, but I must admit I look back quite happily on this venture into crime.

In his unassuming ways, Joe Fourt was a tower of strength. Officially the coordinator of us in the field, whatever his actual title, he provided the group of us with common binding and leadership, fought internal administrative battles for us when needed and was the wholly reliable point of contact between field operations and the rest of JUSPAO. Whenever problems arose, he was there in the thick of it, finding solutions, easing the ways, reducing tensions and never being ruffled. He was particularly important, for the nominal head with a USIS background, Lew Pate, offered little more than his presence. Then in came Brigadier General Fritz Freund, who contributed nothing, but about whom derisive stories were legion, when, as a colonel, he had been the chief military advisor in one of the four corps and then after being promoted in Saigon. I'll just mention how before entering a building for a meeting, he would often grab a handful of dirt and rub it into his sleeves and pants and then tell how he was just in from the field. He got himself into pacification matters, but understood it so little, he didn't know enough to interfere and thus, while a nuisance, was not that much of a bother for me. His sole positive aspect was that he had the wit to know he really didn't have to do much of anything, as Joe was there to handle whatever came up. I guess he deserves credit or that. Joe, by the way, never got the recognition he deserved, but those of us around him admired him for his competence, contributions and likeable ways.

Back to your question. I felt the JUSPAO leadership tried to bring realism to what we were doing, but neither we nor anybody ever got wholly away from the idea of being in fantasy-land. I recall Barry Zorthian once saying in a JUSPAO meeting, "I keep hearing these stories of how well we're doing with this project or that one, but in fact things are rapidly getting worse. We're losing the war. Let us never confuse a few little tactical successes with the big picture."

Q: Barry Zorthian was an important figure at that time in Vietnam. What was your impression of how he operated?

UNDELAND: Barry Zorthian was one of those bigger than life figures. You have to admit he pulled it off, but many didn't like working for him for various reasons and in varying degrees. In short, he had no fan club, not that he sought one or probably would have found one acceptable. He operated in an autocratic way and didn't try to hide it. Once, he created a morale problem, when he proposed to Washington a scheme to extend the length of tours of USIS types on his staff without consulting them. His message, which contained the names of the concerned officers and their new tour dates, somehow got into the read file, available to all. Big brouhaha over that, though I can't remember how it came out. A fairly common criticism of him was that one could never be sure that what he said one day would be valid the next. A poker player with his cards held close to his chest, he usually was able to keep one step ahead of the rest. He liked the power and status that being JUSPAO's head brought him. He's not one of my personal favorites, but then I have nothing against him either. I didn't work directly with him, so my impressions are from a certain distance.

Q: Did you find as a field officer that when you came back to Saigon and JUSPAO headquarters you entered another world? Others have felt this difference between Saigon and the field.

UNDELAND: Yes, very definitely different worlds. There was the physical side. When I went to the field, I was, as I've said, armed. For the provinces around Saigon, I would head off in a Jeep that had a 3/4" steel plate on the floor, topped by sandbags to protect against land mines. I have mentioned the arms I carried. I didn't wear a tie the whole time I was in Vietnam, and when in the field was always in combat boots. Meetings there were held only when needed, were informal, with no standing on ceremony. In Saigon it was quite different. Endless sessions, particularly, when I got more deeply into pacification. Also a lot of working up papers and taking positions, bureaucratic stuff.

Aside from physical and procedural aspects, the attitudes were usually far apart. In the field, it was a case of what works, what is real, what is feasible. In Saigon, much was on concepts and big schemes. Whether they were based on reality or not didn't always seem too important. Political imperatives seemed to outweigh reason on all too many occasions. Doesn't that almost always happen, when those doing it don't really know what's up? I preferred the field. Indeed, I sought to get away from Saigon completely during my last three months and be assigned to psy-ops with the First Infantry Division, but I was not accepted, purportedly because I had so little time left, but I suspect my tendency to speak out may have been a contributing factor.

Q: One of the things that struck me in the 18 months that I was in Saigon, where I was just learning the consular thing, was the lack of knowledge on the part of so many Americans, self included. I found myself at one point chairing a committee where I was supposed to have historical perspective on a problem and I had been there only six months. The constant turnover. Did you note this?

UNDELAND: I certainly did. But I noticed even more that a lot of people sent there were well intentioned and wanted to do well count everyone in field operations, who were in the provinces, in this categorbut there were also some, who didn't have any idea what was going on and, worse, didn't really care or try to find out. It was easy to get lost in the bureaucracy, and these sorts not only did just that, but did it happily. They were the ones, who were putting in their time, 18 months or two years, and mainly went through motions until they could leave. Getting personal, I did not volunteer for the assignment, but once there threw myself into it and did my best, though I must admit I didn't try to learn the language. I am contemptuous of those who didn't seek to become truly involved, that is, the time servers. For me, you are either professional, with all that that means, or you are not much.

I don't think I need to get into chapter and verse, but you're right in saying there was a lack of continuity and information. This is hardly surprising, for so many of us were abruptly yanked out of other places all over the world and thrown into that demanding place and situation, with no thought being given to get us prepared for it. All in all I believe we did a fairly good job of learning on the ground.

Q: What about the problem of corruption? Did you note this at all? And how was the government's reach beyond the capital?

UNDELAND: Two questions. I of course heard talk of corruption, but I did not personally brush up against it much, at least not so I recognized it. There were the items from the PX and commissary being sold openly on the street, but was this theft or corruption or both, and anyway how important was it? I sensed that corruption wasn't as major a problem as some thought. What I mean to say is, there were bigger fish to fry.

You are right on the second one. The Vietnamese government was essentially a Saigon operation, whose officials rarely if ever got out into the field or were pressed or urged to do so. It was not just because of the fighting, but, as I understand it, the tradition which went way back. Of course you had the governors and other officials outside the capital, but the central government-provinces relationship had long had the character of a considerable distance, if not being two different worlds.

This might be the place to speak of Nguyen Van Cat, a thoroughly Saigon bureaucrat in what I took to be his late 40s, who was concerned officially with pacification and became intrigued by the rural survey team idea, as I described it to him. We saw quite a bit of each other and developed a warm relationship.

I induced Mr. Cat to join me and one of our best Vietnamese trainers on a field trip, his first in years, outside Saigon. We flew to Danang and the next day drove south to Hoi An so see the survey team in operation, which we had trained earlier. On the drive, he was nervous and apprehensive, but stuck it out, even when an American marine at a check point said, he personally wouldn't go further down the road and then shook his head when I said we had checked out the security situation with the Vietnamese authorities and were going on. Cat and I chatted away in French, he got out into a couple of villages with the survey team and clearly liked what he saw. I heard later he took back a glowing report to his colleagues in Saigon. I subsequently suggested to him a number of times we take another trip together, but he declined. The one experience was apparently enough.

In the car as we were returning to Danang, he wondered if he could ask me a personal question. I agreed, adding I did not promise to answer. He then asked how old I was, and I told him to guess, and he hesitatingly pout forth "50 years old." When I laughed and told him I was 35, he sheepishly came back with a classic, "I'm sorry, but you Americans all look the same to us." It has ever since been a favorite story of mine. A nice cultural lesson there or what?

Q: Did you get any feel for the two ambassadors, Maxwell Taylor and Cabot Lodge?

UNDELAND: Not at all. I talked once briefly with Taylor, but never even shook Lodge's hand. The distance between a JUSPAO field officer and the ambassador was large.

Q: You left there in 1966?

UNDELAND: That's right.

Q: How did you feel about Vietnam at that time?

UNDELAND: First, I was ready to leave. I hadn't asked to go there, and it was a place for which I was ill prepared, knowing nothing of either the language or culture. For me, not having any kind of a grip on the place is always a source of frustration. I felt I had learned a great deal and had done about as good a job as I could, although I came first to doubt the validity and work-ability of what we were trying to accomplish and the ways we were going about it, and then to conclude there was no way we were going to pull it off. I left thinking that without unthinkable changes of concept and course, we were doomed to failure, which we all know is sadly what happened.

Use of even more military power may have been advisable and justifiable, but by itself could never bring more than temporary improvement, never a viable, long term solution. As I've said, we were trying all too much to solve a political problem militarily. I never felt we were morally wrong or at fault in our Vietnam endeavor, for the idea of preventing a communist take-over had my approval, though I never subscribed to the domino theory. However, the odds were long under the best of circumstances and the desired outcome was impossible under the way we were going about it. Maybe the situation was worse than that, for I didn't see what anyone could do about the Vietnamese authorities, who did not come across to most of the people as much if any superior to the Viet Cong. At least that's the way the villagers and probably a majority of the city people viewed it. Vietnam would have needed a national, rather nationalist, leader of the ilk of Magsaysay or Syngman Rhee in his earlier days. No Vietnamese got even close to coming up to that standard.

I must admit I did not seriously ask myself the question of whether getting into Vietnam was of sufficient importance to the U.S. to justify doing it. In retrospect perhaps I should have, but it was maybe better that I didn't, for I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have liked the answer. Did we ever have a real national interest in getting involved there? You answer.

Personally, I looked on Vietnam then and since as an unsought interlude in my career. I expanded my scope a good deal, and for that I am grateful. I have memories, many positive ones, which will always be with me. I hated the family separation; it was hard to take. I have never owned a gun and was glad to put that part of the experience behind me. I toyed with the idea of making a statement by throwing my weaponry in the river just before leaving, but finally decided against it, probably wisely. I have not owned a gun since, nor will I ever.

Q: You came back in 1966, towards the end of 1966?

UNDELAND: Mid-'66. I picked up the family in Bangkok. We flew to Hong Kong and Japan for short vacations, two places I had never visited, before sailing out of Osaka on the President Cleveland to San Francisco. But leaving Saigon was not without its hitch. I was on an Air Vietnam flight from Saigon's airport, Tan Son Nhut, to Bangkok and looked down out of the window to see us flying over Phnom Penh going west and then a few minutes later I saw that city again but we were going the other way. Engine trouble dictated a return to Saigon and once there to await another plane. Tough on the family, as I couldn't communicate with them and they had no knowledge of what was happening, except the plane carrying me didn't arrive. They waited long at the airport, until they had no choice but to return home. Just one more example of the immense stress Vietnam assignments put on families of those stationed there. Indeed, it was a graveyard for many marriages.

Q: What did you do next?

UNDELAND: I wanted to get back into the Middle East and found out in Washington that NEA and personnel had plans for me to go to Sanaa as PAO. I balked at this, for Yemen was in the middle of a nasty civil war, and it smelled strongly of another family separation about to happen. Events proved my nose right. Two unaccompanied postings in a row would have been too much. The USIA front office line of giving special consideration on next assignments to those who had been in Vietnam was so much hooey. I was told there wasn't anything else suitable that was open in the MidEast, but I was suspicious that no one was leveling with me, and I was right. I fortunately had a friend in another part of personnel and through him got access to the master assignment book. There I found a couple of upcoming vacant jobs that interested me; I homed in on being sent to Algiers as the information officer. They had somebody else in mind, but I had stronger credentials, in addition to being just out of Vietnam and went to bat for it. I spoke passable French and some Arabic, I had Arab World and North African experience and interest. NEA and personnel finally caved, though without grace, and I was off to Algiers in spring of 1966.

Algiers: Information Officer

Q: What was the situation in Algiers, in Algeria, at that point?

UNDELAND: It was a country still very much in the throes of its bloody and grisly struggle for independence, which cost, the Algerians claimed, some 1.5 million lives of their citizens, plus many more wounded and nearly everyone displaced. Whatever the correct figure, it was a traumatic experience for everybody. In the central square of village after village, you would find a whitewashed low pyramid, four or five or six feet high, with the names on the dead inscribed on it. For some small, isolated villages, there were up to 40 names inscribed. The only comparable thing I've seen are the memorials in French villages for the World War I dead. The Algerians were a people striving to get out from under this horror, but it remained an integral part of their lives and national psyche, if such a thing can be said to exist.

However, it was more than this human tragedy, for the economy was in shambles, partly due to the war, but also because of the departure of the French and other Europeans, who had filled thousands of positions, for which no Algerians were trained or otherwise prepared to take over. Much, indeed most, of the economy had been oriented towards the colons, meeting their needs and, by extension, those of France. Algeria didn't even make its own butter; it was imported from France. And there were many other tell-tale examples I could cite. Having opted for a socialist model patterned on the Soviets, efficient agriculture was largely ignored and huge, ineffectual factories, like the massive steel complex, got the emphasis. Even the considerable oil and natural gas revenues were insufficient to bring prosperity to the nation and, especially, the vast majority of the people. On a lifeless, salt flat just outside Oran was a large billboard with peeling paint, bearing the slogan in French in huge letters, "Ici c'est la terre de socialisme." How true.

A third area of confusion was political, and it had several aspects. Standing first were the divisions in the ranks of the victors, the split between the guerrilla fighters, who had been inside Algeria and felt they deserved the top places, and those in the GPRA, the provisional government, who had lived outside the country and, with their better organization, won out in the post-independence power struggle. In the main, this conflict took place before I arrived, though its repercussions still loomed large. There were other splits, beginning at the top with the conflict between Ben Bella and Boumedienne, the latter who once having got the upper hand promptly deposed and exiled the former. It was a one party state, with a party that could never get its act together for personal, bureaucratic and ideological reasons. The bad effects and influence of the Soviet models it adopted contributed to this national malaise. Realism and efficiency/ effectiveness were sacrificed to loyalty and a slavish, grudging, all too often ineffectual, kind of minimum performance. Other aspects in the administrative disarray stemmed from officials being poorly trained and prepared, their low pay and a lack of enforced performance standards.

I had and still have the feeling that many, maybe most, of the problems go back to the dominating nature of the French presence and the ghastly, no holds barred, independence war.

Algerian-U.S. relations were strained and difficult, despite the fact that we had not stood behind France in the war, that the then Senator John Kennedy had made his locally well known speech in the Senate, openly espousing Algerian independence, that we had an economic assistance program, that we were working with the Algerians on developing its natural gas fields and exports, that we were openly seeking warmer relations. We were nonetheless widely perceived as the inheritor of the European imperialist mantle, the opponent of independence movements, the aggressor in Vietnam, the capitalist exploiter. You couldn't call it love- hate, for there wasn't that much love, but at the same time our presence was wanted, and there was much curiosity about, and even quiet admiration for, things American. The few Algerians who had returned from studies in American universities were highly respected, were seen to have acquired particular advantages. They were among the country's best technocrats, a few quite highly placed.

Turning to USIS, we had almost no contact with any main part of the ruling party structure, and of course none with the police or military, but access was not as difficult as might be imagined. I mean our usual clienteles, universities and other parts of the education system, the media, professional organizations and the arts. We were not isolated and at times cooperated fairly well with Algerians from these elements, except for the media, although we could see editors and journalists almost anytime. However, beyond a modicum of purely cultural stuff, they weren't buying anything we had to offer and, in conversations, there was not much that could honestly be called dialogue. That is, we listened to them and they sometimes listened to us, but with little give and few real exchanges of ideas. Nowhere was criticism of American more pronounced than in the press, which, of course, was wholly controlled. Radio station output was a little less strident, with mere silence sometimes replacing an unrelenting America-is-bad line.

Our center was quite well used and seemingly appreciated. Its library attracted a fair sized clientele. Books were being borrowed on a respectable scale. Our documentary films were in considerable demand. We put on, with Algerian co-sponsors, several concerts and an exhibit, which were reasonably well attended and, incidentally, got us that rarity of positive mention in the press. IV and other exchange programs found ready acceptance. Our most popular officer was, not surprisingly, the colorful contact English teaching officer, David Mize stemmed in part from his personality but equally from what he was doing. Some attitudes were, we believed, perhaps being positively influenced, albeit not in a big way and with little overt expression, but the larger political situation throughout my stay was constantly deteriorating.

A personal vignette may not be wholly out of place in providing a glimpse of where the embassy stood. I arrived planning to order a new car as soon as the authorities granted me my expected diplomatic status. However, much time passed without the accreditation coming through. No reason was given for the delay, despite our several queries. The Zodiac Estate Wagon of British Ambassador Sir Thomas Bromley III, who had been kicked out over Rhodesia, was available and he was pressuring his embassy to sell it and get him the proceeds. I agreed to buy it, provided I be given written permission to drive it with its present CMD plates until the Foreign Ministry came through, and I could register it in my own name. I rather liked the respect I got with his Nibs plates, being waved into special parking places and this sort of thing, which went on for months. At last, the embassy learned that the problem was that the decision had been taken there would be no more American diplomats approved until we cut the number of our military attaches from three down to one. We balked on principle, although what possible benefit we derived from individual army, navy and air attaches was a mystery, for they could neither travel around the country nor regularly meet with their Algerian counterparts. Meanwhile, I drove on without incident, although it was causing certain consternation to our British colleagues. The Algerians obviously knew I was using the defrocked ambassador's plates, but didn't do anything about it. The car was obviously immaterial to them, as was I, but clipping the wings of the embassy did have significance. That it took us months even to learn what the problem was indicative of the state of our relations.

(We found the Brits in Algiers somewhat testy over more than just the car, the only place I served where this was true. They formally protested a Fourth of July exhibit I put together and mounted at the ambassador's residence for the traditional reception held there, particularly objecting to the text, for mentioning that Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown had led to their defeat and our independence.)

Averell Harriman came on a mission impossible, seeking to get the Algerians to intercede with the North Vietnamese to provide better treatment for the American servicemen they held prisoner. To indicate where the Algerians stood on this conflict, the North Vietnamese representative had been given the place of honor just to the right of President Boumedienne on the reviewing stand at the most recent Algerian Independence Day parade. Anyway, Harriman called on the young, touchy foreign minister, Abdalaziz Bouteflika, a meeting we thought might last ten or fifteen minutes before he would be shown the door, but in fact that session went on for more than two hours. Harriman finally emergeonly the two of them plus the Algerian interpreter had been presenat least somewhat pleased, for although he didn't get anything on the prisoner issue, it had been the most cordial get together any American official had ever had with him. Harriman seized the initiative at the outset by telling Bouteflika that he, now in his 70's, had been our ambassador to Russia, senator from and governor of New York, presidential candidate, senior diplomat, and now, though at the end of his career, he had never risen to the rank of the secretary of state or foreign minister. He asked, "and you're only 29 years old? What are you going to do with the rest of your life?" Harriman told us that this broke the ice, and they cordially talked about all sorts of things, personal, political, governmental, Vietnam, ending with an uncharacteristically cordial Bouteflika expressing the hope they would meet again before long. In the weeks which followed, we found the customs people and other parts of officialdom a little more cooperative and forthcoming, though this thaw didn't last for long.

We had a situation that was in ways similar with the branch PAO in Oran, last name Harty, who ran our small center there. He was black, outspoken and much frustrated by restrictions and other impediments thrown up before him. After what he considered an egregious case, he would go to the governor or his deputy, make his complaint and add, "I have to assume that the only reason you are doing this to me is because I'm black." They would vigorously deny his charge of racism and for a short while things usually would get a little bit better, but all too soon reverting to the old obstructionist ways. Later, something else would drive him to repeat the performance with exactly the same result.

Speaking of centers, we also had had one in Constantine that the authorities abruptly ordered closed down, when a copy of the agency's film on Ben Bella's official trip to Washington mistakenly got loaned out. It somehow had been overlooked and not destroyed, as we had ordered, after he was deposed. The Algerians wouldn't even listen to, let alone accept, our apology or consider permitting us to reopen it. They were obviously pleased we had given them an excuse to end our presence in the eastern part of the country. If something similar had happened in Oran, we were sure that that center would also have been permanently shut down.

Algeria was in many ways the toughest place in which to operate of any of my assignments. The authorities were touchy, suspicious and often obstructionist. Even when you thought persons had gotten to accept you and lower some of the barriers, it might not mean much. There was still almost always a large distance, a inability to get on the same wave length. For example, when you made a call on an official, you could not be sure whether he was even giving you his real name. However, there was a recognized signal of at least minimum acceptance, by which he showed he was open to further contacts. He would throw in, "oh by the way, you can reach me at this phone number." If he provided a private number, it went a step further and was an invitation to see him again. Still, you might not have his true name. An Algerian official, one of the relatively few whom I got to know quite well, explained it as follows: "You've got to understand where we have come from. So many of us were killed. We were displaced or had to sneak around to avoid arrest. We were being chased and hunted down. We were torn out of our villages. If we cooperated with the French, the Algerians killed us, and vice versa. Families were broken up. Everybody has had a member of his family killed or tortured or both. The only way we could exist was to hide our identities. Now, the war is over, but it is going to take a long time for these habits and fears to disappear."

Though it doesn't really fit in with the point I'm making, he went on: "Of course, we needed a reason for continuing our struggle and putting up with our suffering. Independence was not in itself enough; neither was conducting the war. The only other thing we had to sustain us was our belief in Islam, and to it we turned. Never underestimate the hold our religion has on us, nor how strong our Islamic sentiments and loyalties are, whether we openly show them or not." The later, long turmoil in that unhappy country has made me think back many times to this conversation. Once again, we get back to the fundamental question of identity and time after time how dominating it is.

We Americans moved around Algiers and its immediate environs freely, but we could not travel outside the departement d'Alger without written permission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which took a couple weeks or so to obtain. I and others in USIS were never turned down, but some in the embassy often, if not usually, were. And the military attaches never received permits allowing them to move outside the city.

I have rambled on, but trust that these stories and ruminations give something of the flavor of country at that time.

Q: I didn't ask you what specifically was your job in Algiers?

UNDELAND: I was the information officer, or press attachï¿½, dealing with the media, the press and radio, where, as I've said, we were pretty much frozen out although I did get around in these circles a fair bit. Television was just getting started and wasn't a factor. I was in charge of our fairly sizable film loan program. I oversaw putting out the daily information bulletin using wireless file items and distribution of our magazines and pamphlets. They were much sought after. However, I am the first to admit I was hardly overworked and therefore branched out into some normally cultural section affairs. I handled the visit by pianist Ann Schein, which went over quite well and a few of the exchanges.

It was a strange post, with an egocentric PAO, Bob Behrens, frankly something of a braggart, with the unfortunate trait of all too often taking personal credit for everything anyone on the staff accomplished. Beyond this, my close ties with the CAO, Mike Barjansky, riled him. Mike, by the way, was one of the finest USIS officers I have ever encountered. An effort of his, that got widely known, did more for USIS standing than anything else that occurred while I was there. Some details have now escaped me, but a prickly, senior information official on an IV grant ran into all kinds of problems with French officialdom during a stopover in France on his way to the States. Once, Mike got wind of it, he threw himself into the fray, nearly going to Paris himself to get it straightened out, though at last his constant overseas phoning did the trick, the French relented and the visit came off splendidly. This Algerian was deeply impressed, doubly so when he learned that Barjansky was Jewish. Once back home, he spread this story all over, put in terms that this American Jew had done so much to help out an anti-Israeli Arab. It came back to me in most laudatory terms from different Algerians a number of times.

Despite positive glimpses of the moon from time to time, we well knew our position was tenuous, unable to withstand any serious crisis. The end came swiftly, with official and public outrage over what was believed to be our not only lining up with the Israelis in the '67 war, but our actually joining with them militarily. There was no question in Algerian minds once our friend, King Hussein of Jordan, made the false accusation that American aircraft had to be participating in bombing Egyptians sites, because he held it impossible for the Israelis to turn around their own planes so rapidly. This came on top of, and exacerbated, feelings already aroused. The ambassador was called in by the Foreign Ministry and told that all Americans in the mission would have to leave as soon as possible, because the government could no longer guarantee their safety without using deadly force against its own citizens, which it would not do. The handwriting had been on the wall for some days, and dependents were already leaving on regular flights to Europe. My family was among them, going to Madrid.

A few days later, those of us still there received a late night call from our consul, Steve Buck, telling us to be at the embassy the next morning, in our automobile and with only one suitcase. I flew out to Rome on a scheduled flight and then on to Madrid. All purely routine for me, but when the family left, a security official at the airport gave my wife a hard time, but as soon as he had stomped off, another official came over to her and apologized profusely for this lack of politeness towards her, pointing out she should know that the other person was a security type, not a regular member of the airport staff, for none of them would never be rude like that.

To end the departure story on a lighter note, I did not turn in my house keys to the admin officer, as I had been directed, but rather to a can-do, operator, Algerian employee in the GSO office. I told him he could have all the liquor in my basement, a shipment from Denmark had just arrived, but I wanted my Siamese cat that as usual had spent the night out wandering. Some ten days later I got a call from Madrid customs asking me to come out and pick up a cat. When I arrived and heard that unmistakable Siamese yowl ringing through the cavernous customs shed, I knew this family member indeed was there, impatient to rejoin us. The alcohol part of the story remains a mystery, but I want to presume he got it.

A few days before my departure, a mob, organized by the youth section of the ruling FLN party, gathered in front of our ground floor center, with much shouting and sloganeering. We were not open, and had not been since the fighting began, so the shutters were down and all but a couple of FSNs were not on the premises. The mob pried up the shutter of the window of my office and entered. At that moment our Algerian employees wisely threw the main switch before ducking out the back door, leaving the intruders literally in the dark. They stumbled around in some of the offices and library, overturning desks and throwing about typewriters and books, but doing little real damage. They never found the film library. They didn't have flashlights and used no fire, except in the street outside where they burned contents of my fill was months chasing down replacements of these personal papers. We may have been saved by the fact that the floor above USIS housed the headquarters of the Union Nationale des Femmes Algeriennes, whose members were leaning out of the windows ululating to egg on the demonstrators. Two days later, a similar mob did a far more complete job on the Egyptian cultural center to show their dismay that the Egyptian army had stopped fighting, thereby had admitted defeat! Algiers was like no other place I served in before or after.

I cannot leave your question without relating the following story. The Algerians loved films, and the dynamic Cinemateque was perhaps the most vital cultural organization in the city. On their own, they arranged for a week of films by Joseph Losey and brought him out from England. While up till then I hadn't had all that much dealing with the Cinematheque, they came to me, hoping USIS would get involved and that I would provide simultaneous translation or at least commentary. My French skills, let along film knowledge and whether I should get so involved, would let me do neither, but they covered this base with another person, and the festival came off. (Losey, who did "The Boy With Green Hair", "the Butler" etc. was blackballed in Hollywood and moved to the U.K. where he continued to make message laden films.) He bluntly and publicly criticized Algeria's lack of democracy and personal freedom, as vigorously as he had taken on the House Un-American Activities Committee, to the dismay of the government and glee of Cinematheque members. But no one moved against him. A number of interesting views into the Algeria of those days, showing it wasn't quite as monolithic as it sometimes seemed. Losey wasn't arrested or kicked out of the country. The Algerian film buffs had showed rare daring and got away with it, that is, without official recrimination. They had no problem in coming to American officials, whom they stated they associated with an openness they wanted for themselves. Whatever we thought of Losey and the festival, it showed there was among some an immensely positive view of things from the States, despite what they thought of certain U.S. policies. I asked a Cinematheque official if they were planning a similar festival of Soviet films. He replied with disdain "certainly not", noting that they were an independent organization and had no use for that kind of propaganda.

Q: In Algiers, what were American interests, at the time you were there? What basically were we trying to do?

UNDELAND: We recognized Algeria's importance in Middle Eastern and North African contexther neighbors to the east and west were firm friends of ourand in her ties to independence movements and non- aligned countries. (How I dislike that phrase, for they were almost consistently non-aligned against the U.S.) We sought stability in North Africa within a framework with which we could effectively deal. It was a time when we were competing with the Soviets for every inch of territory in the world, and Algeria was more of a Cold War arena than many other nations. We were worried by its military build-up, which was closely tied to the Soviets, who provided the arms and training. Moreover, we feared the Algerians might give or otherwise make available bases to them, particularly the French built naval installation at Oran. We knew that Soviet economic aid and its planning model was bad for Algeria in the long run, and we hoped we could help wean them, at least partially, away from the Russians. We were, however, under no illusions over our prospects, recognizing that the Soviet models they followed were at heart more political than economic, which jibed quite well with the dominant Algerian government outlook.

We felt we should do all we could to keep up and strengthen contacts, looking forward to a hopefully brighter day in our bilateral relations. We saw some potential openings with Algerian oil and natural gas, particularly the latter in which American companies were deeply involved. Despite the close official ties with the Soviets, the Algerians insisted, and with some justice, they were not under Soviet domination on issues that truly concerned them and their interests. Many Algerians we knew were strongly anti-communist on both intellectual and practical grounds and were fearful of Soviet ways and their grip on major aspects of the country. There was reasonably widespread desire for contact with the West, however much we and Western Europe were suspect and criticized. In short we found attitudes and realities on which we wanted to build, and felt we should try.

A bright spot in the gloomy picture was the Kennedy's speech in the Senate supporting Algerian independence, which I've already mentioned, although I'm not sure how much we gained by trying to pull out and use this card, as we did on a number of occasions. Perhaps our high point during my shortened tour was the visit by Senator Ted Kennedy, accompanied by California Congressman Tunney, to dedicate the John F. Kennedy Square in Algiers. The Algerians organized a good bit of hoopla, but it was only froth. They refused to provide a venue for the speech the Senator very much wanted to deliver on human rights and related responsibilities. Even with a Kennedy, they were not prepared to be really forthcoming, let alone give anything away. Amusement was provided by a perpetually drunken journalist accompanying the two legislators, who couldn't get it through his befogged mind that he was in Algeria and not Nigeria and, to the dismay of the hosts, kept demanding to be told where they were hiding the blacks.

Were it not for the Cold War, we certainly would have been less interested in Algeria, but I feel sure we would have been there with a presence probably not too different from the one we had. It was a time we felt our position and standing in the world justified, indeed demanded, we try to be active everywhere, however daunting the challenge. We were convinced that in the long run our ways were going to win out, and we had to be around to help out that process.

Q: Who was our ambassador? How did you find him?

UNDELAND: John Jernegan, in my book, one of the best. Ever the gentleman, dedicated, bright and perceptive, he was under no illusions about our weak status or our inability to have significant impact on directions being taken by that country. He brought it all together cogently and accurately. He had a wry sense of humor, much needed in that antagonistic climate. Jernegan was unfortunate in that he was riding down a situation that was bad to begin with and getting worse, which was exactly what had previously happened to him when he was ambassador in Iraq. I had a feeling, though with no hard evidence or proof, he was given shorter shrift in the Department than he deserved. I used the word unfortunate, for conventional wisdom has it that an ambassador cannot ride down these kind of situations twice and expect to another posting at that level.

Q: Did you get any feel for the Algerian foreign service? Because I've heard people say that it is a very competent outfit. Was it true at that time or did it emerge later on?

UNDELAND: We were in touch with very few Algerian diplomatI personally with none in more than in passing situations I can now recalthat I question whether any of us could have made such a judgment based on our experiences there. However, I later met a number of them in other places, whom I found a hard working, rather impressive lot, though often on the dour side. There is the experience of the American hostages in Iran, where Algerian diplomacy was central to obtaining their release. They worked closely with Warren Christopher, and he and others have commented very favorably on the roles they played. I don't think Christopher was ever accused of being given to flattery or idle words.

Q: What about a little on, not the Cold War competition, but on the hearts and minds of people, our differences with the French and how USIS fit in. The French and the Algerians had had the major break, and here came the Americans with their own ways, the English language, perhaps differing perceptions and that sort of thing. Did this give us something of an advantage, or were the French so deeply embedded that our inputs didn't amount to anything, or at least not very much?

UNDELAND: I don't look back on these considerations as looming large. Maybe it was that we had enough problems of our own that we didn't find time for paying much attention to the French connection. We in USIS had little substantive contact with our French counterparts, I personally almost none, though I bring to mind a couple of cordial meetings with the French Press Attachï¿½.

Virtually all of our dealings with Algerians were conducted in French. Indeed, adequate command of it was essential to having almost any communication with them. The small English programs in schools and at universities were not large enough to constitute a meaningful alternative to this language dominance although I cannot be sure the French saw it that way. Anyway, they were not raising with us a fuss about it. As to differences of ways and cultures, again these were not issues that much concerned us.

If you asked the question about Egypt or Syria or Lebanon or Tunisia, French noses were often out of joint, for we were often seen there as the competition, sometimes the enemy. I have known Arabs, particularly Syrians and Tunisians, who wanted to make English their countries' second languagit has happened in Syria, if Syria can be said to have a second languagreplacing French with what one Syrian once told me was "the world language." In addition many Syrians favored American methods and systems, making it a cultural and not just a language matter. Maybe, that was true at a later day in Algeria, but not in the mid-'60s. Yet, and as I've said, Algerian technocrats with American experience were looked up to, which may have rankled the French, though that is only a guess. I don't have examples to cite.

A point of major controversy between the French and Algerians and among Algerians themselves lay in the moves being taken to replace French with Arabic in government schools. Arabic teachers were brought in from Syria, Egypt, Lebanon and elsewhere to carry forward this Arabization drive. It was a time of great educational turmoil on several fronts, but since I'm talking only about the language aspect, it resulted in many young Algerians ending up with no thorough competence in any language. Years later, I heard an Algerian refer to them as the "lost generation", for exactly this reason. Still, French remained the strongly implanted second language with everybody and the first language for quite a few. (This comment dates from the early 1990s; I let it stand.)

I remember seeing two middle aged Algerians sitting in an Algiers cafï¿½, in traditional dress, which in itself was a rarity, drinking their coffees and gesturing as they chatted away. A very Arab scene, except the conversation was entirely in French. I conducted all of my business with Algerians in French, except for a couple of English professors at the University of Algiers and some on our staff. I should point out that Algerians expected the foreigner to speak to them in French. As far as they were concerned, doing so carried no baggage.

Q: Do you have more to say on how things played out for us with relations so strained? What was it like, say, in the summer of 1967?

UNDELAND: A comment and a final vignette before moving on. I have been very negative about so much, but we did have some rewarding experiences and relations with individual Algerians. And even officially, more than a few of them regretted the sad state of the country, the inefficiencies, the corruption, the lack of concern for the individual and the fact that ties with the U.S. were not better. It was a joy to travel around the country and be warmly greeted everywhere by the little man and even by many officials. They could not have been more friendly, welcoming and helpful than when a small group of us from the embassy set out to climb Djurdjura, Algeria's highest mountain, or when I traveled to the Tassili 'n Ajjer in the south eastern most part of the country to see the prehistoric wall paintings. Everywhere we went in and around Algiers and Oran, we encountered the same. It seemed at times almost as if they were saying: "don't take us as we publicly present ourselves, for we're really much better and more friendly than that." But how hard one had to work, and did work, trying to establish viable professional contacts.

Now the story. One day I went to the central post office to buy stamps for my son's collection and was standing in line behind an obviously poor Algerian, who had an official paper, about which he wanted an explanation. The clerk started yelling at him and cursing him for his not knowing what to do and for wasting his, the clerk's, time. I found myself getting angrier and angrier at this performance and finally barged in and told this functionary that the man was only asking a civil question and deserved a civil answer. If he wanted to treat me or any foreigner that way, OK, we could always pack up and leave the country, but he couldn't and should get better treatment. The clerk got beet red, slammed down the window and stormed out. I, alas, left without my stamps. Once outside I found myself surrounded by some 30 people, who individually shook my hand and thanked me for standing up to this boorish official. One explained that they were afraid to do it themselves, much as they wanted to, and were glad I had acted for them.

Given the restrictions and difficulties we faced, one year was in ways long enough for that assignment, and yet I left feeling that I had but little scratched the surface of that country and its people. I had not had sufficient time to get to understand the society in the depth I would have liked, nor with the command that confidence required. I would have like to get more behind the confusion that dominated the surface.

After precipitously departing Algeria because of the '67 war. I went on a temporary assignment to Rabat for four months, filling in for the absent IO. I got around a certain amount in that fascinating city and visited a few places outside, but we were there for such a short time, and in the usual summer doldrums brought on by vacations and the heat, I didn't get very deeply into much USIS was doing. It was an interlude, which gave me a superficial introduction to Morocco, but little more. Unless there is a specific project with a clear beginning and end, I find such short assignments unrewarding; still, USIA had to find places for all who were pulled out of Arab World posts due to the war, and I fared better than most.

I was delighted that the Morocco PAO was Ned Roberts, for whom I had always highest regard, as I have earlier related. He was not particularly happy to be posted there, but said that after sending so many others overseas, it was only fair that he go out himself and Morocco was the best in the area that was available. What I saw of him in those brief months increased my admiration of him and the way he operated.

It was something of a relief to be after Algeria in a more open and welcoming work climate. Moroccans were a friendly lot, with editors, newsmen and the like seeking contacts with us, liking our materials and programs. Their interest in me was heightened by their wanting to hear what I had to say about Algeria, which intrigued and dismayed them, for they generally saw it as a threat, a hostile world apart from their own, but one they could not ignore.

Washington: Writer for the VOA, Special Assistant in the USIA Office of Policy and Plans

Q: So then you came back to Washington.

UNDELAND: Yes, my next assignment was in the agency. I came back after 12 years abroad to find nothing waiting for me or even any guidance or suggestions on possibilities. I and a lot of others from the Middle East were told to look around and see what we, on our own, could turn up. Another case of personnel strikes again, although no one could have planned for this sizable, unexpected influx. Still, this total washing of hands attitude wasn't necessary.

After an all too long, fruitless search, I finally signed on to an over-complement job with the Arabic Service of the Voice of America, doing commentary and other policy related pieces, to be sure written in English and then turned over to the translators. I stayed there for 13 months, turning out stuff carrying policy messagebook and magazine article reviews, backgrounders, features, plus the more or less straight editorializing and simply reiterating our standhanging my stuff on any peg I could find or dream up. I was under no pressure to produce, but not a single day went by on which I did not turn out at least one and usually two or three items. It wasn't very stimulating, but still offered something of a challenge, that is, coming in each day to face blank sheets of paper, having it wholly up to me to decide what to write

To add stimulus, rather more to prevent boredom, I tried my hand at a weekly "Letter from America", which I found quite easy and rather amusing to do. It was better received by the Arabic service than I thought it merited, as I didn't work very hard at it.

Writing is always work, but I have liked doing it and, as I think my stint at the Voice showed, I was not wholly lacking in proficiency.

Q: Your were trying to explain America to the Arab World?

UNDELAND: The emphasis was on American policy, rather than just America in a general sense. My pieces tried to present and defend what we were up to, seeking to provide more explanation and background than often is found in the output of the commercial media. I hasten to add that I knew full well that much of my effort fell on deaf ears when it reached the Arab World. I wasn't fooling myself, or anyone else in thinking my output was making any real difference in attitudes towards the U.S. The problem didn't lie so much with our attempted explanations and justifications, but rather with our policies themselves, which Arabs at all levels saw as all too often running against their own basic political views and interests. All I am saying is that we, particularly those of us conversant with that part of the world, weren't kidding ourselves into thinking our political pieces were having the influence we would have liked them to or, perhaps more accurately, that they were intended to. I must add that I looked on this stint as mostly just doing a job, an interlude in my career.

Still, I did and wanted to look back on that experience as being in ways useful, for whatever the listeners thought of our stands and the rationale behind them, it was necessary to have out take on issues made available as accurately, fully and cogently as possible.

After about a year at the Voice, I was more than ready to move on, and at that point was asked if I wished to be a candidate for the job of the special assistant to the director and deputy director of the policy office, Hewson Ryan and Barbara White respectively. I applied, and the interview session with Ryan and White seemed to be going quite well, when I was asked for my views on a system called PPBS, which had become a big thing in the agency. Having been through this evaluation exercise in Algeria, where I found it sadly wanting, I made some disparaging, pooh-poohing remarks, which led to raised voices and brought the interview to an abrupt end. I was summarily turned down...

Q: PPBS was basically a matrix of trying to figure out where you're putting your resources to support our policy goals. It was sort of a mechanistic effort that...

UNDELAND: It went back to the Vietnam War, in which the attempt was made, based on complicated statistical formulae, to determine how much it cost to kill a Viet Cong fighter by using various weapons, tactics and methods. Maybe it made sense for Defense, though I harbor more than a few doubts, but for USIS, where we work with ideas, perceptions and orientation that all too often defy meaningful quantifying, it was ridiculous. To accommodate this inherent lack of precision, the agency version built in such huge margins of error that the resulting statistical conclusions were, so far as I was concerned, pointless. I bluntly stated this, adding that I felt seriously thinking persons having sufficient wit and background would without resorting to PPBS or any other mechanical system, come up with better answers and solutions. I had not realized that Ryan and White were PPBS's parents or godparents in the agency and were wholly devoted to it. As Stan Silverman and I walked out together, he told me what I had done, surprised I hadn't noticed the scowls and fidgeting, particularly from Ryan, until the explosion occurred. Stan, by the way, was the USIA civil servant, who understood the Washington workings of the agency better than anyone else I have met and masterfully knew how to meld these perspectives with those of the field.

But that is not the end of the story. The person given the job had a breakdown a couple of months later. I was back at the Voice, when I got a phone call from Barbara White's office, telling me if I was still interested, the job was mine. I was and took it.

Q: What was your job actually?

UNDELAND: It had several aspects. I reviewed a wide range of documents for the two principals, but mostly Barbara, for it was for her I really worked. I prepared comments on proposals and papers, asked questions and tracked down things that were not clear or needed more input. It was fairly serious job, and I had quite wide authority in doing it.

I was chief recruiter for slots throughout the bureau. It was here I saw how Byzantine Washington operating ways could be. If you decided you wanted somebody presently in another office, you found you could have him or her only if you would take or place two other people they wanted to get rid of, or if you took so-and-so, then you had to support their latching onto someone else. It was like professional sports, getting star player A in return for B and C and a future draft choice, but also having to take player D, who nobody really wanted. I proved to myself I could play the game, but I was never comfortable with this horse trading.

At one point, I was shoved into battle to defend the bureaus domain, whose wings were being clipped by the front office. The battle had in truth been decided, from our standpoint lost, before I got into it. It was Walter Roberts who let me in on this reality, while also complimenting me on having argued the foredoomed case well. When I with some asperity confronted Barbara over being sent blind into the useless fight, she disarmingly replied that someone had to do it as well as possible, which she thought I could, adding that if I had known the full story in advance I undoubtedly would have done a poorer job. I had to admit she was more than likely right.

In looking back on clipping the wings of the policy people, it demonstrated some of the strength of the organization at that time, though I did not realize it until in retrospect. What I mean is that it reflected the emphasis given to a kind of decentralization that left the Washington functional elements and the posts overseas less having a big brother always looking over their shoulders. I don't want to seem to be pushing that fact too far, but it was part of the strength that USIA/S had developed and helped let those, who best knew what the were about, get on with doing it.

Q: How did you find planning in USIA?

UNDELAND: Planning from Washington, when it got away from the judgments and wants of people in the field often became unrealistic and could at times seem to be heading in the opposite direction of that which was intended. Headquarters should not and could not be ignored, but all too often it marched to its own drum beat, removed from the reality of the milieus in which we conduct our operations, and that's often where things could and did go awry. I don't want to be too critical here, for I believe there has been far more good than bad Washington planning, more that is realistic than not. It has benefited by having much of its brain power come from those with long experience overseas, that is, officers with a strong field sense.

The biggest problems in this area have always come when a new administration comes in, no difference whether Democrat or Republican. Many, if not most, of the new senior appointees, often highly suspicious of the motives and ways of their predecessors, have arrived aiming to instill new ideas, new methods and mechanisms, new approacheindeed, a new agenda. This is fair enough, for things should reflect any new administration's aims and goals. But there has also been much to carry over, particularly practices and emphases, that remains as valid for one as for the other, and it was here the educating process has been joined. >From my vantage point, continuation and continuity have usually carried the day, and rightly so, over radical changes that were initially envisaged. But what a lot of sturm und drang has had to be gone through before that happens. The political appointees, who came in at the top and sometimes also fairly far down the line, especially true in the Reagan era, have mostly come around to practical conclusions not all that different, if at all, from those of their predecessors and often exactly the same.

A key point in USIA's decision making was taken long ago, when the power over posts' budgets was put in the hands of PAOs, of course with ambassadorial approval, giving them the authority to initiate much and to turn down proposed programs or products they found unsuitable to their operations, through the simple mechanism of allocating or not agreeing to use the funds they control. That is probably stated too baldly, for the Washington-post consultative process has always been an ongoing matter, with headquarters setting overall guidelines and approving annual country plans and their interim adjustments. Still, the field has been able to say no almost always when it wanted to. An example. In the early '70s, the agency's motion picture people produced a tasteless, unconvincing, unbalanced documentary on the war in Vietnam, which we in the field were asked to evaluate and order for potential placement and other usage. Some PAO's I knew ordered a copy for so-called "in-house" showings, adding in couched, indeed truth shading, terms it would not be useful with our designated audiences and so forth. This was a cowardly, dishonest route, and I must admit that in this case I, then PAO in Jordan, was among the lily livered who fell back on it. On the other hand, the Beirut PAO, Phil Brooks who tragically died while a still a relatively young man a few years later, sent back the famous cable, describing the film as "obscene" and refusing to order any copies. It says something in that with this politically charged item he had his way, and I'm unaware he ever got any serious flak for standing up as he did.

Another example: Under both Carter and Reagan administrations, group International Visitor projects were devised to bring journalists, academics and officials to the U.S. to observe, and then supposedly on their return to relate, all the wonderful things that were being, or would be, accomplished by the policies of these administrations. Nothing wrong with that idea, but both projects were so partisan in their design they were not only unrealistic but would undoubtedly have had exactly the opposite effect on the participants from that which was desired. Both were canceled for lack of nominees submitted by posts. I was one of the nay saying PAOs on both.

For the planning process, guidelines and areas of desired emphasis were rightly set by USIA, but the details, putting the meat on the bones came from the field, and that's the way it should be. And what made it work in a realistic way was in large measure, post control of the purse strings once the basic allocations were made. Maybe things have changed now, and maybe in the post-Cold War era they should, but in my days the system as it was worked pretty darned well.

Q: How, after your earlier clash, did you find working with Hewson Ryan and Barbara White?

UNDELAND: She never referred to it, nor did Ryan. After all they came again to me, knew where I stood on their baby and had seen I was prepared to speak my mind. I did not work that closely with him, but he caused me no problem. With Barbara, we started off somewhat warily, with a few contentions, until at one point when she laid it on me, over something I've now forgotten, I told her I was giving it my best shot, was convinced I was right, and was not willing to remain in that job were we to have such confrontations. That was the end of it. We became not only close colleagues, very much on the same wave length, but the best of friends. Whenever I later returned to Washington from the field, I always sought her out, and long sessions ensued. This continued while she was in Washington, before and after she retired from USIA and after her stint as the president of Mills college. She was a favorite of mine, who, like Phil Brooks, died far too early. She had a reputation for abrasiveness and rough tactics, which I saw something of, but after the initial period that was not the Barbara White I came to admire. She once told me the only way in those days for a woman officer to get ahead, however competent, was to use her claws far more often than should ever have been necessary. She was speaking of both USIA and State. Barbara was assigned to the United Nations with ambassadorial rank, but was never given anything better than the third position in USUN; that rankled with her.

USIA, and particularly the policy office, fretted over not being more at the center If things, not being included more in foreign policy formation, not having its psychological and public opinion expertise more sought after, not being seen as more than a programmer on the fringes of foreign policy. Being a small organization was part of it, as was the fact that under all administrations after Kennedy, its directors and other top leadership were often awarded to major political supporters, who brought to the job little background of direct relevance to the how, what and why of the agency, particularly its overseas aspects. I mention Kennedy, for he brought in Ed Murrow, who was and is, in my book, the best director USIA has ever had. Many who followed him were outright embarrassments.

Position and standing were, as I say, major concerns of the policy people, which, from my vantage point, put far too much effort on pleading and complaining, rather than on just getting on with the jobs at hand and letting the results speak for themselves. Both Ryan and White chafed under the syndrome of being the small boy on the block.

My two part Washington assignment gave me insight into how the headquarters worked, which stood me well in the future and made me more easily attuned to inevitable, and arguably on many occasions rightly so, USIA or Washington perspectives and priorities.

After the VOA and policy jobs, I was ready to head overseas again. I am basically a doer and want to be where things are being done. I also wanted to get my feet again on the ground in the Middle East

Beirut and Kuwait: Arabic study at FSI, temporary PAO

Q: Well, then, you asked to be thrown back into your briar patch, didn't you? Back into the Arab World?

UNDELAND: Yes, to Jordan as PAO, which like most of my positions in Araby, was one I actively sought. The Arab World has always had its specialists, but it was a widely popular area. For those with the interest and credentials, there was not a lot of competition going for most assignments.

Q: I have you there from 1970 to 1974.

UNDELAND: That is correct, but before I went there came interludes in Beirut and Kuwait. In the first, I finally got Arabic training at FSI in Beirut, seven months of it, something I had sought for years, in order to bring my Arabic up to the level where it was really serviceable. The family remained in the States, for my four months of learning French at FSI in Washington, well Arlington, demonstrated clearly that when I am studying a language I am not fit for human consumption. Also, our fourth child was on the way.

I was fortunate in that I was paired with Patrick Theros in the intensive language classes, for we fed off of each other, each spurring the other on to greater effort. By the way, Patrick went as the junior officer in the Political Section of the embassy in Amman, where he was particularly effective in carving out his own sphere among clerics of all stripes, junior police and army officers and the now settled Bedouin tribes. He acquired a splendid knowledge of those circles, which greatly interested me, as my grasp of things cultural, educations, social, etc. did to him. How many a mansif we were at together. But I am getting ahead of myself.

While in this language study, all hell broke loose in Jordan. But before this outbreak, I made an orientation trip to Amman of a few days. While one could still move around fairly freely, armed Palestinians were everywhere. The would come into a restaurant and demand money, sometimes backed up by menacing behavior. People meekly contributed. Police uniforms were rarely to be seen, army garb never. While the PAO and I were having lunch at his house, one of these gun toting types knocked on the door, seeking a contribution. My predecessor told him in steely tones to get lost, and fortunately he did just that, turning around and going down the front steps. It wasn't long afterwards that the Amman center was torched. Yasser Arafat and the Fedayeen had taken over much of the capital city and were blatantly open in challenging the primacy, the rule of King Hussein. To both Jordanians and outsiders, it looked like Arafat might pull it off, and the monarchy would fall.

Dependents and many embassy officers in Amman were evacuated to Beirut, where I, excused from my classes, was among those mobilized to be at the Khalde Airport to meet and assist them, as they got off these chartered flights. Many were quite shaken and emotional. Hardly an auspicious prelude to my next posting.

Following the Arabic training, the agency thoughtfully sent me, as a temporary measure, to Kuwait to fill in as PAO for the departing Isa Sabbagh, as no new officers were going into Amman, let alone families. I say thoughtfully, for the interim Kuwait assignment permitted the family to come out and join me, a factor that loomed large in my mind.

Not a whole lot was going on in Kuwait at that time, for it was summer, when the normal heat and accompanying near shut-down of many institutions prevented us from doing very much. I did, however, deal with perhaps one of the largest pouches ever seen in American diplomacy. It was the entire USIS library from the closed center in Baghdad, for which permission to ship it out of the country had finally been obtained from the Iraqi Foreign Ministry. A semi with a 16 wheel, canvas wrapped trailethe poucarrived, with dozens of stamped wax seals attesting to its diplomatic status. We were to give the books to the University of Kuwait library, an arrangement made by Isa before I arrived, but one look at the falling apart cardboard cartons into which everything had been thrown willy-nilly led me to discard most of them as junk, before turning over what we felt might be salvageable and of interest. Still, the physical quality of that remaining was embarrassingly bad. If a firm commitment to the university had not been made, I would have ditched it all. I probably should have anyway.

Isa, who departed a couple of days after I arrived, deserves special mention. A BBC Arabic newsman during World War II, who brilliantly crossed swords with his Palestinian counterpart broadcasting out of BerlIlsa won that competition hands dowhe was an unforgettable person. Wildly admired by Kuwaitis, as he had been earlier by Saudis, he had opened the first USIS post in the kingdom. He jokingly, but only somewhat, said that in Saudi Arabia, USIS had come to mean only one thing: United States Isa Sabbagh. Truly, his standing and popularity in both countries was immense. For me to say to Kuwaitis I met that I was following Isa gave me an immediate leg up, and I did so often in getting around at fair amount. But it was only stopgap. I had no time to sink any deep roots.

Amman: Public Affairs Officer

UNDELAND: After a couple of months in Kuwait, Washington informed me I was to go immediately and unaccompanied to Jordan. It meant returning to Beirut with the family, where they rented an apartment in Ras Beirut and remained, while I became the only passenger on one of the first relief flights into Amman, on September 26, to be precise. It was myself and the crew in a DC-3, loaded with bread, flour, rice and perhaps some other foodstuffs.

Q: This was Black September, wasn't it?

UNDELAND: Black September, yes. I got off the plane at Amman's airport, reopened only on that day by the Jordanian army, in order to handle the constant flow incoming flights, loaded with relief supplies. I was met there by our military attachï¿½, who took me by the winding, narrow back road to the city suburbs, to the house of the former AID director in the northern part of Jebel Amman, where all American officials not holed up in the chancery were staying. That road was the only one open between the airport and city.

Q: Could you tell me what Black September was, for those who don't know?

UNDELAND: September was the month in 1970, when the Fedayeen hijacked three airlinerTWA and Swissair first and then one of BOAand forced them to fly to a place in the Jordan desert east of Amman. After a protracted delay and much posturing, the hijackers let the passengers and crews go, then set off charges that wholly destroyed the planes. Throughout this crisis, Jordanian army forces stood by in a circle around the hijackers and planes, powerless, or at least not prepared, to intervene with force. It was Jordan's darkest hour, for although the king had been increasingly urged by his army and supporters to enter the fray, soundly defeat Arafat and prevent him from even thinking he might be able to take over. Yet, he continued hesitating to act, why, I have never really understood. In the end, he did give the order, the army moved rapidly and decisively, so that after a couple more days, no question remained over the outcome.

When I arrived, the most serious fighting in the city was over, but there was still resistance and a good deal of firing, especially at night. We had no choice but to stay put, hunkered down if you will. Our movements were restricted to Jebel Amman and then only from its third circle to the west. If one needed convincing that it was not completely over, an army truck mounted with a 50 caliber machine gun was stationed a couple of hundred meters from where we were staying; it would fire off bursts towards the center of the city from time to time. To give a physical idea of Amman and what being on part of one hill meant, it is another of those cities built on seven hills or, in this case, jebels. We had access at that time to no more than perhaps ten percent of its total area, maybe not that much.

The American embassy, located on Jebel Luwebdeh, one hill over from Jebel Amman, had been surrounded and besieged for some two weeks. The only persons to get out were the ambassador, Dean Brown, and the political officer, Hume Horan, who twice or thrice went to see the king. For these trips, an escorted APC roared up to the embassy with all guns firing; the two Americans ducked in through the back hatch and off they went at top speed, with all guns still blazing. Those in the embassy had a difficult time physically, with diminishing food and fuel supplies, stopped up drains, little space, but, as I was told, with morale that was never higher.

I was sent into Jordan primarily to get out news items for USIA's media and to send to other MidEast posts for their home grown usage. The U.S. was providing major assistance, and we wanted others to know about it in more detail and, frankly, with more of our slant than was being provided by the commercial media. My first task was to report on the air force hospital, which had been flown in and was treating the most badly wounded. We got photos, I wrote stories for the USIA press service and did radio spots for the VOA. This went on for about a month, although in the latter part, it was tapering off. I nearly needed the hospital's care myself, for driving out there one day, I got run off the road into a ditch by a Jordanian army truck but fortunately emerged no more than a dazed "what happened, where am I?", as bits of the shattered windshield rained down.

Q: What was your assignment there after the fighting ended?

UNDELAND: The USIS operation had one American, myself, where there had formerly been four. It obviously had to be entirely rebuilt and in some ways recast. The former center, burned out just after my visit the previous March, had been given up, and the FSN staff and I were provisionally jammed into what had been the embassy's storage space. Everything physical, including all records, had been destroyed. At that point, none of us knew what the future would hold, but we were determined to get back into business as soon as possible.

Right away, we had to find more appropriate space. We got it partly in another embassy annex, which was larger although still hopelessly inadequate and not equipped or arranged for our needs.

An initial task was twofold, to reassure the staff as much as one could and to begin establishing and reestablishing contacts. Programs could and would follow. I was impressed by how rapidly the spirit of the Jordanian staff bounced back and how ready, indeed eager, they were to get active again. This did not surprise me, for it is the attitude I had come to expect from our employees everywhere I've been in the Arab World. I cannot say enough good things about these and our other FSNs, who time after time have shown me extraordinary pluck and gumption, as well as competence.

The first Jordanian I sought out was Adnan abu Odeh, a major in the intelligence branch of the Jordanian army, who had been plucked from that service and made the minister of information, a sage move on the part of the palace. When I first called on him, he was still in his army uniform at the qiyada, i.e. army headquarters. We hit it off well from the outset, thereafter saw each other often and cooperated closely throughout my tour. Abu Odeh has since moved on to be court chamberlain at the palace, information minister again and Jordan's ambassador to the United Nations, all the time remaining centrally engaged in the internal political picture.

I do not believe he ever received the full credit he merited for his astute dealing with the Western media in those early '70s days, which saw the Fedayeen challenge, the victory for the king and national renewal. He presented the government's case tirelessly and cogently. I am convinced he was the key figure in turning around the international media's often negative view of the country and the regime. He did it by being open, confident and accurate, the only government official at that time who seemed to welcome serious exchanges, often challenging and even antagonistic ones, with journalists. I would add that in this effort he was ably supported in this by his deputy, Butros (Peter) Salah.

Abu Odeh is a Palestiniain his youth a leftist, a Baathi, some said a communiswho changed course, and while never forsaking his Palestinianism, became a bulwark of royal Jordan. Salah was also an impressive, similarly committed, royalist Palestinian. He had been a dedicated, skilled fighter against the Israelis, who kept his militant outlook, but in the service of the government.

After the initial flurry of getting out news materials on our immediate help, I continued to do some of this informational work, that is recording our ongoing assistance. In the main reporting it dealt with our supply of food and supplies that were at the outset flown in on USAF transports. Most of it was pretty humdrum, but there was one notable exceptiothe delivery of relief items for the hospital atop Jebel Ashrifiyyah, in the heart of the city's main wholly Palestinian quarter, which had been Arafat's bastion and supposedly where he had his most devoted popular support base.

Not only were these supplies American and clearly so marked, but they were delivered in U.S. army trucks, which had been also flown in. The white star and "U.S. Army" markings had been hastily painted over, but so feebly that the original easily showed through. Was that intentional? Probably not, but it sent the right message. They were driven by unarmed U.S. army personnel in civilian clothes. As the convoy noisily wound up the narrow streets of the Jebel, they became lined, in a couple of places several deep, with the curious. I didn't sense any hostility from the onlookers, but then we were moving along as fast as the narrow roads and incline would permit. Arriving at the hospital without incident, its staff greeted us in a friendly way, but at the outset some eyed the trucks and cartons piled up in them warily. Those qualms were fleeting and wholly disappeared, as we formed human chains, Americans and Jordanians intermingled, and got on with the unloading as rapidly as possible. I had a double job of pitching in on one of the human lines and also taking photos and doing a few interviews. The hospital people openly expressed their appreciation for this help that few expected. It was the first time in months anyone from the Jordanian governmena handful went along on this operatiolet alone official Americans, had gone into this quarter. We did not see a single gun at any time.

From there we went on to the Italian Hospital at the foot of the Jebel where we delivered more supplies. The reception there was even warmer from the Palestinian employees and the Italian doctors and nuns. We were relieved everything had come off without hitch or incident, for though we had received assurances from the Palestinians that there would be no trouble, we had not really known how friendly our reception would be. We later heard from various sources nothing but good things over what the Americans had done, sometimes stressing the fact the Americans had done it for Palestinians. If you can combine being respected with being liked, you are way ahead at the game.

The hospital story has an amusing coda. Some months later, I went there on a follow up visit and heard once more how appreciative and surprised they were to get this American help, but they did wonder about one thing. What was the strange oily, brown stuff in the gallon cans? It looked disgusting and most wouldn't taste it, but a couple of brave souls finally did so and were sure, whatever else, it was some kind of lubricant and definitely not to be eaten. So much for a Jordanian introduction to peanut butter.

In addition to foodstuff and medical help, the U.S. provided Jordan with emergency budgetary support. We also flew in plane loads of arms and munitions, which we made no effort to publicize, but we didn't need to. The street grapevine took care of that. Our assistance was both timely and vitaDean Brown saw to that. For this, the U.S. stood sky high in the esteem of all who backed the king, and among a surprising number of Palestinian fence sitters as well, as well as those who had made their commitment to him and his regime. From the public opinion standpoint, America and Americans have never enjoyed greater popularity and standing in my well over 30 years in the Arab World than they did in Jordan at that time.

The authorities on their own took two brilliant steps, which had major psychological impact, winning over many of even the most skeptical. The first was to assure that all schools opened on the first day of November, which was only a few weeks away. In order to do this, many buildings had to be repaired, some considerably, and everything else, including teachers, textbooks, supplies gotten into place. The Ministry of Education uncharacteristically worked overtime. School directors, principals to us, were told to get windows replaced, walls repaired and painted and everything else that was needed, with the government to pay the bills as submitted and without delay, unless the charges were totally out of line. I don't know of another case in the Arab World where a government school head has ever been given such responsibility and the authority to go with it. Open on November 1 they did, and it went far in proving to that education obsessed society that the government was back in business, in control and, perhaps most important, truly concerned with the people's welfare. I did not hear one word about corruption in getting the schools up and running again.

The second was a program to provide rapid compensation to those whose homes had been damaged in the fighting. Committees were set up to inspect these places, to decide on how much to give and to authorize its payment. Once an application had been made, the inspections came in a day or two, made their evaluation, determined the sum and okayed that the money be paid out in the following few days. Some of the decisions were mildly criticized, with carping that a few were awarded too much and others too little, but these complaints were not only minor, but lost in the widespread wave of appreciation for the program and its speedy execution. For both the schools and the compensation, we played an important role in providing most of the funds, which wasn't all that much, five million dollars at the outset and more that followed.

A reassuring move by the government was to station security forces around Palestinian refugee camps and Palestinian quarters in cities throughout the country to assure those living there they would be protected against any hot heads, anyone who might seek retribution and that sort of thing. For an administration which had almost collapsed, this also was an impressive show of responsibility and reestablished authority.

I've wandered over the landscape from your question, but my thinking flowed that way.

Q: That's fine. But it looked like it was a country thoroughly divided into two sides, the Palestinians and the native Jordanians. Could we be popular on both sides, as you seem to indicate?

UNDELAND: If you mean, were we popular with all the Palestinians, particularly those who actively and wholeheartedly supported Arafat, of course not, but the Palestinians did not divide neatly into such pro and anti groupings. The lines were not that simple or clear cut. While the king had solid support from the East Bankers, he also had the allegiance of many Palestinians, and there was another large element, who just wanted to get on with their lives and not be caught in the middle. To take the case of the Ashrafiyyah quarter, resentment against the government of course existed, but once the fighting was over and armed Fatah elements had left, that was the end of the violence. That sector did not have to be controlled with an overwhelming police presence or other open manifestations of power. I went there freely, sometimes by myself, sometimes with one of our Jordanian employees, without any qualms or hesitation. Accommodation was the rule, not the exception. Overt Palestinian opposition to Hussein and the government became so muted that it often seemed not to be a factor. The road back to a viable state proved to be far shorter and easier to navigate than most had expected, myself included.

In a population that was roughly 60% Palestinian, almost all them were Jordanian citizens. They had a legal right to claim this nationality. Many held important positions in major walks of life. Hussein's power base was from the East Bank when the chips were down, but he also could count on reliable support from a sizable number of Palestinians. Certain jobs by unwritten rule were reserved for East Bankers, which aroused some resentment among Palestinians, but overall they had done well in Hashemite Jordan, and many openly expressed their commitment to the king. He, in turn, acted to make this loyalty fundamental and assured. When in the spring of 1971, Prime Minister Wasfi Tell was murdered by Palestinian extremists in Cairo, Jordanian radio held off carrying the news until the refugee camps were surrounded by security forces to protect them. There was a moment then when some Palestinians feared this was a prelude to slaughter, but when the truth became evident, there was not only a huge sense of relief, but an intensification of appreciation for and loyalty to the king. His support among them became stronger than ever, as several Palestinians told me. Many businessmen, doctors and other professionals most committed to the king were Palestinians. So was the chief vice president at the University of Jordan, Mahmud Samra. I have already spoken of information Minister abu Odeh and his deputy, Butros Salah. I could make a long list of loyalist Palestinians.

How did we fit into this picture? We got along well with both East and West Bankers. I, for one, dealt on equal terms with both, but if I had to say with which grouping had I the most contacts, it would be the Palestinians. This was not a conscious or planned decision, but rather stemmed from their being in the majority among professors and teachers, doctors, lawyers, architects and other main parts of our clientele.

My point is that anyone trying to divide Jordan into Palestinians on one side and Jordanians on the other just did not understand the reality and dynamics of that country and its society. I had a continuing battle with the NEA office, which was ever after me to pay particular attention to Palestinians, including a call that I devise special activities/programs aimed at them. I endlessly pointed out I was in constant, substantive contact with them, but this was not accepted as adequately carrying out the Washington wishes. Deputy Director Bill Rugh visited Amman and I thought it would be useful to expose him to a solid dose of East Bank thinking to help get across the point that we also should not ignore or downgrade our ties and dealings with this political dominant element. At a lunch at my home the radio station's director general and the dean of the Economics Faculty at Jordan University, both fervent Jordanian nationalists, spoke out as if they were Palestinian militants, wholly belying their true feelings and pushing the line that completely undid what I was trying to get across. Afterwards, I with no little exasperation bluntly repeated to them my aim and asked what they had they been trying to accomplish by mouthing stuff they didn't believe in and, more to the point, why? Both came back with apologies, saying that they did not know my guest and therefore decided it safest to hew the phony line they put forth. Palestinian-Jordanian divides, and comings together, could at times get more than a little tricky.

Q: During that period, 1970-1974, what were the main things you were doing in USIS? Did your staff increase?

UNDELAND: I reduced the staff slightly, with, for a time, no library or center and some necessary programming reductions. All librarians but one and some others had to go. I worked hard at it and was pleased to be able to find positions in the embassy or outside for all of them, except a couple of the janitors, and I remained involved with them until I saw they finally were into jobs.

We had less waiting for activities to perk up than I had initially feared. USIA headquarters was commendably responsive to our requests, and I wasn't bashful in making the needs known. The post had a good and loyal staff, with gaps to be sure, but it was not one you'd want to tear apart only to have to put together again. And there was the important factor that they had stuck with us through very tough times, showing a loyalty that deserved our every consideration.

When the embassy moved into new quarters on Jebel Amman, I was forced to put the USIS operation into hopelessly cramped space in the basement, albeit with a separate entrance and somewhat less strict physical security arrangements than those for other parts of the building. Bit we had no room for any public activities. I fought the battle for more space as best I could, but the decision was taken, not for the good of USIS, but because the embassy insisted on our being crammed in, as I initially suspected and finally definitively learned, to force a sizable, too high in fact, USIS contribution towards the building's rent. My battles with DCM Bill Brubeck, who took the embassy's lead on this matter, were some of the most unpleasant internal set-tos I've had during my career.

To fit in at all, we had to have smaller than usual desks and chairs specially made in Beirut, which in fact we came to like and used throughout my tour, even when we finally got into an appropriate place. Maddeningly but almost predictably, the embassy soon found that after all it needed our space and wanted us out pronto, in terms as vigorous as those earlier used to compel us to be in. Not an impressive display of administrative acumen, but it was not the only time I have encountered this kind of flabbiness in embassy administration.

We were fortunate to find just off Jebel Amman's Third Circle an appropriate, vacant building, with excellent interior space. It was readily accessible for our clientele, only a couple of blocks from the embassy and next door to the Ministry of Information. Before the fighting, it had housed the Cinematographic Center of the ministry, but took several hits from phosphorous shells, which burned out the interior and was consequently given up. It looked a total mess, which was almost certainly why it was available in that real estate short city. Investigation by engineers we hired determined no structural damage, and it took only a few weeks to get the char off the walls, the repairing and repainting done and the few interior changes I wanted made. As of the time I retired, more than 20 years later, USIS was still located there, so this choice was not only good for the moment but stood the challenges of time.

By early in 1971, we were getting back into our usual fare, which were pretty much the full range of what most small posts do, with the exception of no lending library or auditorium activities, i.e. speakers, film shows, exhibits and the like. Still, we kept on our senior librarian, who was one of our most important employees, giving us, as I was told by more than one Jordanian librarian, more influence on the local library scene than we ever had had before. Constantly on the move, cooperating with libraries all over the city, initiating inter-library cooperation and promoting purchase of American books, she was rightly described by a key University of Jordan official s the most important librarian in the country.

While not all that many exhibits or speakers or cultural presentations were offered to us, there were some, which we put on outside our premises, always under joint sponsorship with a Jordanian institution or organization. I was convinced we were better off doing it this way, whether we had our own space or not. Getting someone from the local scene to lend his name and support to it, and draw his own audience to it was almost always a solid plus. Parenthetically, few Americans wanted to come to Jordan for our programs in the months following Black September. When the state of California's head of education cancelled out "for safety reasons", I shot back to Washington that if it was safe enough for me and my family, it should be damned well safe enough for him. Big brouhaha over that one. He didn't come., which, given my attitude about him, was probably a good thing.

But the Florida State marching band did, and what a show it put on, performing in Amman's 20,000 seat stadium, with every seat taken and Hussein and his entourage in the royal box. The demand for entrance was so great that Jordanian military police literally had to beat back the ticketless would-be attendees who pressed forward en masse at the entrances. Part of the program was performed by the Jordanian army band, the local cultural institution of which many Jordanians were rightly most proud. But what a show Florida State put on, bobbing and weaving with precision to jazzy tunes and marches it blared out. Was it the high point when the baton twirlers in their tight, shimmering silver costumes turned and waved their fannies towards the royal box? All I will say is that Jordanians talked glowingly about that performance as long as I was there. It was the first public show in the stadium in several years, as well as the first one attended by the king for a longer time. Making the arrangements cemented my access to and ties with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Palace and parts of the military establishment.

If that was a high point, a low one came with the visit by an astronaut, name of whom I think was Buzz Aldrin but am not certain, who had carried a small Jordanian flag to the moon. The event was to give him a forum to talk about his adventure and to present the flag and a bit of framed moon rock to the king. Lots of hoopla, the Sports City auditorium was jam packed, Hussein was in his box. After saying nice things about Jordan and his flight, the astronaut got religious and started in on the idolatry of putting faith in a black rock, presumably a reference in his mind to the moon rock but to everyone else the Kaaba in Mecca, contrasting the false belief in it with the true faith of Christianity. I and other Americans present could not believe what we were hearing and were so embarrassed we wanted to crawl through the floor. The king ignored this unintended anti-Islamic diatribe, and graciously accepted the flag and rock. I was told he personally sent out stern instructions that no one was to see it as a religious affront, but must pass it off as something unimportant from one who meant well and didn't know better. Anyway, it was not mentioned in the media, nor were there other repercussions.

The post immediately got back into the full panoply of exchange programs. We worked with the press, television and radio, getting some placement, though even in super friendly Jordan, almost nothing with political or policy content or implications. As I keep saying, I have long felt that any paper or station that carries stuff supporting the policies of another government is rarely if ever worth reading, listening to or seeing, unless the item is in itself newsworthy and the source fully identified. We fool ourselves if we do not recognize that many in our audiences have antennae out to detect such efforts and are pretty sophisticated in determining things as they are. Isn't it almost always a sign of weakness and lack of character when any in the local media carry another country's laundry? If not that, then it's just plain laziness? In addition, there was always the argument that if we take your political output, we'll have to do the same for other foreign governments, including those you don't like.

While it was an era of good feeling for the U.S., East and West Bankers alike remained strongly and unanimously opposed to our policy on the Arab-Israeli issue and what they saw as our always taking the Israeli side when the chips were down. The story of the IV grant for Munther Anabtawi, the chairman of the Department of Political Science at the university. has these overtones, if not illustrating this point. At the time of the '73 war, he protested our support for Israel by cutting off all contact with us and asking we take him off our publications and activities lists. A few months later, he relented to let us know he would again like to get the publications, but he still didn't want to see me. More time passed, and I indirectly got word to him about a possible IV grant to attend the American Political Science Association's annual conference and then visit selected American universities. He jumped at the opportunity, and our contacts resumed. Shortly before he was to depart, he asked me to see him urgently, in order to say, "I want to make sure you and everyone else knows that in accepting this invitation, I am not in any way approving of your one-sided policy in the Middle East, which I continue to wholeheartedly oppose." I could only smile and reply, "Dr. Anabtawi, if I dealt only with people here who supported U.S. MidEast policy, I would have very little to do with anybody. I will always listen to your views and only ask that you hear out mine. "That broke the tension. By the way, after returning, he surprised students and faculty colleagues alike with the positive things he had to say about almost everything American, save our MidEast policy. I had suspected this would be a result; it was frankly why I went after him.

One of the more fun and useful things we did in Ammahow often the two went togethewas to administer the immensely popular American Field Service program, which sent high school students to the United States for an academic year, to live with American families and attend our public high schools. For the 1971-72 program, I was determined to have a boy or girl from a refugee camp and was prepared "to cook the books" of the selection process to make sure we did have one, though that was not necessary. A very intelligent boy who applied was from the huge Baqaa camp, located along the main road a few miles north of Amman. Following his selection and stateside approval, I went out there to talk with him and his family about the experience lying ahead for him and to answer any questions he or they might have. (Not being supposed to go into refugee camps, I didn't inform the embassy security people about it. I must admit it wasn't the first or last time I just went ahead and did my thing, ignoring these types.) I had heard in advance that everyone, including the camp leadership, was pleased, but I was wholly unprepared for their outpouring of warmth and gratitude and the importance they gave to my visit. Greeted at roadside by a large delegation, taken to see the leader in his office and then, accompanied by a happy group, walking down the muddy, unpaved lanes to the boy's humble, cinder block house, where there were more effusive greetings, I was bowled over. They were so pleased at for the boy' good fortune, but at least as much for this recognition by the U.S., as a country and its people, and by me as the representative, who moreover had trusted them to the extent he had been willing to come to the camp alone. This was in spite of the fact that it was American arms and munitions only a few months back that drove Arafat and the Fedayeen out of Amman and then Ajloun. Not this nor any other political note was sounded during the couple of hours I spent in the camp. My guess is that if they had had an American flag they would have flown it to honor my visit.

The boy had a fine time in the States and, word got back to me after his return, of his wholly positive comments on his experiences and on the U.S. in general and how widely they spread in Palestinian circles. The next year, among those we selected was a talented girl student from a very modest family, living in the Palestinian quarter, just outside the Wijdat refugee camp in Ashrafiyyah, and very much an integral part of its society. She returned equally impressed and once again the word of her good fortune and happy life she had led spread widely in Palestinian circles. The fact that we had selected a girl was also not lost on her community.

On the other side, inclusion of a boy from the Beni Hassan tribe and his positive experiences spread widely in East Banker circles in much the same way, though among an entirely different part of the nation's society. So many families of importance wanted to have their sons and daughters selected that we had to fine tactful, well hopefully tactful, ways of turning them down, in fact saying no to well over 80% of the applicants.

Those were the good old days, when we had lots of money for our activities, and, when we had promising ideas, we usually got a receptive response from our Washington headquarters. Under the Fulbright program alone, we had annually nearly 30 grants for fully paid graduate study in American universities. (And there money for even a larger number of grants in the AID kitty for PhD study in designated science, technology and business fields.) It was sufficiently large that each year I had long sessions at the University of Jordan with its president, Abdel Salam al Majali, and academic vice president, Samra, to line up the best Jordanian candidates. We were a significant player in helping build the staff of that institution, which was one of the best universities in the Arab World. Each year, it usually broke down to about ten new doctoral candidates and twenty renewals. I cannot remember what our initial allocation was, but we were always able to glom onto additional grants. One of the reasons was that the university was only interested in having its top notch students get them, and we and they thus had established an enviable reputation for their quality.

A sidelight. I had long sought a comprehensive list of the Jordan University staff members with American graduate degrees, including where they'd been, the dates, their specializations and other details. It was promised me several times, but never came through, until we provided Israel with missiles or another major military item, which prompted a protest to the embassy, signed by all professors with U.S. doctorates, giving the full details I had been seeking. My subsequent asking at the university whether the only way to get this information was to supply military equipment to the Israelis brought out bemused responses. Most appreciated the irony, the sort of thing that almost always appeals to Arabs. By the way, there were over 130 profs on this list.

But things did not always work out. To get our foot better in the door, I offered a couple of PhD study grants to the minister of education for the English language teaching section, with the proviso the candidates had to be top flight and suggested the names of a couple I knew who were. I made the pitch directly to the minister, Ishaq Farhan, who was an ideologue, a fervent member of the Muslim Brotherhood, which seemed strange for one who had gotten graduate degrees from AUB and Columbia with highest honors. He proposed two Brotherhood types, a fact which I didn't particularly like, but far more telling was that they had academic credentials far below anything I would even think about accepting. When I called again on Farhan to tell him this, our session descended into a pretty heated affair, from which stemmed his order that Ministry officials were henceforth to have no contact with the American center. Typically, that order was, so far as I knew, almost totally ignored and then forgotten.

But that's not the end of the story. One of the candidates I had suggested was Salma Jayyusnot the Fatah political figure of that namwho succeeded in lining up her own support in the palace and with the military, including the financing, and off she went to UCLA, where she got her PhD with honors. Parenthetically, the other one I had my eyes on also got her doctorate abroad, from England on a British Council grant, which its director wisely did not put through the Ministry. I might add that both were Palestinians. A lesson. Take ability and combine it with personal and family ties in Jordan, and other Arab societies as well, and you can sometimes work wonders when nothing else seems to be able to do it.

A brief digression on the Muslim Brotherhood. It had come to an agreement with the Palace, whereby it would not only not challenge the regime, nor cause it any problems, but would help it in combating Baathis and other leftists. In return, it demanded and for a while got control of the Ministry of Education and untrammeled access to villages. That explained why Farhan was in his position. However, It didn't last long before he was ousted, and his successor was the university's immensely capable and forward looking president and later prime minister, Dr. Majali, but I must add that he had a difficult time as head of the Ministry, for he kept running up against Brotherhood members, who were well entrenched at all levels except the very top. I know less about the village access story, but the Ikhwan faced a major struggle there for it was opposed by the army and supporting civilian administrators, who in the end won out, though not all that easily.

Q: The staff of our embassy had a number of Arabists, and you were in that category yourself. Can you give a feel of you might say was the spirit or perspective of those officers towards Israel and our policy towards Israel at that time, the 1970s?

UNDELAND: Let me say that the vast majority of us approached foreign policy in a professional, not a personal way, which meant that we supported to the best of our ability U.S. policy on the Middle East. Even when we felt it tilted towards Israel too much for the good of moving forward our interests, we didn't permit ourselves to let this get in the way of what we were charged with doing and how we went about it. You must remember, the United States was the only country that had been and was seriously and constantly worked for a viable Middle East peace settlemenunder Democrat and Republican administrations alike. We all worked as part of and contributors to both the policy and the process. For me that aspect has been a matter of both satisfaction and frustration, the former because we were trying and the latter because it wasn't resulting in more than usually just keeping the lid on, and not always that.

You used the word Arabists, and I might make a comment or two on this. There has been, I feel, a campaign to equate interest in and expertise on the Arab World with near disloyalty, as was done in the Kaplan book. He sounded a refrain I have heard over the years...

Q: We're talking about a book by Robert Kaplan called The Arabists, in which Undeland is discussed.

UNDELAND: ...A refrain that Arabists have somehow been working in Machiavellian ways, to bring about their own agenda. I am convinced in this regard, it is an essentially dishonest book, for I feel certain Kaplan's conclusions were fixed in his mind before he came to do the research and writing, and he used only the evidence and arguments that supported his pre-cooked thesis. He ascribes to Arabist diplomats far more power and influence than they ever had and largely ignores the fact that foreign policy comes from Washington and is based on a range of considerations, national interests, public opinion, estimation of what will work best, views of interest groups, interplay with Congress and likely effect on other countries. But where he goes most wrong is in trying to present the case that the Arabists have used their skills and talents to the detriment of American policy towards Israel and the American-Israeli tie. That is nonsense.

As I said about Vietnam, an diplomat or any other civil servant should try to bring information and insight to bear on policy formulation, but once the policy is in place, there are only two honorable choices: support it, whether you have personal misgivings or not, or resign. And a third, somewhat down on the honor scale, is getting transferred to somewhere else, where he doesn't deal with it. This applies to Arabists as much as to anyone else.

Q: You were in Jordan during the 1973 war, in which Jordan did not participate. How did it impact on your work? What is your perspective on it?

UNDELAND: That's not quite correct, for Jordan was engaged on the Syrian front, although not in a large way. Two elite units were sent there and took modest casualties. Jordan certainly was not fully into it, but nonetheless did enough to pay its dues.

The war's effect on the USIS operation was immediate and nearly total, bringing to a halt our normal public activities, both cultural and informational, beyond providing our daily information bulletins to an expanded list, mainly officials and those in the media. We still all came to the office every day and carried on, to the extent possible, with our routines, but frankly a lot of the staff had next to nothing to do. Emotions throughout society were running high, and for us to have continued as if nothing was happening would have been imprudent and a psychological mistake. Not that advice from outside was needed, but a number of persons we counted among our best friends, both East and West Bankers, sought us out to suggest this temporary hiatus. They added that when it was all over, things would bounce right back and so should we. In any case, everybody's attention was focused on the War, and people had little if any interest in our normal program fare.

I spent little time in the office these days, instead being out to test the waters, to try to keep close tabs on what people had on their minds. Our more senior FSNs did the same. What we gleaned on public opinion vis-a-vis the War itself, the U.S. angle, the situation in country, people's hopes and fears went into a several page daily memorandum I wrote for the ambassador and others at the embassy. I also drafted some cables and contributed to those done by the political section. I probably spoke on for far too long at staff meetings, relating what I and the USIS staff had picked up, but then I was never told to cut it short or shut up. This reporting went over quite well with both the embassy and Washington, so it seems others agreed this was the way we should use our talents, time and contacts.

While the fighting was soon over with only minor dislocations to the country, nobody knew in advance this would be the case, and we were trying to be prepared for whatever might come. In such situations, there is always the tendency to project worst case scenarios by asking all those "what if" questions. Amman put in force a half-hearted black-out, and people were advised to avoid moving around at nighttime, but a general calm prevailed, along side the expected jitteriness over what the future might hold. The big question on everybody's mind was whether the king would decide to throw the army wholeheartedly into the fray or whether Jordan might anyway be dragged in. And if so, what then would happen? Or, what would it take to stay out? I found Jordanians as available as ever to me and willing to speak out openly. As I noted earlier, I had made it my business to know a fairly large number and wide range of people, and here it clearly paid off. I hardly need add it's much easier to get on a frank basis with your interlocutors, if you have already established your credentials with them.

Q: Would you get a little more into how you found public opinion in Jordan? Was it very volatile and ready to believe the worst about the United States and all that.

UNDELAND: I wouldn't use the word volatile, but it was predisposed to think the worst of our intentions, actions and policies whenever Israel was part of the equation. The support that we provided it and stances we had taken over the years had created a mind set of expecting the U.S. to come down against the Arabs, whenever important issue arose. I know I'm repeating what I've said to you before, but I cannot try to deal with your question and not go back over much of the same ground in this manner. A war comes along, emotions run higher and so does the propensity to think badly of U.S. Middle East policy. This was as true of those who knew us well, who had studied in the U.S. or otherwise had significant U.S. ties, who in most ways were openly pro-American, as it is with those who lacked these experiences, contacts and views. One must take this as fact, as a given. Whether they are cooperating with us, benefiting from us, are our friends or not makes little difference. They of course had considerable evidence to draw on to indicate that we have almost always come down on the Israeli side, and however one may feel about the rights or wrongs of it, the considerable price paid with Arab public opinion has been the inevitable consequence.

If that one issue were the whole picture, the Arab World would not have been a very satisfying place to be and work in, but fortunately it wasn't, for most of the Arabs have great deal of respect for the United States, for Americans, for what we stand for, our institutions and ways, our products and outlook. They have admired us and gotten along well with us. A Jordanian academic once told me, "I wish you were different, so it would be easier for us to hate you." I can think of well over a dozen times in Jordan, when someone would start sounding off to me about the manifest wrongs and evils of American Mid-East policy, only to have another person shut him up, often with something along the lines of, "there's no reason for us to get into this agaiwe differ, and a big argument isn't going to serve any useful purpose for any of us. It's unpleasant; stop it."

Still, touchiness remained. There was the case of an American studying Arabic at FSI in Beirut. Its head asked me if I could place him in one of the summer youth camps run by Youth and Sports. One of the best budding Arabists at FSI, what he needed was 24 hour a day immersion, and the Jordanian youth camps were perfect for this. I made the request to the head of Youth and Sports, Director General Prince Fawwaz, whom I saw often and knew well, and he agreed. The student arrived, went into a camp near Ajloun, fit in well, and seemed to be getting on with no problem. Then, I was summoned by the Prince, who, with flashes of anger, demanded to know what I was up to in trying to place a CIA officer in one of his camps. He said that we were friends and cooperated and collaborated on much, but this he could not accept. After checking and finding out that the affiliation was as charged, I went back to him and, without ever explicitly admitting he was right, took the line that the one thing neither of us wanted was an incident or public spat. He agreed, the officer finished out his remaining short time, but the point had been made in no uncertain terms. The prince, indeed the establishment, didn't want the CIA mucking around with the country's youth programs. He was watching to see it didn't happen again, and he was letting me know he had the ability to find out. This happened at the time U.S.- Jordanian ties were perhaps the closest and most friendly they have ever been. Parenthetically, my relations with Fawwaz remained as close as ever. A footnotthe station in the Amman embassy was very close to the palace and king, but that was seen as totally different.

As I have said elsewhere, there were so many positive elements in Arab views of the U.S., and none more so than in the Jordan of the early '70s. They admired American higher educatiothe new University of Yarmuk then being built outside Irbid was popularly known, and with a good deal of reason, as Michigan State East, for that is precisely what its president, Adnan Badran, wanted to create. I need hardly add where he had gotten his PhD. By the way, many years later he became the nation's prime minister.

Jordanians were favorably taken by American openness, in fact nothing was more often singled out in discussions on their experiences with returned grantees. They also, liked our popular culture, frankly more than I do. They came to me for detailed information on our social security system, which they almost without inspection wanted to use as the model for their own. I had similar praise of our court system, followed by a statement that that's exactly what Jordan needed and wanted. And, they liked us personally. This list could go on and on, but I think I've made my point that we had a lot going for us. Having this array of positive elements resting there in the background helped us greatly whenever crises, the '73 war and others, arose.

Q: What was your impression, and maybe also from the embassy's point of view, of King Hussein during this period?

UNDELAND: He nearly lost his crown in those weeks just before I arrived, but afterwards did not, from what I could see, make a false step. Aside from this lapse and an earlier one in the '50s, he has shown himself perhaps the most adept political practitioner and survivor in the Middle East. He has had that ability to change, to lead a diverse country, to bounce back from adversity, and to maintain popularity, while at the same time ruling over one of the most decent, open to give-and-take societies in the Arab World. It's not a democracy, it's probably not going to be one, but it has had considerable participatory character, whether expressed inside or outside of established institutions, along with much personal freedom. Access to sources of power and influence was easier here than in any other Arab country in which I've served. The descriptive word that comes to my mind is decency. People were largely permitted to go their own way. They've had their mukhabarat, which could do nasty things, but theirs was not anywhere near as oppressive as the Syrian and Egyptian versions, when I was in those places. Jordanians were a relatively happy people. For this state of affairs, major credit rightfully went right to the king. Maybe popular is too strong a word, though I've used it, for he was liked and respected across the spectrum. It was widely believed that without him everything would fall to pieces, and that view may well have been right.

Q: How did we view Syria at that time, that is, those in the embassy?

UNDELAND: We were not getting along well at all with Syria, and I think you know it not only menaced Jordan, but had sent armored vehicles on a foray across the border, where the Jordanian army set an ambush and wiped them out. I knew the Jordanian officer, of Circassian background, who commanded that force; he related with glee more than once in my presence every detail of the event.

More serious was the threat of major Syrian military intervention into Jordan to support Arafat and the Fedayeen. I wasn't in any way personally involved, but both the U.S. and the Israelis let the Syrians know this would not be tolerated, and the bluff was called. Syria was the bad boy on the block for both us and the Jordanians. Our assistant military attachï¿½ was scarfed up by mukhabarat while driving through Syria on his way to Lebanon. Unspeakable tortures were inflicted on him before he was released, which intensified our negative feelings about the authorities of Jordan's neighbor to the north.

Anti-Syrian attitudes ran strong among Jordanians, particularly the East Bankers, but including much of the entire population. I recall being at a mansithat traditional tribal meal of rice and lamb cooked in goat milk, served on a huge tray and eaten with the right hand onlwith members of the Beni Hassan tribe, when the subject of Syria came up. Almost in unison they broke out with how you could never trust Syrians, because they had a bad and deceitful government and were often unreliable in themselves, bringing up one past incident after the other to back up their contention. At this one and many others, it was a Theros-Undeland representation.

Q: My usual question. There were two ambassadors while you were there, Dean Brown and Tom Pickering. How did they operate? What were your impressions of them?

UNDELAND: Extremely effective, both of them. They have been two of the leading lights of American diplomacy in our time, and their importance to what we were doing in Jordan and the Middle East in general can hardly be overstated. Dean Brown developed closest of ties with the palace. He got to be known as "the crisis ambassador", sent into Lebanon and Cyprus after our representative in each of these places was killed. He had the reputation of never having failed at anything he set his hand to, also of being able to use the administrative and bureaucratic machinery with a skill equaled by few others. Having seen him is action, I can well believe it. He took on the big issues himself and didn't concern himself with other matters, which he looked on as minor, like USIS quarters, to mention just one that affected me. He repeatedly refused my request to go for a second USIS officer, telling me, "you're doing fine by yourself; we don't need anything more." Yet he was fully supportive of USIS and what I wanted to do, while not himself pushing particular ideas, programs and projects. His backing combined with a certain distance was fine with me. He like to have me drop in on him when I was in the building to pass on what I had picked up from my Jordanian contacts. He once told me that Theros and I had the best stories on Jordan and Jordanians of anyone in the mission, and we should keep on getting out and getting more.

I shared an outside interest with him in weekend, i.e. Friday, jaunts into the desert and rural areas mainly to visit antiquities sites, accompanied by our Jordanian archaeologist friends. I would always drive an old USIS Scout carryall, and he would be in a back seat. When we met people, he would never say who he was. We didn't decide until the day itself where we would be going; he did not take along anyone from his security detail. With Tom Pickering I had a quite different, but equally satisfying and in ways closer, relationship. His style, personality and operating ways were totally different from those of his predecessor. He traveled widely around the country and came to know Jordan well in things large and small. He drove his staff hard, using them to satisfy his insatiable curiosity about everything that was happening in the country and the place itself. Tom had clear ideas and desires for all sections of the mission and, although always open to new or differing ideas and proposals, convincing him to change his mind was never easy. In being with him, one did well to know the matter at hand inside and out and to be fully prepared for new twists and directions he brought up. Many of his sentences began with a what, how or why. That breadth and depth appealed to me.

Jordanians in all walks of life responded warmly to him and his outgoing ways. I hardly need add that his relations with the king and others ion the Palace were superb.

Pickering was also a devotee of the Friday jaunts to antiquities sites, so we continued with these outings begun with Dean Brown. The difference was that he insisted on being the driver, often going at frightening speeds, particularly over desert tracks and salt flats. Indeed, after a few of these experiences, I refused to ride in his vehicle, instead driving the old carryall at a considerably more restrained pace.

It was Jordan's good fortune, ours as a government, and mine personally to have had Dean and Tom at the helm during this critical period and, I might add, during my time as well. Jordan, with American support, came back from the brink, and both of them played key roles in making this happen. Moreover, their efforts led to what was the era of closest U.S.- Jordanian ties.

Q: What about Iraq? How was it seen at that time in Jordan?

UNDELAND: There wasn't all that much emphasis on it, at least not that I encountered. When the subject came up, Iraqis were often referred to as Arab brothers, but many Jordanians had never really liked them. That they had overthrown the Hashemite monarchy and murdered the king, a cousin of Hussein's, was a factor, even though the event dated back to 1958 and was not seen as a pressing current concern. However, that the Iraqis were often looked down on as being brutal and unsophisticated dates in part from that bloody event.

The only specific case I can recall concerns the Iraqi air force, which Jordan had temporarily permitted to take over the air base at Azraq during the '73 war. When it was returned, the Jordanians were aghast at the dirt, filth and squalor left behind. This was widely bruited about and heightened disdain for the Iraqis.

It's not part of your question, but we're talking about other Arabs, and I might mention that Jordanians, official and private, found Qadhafi a clown, when not a problem and embarrassment to all Arabs. I was visiting the Jordanian army liaison officer in his office at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, seeking information on an island with a Crusader castle in the Gulf of Aqaba I hoped to visit, when his phone rang and the conversation became excited. He cupped his hand over the phone and said, "I'm sorry, but you must now leave. None of us know what's up, but Qadhafi's airplane is going to land in ten minutes." When I saw him again, he told me they never discovered exactly why Qadhafi had come, let alone done so unannounced. He questioned whether the Libyan leader was sane.

I have already talked about tension with Syria, but there is also another side, for many Jordanians loved to go to Damascus, which more than one described to me as the most civilized city in the Arab World. There were often strains in relations with Egyptians, who were resented as looking down on Jordanians and other Arabs, of treating them as inferior, but having been in Egypt, that sense of superiority came to me as no surprise.

Q: Dick, do you want to say a little more about Jordan?

UNDELAND: I am not sure I have made quite enough of the political astuteness of the king and, to a certain extent, those around him, sometimes in the face of strong pressure from us. More than once we had urged him to enter into some sort of public relationship with the Israelis, direct negotiations and open contacts, which would have put huge internal pressures on him, pressures which I question whether he could have successfully borne. Privately, as was widely known or at least suspected, he was meeting with Israeli leaders quite often, but it was never turned into a political issue that affected him. In retrospect, I think he was absolutely right and would not have remained monarch had he followed our advice on these occasions. It is a mark of his skill, that he rebuffed us in such sure-footed ways that he continued to maintain his close ties with us.

He had a human touch that contributed greatly to his stature and standing. I'll cite a couple of stories, where I was directly involved. Once when stopped along the side of the road while out on a Friday antiquities jaunfor some reason Ambassador Brown wasn't in tow this timtwo cars pulled up along side us, and the driver of one of them asked if everything was all right or did we need some help. He then got out and chatted with us for a few minutes, about what I don't now recall, before getting back in his car, waving and driving off. It was, of course, Hussein. We all were impressed, but it was more than that with the Jordanian archaeologists in our group. They couldn't say enough good things about him, including the one who was a strong Palestinian nationalist. Only a gesture, but how much it meant.

Another concerns my daughter, Anne, then seven years old, who was at a children's party at the Bushnaq farm in the Jordan Valley. Splashing her feet in the water of the pool dating back to Byzantine days but not knowing how to swim, a man approached her and asked if she would like him to teach her how; she shyly said yes and the lesson began. I don't need to tell you who the instructor was. The king loved children, and they in turn adored him, a fact that did not go unnoticed and unappreciated in Jordan's very child oriented society.

For my last Hussein story, though there are others I could relate, I heard it some years when I worked for air force headquarters in the Pentagon. On his annual visits to the U.S., he always piloted the plane and made it his custom to stop at Torrejon Air Base just outside Madrid for refueling and to spend the night in that city. On one of these trips, he arrived and then went off to do whatever a Jordanian monarch does on an evening in Madrid. The next morning he returned to find the plane not just refueled, but completely cleaned, spic and span from top to bottom, inside and out. Hussein, obviously pleased, said he appreciated this unnecessary extra care, and then insisted on personally thanking those responsible. The commander, Colonel Chuck Donnelly, called in the concerned officers, each of whom got the Hussein treatment of the firm handshake and gaze in the eyes, shutting out all else. Then he told Donnelly he also wanted to thank the men who had done the actual work. Taken back into a work area and introduced to them, he gave each that same Hussein magic, ignoring the greasy hands and soiled mechanics' clothes.

Now move ahead some to when it was Major General Donnelly in the Pentagon, who was playing a key role in the annual U.S.-Jordan military assistance talks. I was on the exchange assignment to the air force and involved these sessions. The Jordanians wanted from us some oxygen equipment for their F-5s and a large unloading machine. Given the job of trying to locate these items, I did so, but had to report back to him I had been categorically told that none were surplus or could otherwise be made available. He looked up and in a matter of fact way said, "I have just found them surplus" and called in an aide to do up the necessary paper work. End of story. The Hussein personality worked time after time and often with lasting effect.

Anwar Sadat projected splendidly his personality, to Americans and other foreigners, so in different ways did Bourguiba and Hassan, but for one-on- one impact, I think no other Arab leader has been as effective as King Hussein.

Q: I've heard the story that at one point before he decided to move against Arafat, he was reviewing his troops and saw a pair of women's underpants, flying from an antenna on a military vehicle, and the remark was made, "well, you're treating us like women, so we'll look like women," or something like that.

UNDELAND: I haven't heard that one, and while I therefore cannot comment on whether it in fact happened, I am highly skeptical, for that kind of incident would be a huge insult to the king and also to women in that very correct society. It just doesn't ring true. Had it occurred, I am sure he would have been deeply offended, and I think Jordanians, and particularly those in the army, would be equally aware of how much this would hit him wrong and would avoid it.

Q: This may be just one of those stories.

UNDELAND: To me, it sounds as phony as a three dollar bill.

You asked me earlier if I had anything more to say, and I have already had all too much, but let me close out the Jordan chapter by still a couple more stories, one of embarrassment to me, but perhaps instructive. The first. Princeton and the University of Jordan had worked out a project without USG involvement to exchange one graduate student each way each year, but while it wasn't our show, both parties kept us informed. I applauded this private initiative, which supported exactly what USIS was doing, and I offered to help informally in any way I could, if they ever wanted me to.

One day a phone call from Vice President Samra told me a big problem had arisen and I should come out and see President Majali, right away. I did as he asked only to be raked over the coals, up one side and down the other, for Princeton had turned down the Jordanian nominee as not qualified, after he had been personally contacted by Majali and had given up a good paying job in Libya in order to accept the offer. He threatened that if Princeton wouldn't take him, Jordan University would refuse to accept the designated American student. I pointed out that I knew about the Princetonian, a black woman already en route and while I didn't know why Princeton had reacted so negatively to the Jordanian, to turn her down at that juncture would only make the situation worse and could damage the existing excellent university-to-university ties. But it wasn't my responsibility and I was only trying to be helpful. However, Majali continued to storm, and I left his office disturbed at the outburst and not knowing what would happen.

So, I went directly to Samra to find out what was going on and why hadn't he prepared me for what I was to face before I went into the lion's den. His disarmingly replied that I had been in Jordan more than three years, knew the country well, and he was sure I fully understood what was up. This floored me. Seeing my blank expression, he went on to explain that the rejected Jordanian was a member of a Christian family from Karak, protected by the Majali clan, the foremost power in that region. Then he disarmingly asked: hadn't I understood this and what it meant? Alas, the answer was I hadn't. Samra was dead right; I should have.

If we don't become pretty conversant about the societies in which we operate, we are walking on thin ice with the ever present risk it may give way beneath us and we will fall in the soup. In Jordan, as much as any place I have served, knowledge of families and tribes and how they interact is essential. That experience has been firmly implanted in my mind ever since, and I have gone to considerable effort to try to make sure I am never so caught out again anywhere I've been posted.

The second. The radio station's director general, Kilani (his first name embarrassingly escapes me), invited Joan and myself to an outdoors wedding feast. We went and found the entire leadership, the power structure, of central Jordan present. I had met, let along had come to know, only a handful of those at this large gathering. Reporting this event at the next embassy staff meeting, Pickering chimed in that we should never fool ourselves on how well we are plugged in. He went on that we try to learn and get around to our best ability, but it is never enough to become thoroughly conversant, and anyway we are always the outsiders. But we have to keep reaching out. He was again right on.

Jordan was a superb assignment from beginning to end, partly because of the country and people, partly because of the close ties between our two countries that were burgeoning, partly because of the satisfaction in rebuilding the post from the ground up and partly because I was convinced we were making a significant contribution to our standing in a part of the Middle East of importance to us. It was a place to be confident and optimistic. It was a post for one who liked to be out and doing things. I have already gone on at great length, but there is so much more I could relate, more stories, more vignettes. It was, in short, a remarkable time to be there.

Kuwait (plus Bahrain and Qatar): Public Affairs Officer

Q: Now, Dick, we've got you going to Kuwait for a relatively short period, 1974-1975. What were you doing there?

UNDELAND: I was once more PAO. I had wanted to stay on another year in Jordan, but Washington, primarily NEA, rejected that idea, and I went on a direct transfer, where in addition to Kuwait, I was responsible for our activities in Bahrain and Qatar. It was a two American officer post, I did most of the things in Kuwait, and my deputy, Bob Hall, handled the lion's share in Bahrain and Qatar. I must admit I found the work and place no where's near as interesting or stimulating as Jordan. In my book this assignment was a considerable step down, although bureaucratically both posts were on the same level, for apparently, the presence of two American officers rather than one carried far more weight than the size, scope and nature of the activities. I never understood this reasoning, but then nobody asked me to.

The operational climate was entirely different, but some of the programs were the same as in Jordan, except there was very little in the way of exchanges. Again, we had no center, no library, not even a reference collection worthy of the name.

Not having exchanges, with a couple of notable exceptions, pretty much eliminated one of my main focuses elsewherIVs, Fulbrighters and other grantwhich I had put at the very center of our efforts to expand understanding of and make impact on attitudes towards the U.S

Many Kuwaitis went to the U.S. on study missions of one sort or another, were in graduate studies programs in a wide variety of American universities, and didn't need or want our help, financial or other. Funding was more than ampler from Kuwaiti sources, and they found the education office in their embassy in Washington, met their needs. I personally didn't think it did a very good job in this area, but it was their show, and they seemed happy with it. These students had an opulence that we would not, and could not, have matched, first class air tickets and Hilton hotels perhaps sums it up. All too often, they lacked a seriousness and an academic and professional focus on which we would have tried to insist. But as I say, it was their business, and it had produced some impressive graduates.

We were quite active was in dealing with the press, a far livelier and more independent institution than in Jordan. They wanted some of our materials, but, as always, nothing that would or could be considered political. I spent a good deal of time in dialogue with editors and writers, some of whom were avid readers of our information bulletins and deeply interested in the States. They welcomed me and our exchanges of ideas.

There were four main daily newspapers, all privately owned, though heavily government subsidized, which were surprisingly outspoken and willing to dig into stories with an objectivity rare to the Arab World of that day. Largely because of this openness and vigor, the press had considerable influence on public opinion, palpably greater than in most Arab countries. Still, there were severe limits. They didn't attack or question the security services or military. The palace and extended royal family was off limits. They were cautious in how much they might promote getting the suspended parliament back into business and the workings of other fledgling, democratically based organizations, but they could be quite critical of ministers and corruption and, in general, things that went wrong. They even got a bit into the hot issue of restrictions on the proper roles for women in the country. In that area, despite the hesitancy and limitations, Kuwait was light years ahead of Saudi Arabia and the small countries in the Gulf, except for Bahrain. I found that many of my discussions with editors and newsmen revolved around press freedom and responsibility. I felt we had a certain degree of influence with them, probably as much as we could hope for.

The radio and television were government owned and run, very tame and friendly, so long as one stayed away from the political, particularly Middle East politics. We had modest placement of cultural stuff and with the TV station got involved, along with an American foundation, in developing an Arabic version of Sesame Street, which was wholly funded by the Kuwait government. As with the press, I saw a good deal of the TV and radio people.

On the cultural side, we put on a piano recital, a rarity in the Kuwaiti scene, which was well attended, including by more Kuwaitis than had been expected. We organized jointly with Kuwaiti architects and planning officials a couple of seminars on city planning, which struck very responsive chords. In fact the second one, only a few months after the first, stemmed from their strong and persuasive request to carry these discussions into greater depth. Here was another example of Washington being forthcoming, for both seminars were add-ons, that is, outside the post's annual country plan. Our relations with the Kuwait University were close and cordial. Many on the teaching staff and a couple of deans had PhDs from the U.S. I was always a welcomed and was often an unannounced, visitor to the campus. We put up on an agency exhibit of technical books there, which they wanted to buy lock, stock and barrel for their library. We couldn't let them do that, as it had to go on to other posts, but we did the second best and arranged for them to acquire a second set of the collection.

The University of Kuwait's administration, in fact both its Kuwaiti president and Egyptian born vice president, tried to get me to help vet the unending string of proposals from American universities, including some elite ones, for cooperation, joint projects, endowments, etc., which all too often were little more than efforts to glom onto Kuwaiti money by almost any means. I was dismayed at the crassness of some of these approaches, one of the most brazen coming from an Ivy League school, not the one I attended of course. I let them know it was not up to me to pass judgment, and I therefore refused that role, but I did all I could to provide requested factual information and could not refrain from cautioning the university's leadership to look very carefully into all the details of this and other proposals until they were sure they had gotten fully satisfactory answers to their questions. They were burned a few times, but on the whole were pretty good at sniffing out the truth and at saying no.

The "brazen" pitch I referred to was from Princeton and had the sympathy of Ambassador Stoltzfus, a devoted alumnus. I explained to him in detail why it struck me as a sham, which seemed to cool his backing, but also did not do my personal relationship with him a lot of good. I might add here that throughout my PAOships, all six of them, ambassadors could count on my loyalty and my never leaking anything, but the other side of the coin was that they were to hear without honey coating what I knew and thought. This usually, but not always, went down pretty well.

In a more general sense, salesmen, hucksters, promoters et al. were coming to Kuwait in droves with myriads of proposals. Some were legitimate, worth-while and had in mind activities and objectives that served Kuwait's interests, but many didn't. Kuwaitis fortunately could usually be hard-headed and tough, indeed, had to be, but they were also more forbearing than I would have been in their shoes. While I was there they did say no forcefully and, by my lights, rightfully so to a weird scheme brought by Spiro Agnew. The hotels were full of foreigners grunging after monethey came from everywhere, but I felt that all too many were Americans. It affected general perceptions towards foreigners, and this wariness did not help build confidence in Americans, other Westerners and outsiders.

At the same time, Kuwait had long had cordial and close associations with the U.S., going back to the turn of the Twentieth Century when American missionaries introduced modern medicine into the countrthose of the Dutch Reformed Church built and ran the country's first modern hospital, which was rightfully respected throughout the area. Americans developed the oil industry, and though it had been nationalized, they remained in key positions. Investments, which were so important to Kuwait's future, were closely tied in with the U.S. industries and financial markets. My point is that this history made many Kuwaitis think it only normal to turn to Americans, usually turn to them first, and, speaking parochially, to USIS and other parts of the mission for many things, beyond just information on who these visitors were and what they were up to.

My assignment lasted for only a year, which is not long enough to get as deeply into the society and culture as has been my wont wherever I have been stationed. I found Kuwait a satisfying, if not my favorite, posting. Among other things, it introduced me to the Gulf area, which I feel is a near necessity for anyone seeking an Arab specialization. Gulf and Saudi experience is highly useful throughout that part of the world, for everywhere you encounter reactions to and attitudes on the oil-rich Arabs. Their money has impacted every corner of Araby. Certainly it was a less distinctive area after major oil money came to flow in, but it still was and is like no place else in the Arab World.

Back to USIS. I traveled some to Qatar and Bahrain, trips I always looked forward to. They provided other perspectives than those from Kuwait, albeit for me all too brief and not enough in depth. I was much taken with the Bahrainis, whose friendly, open and flexible ways made them easy to work with, interesting interlocutors and good partners in projects. Bahraini Information Minister Tariq al Muayyid was one of the most impressive officials I have met anywhere in the Arab World. With the Bahraini Ministry of Education and the Ford Foundation, we sponsored a regional manpower conference, which was the programming highlight of my abbreviated Gulf tour. Access at high levels was very easy in both of these lower Gulf countries. Oil rich Qatar was a strange place, with only some 40,000 Qataris and many times that number of foreigners. What they wanted from us in those days were expressions and demonstrations of friendship, involvement and interest, and not a whole lot more. In other words, they sought our recognition of the reality and worth of their identity, as if this alone contributed to their legitimacy. Since they thought so, maybe it did far more than we usually realized.

Q: What about the Palestinians in Kuwait? You had come from Jordan where the Palestinians had had an uncomfortable role but at least had achieved something. How did you find that situation in Kuwait?

UNDELAND: Kuwait had a population of about a million, of whom nearly 300,000 were Palestinians, forming far and away the largest foreign community. I might add that of the total only half a million were Kuwaitis, and they were divided between those of Bedouin stock and the traditional city dwellers. Although the Palestinian community was well established, only a handful had been given citizenship. Nonetheless, they were at the center of nearly everything, often the drivers and movers, although the very top positions were held by Kuwaitis, as was required by custom where not by law. Thus, the editors-in-chief of the daily newspapers were Kuwaitis, but many, if not most, of the practicing journalists were Palestinians, along with a smattering of other Arab nationalities as well. An anomaly, but one long-time Egyptian resident was a chief editor of the country's leading magazine. The same pattern held true at the radio and television stations. Deans and above at the university had to be native Kuwaitis, with the notable exception of the one originally Egyptian vice president, to whom I have referred, who extraordinarily had become a Kuwaiti citizen. Among the professors a sizable contingent were Palestinians. Similarly, businesses were Kuwaiti owned, while the managers were often, perhaps usually, Palestinians. In a sense, they were second or third class citizens, whatever their importance, but then every non-Kuwaiti fell into that category Many close Palestinian-Kuwaiti relationships existed on professional, business or outside activity levels, but there was next to no intermarriage or other deep personal ties. It is hardly surprising that Kuwaitis were wary of so large a foreign community, which played such a key role in nearly everything, particularly one with its own political agenda. The security services watched them carefully. Still, governmental services were readily available to them, the hospitals, schools and other institutions. Many were students at the university.

Notwithstanding their importance and in many cases fairly high status, it is easy to understand the widespread Palestinian resentment. These strains were never far beneath the surface. One constantly heard from them of the way Kuwaitis were lording it over them and otherwise treating them badly, or at least not showing them the respect they thought they deserved. They particularly resented being watched by the police and other surveillance. One of our long time USIS employees, a Palestinian married to a Lebanese, went to great effort and considerable cost to acquire Lebanese nationality, in order to get away from the stigma of being a Palestinian in Kuwait. In brief, Kuwaitis were determined to remain in control of their land and destiny, and they made no bones about it. They saw to it that they set the agendas. The result was good and bad, cooperation and collaboration, along with tensions on both sides.

The PLO played a large role in the Palestinian community, levying taxes, running organizations and profoundly influencing Palestinian attitudes. By tacit agreement, it had agreed not do anything political within the country that could affect Kuwait either at home or abroad. It would not be a base or training ground for operations and, whatever the PLO thought about Kuwaiti control, policies and actions, it would keep these views under wraps. In return, it had untrammeled access to the Palestinians, the right to tax them, and the quiet support of the Kuwaiti government. It particularly saw to it there was no public or otherwise potentially embarrassing Palestinian criticism of the rulers, the Sabahs, or Kuwaiti institutions. So far as I know, both sides scrupulously lived up to the bargain and publicly kept quiet about it, although the silence was not observed in private comments we were hearing all the time from both sides.

Q: Did we aim part of our information program at the Palestinians, or was this a no-no?

UNDELAND: Let me start by saying we counted Palestinians a major audience we wanted to reach, and we dealt with them all the time. But we did not have specific materials or programs or projects aimed uniquely at them. The realities of the Palestinian-Kuwaiti equation in Kuwait dictated that while we in most ways treated them pretty much the same, we did not losing sight of the fact that we were in Kuwait, and the Kuwaitis were paramount on their own turf. There were two basic reasons for this. The first is that it would have been extremely difficult to separate them out in our dealings with organizations or institutions. For example, at the university, we were in contact with Kuwaiti and Palestinian professors and students, and it would have been absurd to try to exclude or only include only one or the other. It was the same with the media, where we dealt with both Kuwaitis and Palestinians. Also at our two city planning seminars. The only parochial place I recall us drawing a distinction was with a few exchange programs, where the authorities insisted we include only Kuwaitis. We did not argue with this.

The second is that had we tried to single out or favor Palestinians, it would have been easily known and intensely resented by the authorities and Kuwaitis in general, who did not object to our seeing and dealing with the Palestinians, as they themselves were doing all the time, but never to the exclusion of Kuwaitis. Had we wanted to, and I firmly did not, we would have been found out pronto. Moreover, we were USIS-Kuwait, not USIS- Palestine in Kuwait

Still, there was pressure from Washington headquarters to develop Palestinian specific approaches, which I rejected, trying time after time, using the reasoning I've just given. I never really understood why even those in our service with wide experience in the Arab World, could or would not easily see and understand this reality. The same had been true in Jordan, where NEA made it a bigger issue of it than it did in Kuwait. That I didn't succeed in making them understand this and found myself at loggerheads with NEA over it I look on it as one of my communication failures.

Q: You have talked about Kuwaitis, but could you add to how they struck you?

UNDELAND: I am leery of generalizations about a people or a nation, yet there were certain traits, aspects may be a better word, that were widespread and which tended to separate the Kuwaitis from other Arabs, and particularly those of the Arabian peninsula. It is often hard to comprehend just how rich they were, so much so that their government had no problem in seeing to it that this largesse was amply shared to all. Almost by definition, no Kuwaiti had serious financial worries. There was enough for all of them, with plenty left over for the palaces and their likes that made the country a place of such opulence for the truly wealthy. I might, however, add that this had hardly turned the country into a land of beauty. The norm was, to my eyes, garish and ugly.

You might have thought that this tremendous wealth would have made Kuwaitis soft and complaisant, but these are not adjectives I would use to describe them. I often encountered a toughness of character, a show- me or prove-it attitude that on occasion could more than merely border on the truculent. They were usually nobody's pushover and in many instances were not shy in wanting everybody to know it. If they were out after something, they would usually pursue it in a forceful, often direct, way. This did not conflict with their readiness to come to us for advice or evaluation or other help, for that was merely seeking information and counsel; putting it to use was something else. This did not mean that the politeness and graciousness that mark Arabs everywhere were absent. Indeed, they were not. Wirth Kuwaitis these two sides of their character seemed to go together quite easily.

They tended to look down on Saudis and other Gulf Arabs as weak, indecisive and unsophisticated and, as one Kuwaiti ruefully told me, were all too often overly blunt in saying so. It is hardly surprising that Kuwaitis were not very popular up and down the Gulf. A high ranking Bahraini official asked me about living in Kuwait and working there, adding he wouldn't want to do it himself, as he found Kuwaitis overbearing and unpleasant. I knew Kuwaitis who readily admitted they were not easy to get along with, some being proud of it, others merely treating it as a matter of fact and a few being apologetic.

I got to know a quite a few, whom I respected and enjoyed being with. More to the point, I did not find my job in any way impeded by this trait of toughness. In fact, I left Kuwait feeling that this streak of hard headedness was exactly what the country needed and, barring a disaster coming from outside, it had a better chance of making it than any of the other small Gulf states. How sadly that conclusion was put to the test 15 years later.

It is not part of the question, but I might throw in that the U.S. had varied interests in Kuwait, along with a presence built on a history of friendship and involvement. Cold War issues were never all that far away, but the government and institutions were solidly anti-communist and didn't need help from us on this score. Oil and Gulf security loomed large, with equipment and training being provided by us to the country's fledgling military forces. We wanted to see the Gulf Security Council strengthened. We supported Kuwaiti independence in the face of Iraq's long time hostility and its then quiescent but little beneath the surface claim to the entire territory and especially the northern old fields and Bubiyan Island. Kuwait had geographic and strategic importance by its being at the had of the Gulf. It was a market for American products. None of these main elements bore on USIS directly, but we found time after time, we had an ancillary, if secondary, role to play, for we were out in the community, providing another set of eyes and ears to learn what Kuwaitis had on their minds and, of course, to pass on things we had on ours. I felt our small operation was the right size for what we had on our plate.

Q: Outside of the more usual parts of the USIS program, were there areas where you were involved or interested?

UNDELAND: Two come to mind. The first was one of our few exchange programs, alas later discontinued, which had a subtle but significant impact. It was CIP, in those days the Cleveland International Program which later was renamed the Council of International Programs. It brought persons from the working level in official social programs to the U.S. for a few months for on-the-job experience in the Mid-West. The participants could be placed in summer camps, with urban and rural social services operations, voluntary organizations, mental institutions, even prisons, all sorts of places. We sent off two or three a year from Kuwaiin Jordan we had also had the same number yearly, which I should have mentionewho came back with batteries charged and full of ideas.

Most of them worked in an imaginative, entirely Kuwaiti program, in which Ministry of Social Affairs social workers were trying, and with considerable success, to bridge the immense generational gap separating parents psychologically and intellectually from their children in the Kuwait that was changing so fundamentally and rapidly. The untold wealth was having a huge effect on the structure of that very traditional society, which had heretofore little changed from one century to the next. What children of Bedouin were learning in school, socially, intellectually and culturally was beyond the understanding of many of their parents. It was an innovative and surprisingly effective program. I got to know some of these social workers quite well and was tremendously impressed by their dedication, flexibility and skill. I used those three descriptive words once in talking with a CIP returnee; she smiled and said that's exactly what she and others had gotten out of their experiences in the United States. I never understood why we had none of the first class travel and hotel problems with them that we confronted so widely elsewhere.

I was at first surprised to find myself sought out as a sounding board on a wide range of issues concerning the emergence of women in Kuwait and questions as to its pace and content. The majority of the social workers I have just mentioned were women, and this was an issue on their minds. They welcomed talking about it with a sympathetic American, which I rather prided myself in being. So did the head of the legal section in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a Kuwaiti woman lawyer and quiet feminist, whom we had earlier enrolled in one of our programs in the States. The dean of women at the university I saw her often and usually at her requeswas faced with questions not so much of what changes were needed, but rather how fast they should and could come about. Most of the faculties had mixed classes, though not all, but still many gender questions remained up in the air, even such a basic one as to whether it should be acceptable for a boy and girl to sit next to each other in a classroom. There was the issue of how male students and professors would accept and deal with women professors. I gladly provided materials, got answers to questions raised and put this dean and others in touch with several visiting American academics, all small gestures but those which gave more than a little standing to USIS. This was the kind of thing for which there was no place in our country plan, but yet paid off, and I think promoted American interests far more than some things carefully written up, justified and approved by the USIA machinery.

Q: Your mentioned that the ambassador was Bill Stoltzfus.How did he operate?

UNDELAND: He knew the area well, in fact had spent much of his career there. He liked the Kuwaitis. He found many frustrations in dealing with the "new rich", who were harder to get to know, more difficult to see, less inclined to real dialogue than those he had known a few decades earlier. I think it fair to say he had found those simpler times of the past more satisfying, but this was hardly strange. It was the common view of every long-time Arabian peninsula type I have met. He was concerned about keeping U.S.-Kuwaiti relations on an even keel and concentrated on political, military and economic issues, in that order. My impression was he did it pretty well. But I would add that it was not a time of major problems and tests for any American ambassador.

I got along reasonably well with him, though the Princeton affair, as I have noted, rankled. Ours was a fairly distant relationship, but he was open to what I had on my mind, and I could usually get his backing for our activities, although the USIS world was never ranked high among his interests. There was the case of a message he wanted to put out, but was not getting others on his staff to pull it together the way he wanted. It did not concern USIS in any way, but I offered to take a crack at it and came back with a draft that he liked. It had a salutary effect on our relationship. It wasn't just me; Stoltzfus never got close to any on his staff, from what I could see.

I might mention Bob Ames, the station chiehe and his family lived next door to us, across the street from the embasswho had a relationship with the ambassador in ways fairly similar in nature to my own. I bring it up only because we talked about it and found ourselves on the same wave length on this matter, indeed, I might add, on everything concerning the Arab World and our place in it. Parenthetically, I have never known a more knowledgeable Arab World expert in USG service. You recall, he was tragically killed some years later in the bombing of the Beirut embassy.

Q: Then you returned to Washington. Were you due to come back?

UNDELAND: I'm not sure I ever learned the true story. At no time in my career have I felt less in tune with the area leadership than then, and I had had, stretching over months, a silly home leave battle going on with NEA and personnel, which brought forth my combative spirit. Whatever the real reason or reasons, I was pulled out of Kuwait after only a year, ostensibly because Washington had suddenly discovered I had been too long overseas. There's a rule saying you have to spend three of the first fifteen years...

Q: I used to be a personnel officer and I used to yank people out, many of them screaming. In those days everybody wanted to stay overseas.

UNDELAND: Maybe that was it, but I have never been convinced. A few years earlier, USIA got a new computer that supposedly was going to transform fundamentally the way the agency did much, if not most, of its business, but that thinking proved in practice to be far too optimistic and unrealistic, and its scope was trimmed back until it was doing nothing beyond keeping track of motor vehicles, assignment records and other hum-drum stuff. Did the infernal machine catch up with me? In any case, I should have come back according to the rules, for I had been out for 14 out of 16 years, which was longer than the regulations specify. In many ways I was sorry, for I departed feeling I hadn't yet really gotten into the assignment, but the idea of being in Washington also had its appeal, and there were also some personal reasons, including letting the kids have some of their schooling in their own country.

Washington: Exchange assignment with USAF Headquarters; Deputy Director, State NEA/P

Q: So you were back in Washington for four years, 1975-1979. What were you doing?

UNDELAND: If I had relied on the personnel system, the answer at the outset would have be, nothing worthwhile. Having been PAO in Amman and then in Kuwait and the Gulf, and having done, so I thought, reasonably well, as my OERs said, I was more than a tad taken aback to learn the only possibility Personnel could come up with was the assistant tour director at the VOA. I reacted, "you've got to be kidding", but those giants of reason were deadly serious. Thus, I was on my own to find something, which probably worked out best anyway, although being turned loose to walk the halls to shop around for a job is not much fun.

I found nothing anywhere in USIA that was open and I found the slightest bit interesting or suitablin my search I didn't feel I was being all that fussbut then learned of an exchange agreement with the Pentagon, which had been on the books for several years, but never activated. I pursued it further, found a ready welcome from air force headquarters, and decided to take it, branching out into something entirely new to me, which was part of its appeal. I became the only civilian in Middle East Policy and Plans, which had the unlikely acronym or initials of XOXXM, the letters standing for what I have no idea. I later learned the story behind this assignment was a little more complicated, I should say Byzantine, than I could have dreamed of.

That part of the USAF hierarchy was having problems with its intelligence branch, over basically not trusting the latter's judgment on matters relating to the Middle East. Close relations with the Israel air force and the consequent mutual interests and benefits were a given and caused no problem, but in the shop I entered there was feeling that the intelligence operation went too far in its pro-Israel stance. Overall, under the ideologically driven General Keegan, the Middle East section was headed by Joseph Churba, a civilian ï¿½migrï¿½ from Damascus and Colonel Katz, the two being of like outlook. Perhaps you recall the story of the air force civilian who publicly attacked its chief of staff, General Brown, for using the word "burden" in referring to Israel. It went back to the '73 war, when munitions, planes and systems were taken out of inventories in Europe and rushed to Israel, over strong air force objections. Little time was wasted in getting rid of Churba through the simple mechanism of removing his security clearance, but the orientation he had represented largely remained. Policy and Plans, which included the now Major General Donnelly, about whom I've told the story of the equipment for the Jordanian air force, wanted someone with area experience, who had an understanding of the region's politic dynamics, but did not want an officer from State, for there were fears that he or she might bring along and promote a pre-cooked agenda. However, someone from USIA aroused no such qualms. For starters, few had ever heard of it, and those who had or who looked into it found it was not a significant policy influencing body.

Q: How did they use you at the Pentagon?

UNDELAND: I found myself involved in a lot things that were new to me. My first project concerned Omani flown BAC trainers, a British plane being used for ground support, all too many of which were being damaged or shot down by Soviet-made, hand-held missiles, named the Strella. The problem in hand was what could be done to foil them. Finding out was a splendid introduction to offices in the headquarters, although my investigations led to little that was useful, for electronic and other technological measures proved not suitable for these small and rather rudimentary planes. That left only series of evasive maneuvers by the pilots, which helped save the aircraft, but greatly reduced their effectiveness.

In addition to such largely technical projects, I wrote a number of political pieces on the area and worked closely with others on preparing for presentations to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Lebanon was one of the pressing concerns. The JCS was developing detailed plans on different options for extracting the American staff from the embassy in Beirut, were it to become necessary. The air force was slated to provide the communications and much of the firepower. Strangely, JCS did not have detailed knowledge of Beirut's rocky shore line, that is, places where it would be best to bring marines ashore, were that to be the chosen option. Having walked many times along these stretches, observing what was where, the powers that be decided they wanted my knowledge. Although I had the general top secret clearance, I lacked it for some of those security categories out to the side, so I could have access to satellite photos and the like. My case must have set a record for getting these additional clearances. A senior air force officer placed a phone call to the USIA security office, and it was arranged in only 20 minutes. I contributed what I knew, but it proved not necessary, for the embassy's staff came out peaceably, ironically under the protection of the PLO.

There were ten officers in XOXXM, majors and colonels, one being John Warden III, who developed the bombing theories that became a basic element in Desert Storm. A likable, bright, hard working lot. The day began at 7 AM and went on for 10 to 12 hours. They made me very much a member of the team, though my background was entirely different, and I barely knew one end of an airplane from the other

The Pentagon was a strange bureaucracy, the likes of which I had never encountered, although the workings of MAC/V in Vietnam provided some intimation. I was and am appalled at the unbelievable amount of manpower needed to make that system function, but I don't mean to complain. I threw myself into the machinery and did my best to contribute, for function it did. In those days, the air force was the most effective of the services in getting a handle on a problem or project or whatever and staffing it through, so that when considered by the Joint Chiefs or other parts of Defense, it had the best record of getting decisions to go its way.

Q: One of the things that has struck me, and I was in the air force for four years as an enlisted man in intelligence, was that it seemed to see issues as solvable by dropping things from the air on whatever the problem happened to be, believing that would take care of it. Did you find this attitude or not?

UNDELAND: Not at all. The people I worked with were far more sophisticated than your question indicates. They were of course primarily dealing with the air component of problems and solutions, but rather than thinking they could handle things simply and by themselves, they realized the limitations of air power, as much as what it could do. My "they" is everybody in the office where I worked, but also a fair number of other officers I got to know. Certainly, they were believers that sufficient concentration of ordinance from the air could, for a limited period of time, make any area untenable for an enemy, but I met only a couple, none as I say in my office, whom I would put in a "victory through air power" school. They were quiet and reserved, with none of a gung ho, cowboy attitude. If anything, they tended to be cautious, maybe overly cautious. They were very leery of relying solely on the military, let alone purely air, power to find solutions for issues with significant political aspects. And they were constantly fearful of becoming overextended.

Q: Going back to Oman, who were these Omani rebels?

UNDELAND: Undoubtedly, some of them were Omanis, operating in the southern part of the country which lies up against the Hadramaut, but in the main they were South Yemenis. This group was challenging the rule of Sultan Qaboos and his control over the interior of the country, which was being defended by his British-led army.

Q: And these are an offshoot of the Aden-Yemen group?

UNDELAND: Aden or South Yemen, two ways of saying the same thing. Aden was the capital of the People's Republic of South Yemen. They had Soviet weapons and we assumed the Russian go ahead on using them in the fighting. However, we did not believe that the Russians were operating the Strella missiles or were otherwise directly involved.

Q: Strella means arrow missile in Russian.

UNDELAND: I didn't know that.

Q: It's been said and reported in the press that one of the main things our military liked about the Israelis in those days, is that we got a lot of information from them about Soviet equipment, which the Syrians were using, that is swapping a lot of information.

UNDELAND: Although my job did not personally take me into this arena, what you say is very true. In fact, it would be more than merely strange, were it not the case. The air force was understandably much interested in the tactics developed by the Israelis to counter Soviet arms and in some of the Israeli modifications, inventions and adaptations of equipment and munitions. I met nobody in my Pentagon stint who belittled the abilities and achievements of the Israeli air force. One fighter pilot in XOXXM termed the Israeli air force the second best in the world, second only to, of course, the USAF. It was no secret that the ties between American and Israeli air forces were warm and close on many levels.

Q: This was a period where we were still seeing the Middle East, at least in some quarters, as the cockpit of the conflict between the Soviet Union and the NATO powers, which could break out into warfare in that region. And yet those who served in the area said, no, the real issue is between the Arabs and Israelis, which is the focus of everyone living there. How was the air force viewing it? As an extension of the conflict with the Soviets, or essentially a regional matter of a local rather than a world nature?

UNDELAND: I don't believe there can be a categoric answer, making for one air force view, but broadly speaking its main attention was first and foremost on the big picture of our competition with the Soviets rather than on any regional issues, Arab-Israeli or other. Hardly a surprising statement as our potential adversary was the Soviets, not anybody in the Middle East. However, I was working in the office dealing with maters in that region, where attention naturally centered on its events and problems. The officers, who were involved, recognized that what was going on right there was of far greater concern to the nations and peoples than anything occurring outside. The Soviets and the Cold War were ever-present factors, but in area terms, they did not dominate the scene, either in fact or through the XOXXM optic. What I'm trying to say is that both aspects were treated as important, but if you are dealing with a specific area, you tend to put your main focus on it.

Q: Were you affected at all, or did you have any feeling about the Israeli lobby when you were there?

UNDELAND: No. This consideration never arose in anything I was involved in.

Q: You left there when?

UNDELAND: Mid-1977. I went to State for the next couple of years, but before taking up that part of my career, I want to say that my Pentagon experience, though for me it was nothing more than an interlude, provided me with insights that I valued at the time and have ever since. I have never been with a more dedicated group of people. They worked hard and, in the main, selflessly. They treated me as one of them, though a couple of them were initially not fully at ease having a civilian in the office. Still, I felt my stint there had gone on long enough; I was ready for something else more in keeping with my interests and background.

I learned, I now forget exactly how, of an opening in the public affairs section of the Near East Bureau at State. It appealed, I met the people involved, applied and was immediately accepted. I and didn't even look into possibilities in USIA.

Washington, Deputy Director on NEA/P, Department of State

Q: What were you doing at State?

UNDELAND: I came on as the deputy in NEA/P, the office which dealt with press and information activities, interns, university programs, seminars, speaking engagements, Freedom of Information declassifying, speech writing, queries from Congress and other such. However, the two central functions were, (1) preparing "guidances", a horrible bureaucratese word, or talking points for the Spokesman's daily noon press briefings and higher level press conferences at State and the White House, and (2) answering queries from correspondents.

Its chief was George Sherman, an uncannily perceptive, highly talented and acutely political person, the former diplomatic correspondent of the defunct WASHINGTON STAR, who expertly knew his way around State and got to the nub of matters as rapidly and well as anyone I have known. First class mind, first class writer, first class person.

Q: What specifically did you do?

UNDELAND: At the top of the list was putting together those "guidances" and getting them approved for Hodding Carter's daily press briefings. I don't recall a single day when journalists did not pose at least one question touching on the Middle East, and usually there were many more. The job was, first, to figure out what would likely be asked and how, then to put together the information for the answer with as much detail as would be needed to satisfy the asker, and thirdly to get it cleared as far up the line as the subject and treatment required. I arrived by 7:30 AM and with George did a quick run through half a dozen morning newspapers, but concentrating primarily on the Washington Post and New York Times. For the researching and writing, we went to the country desks for things we did not already know, and then got the clearances, which could be simple and fast or complex and maddeningly slow. On a few occasions, it had to go as high as Under Secretary Warren Christopher. I had authorization to break in on anyone except the Secretary himself and on any meeting. While a couple of times I encountered a tad of petulance over barging in at the higher levels, nobody ever tried to put me off, let alone turn me away. There was no time for delays, for we were supposed to get the whole package to Carter by 11:30. To make the deadline, I have shown perhaps ungainly speed on State's long corridors, though mostly a brisk, purposeful walking pace sufficed.

Q: What was your impression of the Washington press corps, particularly those concentrating on your area, the Middle East, which was, I suppose, probably the most heated one?

UNDELAND: Most of the newsmen assigned to the Department had been there for some time, were knowledgeable on what was going on, knew what information they wanted and were likely to get and played by the rules of the game. They were in the main hard working, responsible people, who did their homework and, although always zeroing in to get as much as they could, were reasonable. The vast majority were wholly reliable. They were people you could talk to frankly, if need be off the record or on background. You could therefore be pretty responsive in replying to them. Of course, there were a few grandstanders and untrustworthy types, mostly from less important papers and stations or from publications that had their own particular political agendas or axes to grind. I found I had to be a little more circumspect with the foreign press. There were a couple of times the agreed to background status wasn't respected, but nothing serious resulted, so that today I can't now remember what were the subjects or the offenders.

Q: Did you have any problems with, say, Israeli and Cairo correspondents?

UNDELAND: The Israeli newsmen were as a group very active, indeed, some of the most insistent and aggressive in the State press corps. With a couple of them I had to be a little extra careful, but it was no big deal. The Arab journalists tended to pose more general, easier to deal with, questions. But again, there were a couple working for Lebanese publications, who had a reputation for not respecting the rules and with whom I was more careful. But, with these few exceptions, Israeli and Arab journalists were like all the rest, and we treated them all the same. I have expanded the Egyptian in your question to include all Arab journalists.

Let me go back to what my days were like after the "guidance" process, which we broke off in the middle.

We listened to the noon briefings in our office over an internal system, called Stroeger (however that may be spelled) to know what in fact had come up, to see how Hodding used the information we had given him, and mostly to know immediately what questions he had taken, for he always wanted the answers to them as early as possible. This had priority, but was usually pretty rapidly disposed of. An afternoon chore was to get the transcript as soon as it was printed ouit had been taken down by court reporter typeextract the Middle East related portions, edit as necessary, type up and send out as an immediate cable to our embassies throughout the area. This was usually completed by about 4;00 PM, at which time a calm descended for about an houl usually then went jogging, getting myself in sufficient shape to complete the marine corps marathobut by 5:00 PM or so, the phones started ringing and continued to do so intermittently for nearly two hours, largely calls from journalists who wanted some specific information. It was also time when we could catch up on other things. These were 11 to 12 hour days; that was the norm.

I was in charge of the NEA intern program, which brought in some six to ten graduate students for a couple of months in the summer, plus one or two who went out to various embassies. I put together an NEA committee to evaluate the applications and make the selections. The next step was getting tem security clearances, a process which moved at a maddeningly slow, might I say plodding, pace. Once the interns were on board, briefed and assigned to the desks, I usually had little to do with them, except on rare occasions when problems arose. We got into the Department some brilliant, imaginative young people, several of whom later passed the exam and joined the Foreign Service. This was like my USIS work and not complicated, though it took up a certain amount of time that had to be fit in around more pressing demands.

Another USIS-like responsibility was the seminar program, in which twice a year, NEA invited teachers from colleges and universities all over the country to spend a week at State, during which time they worked along side desk officers to observe from that vantage point how we conducted our diplomacy day-to-day. They had a second responsibility. Numbering a dozen or so, they studied as a group a real problem and were charged with coming up with recommendations on what to do about it. This was capped in a final session with the NEA assistant secretary and some of his deputes to discuss and critique their recommendations. It was fascinating to see them pull their ideas together. In one of the groups, agreement slowly but finally emerged between an Arab nationalist, a Palestinian-American professor, and a yarmulka wearing professor from Yeshiva University on how to treat the PLO, the question fixed for that seminar. These two, I might add, found more common ground than either had initially thought possible. A popular program, like that of the interns, recruitment for it also was not difficult. Again, there was the security clearance procesI came to know that office and its snail like ways all too well.

The seminars led to quite a few invitations for NEA officers to visit the colleges and universities from which the participants had come, to give lectures, and participate in discussions, seminars and the like. Out of it came some excellent relationships between State and academia.

Q: I was wondering how you treated questions that must have cropped up from time to time about nuclear developments and nuclear weapons in Israel?

UNDELAND: The Israelis denied any existence of this, and we did not, at least not publicly, challenge that view. It was not a question journalists brought up very often, though when they did, we repeated what we had already stated on the record, in reality we ducked it. If pressed, we would dig in our heels and go no further.

Moving beyond this specific matter, when we thought it in our interest to comment on what was happening in other countries or their policies, we did so, but more often, and I personally think very rightly so, we did not put ourselves in the position of explaining things for other governments or justifying or attacking what they were doing or standing for. Not creating, or seeming to create, contentious issues with them was pretty deeply ingrained and prevailed, unless we wanted to make an unmistakable point. While high levels at State and the White House at times got preachy and lectured other governments, we knew it was rarely effective and tended only to raise hackles needlessly. More important, it rarely led to getting the answers or actions we wanted.

Q: Obviously you are a good soldier and answered questions according to policy. but were there any events, like how we handled Iran or how we handled Israel or Syria or Jordan in that period that gave you personal difficulty? Where you felt our policies and actions weren't serving us well?

UNDELAND: We have touched on this before, but let me go at it once again. My basic point is that an honorable public servant has the duty to support established policy, and, if he cannot bring himself to do that, to resign or be transferred or somehow get located where it is not something he has to deal with. You expect a military officer to obey whatever orders are issued and do his best; why shouldn't it be the same way for a Foreign Service Officer?

The people in NEA whose views on Iran I respected the most were constantly warning against the dangers of pursuing the policy in place, although to my knowledge none of them ever took it outside of internal, in house, deliberations. They felt we were making a huge mistake in putting all our cards on the Shah and were frustrated at what they saw as our unwillingness to see this reality that to them was so evident. When he visited the United States, the Iranian embassy couldn't mobilize even a couple of hundred of the 50,000 or so Iranian students in this country to come to Washington, all expenses paid, and shout, "long live the Shah." So they had to bring in a few soldiers here on training missions, and even they were reluctant cheerers. What did this mean? Why did we ignore what this example meant, which was there right before our eyes? I never laid claim to any particular knowledge on Iran, but silently shared some of the frustrations of those who did have the knowledge. It was their job to warn on likely consequences, and they have my admiration for the discreet, yet forceful, way they did it. As I've said, I am unaware that any of them went public or became leakers. Iran was a case of American politics overwhelming the reality of what was really taking place. But, my, how their careers were destroyed. The first class, knowledgeable and perceptive Iran Country Affairs Officer Henry Precht comes immediately to mind.

I, and most others who toiled in the Middle East trenches, had long felt the United States could and should have played a more active role in pushing both the Arabs and the Israelis into negotiations, into a meaningful peace process. I understood that domestic politics made putting pressure on the Israelis difficult and dicey, but I personally thought we could have done more than we did. I have also seen how our policy and our articulation of it have given grounds to the Arabs to question our aims and motives. Whatever I personally saw as our shortcomings, they remained with me and not a public matter. But one basic fact should also never be forgotten. It is that the United States and the U.S. alone has been seriously and consistently trying to work on solving the Arab-Israeli conflict. No personal misgivings over details of what we were doing or not doing were sufficient to make me want to see us opt out of this process. You used the term "good soldier", which is true, but there is more to it than merely that.

Q: Hodding Carter, whom I have interviewed, came from the early Carter camp, was a liberal Democrat, and had never been a spokesman before. What was your impression of him, by you, a professional, sitting there listening to him every day?

UNDELAND: Brilliant. He had the ability to get a hold of a tremendous amount of varied information coming at him from all sides, rapidly absorb it, see aspects of it he thought might give him problems, get clarifications on them and then put it into a whole he grasped and handled with confidence and aplomb. The biggest or knottiest issues he reviewed personally with the secretary before he faced the journalists, but he understood policy and the media so well he needed to refer very little to anyone else. He got right to the heart of the matter without diversions or flim-flam. In my book, he was the best spokesmen State has ever had. The media trusted and respected him. The NEA part of the equation was helped by the great mutual respect that existed between George Sherman and him.

A few words on NEA. No bureau had a higher reputation in State at that time and, indeed, I have never been around a more impressive body of talent at all leveldesk officers, country directors and their deputies, deputy assistant secretaries, virtually everyone. Its patterns and reputation were set by the two extraordinary assistant secretaries while I was there, Roy Atherton and Hal Saunders, both of whom were fine leaders and incredibly knowing experts, while at the same time, superb human beings. It was a joy to be around them. I was much taken when Roy in reviewing a performance rating on me, wrote that he particularly valued the fact I had never confronted him a surprise. I close this section by repeating that after the air force stint, satisfying as it had been, I was happy to have gotten back into my own milieu.

Damascus: Public Affairs Officer

Q: Well, I see in looking at your resume that in 1979 you brushed up your Arabic and went off to Damascus. You were there from 1979 to1983.

UNDELAND: Yes, a total of four years. I was once more the PAO. It was an assignment I had long wanted and actively went after. I was encouraged to do so by Talcott Seelye, who was in the African bureau at State when I was in NEA/P, that is, before he went out to Damascus as our ambassador. We had several talks in Washington, and I was confident we would get along well together, as we looked in similar fashion on many aspects of the area.

I had been to that city a few times in earlier years, in fact, starting in 1957 when I was a JOT, on, with one exception, purely personnel visits and had always liked what I saw. Moreover, being assigned there intrigued me for several reasons. Politically, Syria was central to peace or war in the Middle East. Though its ability to act effectively by itself in a positive sense was limited, it had the capability to prevent many things from happening, good or bad. It could be the spoiler and knew it. Secondly, although its relations with the United States were strainewe in USIS faced severe limitations, restrictions and suspicionwe also had a good deal going for us, with our center, active exchange programs and widespread contacts, which I hoped could be exploited and built upon. Thirdly, Syrian- American ties had a long history. How often the Syrian you met had a cousin or other relative who had immigrated to the States. Lastly, I think any diplomat wanting an Arab World specialization would feel he had not touched one of the key bases, were he not to have been posted to that most Arab of all Arab countries.

Before arriving I had not fully realized just how deep the U.S.-Syrian political chasm was, nor how profoundly it impacted on our relations in general and on aspects of the USIS program in particular. Still, I found that once there, we had a lot going for us and, furthermore, dealing in that atmosphere added considerable spice and challenge to pursuing our aims and conducting our activities. I think it fair to say I thrived on having to find circuitous ways to get things done. In this, I was greatly aided by the friendliness and graciousness of so many of the people, who down deep inside were very well inclined towards the U.S. on nearly everything, save our MidEast policy. This dichotomy set the basis for what we could and did do and, for me provided endless variety and fascination, mixed in with a fair amount of frustration.

To start off with part of the down side, our relations with the local press were not only bad, but worse than that, almost non-existent. Editors-in- chief of the three Arabic dailies would see me when I sought them out, as I did every few months, but all of us knew full well that in our conversations we were merely going through the motions. Of course, no placement, not that I'm big on that, but more important no dialogue and no interest in even seeing our materials, nor what I had to say, nor anything else American. These newspapers were wholly under the government's or Baath Party's thumb, the two being undistinguishable, differing in name only. They ran an unending litany of items pointing out our political ills and wrong doings and ignored nearly all else about the U.S. The editors were perhaps personally a bit more reasonable than what appeared in their papers, but in essence what I heard from them face-to-face wasn't different from what I read. They were probably glad when our get-togethers ended. I made these calls to keep a foot in the door, to let them know I was paying attention to them and, most of all, to show that I wasn't afraid of them and therefore was just staying away. I must add that for nearly all Syrians with whom we were in contact, the press had little credibility, being seen as purely the regime's mouthpiece, a regime I might add with little regard for anything other than its welfare.

Q: What other gaps were there in interrelationships?

UNDELAND: The military and police of course. I didn't even try to have my usual contact with the secret police, fearing it would raise suspicions, and probably it wouldn't have been acceptable to them anyway. Moreover, there were five mukhabarat organizations, each often in competition with and jealous of the others. The ruling Baath Party was officially closed to us, but with some ironic gaps we tried to exploit. This ban was not only for the structure itself, but also extended to professional associations and institutions, which in most places we deal with extensivellawyers, professors, teachers, engineers, doctors and the others, even sports, which were thoroughly under this political thumb. Except on a limited and cagy basis, the presidency was off bounds, including its press office. However, they very much wanted our information bulletins, so Dr. Barnea, one of the president's interpreters and a pretty good friend of USIS, would daily pass by the office to pick them up. He also was a professor in the English Department of Damascus University, the rationale he used to justify for coming to our place. Later, he found this daily chore got too burdensome and worked out an arrangement whereby we could deliver our stuff at the presidency back door, but it had to be given personally by our driver, and only him, to the designated doorman, and again, only him.

Despite contacts with professional groups being officially outlawed, we had excellent ties with a sizable number of individual members and sometimes informal, albeit it often indirect, access to the organizations as well. An awful lot depended on whom we knew and how much they trusted us. Even those persons had to have sufficient cover and/or confidence to deal with us, especially when what they did might be seen as involving the organization itself. Working against development of ties, except on a quiet, discreet basis, was the fact that members, officials and some others had to be careful not to leave themselves open to charges of consorting with the enemy, a handy tool in the hands of a rival or an opponent, a possibility so common in that system, indeed, suspicions that were fostered by it. Protecting one's backside loomed large.

I made only a few formal visits as such to these party affiliated organizations, except when we brought someone in or program they wanted and for which or whom, specific approval had been already gotten. The swimming and basketball coaches we brought in to work with the sports federations are cases in point. It was never simple, but somehow easier if we were armed with a visitor or activity coming from outside, rather than for us permanently on the scene, acting solely on our own. Yet, party members were among those I saw the most of, in their offices and homes, at our home or, to a lesser extent, at my office or our cultural center. If you liked weaving in and out of those kind of contradictions, Syria was the place to be. Once you were seen as understanding how the games were played on all sides and being sure footed, you and they could find ways to interact and to move forward with ideas and projects or programs. It made those you were dealing with more relaxed and confident.

I have noted several times my emphasis on developing and strengthening personal contacts, and in none of my assignments have they played a greater role than in Syria. In addition to getting to know a sizable slice of Syrian society at the levels where we wanted to deal with thein an oversimplified term, the educatel made it my business also to try to understanding public opinion at more popular levels. Many different opportunities arose for doing this, but one of them came through my having taking up Islamic coin collecting and spending much time in shops in the souk dealing in them, where I sat back and listened to what the shopkeepers, clients and passers-by had to say to each other. It provided an immense window on their lives and those of their families, friends and associates, as they talked about their activities, complaints, fears, aspirations and, most tellingly their almost always strained relations with officialdom. That I, obviously a foreigner, was listening to them did not seem to deter them one iota from speaking out. My Arabic by then had gotten to where it could handle this challenge. What came across more than anything else was the desire to live and let live, to the maximum extent without interference from officials and politicians. I was fascinated by the small things, the everyday details, that loomed so large in determining their views and attitudes. They almost never brought up international concerns or politics, though if someone had, I feel pretty sure their thinking would have run parallel to that of other Arabs. It wasn't to them the world that mattered, at last that mattered most.

Q: And what problems, other than those you've already brought up did you face?

UNDELAND: The phones were tapped, which was nothing new, for we always assumed they also were in other countries, but in Syria it was so obvious and flagrant. Once I picked up the receiver at home to make a call out only to hear somebody on the line, ordering chickens, so I testily asked him what the hell was going on on my private phone line. My "listener" politely asked me to be patient; he would be off the phone in a minute and I could then make my call. When I did I could hear the tape machine whirring. They didn't make the slightest attempt to hide what they were doing.

In inviting guests to our home, and in Damascus entertaining was a significant part of our activities, anyone working for the government, and that meant professors, other teachers, archaeologists, many lawyers and doctors as well as what we usually think of as government officials, was supposed to have the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' approval in order to attend. During the early stages of my time there, this rule was enforced in a slack way with nearly every name I submitted approved, but during my last year the screws were tightened to the extent that having up to 80 percent of the intended invitees capriciously turned down became the norm. The way the system worked was that I would send the invitations to the ministry, which would stamp the ones it approved and return only those for us to deliver.

I complained both directly and indirectly, but to no avail, so I countered by altogether ceasing to send out written invitations. Instead, I did it entirely by phone, even for largish functions, thereby not giving them anything to reject or stamp. A few of the invitees were intimidated and stayed away, but the vast majority came and were amused by my tactic, one noting I had lit on a very Syrian solution. The Ministry obviously knew what I was doing, but didn't give me any trouble. It's a story that illustrates several things: rules, rules, rules. And the way they were and could be often ignored. Also, the ability to laugh and poke fun at officialdom in that police state. And lastly, the good hearted welcome given, once on a you-understand-us/we-understand-you basis.

Travel was surprisingly relaxed all over the country. I did a great deal of it, usually just jumping into the office van and by myself heading off, rarely using the office driver when going anywhere outside of Damascus. (But I did have him drive me around there, more than anything because it was so difficult to find parking places.) Traveling throughout the country, you would have to go through some police check pointsurprisingly, there weren't that manand I was almost always waved on through or when rarely stopped, merely showed my Syrian diplomatic ID card before going on my way with the friendly, ahlan wa sahlan (you are welcome) greeting. One exception I'll get to later on.

I was prepared to move about anywhere in the city, and for that matter elsewhere, without batting an eyelash and did so all the time. I've never been in an environment where I felt safer. The ever-present police and security types left me, and others they weren't specifically looking for, alone. Yet, it was never a really relaxed atmosphere, for they could be a capricious lot and you never could be sure you knew what might happen, but we got used to their presence and freely went about doing our thing, while being careful not to seem to be in any way challenging or engaged in activities that might be questioned. In general, the state security measures were pretty feebly enforced, so long as internal politics and perceived security threats were not in the picture. Yet, heavily armed police and security service types were to be seen everywhere.

Nonetheless, we did have a couple of worrisome near run-ins, which involved American Fulbright students, who were in Syria for an academic year to perfect their Arabic. One day, the station chief let me know that one of the secret police organizations was interested in a Fulbrighter, who had been foolishly asking probing political questions to Syrian students at the University of Damascus, where he lived in a dorm. I immediately moved to get him out of the country pronto, personally taking him to the airport the next day, only to learn once there that he hadn't bothered to renew his exit visa, so we had to have that taken care of before I could take him to the airport again on the following day. He got out safely, and I heard no more about it. The other was a homosexual from Yale, who was being far too open about it and was leaving himself open to being arrested, convicted and given a lengthy prison term. I cautioned him to lie low, which he did, and went to the dean of the Faculty of Arts, Nabih el Akel whom I saw often. He agreed to protect him until the end of the semester, so long as he controlled himself, which he did so far as I know and then quietly left the country. (Not at all concerned with security, but while on the subject of the American Fulbright students, I discovered that one of them was writing anti-American editorials for the little read, weekly English language paper. I wasted no time in telling him to cease immediately or I'd get his grant withdrawn. He promised to do so, and then maintained an offensive future article wasn't from his pen. I accepted his word, though I was never wholly convinced.) I didn't want to be any more invasive with or controlling of these students than was dictated by their being under our sponsorship in that day's Syria, for they were overall a good lot, presented a worthwhile view of American youth to Syrians, and some of them were making immense progress in mastering Arabic, which after all is what they were there for.

I knew that most, I suspected all, of our Syrian staffers were called in by whichever of the mukhabarat organizations was responsible for keeping tabs on USIS to report on our activities, travels and contacts. Indeed, a couple of these FSNs defied strict orders given them and always came directly to me afterwards to tell me what they were asked and what responses they had given. This questioning may have been a good thing, for what we were doing had nothing of a nefarious of subversive nature about it, unless you consider our openness and individual freedom in that light, though we undoubtedly were suspected of being up to unacceptable shenanigans.

But I do not want to dwell too much on security and negatives and absurdities, though they were legion and will probably crop up again as I talk on, but rather turn to the assignment, which was a rewarding one for me and the post and, I am convinced in the long run, for U.S. interests. Our ways were careful and our means modest, but we were convinced we were helping pave the way for a more open, more thoughtful, more efficient, and hopefully more friendly Syrian state, when and if its internal politics sufficiently changed to make this possible. Ours was of necessity a long range view, and I credit NEA and other parts of USIA for being willing to look a long distance down the road and not judge and commit resources based only on and for immediate concerns and issues, the knee jerk "let's punish the bad guys" syndrome.

I have already alluded to one very positive thing we had going for us in that land of paradoxes, namely that nearly every Syrian family seemed to have had a favorable or positive personal relationship with the United States in one way or another. They had relatives who studied in our universities or who had immigrated and reported back on their lives in the land of milk and honey. These immigrants, taken all in all, had done and were doing extremely well. Syrian students had usually excelled in American universities and others with stateside experiences spoke of their liking what they had done and observed. There was thus a positive, ongoing flow of information about the U.S. flowing throughout Syria. That we were being continually pilloried in the media and government pronouncements only served to put us in a more favorable light in the minds of many.

Turning to our activities, IV's frankly did more for USIS's reputation than any other tool in our arsenal, with Fulbright and other exchanges coming in second. We also got a lot from the library at the center, highlighted by always crowded its feature film festivals its director put on several times a year, from the annual English teaching seminars conducted jointly with the British Council and from our support for American involvement in archaeology and antiquities. Beyond specifics, we were seen as the good guys by many, having a status beyond what our activities probably justified.

Our exchange programs were as good as I have managed anywhere. Syria had earned an enviable reputation in USIA for the consistently high quality of the IV grantees we selected, and, by my lights, deservedly so. The post's allotment was some 17 grants per year, but we used these up as quickly on as possible and like a pest kept dunning Washington for more. It was a tactic that worked well, for our final number of grants was at least double the original allocation in each of the four years I was there. No other activity allowed us to spread our net further and wider, for it was the way we not only got to important people who were new to us, but came to know them and their organizations and functions in considerable depth. We kept hearing positive things about their American experiences, which they were relating in their professional and personal circles.

It is the only country I have been in where the returned IV grantees themselves have played a key role in recommending others for these three to four week visits. In a nation where favoritism and nepotism were rife, it was remarkable that we did not receive single bad or unsuitable recommendation from an earlier grantee. Similarly, we went to persons we knew well in institutions, the universities, the Damascus and Aleppo city governments, even the Ministry of Defense for suggestions on candidates, and came up with a number of splendid choices, with whom we had has no previous contact. In short, the IV program had gained tremendous prestige across a considerable spectrum of Syrian society.

Before going on any further about the IVs, I must mention Evelyn Barnes, the extraordinary civil servant in charge of the program in Washington. She was a pillar of strength, who knew every aspect of it inside and out, who responded encouragingly to everything we suggested and who was the one really responsible for our getting the extra grants. I remember while once seeing her in her office in USIA headquarters and seeking grants for a group project we had devised. She opened the master book, said yes, and to my "but we have no money for it" came back with a steely, "I don't tell you about added IV slots without providing the funding." Then she smiled. Evelyn was one of those dedicated, tireless officials who made the difference.

Let me relate some specific cases, for they say a lot about us, about Syria and about how we operated. The vice president of the University of Damascus, Assad Lutfi, who held a PhD from Wisconsin, asked me if we might have an available grant. He had in mind American exposure for a Soviet PhD engineering professor, who was a main Baath Party leader on campus and therefore influential and powerful, could pay dividends for both the U.S. and the university. I was receptive, met this person and was duly impressed. He went off and came back a changed person, that is, one of the strongest defenders of American education and scholarship on the campus, as well as being outspokenly pro-American in a wide range of non political areas. Moreover, he opened up to us the two faculties of engineering, till then virtually fiefdoms of the Soviet educated teaching staff and their ways. The following year with his strong backing, we put Fulbright professors in one of them and organized group IV programs with other Soviet educated professors. We could have asked for no better follow on.

This professor, who later spent a year at Vanderbilt on a Fulbright, had his doctorate from the Moscow Institute of Bridges, Viaducts and Tunnels. His Vanderbilt experiences led him to say he could now think and reason as an engineer, where formerly he could only spout back what he had been fed and memorized. He was not shy about making this point to other Soviet engineering PhD's at Damascus U, arousing much curiosity and some misgivings over what they had missed out on. There is a roughly parallel story to be told about a three-person IV project for professors of the University of Aleppo's Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, similarly a bastion of Soviet formed educators. These people carried the message of American excellence in ways and to places we never could have reached on our own and with a credibility we could not match.

When the Damascus University section of the Baath Party tried to get us to include a couple of unimpressive and unqualified, but staunch party types in the English Department in another group project, I put the problem of their lack of quality before our engineering professor friend; it was the last I heard of those candidates. He insisted on introducing me to the party chief at the university, of course with a Soviet doctorate, whose office was an exact replica of the university president's, in the same building only located one floor down. My visit was in itself no big deal, but it further facilitated access to and programming in parts of the university that previously had been nearly off bounds for us. I later heard the Soviet embassy was infuriated by our encroachment on their "territory."

But how did the IV and other exchange programs work? We couldn't invite a specific person, according the rules set by the Syrian authorities, but only designate a category and provide a description, which we sent in a note verbale to the Foreign Ministry, which was officially charged with selecting the participants. What almost always happened was we found the person or persons we wanted, made sure of his/her/their interest and probable availability. Only then did we craft the note, which we designed to fit the candidate(s) we desired, as much as possible in ways to exclude consideration of all others. We could and did get absurdly specific, but Foreign Affairs never objected. Sometimes we would go to the institution where the prospective grantee worked to be sure of its approval; sometimes we would leave this step up to him, her or them. In any case, the desired candidate would get the required OKs up the line and then he and his boss or influential friend would put pressure on the MFA to approve, while keeping up informally the dialogue with us. Meanwhile, we unofficially also approached the Ministry and usually had its informal assurance that all was or would be in order, at which point we sent the grantee off. Its written approval did not once in, my memory, arrive until after the grantee had already left for the States and sometimes not before he had returned. Then, there was the one case where we received an official rejection, but since he, a professor, had already departed, we just ignored it and left it to him and the university to work it out later with the Ministry, which they easily did.

There were endless variations on the approval process. The dean of Faculty of Architecture of Damascus University, who was well connected in the party, told us not to bother with a note verbale, for he would "just give Khaddam (the foreign minister) a ring, and that would take care of it", which is what happened. When we nominated the librarian at the Ministry of Defense, she told us to forget about the MFA and instead send a letter signed by me, on USIS, but not embassy, stationery, personally to the minister, General Tlas, for "it was better not to involve the embassy, and Defense never concerns itself with Foreign Affairs."

I tried to breach the ban against our dealing with the party's organizations by proposing a three-person group project for the Teachers Syndicate, which I thought might provide a relatively innocuous test and lead to a break through, and for a while everything seemed to be moving ahead nicely. Then, road blocks appeared, one after the other, to the point that I was prepared to write off the idea, when a senior syndicate official came to me to say they had finally broken free the project, but there was such competition over who would be selected for the three places that they needed a good del of extra time to sort it out. Would it be possible to put it off for a year? I agreed, but with that additional time they still couldn't get their act together, and it finally fell through. Two of the three persons we had particularly wanted included visited me in my office, saying they were ready to go privately, using their vacation time and acting outside the syndicate framework. Would that be possible? Yes, it was fine with me and off they went. That is not the end of the story, for when once back, they provided me with access to individuals in this organization as we had never had before. By the way, the party later reasserted its ban, but the doors for us had already been opened quite wide, so long as we entered quietly and carefully covered our tracks.

I loved playing these games, testing the waters, probing the system, getting things to work that by the rules shouldn't have, or, when need be, shifting ground or just plain ignoring the rules. I must admit I was pleased when a Syrian doctor told me I had become nearly as Syrian as the Syrians themselves.

Q: Tell me more about the universities, how you dealt with them and what you thought of them. Were you in any way cut off from them?

UNDELAND: As I have indicated, we weren't cut off, though some parts were more welcoming than others and our dealings with all of them were often complex, with the line between points A and B rarely being a straight one. We usually had two or three Fulbright professors at Damascus University, one or two at Aleppo and for one year one at Lattakia. We had American Fulbright students at Damascus three of the four years I was there. We put on a few exhibits on campuses. We brought in speakers to participate in symposia and sponsored visiting lecturers. The cultural center library was a drawing card for students in the English Department, for English language books were in fairly short supply. I have gone into some detail on our IV grants for professors and administrators. I personally spent quite a bit of time there developing as close contacts as I could and usually found a ready welcome. But where in Alexandria and particularly Amman, I would just jump into the car, go the campuses and then drop in on professors and officials I knew or wanted to meet, I was careful in Syria to let them know in advance I was coming, so they would have the opportunity to say no, which almost never happened, or to get things lined up, so they would not be caught off guard and be left open to criticism.

The largely Western educated university leadership, the presidents, vice presidents, many deans and some senior professors were bravely fighting a steep uphill battle, trying to maintain standards and avoid becoming ineffectual and imitations of Soviet institutions. They were gradually losing ground in this fight, but we and they hoped they would be able to hang on and maintain significant influence and effectiveness until better times arrived, and things could be decisively turned around. The fundamental problem, which weighed most heavily, was the heavy hand of the party, abetted by the large number of teachers coming back with doctorates from the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries. Once on the university staffs, most of these returnees understandably defended their Soviet and Bloc credentials, whatever they may have thought of the education they had received. They numbered in the hundreds, with more returning yearly, compared to a mere handful coming back from the West, primarily the U.S., U.K. and, to a lesser degree, France, plus a few from West Germany. With our limited resources, and other constraints, we could effect only so much "conversion", as we had with the engineering professor.

Party control was injurious for a number of reasons. Members got the best student housing and could not be failed in any class, whatever their performance. This unwritten rule was applied everywhere. We heard it always as a criticism. Those with new PhDs, wherever they got them, had to become party members to be hired. Its dominance in every aspect of university life bred huge cynicism and fostered a lowering of standards, the latter caused in no small part by the annual increase in number of students admitted on orders from the Baath Party/government, and over the many objections from professors and administrators, including some of the Soviet trained ones. Capacity of facilities, size of teaching staff, funding and quality of education were factors that were just ignored, for decisions taken on virtually everything were overridingly based on political considerations. The sad result was that the once esteemed Syrian universities had lost much of their stature and standing and were ever sinking still lower.

USIS and the British Council played an important role, including a psychological one, for with our centers, our programs, our interest and our contacts, we contributed to the battle being waged by the Western trained educators much more than one would have expected by merely adding up the size and scope of our activities. A dean and an English Department professor, both with U.K. doctorates, told me we should never get discouraged, give up our support or back off, for they had no one to whom to turn except us. They both wondered if we realized how important we were to their struggles. The "we" here is both USIS and British Council, which many Syrians saw as virtually two peas from the same pod, and in many ways we were. I should add that our British counterpart operation was splendidly led, quite sizable and very active.

The Brit-American connection is worth a special mention. At Damascus University, the vice president for academic affairs had his PhD from Wisconsin, as I have noted, and had been in England a number of times. At Aleppo, the partially British educated president returned from an AID sponsored visit to the U.S. one of the wholly converted, even down to his loud sports jackets that he pointed out he had bought in California. A vice-president at Aleppo and a couple of deans, a later vice-president at Damascus had U.K. PhDs. They all had also been to the U.S. as IVs or on other programs. My point is that the American degree holders knew England quite well and vice versa. This double exposure was more than just reinforcing in a minor way, for it carried a joint mystique which served our mutual interests extremely well. If we had built-in advantages through the large number of Syrian-Americans, and the American missionary founded Aleppo Boys School, it was the Brits who got the French out of Syria at the end of World War II, and until the Syrians turned to the Soviets, played the major foreign role in the country. They trained the Syrian military, especially the air force. An amusing footnote was that in the early 1980's the Syrians had the largest number of operable Spitfires, a full squadron of 18, to be found anywhere in the world, which were eagerly being sought by both American and British film companies. They were also active in commerce and education. Our commonness of interest and aims was more evident there than in any other place I've been stationed, although it has been important in several other Arab countries, most notably Egypt and Tunisia. At a farewell dinner put on for Joan and myself by British Ambassador Ivor Lucas, I spoke to the mutually reinforcing aspects of Syrians having had both U.K. and U.S. experiences. The Syrian guests, all of whom had been to/studied in both of our countries, voiced whole-hearted agreement.

Q: I've heard it said sometimes that probably the most successful exchange program from the United States point of view has been citizens from other countries sent to the Soviet Union by Soviets, because things are so miserable there. You spoke about Egypt; did you find this was a factor in Syria? Were they committed to the Soviet way when they came back?

UNDELAND: It would be unrealistic to think that none returned who were not committed, though I personally never met a single one who had been won over, so I am convinced it is right to say that at least the vast majority were not. So many had experienced things they did not like. Perhaps at the top of the reasons was the deeply ingrained Soviet racism that found expression in rampant anti-Arab sentiments so common throughout much of Russian society. I heard over and over how they were looked down on by Soviet students, who wanted little to do with them, though of course there were exceptions. The Soviet authorities made sure that they passed every course and got their degrees, which in turn set them aside from Russian students and helped foster feelings of envy and ill will. On a number of occasions returned Syrians spoke very negatively, even harshly, of virtually every aspect of their experiences in the Soviet Union. There was considerable feeling, though just how widespread I cannot say, among these Syrians that they had come back not all that well educated, and it left a stigma on them.

One, who got an advanced degree in theater, had married a Russian, and, when back, became an important official in the Ministry of Culture. He regaled me with a litany of the problems he and his wife had faced with Soviet officialdom over visas, possessions and status. Several times his Russian wife joined in, heartily agreeing with his criticisms, but with a difference, for she was proud of her Russian background. I met others with similar tales of woe and being turned off.

I should point out the Soviets had a number of programs for sending Syrians off for studthe official exchanges through the Syrian Ministry of Higher Education, those personally invited by the Russian ambassador using funds he controlled, scholarships from trade unions and the various professional associations. Additionally, special arrangements were available for children of Baath Party members. It was next to impossible to find out how many Syrians were studying in universities or attending training courses in the Soviet Union. I had the task of writing an annual report on this subject and turned to friends in the Ministry of Higher Education for information, as no one in the embassy, or Americans elsewhere for that matter, had any information on this. These officials were, I believed, fully open with me, but had to admit that they themselves didn't know precisely. The best they could come up with, beyond some specific cases they knew of, was the rough estimate that the number was up in the thousands.

The Syrian Atomic Energy Commission provided a telling Syrian view on the standing of Soviet education. It wanted to deal only with the U.S. and kept coming to us to get places for graduate study in American universities, the Commission agreeing to bear all costs. At the same time they were turning down almost unlimited Soviet offers. I got to know fairly well some of the people that were involved with this; I never heard anywhere more disparaging remarks about Soviet education and training. I must add that as much we were courted, this was a big problem area for us, and we were not at all cooperative. They said they were up to nothing but agricultural and medical isotopes and that sort of things, but who knows? However, my point here is merely to speak to our prestige and standing in contrast with the nearly total lack of it the Russians had. For me there was a personal problem in continually saying no, for I had to do it to Assad Lutfi, whom I knew well when we was a dean and then vice president at the university before being named the director general of the Commission, but it did not sour our relationship, which has persisted until today. He certainly realized full well how touchy the nuclear field was for us. Never fool yourself into thinking that the Syrian, or I might add other Arab, hasn't seen pretty clearly through you, your words and your intentions and motives.A talent one had to hone in Syria was the ability to come up with 1001 tactful ways to say no to requests you kept receiving, more than anything else for American university admittances and scholarships and for visas. One incident sticks out in my memory. The minister of education, whom I had only met in passing, asked me to visit him in his office, which of course I did. There, he told me the consul has turned down his nephew for a visitor's visa and would I get this turned around. I left promising nothing but to look into it. When I did, I was told that he was almost certain the young man would not come back, but given the minister's interest would review it again. He reluctantly agreed to issue it, but only if he got a signed letter of guarantee. I went back to him and after much "how could they demand this of me?" he finally wrote his personal assurance on a sheet of plain paper, which the consul, with qualms unresolved, accepted. Of course, the young man did not return. It was not wholly without satisfaction, I visited the minister some months later and told him that both he and the consul had been made a liar and maybe me as well. It was a story I used more than once when asked to intercede similarly by others. But isn't it also another example of the standing, the appeal that the States had? I think so.

I have talked about the Soviets and education. Your question, however, is considerably broader in scope. I certainly got the idea that almost all civilian contacts with the Soviet Union left the Syrians unsatisfied and unimpressed. At least it was certainly true of the people in circles I frequented. I can't speak with the same assurance about the military, but many were brothers and cousins and other relatives of those I did know and through them I heard nothing, which would indicate anything remotely resembling "conversions" coming from the time of these military personnel spent in the Soviet Union or from their contacts with Soviet advisors in Syria.

Q: What was the feeling, we're talking about the 1979-1983 period, from the embassy and people you talked to and your own personal feelings? What was the Syrian-Soviet relationship?

UNDELAND: Some of these relationships were necessarily close, at least on the surface. Military equipment used by the Syrians was entirely Soviet and training practices were of Soviet design. I can only repeat that everything I heard, and it was all second hand, belied the idea of closer ties in this area than actual situations required.

Trade was relatively small, but not insignificant and was promoted by both sides. There was not a whole lot of economic aid, because it came mainly in the form of loans, and the Russians were demanding hard currency repayment. In fact, it was a bone of contention. The media did not go overboard on the relationship, but what they said about the Soviets was only positive, the so-called "fruits of the eternal friendship" and cooperation of the two socialist peoples being a tune that was played with some regularity, though not convincingly. High level visits took place all the time, and there were many other exchanges. I did not believe the Syrians were ever in the pockets of the Soviets, as some have accused them of being, and, moreover, were careful to see that this did not happen, whatever things on the surface seemed to be saying. It was a case of being willing to go along with them totally, so long as the issues at hand were of no real importance to fundamental Syrian interests. If they were, then Syria went its own way and did its own thing, agreeing with the Russians only if there was real accord or if it didn't matter one way or the other. Had the Soviets wanted to apply pressure through their military assistance programs and to a lesser extent the economic ties, would it have worked? I am pretty sure it would not have, at least not over time. The Soviets must have foreseen these likely pitfalls and recognized that the Syrians were not about to put themselves under the bear's paw, whatever they might put out for public consumption. This was and is my own view, though I think it fair to say that most other diplomats and outside observers on the scene agreed with it.

A brace of military examples make this point. The Syrians mobilized a couple of divisions and sent them to the Jordanian border without, as the embassy learned, telling the Soviets, which infuriated them and particularly their military advisors. That the Soviets didn't know from the outset and could be surprised speaks to the quality and depth of the military relationship. Likewise, I heard the Syrians kept the Soviets wholly in the dark over what they were doing in Lebanon. It seemed almost as though the Syrians were saying: we get along well enough in lots of ways, but remember you here in Syria are as much, if not more, dependent on us than we are on you and, anyway, this is our country, not yours.

While we were there, the Israelis attacked and destroyed the Syrian SAM missiles in the Baqaa Valley and wiped out the Syrian air force. This military disaster was taken by many Syrians I knew to prove that Soviets equipment, tactics and training were vastly inferior to those of the Israelis and Americans. There was the often heard refrain, "of course, they are only giving us the old models, not their best, but even their best isn't anywhere near as good as yours." The Soviets replaced most of this destroyed equipment rapidly, but by doing so did they regain much standing? With the military and top leadership, I can't say, but with the Syrians I was seeing, definitely not.

It wasn't only that the Soviets were generally unpopular and looked down on, but also they were targets, for one way the Muslim Brotherhood and perhaps other groups in opposition to the Assad government could attack it was to go after the Russians. A number of them, particularly military advisors, were assassinated. The total sticking in my mind is a confirmed 14 killed during my four years in Syria, along with rumors of still more. At a reception, a Syrian academic jovially asked me if I'd heard the latestwo Soviets military officers had just been gunned down in Hama. He was happy about this and thought I would also be. When I tried to reply in kind, and admittedly not in very good taste, that it was important to make sure no mistake was made and those singled out to be bumped off were Russians and not Americans, he came back, "don't worry, we would never mistake a Soviet for an American."

Of the four major bombings that occurred in Damascus during my tenure there, all supposedly committed by the Muslim Brotherhood, one caused casualties and did major damage to the building housing the Soviet military assistance group and their dependents. Many Syrians treated this as a kind of a joke, at least had no regrets. They just didn't like the Russians or cared what happened to them. When you identified yourself as an American in a shop or taxi, you would often hear what bad people the Russians were, how rude and boorish they were, how they had no real interest in Syria or in Arabs. Some of this was undoubtedly said for our benefit, but it happened so often there had to be more behind it than merely trying to please us.

I don't want to push this line too far, for we were seeing only the Syrians who were agreeable to be seeing us, and this would almost automatically exclude any who were won over by the other side. I must add the Soviets did a few things very well. Their cultural center was an active, first class operation, run by a dynamic and well liked person, who was a fluent Arabic speaker. It was a jumping place every day, fully competitive with, maybe better than, ours and the Brits'.

A weird story concerning the Russians. I got a call from the cultural counselor at the Chinese embassy who invited me to a film showing at their large embassy just up the street from ours and asked if I would bring some of my colleagues? I checked more deeply into this unusual invite and found it was to see a film of the ice hockey game at the Mount Pleasant, New York Olympics, where the underdog American team had improbably beaten the heavily favored Russians. Furthermore, he added that the Chinese ambassador and almost everyone on his staff would be there. We arrived with a similarly ranking American delegation to be feted and toasted with glasses raised to eternal American-Chinese friendship and all that stuff. This event so infuriated the Soviets that they lodged an official complaint with the Syrian authorities, but it of course went no where. The Chinese further rubbed it in by putting on other invitational showings of the film to the considerable satisfaction, I might add, of many Syrians. They played up their American ties by hosting several ten plus course dinners, with alcohol that flowed so freely Ambassador Seelye ordered we all be driven there and home in official cars.

Q: I would have felt that this was a particularly bad time to be in Syria because of Camp David and the peace between Israel and Egypt. I recall the saying that there can be no war without Egypt and, as you have indicated, no peace without Syria. With the Egyptians out, Syria at that point probably had the most effective and largest Arab army, yet must have known that war was not a meaningful option. It must have just about hit home to them just about when you arrived.

UNDELAND: Fair enough, but it was a complex affair. Assad talked about reaching military parity with Israel, but did he really think that was possible? My guess is he didn't, but who knows for sure? How much faith did he have in his military beyond its ability to control the situation inside Syria and in Lebanon, particularly after destruction of his missiles in Lebanon and the elimination of his air force?

There was the supposedly planned coup by mostly air force officers, which was uncovered and reportedly led to the summary execution of some 50 of them. I heard more than a few times references to the fact that in the military loyalty was more important than competence. How good was the army and how effectively could it be against a modern opponent were questions Syrians themselves would raise privately and then almost always offer pretty negative assessments. The sizable number of broken down military vehicles left on the side of roads all over the country seemed to be saying something. Our oldest son gleefully counted them when we on family outings, and there were always enough to keep up his interest.

Syrians I knew were convinced that another war with Israel would result in a catastrophic defeat, and therefore must be avoided at all costs, whatever one thought of the enemy. They felt this was also Assad's view and however much they would criticize him and the regime, only privately of course, he consistently got high marks from nearly everyone for his conservatism or realism on this matter. The total lack of incidents on the Golan Heights and Syria's scrupulous adherence to the U.N. monitored cease-fire were widely welcomed. I never heard anyone suggest that that accord be scrapped.

There was a Soviet factor in the equation, for Syrians were convinced that whatever the Israelis might do, the Soviet response would be lots of words and maybe a few shipments of arms, probably old ones, but nothing like the real support that would be needed. "It wouldn't be like the way you always back up the Israelis", a Syrian businessman told me.

While Syrians saw no choice but to accept the reality of Israel as part of the Middle East, every one I knew deeply mistrusted them. None believed Israel wanted a true peace on a mutually acceptable basis, but instead was intent on two things: (1) territorial expansion, that is keeping the Golan, but also the West Bank and Gaza, and (2) continually humiliating the Arabs, so they would look on themselves as perpetual losers. No war and co-existence, yes, but a real peace? Well, maybe, but only after a long time, a very long time. This was not a purely Syrian view, for I have consistently encountered much the same throughout the Arab world.

Q: There are a number of major things that happened while you were there. You were talking about the Muslim Brotherhood. Did that have any effect on what you were doing? How did you perceive it?

UNDELAND: It didn't effect us in USIS directly, but the challenge to the regime from the Muslim Brotherhood, or whomever fomented the problems, was the foremost internal political issue. The authority of the government was challenged by a series of violent incidents, beginning with killing of a group of mostly Alawite cadets in an Aleppo military school very shortly before I arrived. Then, there came the four major bombings in Damascus and the killing of Russians, which I have already noted, but Hama provided the climax, both physically and psychologically. An armed Islamic group sought to take over the city by force of arms, some said tried to start a nation-wide uprising to overthrow the regime and end Alawi dominance. They hunted down and killed a number of officials and local Baath Party bigwigs. The response was massive and brutal, calculated to obliterate the insurgents and warn others of what retribution awaited them if they revolted. The uprising was labeled the work of the Muslim Brotherhood, which Jordan was accused of supporting, but whoever the insurgents really were, they mounted a serious, organized challenge, yet one that had no chance of succeeding. Depending on your sources, the number killed in Hama by government forces ranged between 20,000 and 30,000. This bloody retaking of the city was the work of the president's brother, Rifaat al Assad, and his special forces. A standard tactic was to level with artillery fire any building from which so much as a single shot came, taking no prisoners and killing all who were inside.

I drove north to Aleppit was a previously planned trionly a few days after the fighting ended, and on the way up was routed by security forces to the east of Hama on back roads, so I did not see anything of the city. However, on the way back three or four days later, all traffic was directed through its center on the main road. The destruction was staggering. The large blue domed mosque you had had to make a little loop around in the middle of the city had been totally leveled and the adjacent cemetery laid waste. Where there had been the buildings of the old city, you now had a clear view through to the Orontes River. A historic, big water wheel, one of the noria, was gone. I had been to Hama several times before and had trouble believing what had happened, how much I had known that was just no longer there.

The only time I felt personally threatened while in Syria came on this trip. A soldier with his rifle waved me down outside of the city as I headed north. I of course stopped, for one never knew whether it was a kind of a control or check point or just someone wanting a ride. It was the latter, and as we drove on over the back roads, we got to chatting, in Arabic of course. Then we did come to a check point, where I went into my usual routine of knowing only English, not thinking of my passenger, and after a few smiles and friendly words, I was waved on. My rifle toting companion was not amused and became menacing and accusatory, punctuating his words of displeasure by fingering his weapon. When he challenged me on why I had feigned not knowing any Arabic, the best I could come up with on that spur of the moment was that I was an American diplomat, English was my official language, which of course I would use in an official situation, such as being at the check point. Finding this as feeble as I did, he scowled, clammed up, while continuing to play with his gun, Fortunately, only a few miles further on, he asked to be let down, land with a sigh of relief I headed on alone. A lesson there about keeping your wits about you at all times.

Q: Did the United States play up Hama at all?

UNDELAND: No, but then, could we have done so? The embassy reported back to Washington what it gleaned, including what I heard and samy disobeying Ambassador Paganelli's order that no one from the mission was to go there was overlooked and never mentioned to me, for, without referring to my trip or naming me, it gave him the guts of his reporting cabland I think the Department spokesman fielded some questionbut the USG didn't publicly make a big deal out of it. Part of it was there was little hard information, beyond my after the fact observations, for the Syrian government at first wholly denied and then played down what had happened. Correspondents were not allowed in. Many details came from Phalange/Kataieb and other Lebanese sources, which were inherently unreliable and rightly suspect, for they had rarely been trustworthy in the past and, anyway, had anti-Syrian axes to grind. Stories were everywhere, but it was hard to track them down and separate truth from fiction. The tale of the indomitable British correspondent, Robert Fisk, is illuminating. Denied permission to go there, he instead traveled from Damascus north to Aleppo, where he hired a cab and returned south to Hama, arriving at the height of the shooting. His reports of what was happening, filed a few days later after he got out to Lebanon, were categorically denied by the Syrian authorities, and there wasn't reliable stuff from anybody else to back him up. Fisk didn't make the splash he would have had he been supported by other credible sources. On this one, the Syrians played their cards skillfully, whatever you may think of their game. Stout denial can be a powerful tool.

A somewhat analogous example came after the grenade assassination attempt against the president in Damascus and the purported ensuing killing of political prisoners at the prison at Tadmur, or Palmyra as we know it. Another case of nasty intimidation, with the killing again reportedly done by Rifaat and his goons. The Syrian grape vine learned of this retribution, but in bits and pieces that were mixed up with rumors and fabrications. These were passed on to us, but in the face of the blanket official denial, there wasn't any effective corroboration. Totally unreported inside Syria, it got very small play in the media in the West or anywhere else.

The only direct USIS connection with this strife was of a parochial nature and concerned a Fulbright professor teaching English at the University of Aleppo. On two occasions his teenage son was fired at or at least there was firing near him when he went outside their apartment near the campus. Shooting between security and presumably Brotherhood types had become by 1980 a disconcerting feature of the Aleppo landscape, but it had not previously occurred close in by the university. The second time it occurred was understandably too much for the family, for on that one, he had had to hit the ground as bullets whistled over his head. They called me to say they had to come out right away. I jumped into the office van with our senior FSN, Abu George, and drove up to Aleppo to extricate them, square things with the landlord, explain to the university's president why I was pulling him out, load them and their belongings in the van and return to Damascus. Everyone I saw in Aleppo was chagrined that this had happened, for their sense of hospitality and propriety had come under fire, as well as the professor's son. The president was somewhat mollified, when I told him we still planned to have another Fulbright professor there in the English Department the following year, provided the situation had by then calmed down. It did, and we did.

Q: How was the situation in Iran playing in Syria, that is, from the American point of view. What were reactions to the war between Iraq and Iran?

UNDELAND: Syrians officially, and to a much smaller extent popularly, lined up with the Iranians, partly out of approving of Iran's anti- Israeli stand, but mostly from dislike of the Iraqi version of the Baath Party. Privately, most Damascenes I knew had little use for either Iraqis or Iranians. The border was closed between Syria and Iraq throughout my tour, their relations ranging from bad to worse. In trying to woo Syria, Iran gave it a special deal on oil at well below international market prices. On the other hand, and obviously not openly stated, some Syrians had a problem in that Syria, an Arab nation, was supporting a non-Arab state in its war against an Arab country.

Iranian backed groups in Lebanon, mainly Hezbollah and perhaps others, were receiving Iranian arms through Syria and other kinds of help. This was the subject of some moment, but not a main conversation topic, at least not with me. People knew in general terms it was going on, but lacked specifics and, for the most part, also lacked interest. Whenever an Iranian official visited Syria, and its foreign minister, Valeyat, I think was his name, did so several times, the red carpet was rolled out and the media carried fulsome stories, but few, if any, Syrians paid much attention to any of this hoopla.

Q: We were very heavily focused on the fact that for 444 days we had hostages from the embassy in Iran held by the Iranian government. No matter what the policy considerations were, Americans felt you were either with us or against us on this particular issue. How did it play out in Syria, which officially had much more of a friendly relationship with Iran than most of the other Arab countries?

UNDELAND: I'm sure the hostage issue got some Syrian media coverage and came up in conversations, but it was not a matter of emphasis; in fact, I'm drawing a blank on trying to recall specific instances, with one exception. It is that Syrians could not conceive we could have so thoroughly botched the rescue mission. Interlocutors could not, would not, believe that American equipment had not worked properly and our planning and execution had fallen down so badly. It was not their image of things and ways American. I once found myself being told by several Damascenes that the Iranians must have gotten a secret laser weapon or some such from the Russians. Only that could explain to their understanding the American debacle.

Q: Why don't we talk about Lebanon. Israel went into Lebanon when, in 1981?

UNDELAND: At the time, this subject loomed large in Syrian thinking, was a major topic in the local media, and, for once, these two were nearly as one, convinced the United States had at least supported, and probably promoted or prompted the Israeli attack. Arguments to the contrary, and we made them at every opportunity, fell on deaf ears. A point used time and time again by our interlocutors to make this case was that the U.S. had obviously stood behind the attack, because it provided the arms the Israelis were using and probably the intelligence they were relying on. Reports from American and other Western correspondents coming out of Lebanese capital tended strongly to confirm these views. During the main attack on Beirut, every night, all night long, you'd hear the wailing of the ambulances' sirens, as they brought over the wounded to the Palestinian Hospital in Damascus and to other local hospitals that were mobilized to handle the overflow.

Syrians found our statements of trying to get the Israelis to halt the attack unconvincing, if not downright mendacious. The onslaught against Beirut was taken as crowning proof, not that they felt they really needed it, of Israel's fundamentally evil nature. Private criticism of the U.S. was somewhat more muted than that in the media, often running along the line of "can't you finally see how bad the Israelis really are? How can you support them so blindly?" I was struck at how often such sentiments came out more in sorrow than anger. While attacks on our policy were rife, we were not nearly as much under the gun as you might have expected. The center remained open for business throughout, with its activities going on pretty much as usual. I made my rounds, including visits to the souks and found people everywhere their as always amicable selves. Although Syrians felt strongly about what was happening, they tended to put that issue in its own compartment and not let it get in the way as they dealt with others things.

Not really a Syrian story, but nonetheless illuminating, is that of the USIS driver who was a Palestinian from a prominent Jerusalem family. He had refused to go to school, so that while his brothers who did became doctors and lawyers, he ended up a USIS chauffeur. One day his driving inexplicably became not just erratic, but downright dangerous. I asked him if he was sick, and he said no. After a near collision, I took over the wheel myself. Back at the office, he came to see me, tearfully apologizing. Then it all came out. He had two sons among the PLO fighters in Beirut and was so terrified they would be killed, he could think of nothing else. He then blurted out, "we Palestinians should hate the United States for all you've done, for your bombs and your bullets that are killing us. But we can't, because of all the Palestinians, the only lucky ones, the only ones that are really doing well, are the 100,000 you took into your country. These are the only happy Palestinians anywhere." About a year later, a Syrian lawyer, who obviously knew of our driver, told me nothing had impressed him more about the Americans than our keeping on our payroll a Palestinian with sons in the PLO. I told him the above story, which he punctuated with "yes, yes" comments. By the way, I wondered if security at the embassy knew this, but they must have, for they had his personnel records and, moreover, his oldest son was in charge of maintenance for the GSO shop.

Going back to the subject of Lebanon, the Syrians let us and everybody else know they were going to continue giving their support to the cause of Palestinian liberation and to the radical Palestinian groups they dominated or at least heavily influenced. They had always had problems with Yasser Arafat, but got along well with the Hawatmi, Jabril, Habbash and other leaders, who shared the characteristic of being more extreme and of accepting, or at least going along with, Syrian dictates. They all had offices, some their headquarters, in Damascus. However, Syrian security services watched their every step carefully, indeed the movements and doings of all Palestinians, which was deeply resented but reluctantly accepted, for nothing could be done about it.

To my amusement, I was thought to be in contact with at least one of these organizations. Quite regularly I visited the Syrian Writers Union offices, which was located in the same building as the PFLP or DPFLP, I forget which, and my visits did not pass unnoticed. Several Syrians rather slyly asked me about these contacts, not believing for a minute I was only concerned with authors and poets. By the way, it was one of our favorite programming venues. The poet Naomi Nye and the Library of Congress' George Atiyeh had lively sessions there, both with some of the most open and spirited discussions of any of our programming efforts.

Syrian attitudes, and here I'm not talking about official ones, saw the Palestinian cause very largely in moral terms, and their support for it had become an article of faith. I regularly heard much criticism of the Assad regime, its repressiveness, inefficiency, harmful policies, corruption, but I cannot think of one time I heard it criticized for its stand on Palestine and the Palestinians.

Q: At one point one of our battleships fired on Syrian positions in Lebanon near Beirut, didn't it?

UNDELAND: It wasn't, as I recall, specifically at Syrian army positions, but it could have been at those of Syrian backed Palestinian groups, some of which had Syrian so-called volunteers, but in any case, the battleship did open up with its 16 inch guns against targets in the Lebanese mountains, which rise just behind the coast. The story went that the firing was woefully inaccurate due to using outdated ammunition left over from World War II, with the wayward shells causing much unintended damage and many civilian casualties. Accuracy aside, it was an anathema to Syrians that the United States would use the huge guns of battleships against small positions in the mountains. It struck them as being totally out of proportion. As a spin off on this, a dean at Damascus University, put it emotionally to me this way: "How can you do it? How can you make it impossible for any Arab to be a friend of the United States? What do you think you are accomplishing?"

Q: It was the New Jersey, wasn't it. What about the incident of the American plane that was shot down?

UNDELAND: Now that you mention it, it was the New Jersey.

Details have by now largely slipped away from me, but two U.S. Navy planes were fired on over Lebanon, and one was shot down, with one of its two-man crew killed and the other captured by or, in any case, turned over to the Syrians. The embassy moved rapidly to try to get the live airman back and recover the body, but despite our strenuous effortI was not personally involved in thinothing happened until Jesse Jackson got into the act, came out to Damascus and succeeded where we had not.

Q: This is a black American pilot, and Jesse Jackson was a black political leader.

UNDELAND: Yes. The embassy didn't have much contact with Jackson when he was in Syria, as he made no bones about not wanting it. As I recall, he came by and conferred with the ambassador only once...

Q: Bob Paganelli's?

UNDELAND: Paganelli's, right, but otherwise he dealt alone with the Syrians, who used this incident to twit the U.S. Government and the Damascus embassy, while trying to appear forthcoming and humanitarian and showing no antagonism towards the American people. They pulled it off rather well. For them, Jackson was a useful vehicle, for by dealing with him, they found a way to bring the incident to an acceptable end, in which they looked good. If it had dragged on for a lot longer, I felt it could have proved embarrassing to them, and am not sure but that it may have already begun to be seen by them as a burden.

This separating out of the American people from their government was not an uncommon ploy, but at no time did it come up with me more bemusedly than during my farewell call in 1983 on Minister of Culture Madame Najjar, who I saw intermittently during my tour. Usually one very tough bird, she became uncharacteristically warm and effusive in going over a number of projects on which we had collaborated. She praised our center and cultural programs, our sending Syrians to the U.S. and bringing Americans to Syria. Then came the old line, "we don't have anything against the American people, for whom we feel only affection, but only against your government." I thanked her for the nice words on our cooperation and what we had done, but pointedly stated that our activities were programs of the American government, which I officially represented, and indeed I personally had the rank of a diplomat. Without losing a beat, she came right back, "oh, we don't look on you and what you're doing in that way at all."

I might just add that it is a line we have been known to take ourselves with governments we don't like. It seems to be always them and not the citizens of the place, and how often we draw that distinction. Put another way, it's a game we all play.

Returning to Madam Najjar, she asked me in for information on American medical schools, for her son had just graduated from a medicine faculty in France and was insisting on doing his internship in the States. Why the U.S., she had queried him; is it better than anywhere else? He had come back with a resounding yes. Why was that, she wanted to know? She later told me he had been accepted and was getting on well in a hospital, if I remember right in Boston. So, here was a died in the wool Baathist, with an America loving son. If that were not enough, her brother was an active Muslim Brother, who had been assassinated in Switzerland, everyone believed by the regime. One just got used to these kinds of contradictions or anomalies or whatever they were in Assad's Syria.

Q: Here you were at stirring times in Damascus as far as what was happening in Lebanon. How about the internal scene?

UNDELAND: There were many tensions. I have mentioned Hama, the bomb in the city aimed at the Soviets, the Muslim Brotherhood, extricating the Fulbright professor from Aleppo and so forth. While I did not feel in any way ever threatened and freely went almost everywhere without thinking about it, the four major bombs that went off in Damascus were telling reminders that all was not well. Of the other three, one was detonated in a car passing in front of a police station, which killed some 50 policemen and bystanders. Some said this one was intended for elsewhere and went off accidentally while en route. Another blew up next to the customs office in the center of the city. Few were killed by this one, but there were casualties. The third went off at the air force headquarters building, which was across the street from the playground of the American School. About 50 were killed, some from the blast, more from security people stationed there firing at anyone who moved, and they were mainly other security people. I was chairman of the board of the School and rushed down to it, as soon as I heard the explosion, to find every window but one blown out, with glass shards and debris everywhere, but thank God it occurred a few days before the school year was scheduled to begin and no teachers or students were on the grounds. But what a mess. In inspecting the damage, we came across a human foot obviously blown on to the playground by the explosion, not a pretty sight.

Shortly thereafter Syrian security forces besieged a house in Damascus, killing those inside in the ensuing fire fight. They were said by the authorities to be the Muslim Brothers responsible for the bombings. This official view was generally accepted. Whatever the truth, that was the end of the bombings. People I knew, who were critical of so much, thought the government acted properly to clamp down hard on the extremists, to eliminate them. It was given credit and often praised for bringing this wave of terror to an end.

Q: What was the feeling in the embassy about American policy at the time? I'm not talking about the official line, but obviously you all have your own ideas. What was the general feeling about that of the new Reagan Administration and the earlier Carter Administration?

UNDELAND: We have been over this ground several times, so I really have very little to add, but I'll take a stab at it. There was some feeling we could and should have been more active in pursuing a peace settlement and that for us to be effectively mediating or otherwise engaged, we would have to find more and firmer middle ground between the Arabs and Israelis and to be so seen and accepted by all the parties. As to differences between policies of Carter and Reagan administrations, there was continuity in effort, rather than any startling or dramatic departures. At least this was true once Haig left State, and we no longer had to deal with his hair brained idea of a Middle East accord based on an Israeli- Saudi anti-communist pact. As to our own, our private views and politics, they ran in several streams as always, but I cannot recall one case of when they got in the way of what we were officially trying to accomplish in the peace area, albeit without measurable success, beyond perhaps helping keep the lid on the pot.

Q: Well, now, Talcott Seelye was the ambassador during the first part of your tour, wasn't he? Didn't he depart giving the interview which attacked U.S. MidEast policy?

UNDELAND: Yes, he gave the interview to John Cooley and, wasn't it, Peter Jennings?, the day before he left, i.e. before he retired. In it he came down hard on American policy for not taking into account what he felt were the realities in the area, and most pointedly for two things, not dealing with the PLO and overly favoring the Israelis.

Q: Were you involved in that one at all?

UNDELAND: Not one bit. I only heard about it, when it was published and I then read it. Talcott himself made the arrangements with these correspondents. Understandably, he was criticized in Washington and elsewhere pretty heavily. I like and respect him, but had it been me, I wouldn't have done it, at least not until I was officially retired. He had wide understanding of the region and its dynamics, but was not the easiest boss I've had. The interview was not the only time he was into things impinging on the USIS realm, of which I was not made aware until after the fact. And I think he sometimes looked down on what we were doing, as being of lesser, maybe not very much, importance. Still, add that we got along well personally and professionally. He was a supporter when I asked him to be, and he included me in on things he did.

Perhaps at this point I can mention the DCM, David Newton, who went on to become our ambassador in Iraq and Yemen. In my book, he was everything a DCM should be, a conduit, an early warning system, a frank and sympathetic counselor, knowledgeable and perceptive, a quiet person but never to be belittled, a very decent human being. He had it all and was, on nearly a daily basis, important to me, who as head of an organization in the mission located outside the chancery. I've heard much the same about him from those who served under him in Baghdad.

Q: Going back to Lebanon, was there in the embassy a sense of outrage over the bombing and shelling of Beirut? And what were your reactions to the massacres in the Sabra and Shatila camps?

UNDELAND: Everybody whom I knew, in the embassy and outside, Arabs and Westerners, was appalled by the attack on Beirut. Remember, as I have said, the American government was opposing it, though some felt not decisively and forcefully enough to have any effect. What we had to say on where the U.S. stood was greeted with skepticism, more often downright disbelief. We had a big time credibility problem.

We kept getting first hand reports from journalists, who were coming over from Beirut in cabs sending out their reports and films from Damascus. By the way, Syria made its television studios and up-link facilities available to TV correspondents day and night and, extraordinarily, waived all censorship. Many of us had lived in Beirut, had studied Arabic there, knew it well, so that reports of this or that being destroyed had a particular poignancy. The reality of Palestinian casualties was accentuated, as I have said, by the nightly wailing of the ambulances' sirens, bringing the wounded to Damascus hospitals.

A question which kept coming up, although only after it was over, was whether Secretary Haig had slyly given the Israelis the green light for the attack or not...

Q: The so-called "wink de Sharon"...

UNDELAND: I had not heard that phrase, but it fits. It seemed to me at the time a murky area, and when I read Haig's denial, the murkiness was by no means dispelled.

The Syrian reaction was strangely muted, for they, on all levels, expected nothing but the worst from the Israelis, and felt that what happened in the Sabra and Shatila camps, offered just two more examples which proved they had been right all along. A professor took me to task for what he called my naï¿½vetï¿½ for not looking on it as normal behavior from the Israelis. We heard more of the line, "now that this has happened, how can you still continue to line up with them, when they condoned and supported the killings and showed what they really are?" These comments rarely came in anger, but rather almost quizzically, for they had no problem accepting something so outrageous from the Israelis, but they found it hard to associate it with the America and Americans they knew. I repeat once more, they didn't believe our statements of opposition, for they felt we could have prevented Israeli forces from just standing by and letting it happen, in their view abetting it, if we had really wanted to. Part of it was giving us credit for more influence than we had, but this is an attitude that I, in varying ways and circumstances, have often encountered in the Arab World.

Q: What was your impression of how Bob Paganelli operated the embassy and dealt with the situation.

UNDELAND: Paganelli did well enough when bluntness, even truculence, and bold, bald honesty were needed. He told the fever ridden Secretary Shultz to the latter's dismay and anger on a trip to Damascus that the Syrians had not accepted and would not accept the May 17 Israel-Lebanon agreement. Paganelli may not have been tactful, he almost never was, but he had it right. Shultz was infuriated.

Jimmy Carter came to Damascus when an ex-president and was insisting on giving Assad a lacquer and wood representation on the Dome of The Rock that the Jordanian Palace had resented to him. Paganelli saw that this was wholly inappropriate, would have been seen through and taken very much amiss. When Carter's Middle East aide, Ken Stein, refused to take this word to him, Paganelli barged in and did it himself. The gift was not made. He could and did talk turkey to the Foreign Ministry when situations so demanded, at such times reportedly making them squirm a bit, which was probably for the good.

(I was taken aback a tad by Stein's begging off. I had earlier programmed him as an Ampart and found him confident and outspoken, as well as being in firm command of his subject. That he didn't accept cautioning Carter as part of his duty came as a surprise.)

Much as I admired Paganelli for taking these stands, I, and others on his staff, found him abrasive, suspicious, unsubtle, difficult to work with and, frankly, lacking in real understanding of Syria specifically and the Arab World in general. He could be incredibly petty. I had a few run-ins with him, but overall feel we got along passably well, although I am pretty sure he never really trusted me. He didn't like anyone to speak up to him or say anything contrary to his own, regrettably often ill informed, ideas and perceptions. But I spoke out with him, as I have with every other ambassador, at least when I was PAO. At a staff meeting, he once jumped up shouting at me, "you're wrong about that, Undeland, and I'll prove it" before racing out to get to get the supposed evidence, a piece of paper he couldn't find. He returned clam lipped but glowering. A result of his ways was that he got only a fraction of what he should have out of his staff.

Embassy morale hit rock bottom. At one point when I was at the chancery, Political Officer Cameron Hume shouted out, "I won't take any more shit from that son of a bitch" and went on cursing him, while secretaries scurried around nervously shutting doors. Things sank to such a low level that State sent in one of its psychiatrists. Paganelli was absolutely paranoid on security, real and imagined or presumed. During an officially orchestrated and carefully controlled demonstration against the embassy, he phoned me in the USIS quarters, which were located across the street, demanding so incoherently I barely could follow him that I must get the Foreign Ministry to intervene, because no one there would talk to him. It blew over with no damage done but the flag torn down, a window pane broken and the wrought iron lamp over the front door dented.

He waited until I departed for my next assignment and then immediately and without explanation undid a number of decisions taken by the school board under my leadership, as if he somehow was thus reasserting his position and dominance. Yes, a petty man.

Q: Dick Veliotes talks about the hard time he had in keeping Paganelli from being fired right there on the scene, because Shultz got so mad about being told the truth.

UNDELAND: In his book, Shultz writes of his problems with Paganelli, but omits giving him the credit he deserved for being correct. It was not one of the secretary's finer moments, but during that visit to Damascus, he went through a most taxing schedule, while down with the flu and running a high fever. As I have said, this showed Paganelli at his best, his abrasive and tactless best. Shultz finally agreed to keep him on, because he, Shultz, was at last convinced by the NEA leadership that he would not be able find anyone else with Arab World background who could lay it on more pointedly to the Syrians.

Q: What was your impression, and also the embassy's point of view, of Assad during this 1979-1983 period?

UNDELAND: We knew very little about him. We rarely saw him, nor did others with whom we talked. I have noted how limited our contacts were at the palace, except when a high ranking visitor came through, and then there was such a formal, official cast to the meetings that one rarely, if ever, got at the man and the way he thought and worked. He almost never met with foreign journalists and had next to no dealings with Syrian newsmen, for that matter. The Syrians we knew were as much in the dark about him as we and other foreign diplomats were. He obviously wanted it that way. One thing was certain; he carefully programmed himself.

Of course, we did know some things. Soft spoken, cautious, given to arguing over the smallest points, projecting himself as the most reasonable person in the leadership echelon, reclusive, shielding his personal life from public view, obviously intelligent, a tough negotiator and bargainethese were some of the characteristics that came through, but they were generalizations which left huge gaps about the real man. Questions on how his decisions were made, with whom he consulted, who were his confidants, basic questions on how Syria was run were carefully concealed. But it was abundantly clear that he personally was in total control, not permitting the slightest semblance of opposition to him or his views in any area. He was respected, albeit grudgingly, for he had brought stability and, among some, a feeling he had made Syria more important than it had ever been before on both the area and world stages.

At one point there was much speculation about his health, with stories of tumors and cancer, a weak heart and mysterious stomach disorders circulating in the community. Photos showed him thinner and set off a spate of theories or rumors on what malady he had and how serious it was. It later came out, whether true or not is another matter, he had decided to lose weight and had taken up jogging.

While the security mechanisms of the state were justifiably hated and feared, and there was much criticism of those around him, many Syrians looked quite benignly on Assad himself, offering excuses like, "he couldn't have known...he was too busy with other things...his health hasn't been good" and so forth. The most feared and disliked person in the country was his brother Rifaat, along with his private army. Part of the president's standing came from the fear that if he departed the scene, Rifaat would take over.

The Baath Party was important because of its institutional, organizational and stabilizing role in the country, but it was never anything more that a reflection of the president and was wholly subservient to him. In some ways, Assad was a leader much out of the Stalin mold, a leader whom he reportedly admired, and the institutions he created and directed around him had similarities with Soviet counterparts, though I don't want to seem to be setting myself up as knowing all that much about Stalin and the Soviet Union.

The Assad control was so complete that on official levels, there was no wandering off the reservation, privately expressing any contrary or questioning opinions. When Malcolm Kerr came as an Ampara well known and sympathetic Middle East hand, who later as AUB president was tragically assassinatewe used his presence to try to get serious exchanges of ideas with ministers and senior Baath Party types, but he was totally frustrated. He said he'd never been in an Arab society, where he felt so put off, where all meaningful thought and exchanges were frozen out, even on one-on-one, private bases. It was a worthwhile effort he made, but the results came as no great surprise to me off, though I had hoped with his well known credentials, he could at least somewhat break through. No, it was just like my sessions with editors in chiefs of the daily newspapers.

Yes, it was a police state, where there was no place for opposition to raise its head, but there were some cracks, so that it was not monolithic. One was that travel inside the country and abroad was relatively easy and unrestricted. A few could not get passports, but most could. Another feature was more openness in expressing opinions than one might have expected, but only, and I repeat only, in private situations. Syrians had to be careful they spoke out only to those they knew and trusted and were not where they might be overheard by the myriad of informers. The one person not bound by these strictures was the country's leading comedian, something Doraid, who poked fun at everyone and everything, at times having his wit and irony skate surprisingly close to the corridors of power. In plays and on television, he had an immense following.

Q.: Any final comments?

UNDELAND: Nowhere have I had a more stimulating times than in Syria, and I like to think that the relationships we developed with Syrians during those four years could in the long run pay off, much as happened in Egypt. Of course, nothing determining can happen until the system decides to open up, trust its people, provide ways for participation in deciding and running things. I did not kid myself in thinking that this evolvement is bound to happen. It may not. Secondly, I believe that what we stood for, the example we set, the values we espoused and demonstrated had and continue to have importance, for they were seen by lots of Syrians as keeping a light burning, as providing something they could aspire to, thought not then latch onto. In this regard, I have to praise USIA for its taking a long view and not being diverted by specific incidents or events the U.S. government didn't like. This showed a maturity and sense of vision, which I applauded then and do so now.

Just before departing the country, I made a tour around the country to say goodbye to officials, academics and others I had come to know, as always driving myself. I went to Homs, Hama, Lattakia, Aleppo, Deir ez- Zour, Basra, Tadmur. It was hard to equate the warm reception I received at every turn with a government that was at such loggerheads with ours. In Deir ez-Zour, the director of antiquities first took me in to see the Governor, whom I'd never met and then insisted I stay with him and his family at his house. When I asked whether this mightn't get him into difficulties with the authorities to put up an American diplomat, he said he was the authorities out there. I stayed with him. The same thing happened earlier in Aleppo, when an official took me to his village, where I spent the night in his family's home. Yes, I knew these people pretty well and had made the effort, but my point here is that the United States and Americans had a lot going for it/them in the Syria of those days. We were liked, but more important, respected.

And on a personal note, I got great satisfaction out of heading up the school board for nearly three years, as I had for another three years in Amman on my assignment there. As I have worked to build up post operations and, where needed facilities, I have brought that over to these schools, both of which saw major plant expansioblock of new classrooms in Damascus and new second floor in Ammagot American accreditation and had, I felt, heightened stranding in the community. While Syrian and Jordanian student enrolment was limited, these pupils needed the Ministry of Education's waivers to attend, there was considerable desire to be admitted. Some of my knottiest times came in having to give bad news to important families, when their children lacked acceptable credentials and in one case flunked out. Here was one more example of the standing an America institution had among more than a few in the country.

I departed Syria firmly believing that whatever ups and downs the future were to bring, our interests there were important enough that we should never write it off, that we should try to overcome difficulties and opposition, however challenging they might be and irreconcilable they might at any given time seem. I was convinced that wherever the Arab World were to go, Syria would be an integral part of it. The key to our relationship must be dialogue, continuing dialogue while seeking accommodation and cooperation wherever possible. I left an optimist in that, however long the road, better times in our bilateral relations were bound to come, assuming that neither side slammed the door.

Riyadh: Public Affairs Officer

Q: You went to Saudi Arabia in 1983. Could you talk about what you were doing and what the situation was at the time?

UNDELAND: Again PAO, I remained for only 21 months, instead of the projected 36, for I was pulled out early to go to Cairo. The Saudi assignment came about by my opening an informal dialogue with NEA and agency personnel, at least that was my intention, that is, to sound them out on what might be the possibilities in the area after completing the Damascus tour. I mentioned that Saudi Arabia seemed to be coming open at about that time and wanted to know whether it was true and also what else there might be. Back almost immediately came a cable, announcing I was assigned as PAO in Saudi Arabia.

Q: So much for discussion.

UNDELAND: Maybe there was some in Washington, but it had to have been very cursory and certainly nobody brought me into it. This unexpected assignment announcing put Paganelli's nose out of joint, and understandably so, but I explained to him that I had thought I was just starting an informal dialogue with Washington, not setting off precipitous action. He said he accepted this and calmed down.

Coinciding with my arrival, the country post was moved from Jeddah to Riyadthe Saudi government itself had mostly completed making the same transfer, doing it ministry by ministry. It was where the main newspapers were published, as well as the site of Saudi radio and TV. Two of the country's universities were there. The embassy made the switch itself following my arrival by only a few months. If anything, USIS should have done it earlier, although there was logic in having it coincide with the changeover of PAOs.

I had no inkling of it before I arrived, but I inherited a woefully dispirited post, with morale by far the worst I have seen anywhere, caused by a series of personal conflicts and rivalries, some preposterous egomania, lack of fairness and consideration, health problems and divided authority. When the family and I landed at the airport at around midnight, I was surprised to find most of the American and expatriate staff present, ostensibly to greet us, but in fact as some later admitted to see if they had another devil on their hands. The problem went back to one person, Riyadh Branch PAO Don Cofman, who assumed power and exercised it in an appallingly self serving and arbitrary way. He moved into a vacuum created when the country PAO, Howard Russell, had had to leave definitively for medical reasons several months earlier. The Howard I had known and admired in earlier times had become so ill he barely functioned during the last part of his time there.

It was abundantly clear that the people problems had to be tackled immediately and vigorously. I was pleasantly taken at how fast the difficulties diminished and then disappeared with a little give and take, concern for the other fellow and inclusion in decision making. If there was ever a place where the staff needed to get along well with each other, it was Saudi Arabia, for the kind of pressures found in posts elsewhere were greatly magnified by the Saudi environment, constraints and restrictions.

That country was a world apart in many ways, for its character, history and customs dictated so much what we could do and the way we could go about it. We had less flexibility, narrower margins in which to operate, less opportunity and ability to adapt, greater removal from our normal procedures than in any place else I have been. Begin with the country's isolation stretching over centuries, cast on it Wahabi Islam with its concepts of asceticism and denial, add in one of the world's most inhospitable climates, mix in unbelievable wealth and an extended royal family that had come to number more than 5,000 princes and you have a unique place, with clashes of cultures, of ages, of eras, of the traditional and the modern. The longer I was in Saudi Arabia, the more I came to respect what the Saudis had already accomplished and what they had currently underway. If there was ever a society that could have come unstuck and disintegrated, it was that one. At the same time, Saudi ways, all too often mixed with Saudi hypocrisy, vastly complicated what they, and we, wanted to achieve and the tools that could be used.

In some ways, it was a place as closed to us as Syria, for the central decision making processes were carefully held within a small inner circle of the royal family, which effectively kept its own counsel. I had gone from a country where we had lousy government relations and pretty solidly good ones elsewhere, to a place with good official ties, though wholly on their terms, but many complexities and difficulties that often created great distance, socially and culturally. And with much less personal openness. These generalizations are just that and therefore are to be treated with caution, for they can be and often are belied by specific examples seeming to show just the opposite. Put another way, I got to know a fair number of impressive Saudis.

Saudi mores, customs and restrictions shaped a unique USIS operation. For starters, we did not have one Saudi FSN on the staff, but rather a mixture of Arabs from other nations, primarily Sudanis, Syrians and Egyptians, and also an Afghani, a Pakistani, several Europeans and two locally hired Americans.

We could not do any programming which mixed men and women. For a time, it looked like we at last might find a chink in this wall at the prestigious Faisal Institute through the visit of Dr. Esin Atil of the Smithsonian, one of the world's foremost scholars in Islamic art, who was slated to give a lecture there. But at the last minute it was canceled, for, as was explained to me, it was deemed too radical or revolutionary a departure to have a woman lecturing to a male audience, regardless of the subject or her qualifications. That Atil herself is a Muslim made no difference. There were no cinemas, no exhibit or concert halls and no public cultural events or performances of any sort. We finally got nervous official approval to mount a totally unobjectionable photo exhibithe work of Ansel Adams if I remember correctlin the lobby of a leading hotel, but after the opening, which almost nobody attended, for we had not been permitted to put out any publicity, the Saudis ordered it closed, not because of anything in the exhibit itself, but because of the precedent they claimed it would set.

We had small libraries in Riyadh and Jeddah, but as I soon learned, both didn't have a single Saudi user and were visited by very few other Arabs. We did put on a couple of concerts, but in homes, with nothing more than word of mouth to publicize them. The audiences included no more than a handful of Saudis. Frankly, we got rather desperate for things to do.

Q: Was this official policy or what?

UNDELAND: Official Saudi policy, very definitely, and applied not just to us, but to everyone else as well. Public entertainment, except for horse and camel races, was taboo. The main source of, I guess amusement is the word, outside of homes was visiting the shopping malls and centers, which were glitzy and jammed. Saudi families, particularly those of Riyadh, often went to the desert for their version of camping, with big tents, refrigerators, catered feasts and God knows what all, but in almost every aspect except location a far cry from their Bedouin past. It was a society where many Saudis, particularly the Western-educated, and there were a lot of them, would spend several months outside the country every year, where they were away from the social and cultural constraints and could and did lead entirely different kinds of lives. It was an annual escape that a number of our Saudi friends told us they found absolutely essential to their peace of mind and sense of well being. There was also a kind of relief or escape inside the country, namely weekends on privately owned farms. During the cooler montha well kept secret is that Riyadh has one of the world's most splendid climates for about four months out of the yeathe owners' family and like-minded relatives and friends would gather at the farm, whose size was described not in acres or square whatever, but in pivots...

Q: These pivots refer to irrigation circles?

UNDELAND: Exactly. Watered by underground aquifers that were being rapidly depleted, they were circles of green in an otherwise barren landscape. You would speak of so-and-so's farm in terms of having two or three or however many pivots.

We got included in a group of highly Westernized Saudis, who had spent long periods in the States and Europe, and who when on their farms, cast aside the Saudi world. Jeans and shirts replaced the thobe, the ghutra was put aside, easy relations between men and women emerged, even in one case ball room dancing to popular music by teen age sons and daughters. Of course, they were always on the lookout for an approaching vehiclthe clouds of dust they raised made them easy to spoand for a quick change back into Saudi clothes and ways. The kids were bilingual in English, often speaking with heavy accents learned from their Bangladeshi or Filipina nannies and other English speaking servants from Asia. These weekends were, however, very tiring for us, for it meant partying most of the night, the Johnny Walker Black Label flowing without stop.

We did a fair amount of entertaining of Saudis in our home, usually just men, although there were a few who would come with their wives. When you invited somebody to your place, the main guest or guests often wanted to know who else would be there before accepting. This was doubly true when wives were included. Indeed, it went so far, that the almost normal process was to get the main guest to accept and ask him whom else he would like to have invited. We found this procedure sometimes useful, for by it we got to meet more Saudis and in this relaxed social context. When they had come to our place once, they were likely to do so again. But this does not diminish the fact that the social part of developing and maintaining contacts was never anything but tough sledding. There was also the question of whether an acceptance meant the invitee would in fact come or not. It was a phenomenon not only the foreigners faced. At a farewell dinner given for us by an official and his doctor wife, both Saudis who had spent long periods in England and Germany, the two other Saudi couples who had been invited and accepted didn't arrive, and finally the hostess blurted out, "you just can't trust us Saudis. You never know when we mean what we say and when we don't."

Q: You had said earlier some people had acquired Saudi citizenship, but basically foreigners and Saudis remained apart, and you had no born and bred Saudis working for USIS.

UNDELAND: On your first question, only a handful of others, all Arabs, had ever acquired Saudi citizenship, with the exception of St. John Philby and perhaps a very few other Englishmen back in the early days. There were two Saudis on the embassy's staff, one in the consulate, who had been born in Saudi Arabia of originally Syrian parents, who had somehow acquired Saudi nationality, and the second in the political section. Why didn't we employ Saudis? Two simple reasons. First of all, our salaries weren't high enough to attract them. Secondly, huge differences in the work ethic made none of them want to accept our work rules, so the didn't even consider applying. For our part, we frankly didn't want them to. This lack didn't cause resentment or limit our effectiveness, for they were so used to dealing with foreigners that not having them on our staff was seen as only normal.

Q: Talk a little about the Saudi-foreigner relationship, particularity in those areas of concern to you, to USIS. How did it work in the universities?

UNDELAND: The Saudis clearly ruled that roost, period. They called the shots, but left much of the functions, the detail work, the administering, to others, that is, to foreigners in their hire. We encountered this all the time in our relations with the universities and government administrations, but I sensed an ever so gradual change of thinking about this was emerging, that was mildly reflected in Saudi inputs becoming slightly larger and more important at all levels, not just at the top. More than a few of them saw that this transformation was over time absolutely essential, but everyone accepted it would only happen significantly over a very long haul, and some questioned whether it was really occurring at all. One thing was certain, ant that was that nothing was taking place that was resulting in raising academic standards at the universities or elsewhere in the schooling system.

Turning to the media, our relations were with both other Arabs and Saudis, and increasingly with the latter, who were the editors and ranking officials. All in all, there was no question on who was boss, but usually both chief and Indian elements got along relatively well together on the surface, although underneath, the foreigners harbored much resentment, matched in part by disdain from the Saudis.

At the stunningly modern Ibn Saud University, built by an American-French combine, its president, deans and all in the top echelon, plus abut 25 percent of the professors were Saudis. Their number on the teaching staff increased each year, but with the institution's annual growth, the percentage didn't change during my time there. Each year, a massive recruitment of outsiders was undertaken to fill vacant positions, looking first to Syrians, Lebanese, selected Egyptians, Jordanians and Palestinians, although the Saudi officials and security services were becoming more wary of Palestinians. For the still remaining vacancies, they turned to other Egyptians, for there never was a problem in finding enough of them with PhDs in any field, though their quality was at best uneven, and the Saudis were in the main pretty contemptuous of them. We provided a couple of Fulbright professors every year, wholly paid for by the Saudis, and when one was and Egyptian-American mathematician, the Saudi administrators were scornful, until they realized how immensely talented he was.

Standards in the universities, never very high, were in fact falling, for a number of reasons, but a key one was that no non-Saudi professor dared fail a Saudi student, as this could lead to his contract being terminated on the spot, his passport being returned to him and his being sent home pronto. It had happened enough times that its possibility was not to be taken as an idle threat. This was hardly a viable formula for promoting or insisting on high standards. Why did the foreign professors come to Saudi Arabia? The same reason as foreigners in all other fields, for money, pure and simple. A professor from Egypt made more than ten times what he would get at home. The pay gap for Syrians and Jordanians were less, but still very large.

Change was seen as necessarily lying ahead, for there was fairly widespread recognition that Saudi graduates had to be better able to function in an increasingly competitive country and world. The time had for the most part passed when there was an automatic guarantee of a good job for every graduate just because he was a Saudi. The universities had some able, serious professors among both Saudis and foreigners, who were trying to improve the learning process, but the obstacles were great and not easily susceptible to making the fundamental change of rules and attitudes needed for improvement, without a major infusion of resolve, toughness and insistence on standards from the higher levels. They talked some about them, but were not yet prepared to impose them. This situation in academia found parallels elsewhere in the society. A lot of rot had set in, for the incredible oil wealth acquired with little or no effort had profoundly impacted on Saudi ways and thinking and lay at the heart of many of their problems.

Q: The United States had been involved with Saudi Arabia intimately since World War II, so the basic relationship has existed for some time. But USIS, one of whose main jobs is selling the United States, is much involved in the arts, literature, etc., and yet for religious and political reasons, these activities were almost precluded. You must have felt you were operating with one hand tied behind your back. What did you do?

UNDELAND: In many ways we were severely limited, but we also had openings. We developed close relations with the media, and a fair amount of our stuff was used by newspapers, radio and television. Nothing they deemed political, but then that has been true everywhere I've been stationed in the Arab World. The media were basically friendly to the U.S., which was the way the authorities wanted it. Interestingly, this was much less true of the English and other foreign language publications, but the Ministry of Information didn't pay much attention to them, and they were therefore freer to go their own, often highly critical, way. Media and government officials and some others valued our information bulletins, which helped them keep up on American policy and thinking. We were welcomed at the ministries dealing with information and youth and sports, other government bodies, professional organizations and throughout the Saudi education structure.

At that time we did not have a woman officer, so our contacts were entirely with men. By the way, I repeatedly recommended, indeed requested, that our staff always include at least one woman officer, so we could work that side of the street. It didn't happen then, but became reality in later years, though I lay no claim to my campaign playing any role in bringing this about.

We had no exchange programs, except for a few Fulbright professors and one researcher from Harvard, who was working on Islamic law. His grant was completely paid for by fellow Harvard grad, Minister of Oil Yamani, and in fact the whole thing had been worked out by the two of them without any post involvement. The professors, as I have noted, were paid for entirely by the Saudi universities to which they were assigned. We tried early on after I arrived to help with the planning of portions of visits to the U.S. by some Saudis, under the Voluntary Visitor Program, but it proved to be only an embarrassment, for these Saudis invariably went their own way, ignoring the appointments and schedules that we had set up. I soon stopped offering this help, for I was only angering the planners in Washington and not helping the Post or the visitors.

One of the most active operations was our student counseling, which attracted Saudis in droves, who were seeking information on American colleges and universities and who ensuing needed help how to go about applying and other follow up. On this we worked closely with the Foreign Missions Office in the Ministry of Education, which became my main point of contact in that Ministry. I would have preferred that AMIDEAST take over the counseling and undertook something of a campaign to bring this about, but the Saudis never forgot or forgave AMIDEAST's former CIA connections, even though they had ended a couple of decades earlier. They would not even consider letting it function on their soil. I tried to explain that they could do the counseling as well and probably better than we could, and that they were operating and respected throughout the Arab World, but I made no dent whatsoever in this stone wall. I probed but never got a satisfactory answer as to why this categoric, indeed vehement, denial.

I myself and others on the staff spent much time on personal contacts, probably more than would have been the case, if we were running a lot of programs and activities. We had quite a few Saudi interlocutors at fairly high levels and I found them interested in kicking around ideas which ranged wide, but of course centered largely on areas of our expertise and common interests. To give an idea of who they were, I saw much of two deputy ministers, one in information and the other in communications, the head of the Civil Service Commission, the chairman of the national science organization whatever was its exact name, the director of the Manpower Institute, the prince doing public relations and security for Jubail/Yanbu development, the director general of the Department of Antiquities and of course university front offices, deans and professors, and editors and selected journalists. I developed an unusual tie with the minister of education, for both he and I shared a deep interest in the mamluks, those slave rulers of Egypt and Syria from 1250 to 1517, about whom he had written his doctoral thesis in England. He was ever after me to come by his office regularly, and our conversations, which ranged widely beyond our historical common interest, gave me particular insights into the difficulties he faced in trying to make Saudi education viable. He was blunt in these private sessions on its sad state of education in the kingdom, although you got no inkling of it in anything he said publicly.

It wasn't the first time I found a personal interest in something completely outside the job opening doors and leading to valued relationships. Such as, my talks with the prickly president of the university in Jeddah on the glories of and means of gathering desert truffles, which then went on to what was happening at the university and got us in USIS plugged in with that institution, as wet never had been before, He insisted I was never to come to that city without looking him up. Similarly and it the same place, my interest in the hajj center in Jeddah led to a similar plea for follow on visits there, though of course I could not get near Mecca or Medina. These contacts were fun, but their importance lay in the entree they gave us and the information we gleaned from them on matters that bore on our substantive interests. Mamluks and truffles and history are fine as introductions, so long as they are only a prelude to common matters of substance. You must combine being a good listener with having something to offer that your interlocutors deem important.

Getting to know these people well led to asking for a considerable body of special information, which our agency headquarters provideWashington responded particularly well to our requests, even the off beat oneor guidance on where they could go themselves to get what they wanted. We were quite active with many who had studied in the U.S., helping to strengthen or promote their American ties, particularly with institutions where they had studied. The visit of the president of the University of Pittsburgh comes to mind. Working closely with the General Electric representatives at their request, we jointly put together a program for him, which to no great surprise centered around Saudi graduates from Pitt. To the president's chagrin, Pitt hadn't ever compiled a list of Saudis who had studied there, nor did it have any other list from which they could be extracted. I knew fairly well of a couple of them and learned through them of a few others. They were the vital juice that made the visit come off well. As a postlude, only a couple of weeks elapsed before I received by urgent mail a complete listing of Saudis who had been at Pitt.

I cannot mention getting to know many significant Saudis without noting especially three members on our staff. The first is Samir Kouttab, a Palestine born FSO, our IO, who was wholly at ease and effective in both Arab and American contexts. He developed an extraordinary broad and deep set of contactit was these that Cofman particularly resenteand moreover saw that others at the post, starting perhaps with me, benefited mightily from them. The second was Fran Meade, officially the highly capable American secretary-admin assistant, but in fact the 20 year resident of Saudi Arabia, who knew so well the country, the way things worked and many of the people. The third was Martin Quinn, a JOT then in his 40s, who had given up a tenured path at Penn State to join USIA. He had taught English at al Azhar in Cairo and in Iran and who easily found his way around in Riyadh. He developed extraordinary relationships with educators at the religious university and through them others in the clerical world. It was my good fortune to be able to draw continually and mercilessly on their talents, contacts and knowledge.

Did the kind and size of the operation we had make sense in Saudi Arabia, with the main effort in Riyadh, supported by those in Dhahran and Jeddah? I didn't ask myself that question when there, but in looking back, I fear the answer probably is that we could have gotten along quite well with less. Something simpler and on a smaller scale would probably have done the job, provided there were enough officers sent there to keep up the contact work. Yet, my successor somehow justified adding another cultural affairs slot. What he could usefully have done beyond see more people puzzled me. Obviously, I was followed by a more accomplished bureaucrat. In one of my annual performance ratings by Ambassador Walter Cutler, he commented that he found the USIS program more viable than he had thought possible in that restrictive environment. Nice words, but in retrospect maybe he was right in his original premise.

I did earn a certain notoriety within USIA, for I closed down our lending libraries, though I beefed up the reference collections and added more books on university education and college catalogues. This, in the minds of at least some in NEA, notably Dick Arndt, placed me among the book burners or perhaps other types further down on the scale. It led to increasingly pointed exchanges, at one point exacerbated by my attempt to insert a note of levity, by asking whether any other PAOs in the NEA stable were currently into reading the novels of W. Dean Howells, as I was, and wondering how this could be true of a committed book burner. Attempts at wit or levity rarely go down well in government bureaucracy. This one certainly didn't. But I stuck to my guns. USIA grumbled but finally went along with me. My suggestion that the funds saved be used to purchase books for other USIS libraries in the Arab World similarly did not win me points of favor.

Q: Why weren't they using the books? Did they have their own, or weren't they readers or what?

UNDELAND: Reading for pleasure or other personal satisfaction, at least in a foreign language, was just not part of the Saudi scene, at least as I found it. I don't say this to be critical or judgmental, but only to state a reality. If an individual or institution needed books, say on computers or construction or even in the liberal arts, they didn't need us. They had virtually limitless funds and went out and bought them. They didn't even come to us to help them put together lists of appropriate books on a certain subject while I was there, although we offered to do so for or with them on several occasions. Simply stated, In the library or book field, we were drawing a blank.

Q: You say you would have welcomed a woman officer on the USIS staff. How would this have worked out?

UNDELAND: Very well, as was proven in spades in subsequent years, when at least one woman officer was almost always on the staff. In this country with separate universities, separate banks, separate facilities for everything outside the home, you either had a woman officer for programming with this half of the population or you had to ignore it, except occasionally when you could program a woman visitor or get a wife involved. Yet it was very important we have the ability to reach them. There was often greater receptiveness in female institutions than in those of their male counterparts. And through women, we could and did developed a wide range of impressive contacts not only with them, but with their husbands as well. It must be remembered that Saudi women very often have major influence on what goes on outside the purely family domains. In no other place I have been have stationed have families, and this means in large part the women, played more important roles that in Saidia, although almost always in unseen ways, hidden behind the high walls that almost fortress like surround their homes.

Q: You mentioned Dhahran. That is where Aramco is. What did your sub post do there? How did it relate to Aramco? How did you see that part of the Saudi scene?

UNDELAND: Aramco had been nationalized, and while the American presence and inputs were still immense, it was no longer a distinctive American island. This changeover to Saudi control and ways had been occurring as a slow process over time, but it had moved inexorably in that direction and was largely completed. Americans in the petroleum industry were very important and would long remain so, but by this time, everyone was pretty much marching to the Saudi tune. I met some of the Saudis working in the oil company, and it was clear from what I saw and what I heard about them that they were a dedicated, competent group, schooled thoroughly in American ways and imbued with our work ethic. Middle East politics apart, they were intensely pro- American. I have been referring here solely to the professional side. Socially and culturally they, at least on their home turf, pretty rigidly abided by Saudi mores, at least when in public or where they could be observed by others.

The Aramco compound housed Saudis as well as Americans and other Westerners. The personal freedoms, the isolated openness, enjoyed by these residents in the past had pretty much disappeared. No more mixed swimming in the pool. No more driving by women on the compound. No shorts or bare arms for women outside the house. It still was not subject to quite the full range of restrictions of Saudi society, but Americans there looked back longingly on the good old days. There was the incident, when an American wife said, "the hell with it", jumped in a car and drove to another place on the compound. The brouhaha and crack down which followed led to no one else repeating this show of independence. Far more serious was the case of the American oil worker, who was making pornographic films in his home, which starred ex-pat wives. He was discovered, arrested, convicted and jailed, then after a while expelled. This case generated a fair amount of noise, for his purported ill treatment while under arrest was taken up in the American press, and Congress also became involved in its usual public way.

I did get to know moderately well a number of Saudi professors at the Petroleum University, which had been started and run by Aramco, but by my time was thoroughly under Saudi management. It was far and away the best university in the country, demanding solid performance from its students and not afraid to fail those not measuring up. Insisting on high standards, it was turning out capable graduates not only for the oil industry, but other enterprises as well. Saudis rightfully took pride in its achievements. USIS in Dhahran worked closely with it. In fact, in addition to a certain amount of representational stuff and being a presence, its main fare consisted of dealings with that institution and providing student counseling. Despite these functions, that Post was the one part of our operation, whose viability I questioned at that time, but I did not take it further than passing on my musings and doubts to NEA. I got no meaningful reaction back and let it drop.

A bit off the subject, but the USIS officer in Dhahran was a devout Mormon, which in itself was risky, for anyone discovered by the authorities to be of that faith, regardless whether he attempted to proselytize or not, even among foreigners, was immediately kicked out of the country. I learned about this shortly after my arrival, made a hurried trip to Dhahran and worked it out with him that he keep his religion to himself and family as long as he remained on Saudi territory. As I told him, his beliefs and affiliation were strictly his own business, and on a personal plane I would never interfere, but there was the USIS side, which could affect us and our activities and which I could therefore not ignore. He clearly understool later learned there were over a dozen "silent" Mormon families in Dhahraplayed by the rules and, being a capable officer, did very well. Branching still further afield, for me one of the hardest things to come to terms with was the hypocrisy of many Saudis on religion, the repressive rules and the practices stemming from their version of it. I could have accepted quite readily the rigors and even fanaticism dictated by honest, sincere observance of Wahabi strictures, but not with the fact that virtually every rule and constraint was flouted with the connivance the highly placed, even members of the royal family. There was no sin or vice that could not be satisfied, and in fact was not on a large scale being satisfied. You had no problem in buying alcohol if you had the $150 for a bottle of whiskey. The importers were purportedly princes. The same was true with drugs, and of women and others there to provide sexual pleasures. The only sin was going public or getting caught. The supermarkets, modern stores a la Safeway and A&P, had cases of fruit juice stacked floor-to- ceiling along entire walls. A tenth, a hundredth, of the supply would have met all breakfast and other juice demands, unless you happened to be into home fermenting and distilling on an impressive scale. You could openly buy the equipment for a still and the starter kits to get it going.

Q: We used to call them the Aramco kits. I go back to the 1958-1960 tine in Dhahran, when that area had the highest consumption of orange juice in the world because it was turned into something called sadiki juice, which was 180 proof alcohol.

UNDELAND: Sadiki, by the way, means my friend.

It's very easy to come up with one derisive story after another about the Saudis, and there was much basis for them, the things which were wrong, absurd, dishonest and deserving all those negative words. But in doing so, we must not lose perspective, for there was also much that was right, admirable, promising. The Saudis deserve a whole lot of credit for what they've done with their country. Don't forget that the rulers and much of the population came out of a primitive, harsh desert environment, which demanded immense strength of character, body and personality just to live. Jeddah, with its merchant class and commercial traditions is another story, but they did not set the pace and indeed some of them rather reluctantly went along with it. It is not difficult to understand how this climate produced a rigid religious conservatism. Maybe, social and cultural extremism was inevitable. In any case, Abdel Aziz and his cohorts took over the country in the early part of the Twentieth Century with camels and flintlock rifles and made Wahabism, their belief since the 1700s, the law of the land. Theirs was at the outset a simple society. If you want an example, the person in charge of the royal treasury, that is to say the national treasury, carried it around in a couple of chests on camel back in the early days.

All of a sudden, technology and unbelievable amounts of money engulfed this society. It didn't disintegrate, but adapted, finding its path with increasing assurance, and it did so in an amazingly short period of time. I think anyone who looks at the country in historic terms would have to agree that the Saudis have handled change incredibly well and have built a state that is viable and, in many ways, forward looking. Self sufficiency in key areas may not ever be reachable, but the development of industry and even agriculture is impressive. The huge industrial developments at Yanbu and Jubail provide cases in point. They also have developed their social services and administrations to handle it. It wasn't just the largess of the king, his handing out money in a disorganized way, which it easily could have been. Given the newness of everything and the weight of their past, things have functioned pretty darned well. The Saudis deserve a lot more credit than they often get.

I do not want to move on without a few words on that key matter everywhere I have been, that is, of identity. It took on some particularly characteristics in Saudi Arabia. The Saudis came across at almost every turn as a proud people, and yet not quite sure of who they were, where they were heading, how and even why. While often disarmingly accommodating and open to ideas, other thinking, discussion, there was so often a flintiness either on or not far beneath the surface that reacted strongly to perceived insults or being looked down on or not being taken seriously. It all got back to their sense of identity that was in many cases, particularly in those we dealt the most with, that combined the modern with the traditional, the religious with the secular, the Arab with the Western, the progressive with the deeply conservative. To me, it was fascinating to see these elements play out and to interact with them.

I was much taken by the way that they run the hajj (the annual pilgrimage to Mecca). The well over a million pilgrims annually present huge logistics, management and security problems. The Saudis took pride in the way they handled its challenges. I would cite their toughness and effectiveness in keeping under control the Iranian pilgrims, who clearly were using their presence to create disturbances in furtherance of their political agenda. The Saudis cracked down hard, but I did not feel excessively, nor did the Saudi individuals with whom I talked. Contrast this with the earlier disturbances, when they had to bring in the French military to put down a major and highly embarrassing home grown uprising in the main mosque in Mecca.

We helped Saudi Arabia in so many ways. We built the roads. We ran the hospitals. The army was largely trained and equipped by us, as was the national guard, set up as a parallel organization to assure that the army did not get a monopoly on power. We were the central player in so much development in addition to Aramco and other oil related activities, but that is not to belittle Saudi inputs. Social welfare and Arabsat were two examples of Saudi initiatives, with which we in USIS got involved.

Perhaps I have ridden this hobby horse a tad long, but I feel we must not harp too much on the criticisms and negatives.

Q: Even in my time, 1958-1960, we used to talk about prince Faisal, saying that his greatest confidante was supposedly his mother. Very often, you....

UNDELAND: His wife, too.

Q: ...And his wife. These were the powers behind the throne. But you didn't have such women later on. Was it just happenstance?

UNDELAND: Hard for me to say, but these two women were talented and impressive from all I have heard. Maybe part of the reason lies in their having the advantages of the intelligence, leadership and charisma of Faisal himself. Virtually all Saudis looked on him as far and away the best and brightest of Abdel Aziz's sons and found his assassination a disaster for the country and its ruling family.

Q: How did Ambassador Walter Cutler operate while you were there?

UNDELAND: I was fond of him, respected his outlook and liked the way he ran the embassy. He had a talent for being to the point, even tough, but always in a quiet, unabrasive, laid back way. He came across as open and sympathetic, with a pleasant expression that never left his face. The Saudis reacted well to him, his candor and friendly ways. They found him easy to get along with, a good listener, understanding and never impetuous. We were well served by many of our top diplomats assigned there, for the ambassador before him was Dick Murphy, who left a couple of weeks after I arrived. I had not served with him elsewhere and although I got to know him only in passing, Saudis and Americans alike continued to speak well of him throughout my tour. During the interregnum between Murphy and Cutler, Rocky Suddarth was the charge, and he, pro that he is, did a commendable job by all that I could see. He also had a no nonsense streak, but was sympathetic, knowledgeable and relatively open. Saudis liked and respected him, as did I.

Q: USIA Director, Charles Wick, visited Saudi Arabia while you were there. Tell me about it.

UNDELAND: For that brief period, the Wick visit dominated the whole embassy's attention, as well as of course USIS's. Although he came as the head of USIA, the Saudi and embassy's real interest in him stemmed from his close personal ties with Reagan. Wick had the reputation of being demanding, short tempered, not open to new, let alone contrary, ideas and much taken with his own importance, expecting kowtowing and all sorts of fancy treatment and accommodations. We went all out to make sure all these bases were covered. I had not met him before and found his reputation far fiercer than his reality.

The high point was his long session with the king. Fahd started off with a monologue on the importance of water, which had Wick champing at the bit, but then he moved on to the evils of communism, and the two of them nodded and agreed on every point. When a slight pause in the conversation occurred, Wick jumped in and launched into his WorldNet sales pitch, which obviously befuddled the king, who gave a "what is this" gesture to his confidant, the minister of information, who reassuringly gestured back in reply with a be patient, at which point Fahd sat back, smiled and seemed to listen politely, without saying a word. Final pleasantries and the meeting was over. After we departed the room, I mentioned that the session had gone on for more than an hour. The elated Wick turned, grabbed me by the lapels and said, "one hour and 22 minutes", going on to say how gratified he was that the king had accepted to have Saudi participation in WorldNet interactive programming.

I told him then and there that my reading of what happened was just the opposite, for I was virtually certain the king's silence meant a turn-down, but I would, of course follow up to find out how the land really lay. I cautioned against taking smiles and no stated objection to be the same thing as saying yes, adding the way the rejection would undoubtedly be expressed in getting no answer at all to my queries, that is neither a yes nor a no, with not even a maybe-later or something of that sort. Wick bristled a bit, but said nothing. When I went over that ground again with him, as the two of us were riding in the back seat of the car going to the airport for his departure, he said without rancor or any indication of anger he would await my message, adding that he didn't understand this kind of behavior or know how to deal with it.

My follow up cable to Washington stated that the Saudi silence was exactly as I had foreseen. When I probed deeper with a well placed friend in the ministry, I was told, "you know what it means as well as I do." Neither Wick nor anyone else in he agency replied, and when I saw the director next, a year or so later, at a PAO conference in Cairo, he was all smiles, even when I brought up a somewhat analogous case involving the USIA research branch's attempt to survey Egyptian attitudes about the U.S. at a large Cairo trade fair. I later learned he had backed the study, the arranging of which had all been handled before I arrived. Once more, a no direct objection had been taken to mean yes. As soon as I learned about it I called on the fair's director, who said the last thing he or anyone else in authority wanted was the U.S. government asking the fair goers a lot of political questions, and the fact that it would be done by an Egyptian research company made no difference. Still, he hadn't wanted to come out directly with a no. At the conference, it wasn't just Wick and myself talking off in a corner, but occurred before the other area PAOs and the Washington officials that accompanied him. He listened calmly and made no comment. Shortly thereafter I was instructed by Washington to let the Egyptians know that the study was cancelled.

The Saudis put him up in a million dollar guest house, with gold bathroom fixtures and the works, albeit with a marble bathtub, rather pool, that leaked. I had a piano sent in, which he played for hours late at night, and for two of these "concerts" I was latched onto as the only audience. These show tunes weren't exactly my kind of music, but he's a talented pianist and loved immersing himself in songs going back to his Hollywood days. He kept asking me how I liked this or that one. Was it strange that I replied that I liked them all? Two thermoses, one for whisky, one for gin were regularly refilled and sent into the quarters occupied by the Wicks. The visit came off without a hitcit had no more than most fleeting reference to what USIS was doinand he left happy, having been royally feted at every turn and obviously having hugely enjoyed himself.

It wasn't that way with all visitors, however, but perhaps the most trying one was Rumsfeld...

Q: Donald Rumsfeld.

UNDELAND: Yes. He came to see the king, seeking active Saudi backing for an agreement between the Israelis and the Lebanese government to get things sorted out in Lebanon. Rumsfeld had insisted on meeting the king on a Friday, which apparently was the day that fit best into his schedule. The embassy foresaw this as a major problem, but of course checked it out and then informed him on that this day of the week it would be impossible. Nonetheless, he imperiously flew in Friday morning on a U.S. government plane and demanded the meeting that day. The palace's nose was put thoroughly out of joint, which was made predictably clear by having him cool his heels not only all day Friday but Saturday as well, not agreeing to his call on Fahd until well into Sunday. I was at the airport with the press and saw Rumsfeld fuming and exploding magnificently. He put on quite a splenetic show. We run silly risks when we do not pay attention to other countries' practices, customs and mores, all the more so, if sizable cultural and social gaps exist between us and them. By the way, Rumsfeld left empty handed.

Q: I imagine one of your major concerns was trying to get across in various ways our relationship with Israel. There must have been, for example, lots of problems from Israeli objections to our arms sales to the Saudis. I don't recall if the AWACS issue came up when you were there.

UNDELAND: You're right. This was a thorn in the side of our relationship with the Saudis, although it came up in conversations less often that you might have expected. Yet, resentment over our paying so much attention to the Israelis and their concerns was never more than a scratch beneath the surface. In the main, however, the Saudis decided to live with, without accepting, our position, although they were convinced it was wrong morally, wrong in a strategic sense and bad for American interests in the Middle East. It was not just the AWACS story that rankled, but also our cautioning the Saudis, at Israel's behest, against basing American provided fighter planes at military airfields in the northern part of the country and our restrictions on the type and quantities of advanced munitions, electronics and other equipment we would agree to sell them. They went along with us, swallowed hard and kept quiet to an amazing extent, for they had many fish to fry involving the U.S., projects of importance to them, and they therefore refused to let themselves get too wound up over our Israeli ties. They were afraid the Israelis might lash out militarily against them, if they did not pay attention to its fears and concerns, and felt were this were to happen, we would do nothing to stop it. I personally did not very often find myself caught up in discussing these matters, but they did of course come up. Rarely was there much heat; the phrase "agree to differ" describes where we usually ended up.

Q: We've been down that road many times.

UNDELAND: You are right. We have had to accept not only the unpopularity of our Mid-East policy, but the sense of even our closest Arab friends that it is wrong on all counts. It's like a rock in your shoe. While uncomfortable, you can still walk pretty well with it, and it doesn't stop you from reaching the places you really want to get to. Forget for a moment Israel and look only at our other ties with the Arabs, economic, social, cultural and political, and you have a pretty full basket of things that are good and working in our favor.

Q: Could we go back to the Saudi-foreigner relationship, which seemed to be one of continual tension. How would you describe it?

UNDELAND: While the fundamental government-to-government relationship ran quite smoothly, at least in the main, social and cultural tensions and restrictions were a constant thorn in the flesh. Limitations on women's dress and movement, on all activities that would bring men and women together, complaints over Saudi justice, restraints posed by compound living and the like created constant friction between the foreigners and the Saudis. It was made worse by the widespread contempt existing on both sides. The vast majority of the outsiders were there for one thing alone, to make as much money as fast as possible and get out of what most looked on as "that miserable place". Saudis were no fools and saw through this clearly. They responded with a, "we've got you foreigners here to do what we want you to do, but we know you have no real concern or regard for us. So we accept and get along with you, while remaining the boss, but we'll throw you out just as soon as we no longer need you." In sum, Saudi personal relations with Americans and other foreigners in both the abstract and particular were fundamentally antagonistic, though there were many exceptions.

One also saw individual friendships, which were excellent and enduring. Some truly tried to come to terms positively with the Saudis and, understanding they weren't on their own soil, did so quite well. The vast majority, however, did not even begin to make an effort. Negative sentiments were fueled by an ongoing spate of incidents and rumors, which, in the thinking of most foreigners, invariably cast the Saudis as the bad guys. There was all too little of the "it's their country whether we like it or not" kind of acceptance. But if there were arrests of foreigners on charges of alcohol, cheating, corruption, etc. that roused resentment, the fact that is they were all too often the ones at fault and guilty as charged. This, however, often made no difference. Many Saudis had been done in in business and other dealings or treated in a cavalier, off-hand manner, without respect. My point is, more than enough blame lies on both sides to go around. Sadly, very few tried to look at things through the other fellow's perspective or optic. It wouldn't have been easy to do so, but how even efforts in that direction could have improved the atmosphere.

Let me close these comments of my Saudi posting by saying I found it in a fair number of aspects a useful, though not particularly satisfying, part of my career. It was the Arab World assignment from which I took away the least personal gratification. We made quite a few friends with and were in some important circles reasonably well accepted, but the usual USIS program didn't amount to much, and it was not an easy place to work and live. While I did not feel USIS Americans and their families had extraordinary morale problems, and I did my best to see they were kept to a minimum, the life there was sufficiently lacking in appeal that not one of us who were then assigned there even remotely thought of seeking to extend. Speaking personally, that thought never crossed my mind.

Still, I left Riyadh believing that USIS had met quite well the challenges we faced, not that there were any all that demanding beyond the normal, and that we had made some progress in dealing with persons and institutions of interest to us. We had made it our business to spread our net quite wide in the community and, on the whole, thought that our efforts had worked, albeit in undramatic ways, to the U.S.'s benefit, in fact, to our mutual benefit. I did not see how we could have done a lot more than we did that would have been productive, thought I hasten to add it is always good to be proven wrong, and the way to do that is to bring in new blood and ideas.

Cairo: Public Affairs Officer

Q: You left Saudi Arabia in 1985 and went to Cairo, where you served until 1988.Could you talk about how that job came about?

UNDELAND: Early on in my Saudi stint I started looking ahead for another PAOship in the NEA area, a process which didn't require a very complicated search, for there were only two possibilities, leaving the subcontinent aside, that would have been for me a step ulsrael and Egypt. Egypt seemed by far the most logical and appealing, given my prior experiences there, my interests and, I felt, my knowledge of it and the Arab World in general. I thought I had done well enough in Damascus, Riyadh and elsewhere to deserve a crack at it. So I sounded out this possibility with NEA and with Ambassador Nick Veliotes in Cairo, whom I had known and liked from our time together in NEA at State in the late '70s. From both, I got encouraging but non-committal responses and then, out of the blue, came the cable saying I was being directly transferred to Cairo after finishing only 21 months of my supposed 36 month tour in Saudi Arabia. The vacancy occurred because the then Cairo PAO Ed Penny was suddenly pulled out to take on the number two job in NEA.

Q: My standard question. What was the situation in Egypt when you were there?

UNDELAND: In broad terms, it was a very positive one for us. Ties were close and friendly, having weathered the Nasser years, thrived during Sadat's tenure and continued to be excellent under Mubarak. They had, moreover, a solid underpinning going back to the early part of this century, indeed earlier. I don't mean to get off into too much history, much as I personally enjoy doing just that as is perhaps already all too apparent, but I might make mention there were the American travelers dating from the 1820s on, and then the Civil War officers, both from the South and North, who trained the Khedive's army beginning in the late 1860s. We even sold them a submarine from those days, that was in Alexandria although never uncrated when the British fleet bombarded that city in 1882, but enough on the distant past.

We had a huge economic aid program, Egypt's reward for signing the Camp David agreements and entering into peace with Israel, the "peace dividend" as it was called. An equally large military assistance program was helping modernize the Egyptian army, replacing the outmoded and deteriorating Soviet equipment and changing its military planning and tactics to be more like ours, at least more compatible with ours. We saw Egypt's well-being and the projection of Egyptian influence and power throughout the area as serving the peace process and our other MidEast objectives, which broadly speaking aimed at strengthening moderation, stability and access. And of course, oil.

We had working for us long-standing cultural relations reinforced by the large number of Egyptians, who had been educated in the United States or in other guises had spent considerable time in our country. The American presence in Egypthe American University at Cairo, the American Girls College, a host of medical and other educational activities conducted by missionarieare part of that older record, as is the American involvement in Egyptology, most notably, but by no means exclusively, Chicago House in Luxor which goes back to the late 1920s.

Q: What is the Chicago House?

UNDELAND: Part of the Chicago University's Oriental Institute, it was founded by that eminent Egyptologist, James Breasted. Since its inception, it has recorded and published in magnificent large folio books temple and inscriptions and pictorial carvings, mainly of Luxor Temple, a task made all the more urgent by the rapid deterioration of so much of the carved stone, to the point where the pictures and texts were fast becoming undecipherable. A main part of the problem came from the rise in the Nile valley water table, which brought up ground salt into the porous lime and sand stone. It still does. When infused with this salt, it takes an amazingly short time to flake away surfaces that have lasted in pristine condition for thousands of years. The problem gets back to damming the Nile and thereby no longer permitting the annual floods that scoured out the river bed and flushed the salt downstream and out to sea. From the time I first saw them in the 1950s and then again thirty years later, some nearly whole inscriptions and pictorial representations had been so eaten away you couldn't tell what you were looking at.

Q: Is this because of the Aswan High Dam?

UNDELAND: That's a biggest part of it. But also guilty on a lesser scale is the earlier Aswan dam constructed by the Brits in the first decade of the Twentieth Century and the increase of permanent irrigation. Some of it would therefore be happening High Dam or no, although the problem would be far less acute.

Q: You were running I assume a very large program. How did you operate in Egypt and what were you after?

UNDELAND: Two questions. Let's take the second one first. A main aim was to help promote Egypt as a force for moderation and reason, which was very much connected with efforts to expand and deepen the Arab-Israeli peace process goal. Stated baldly, Egypt was our vital and most influential ally in the Arab World. Its views and policies on many issues closely paralleled ours, though certainly not all. They in turn wanted a close and continuing tie with us, which they saw as essential to helping their influence and standing in the area. We wanted to make sure Egyptians understood as fully as possible our policies and actions and hopefully supported them, on both government and popular levels. In the broadest sense, we strove to help maintain and where possible intensify the already close relationships between the two countries on various levelgovernment-to-government, institution-to-institution, expert or specialist to counterpart. Put another way, we wanted to reinforce still further the current policies and bases of the positive interaction between our two countries.

Cairo was far and away our biggest operation in Arab lands, one which used virtually every tool in the USIA/USIS arsenal. We had the centers/libraries in Cairo and Alexandria, the whole range of exchange programwhere we'd had an initial allocation of some 17 IV grants in Syria, we had over 80 in Egypthe full panoply of press and other media operations, English teaching, book translations, publicizing AID activities, exhibits, cultural presentations and, during my last two years, Ambassador Frank Wisner, who could be viewed as virtually a post program in himself. In addition to USIS in the narrow sense, there was a large Fulbright office, plus that of AMIDEAST and the American Research Center, all of which received major USIA funding and with which we were deeply involved on the ground. And we were in close touch with the Ford Foundation and other such organizations, the Egyptian-American Chamber of Commerce, the Library of Congress' regional office and I'm sure I'm not recalling others. Although it did not appear in our country plan, dealing with and supporting the never ending stream of official and non-official visitors to Egypt probably took more of our time and resources than any other single activity. Another non-program reality was the sizable foreign correspondent community, which demanded a good deal of care and attention. In sum, we had a full plate.

We were eight substantive officers in Cairo, with an FSN staff numbering over 70, plus another officer and over 20 Egyptian employees in Alexandria. In every previous post I had run, there were at most one or two senior FSNs, who provided the cement, much of the understanding and analysis, and, of tremendous importance, the continuity. But in Cairo we had ten of them, forming by far the most impressive FSN staff I have encountered anywhere. I found myself necessarily more of a manager and less a doer than in my other PAOships, but I made sure I did not succumb totally to this bureaucratic role and insisted on personally immersing myself in some projects and programs. It was challenging, stimulating, good for the ego, satisfying, yes, and yet I must admit less fun than Damascus and Amman had been and Tunis would be.

That is more an answer of what we were than how we operated. In now looking back, I don't feel there was that much basic difference between the nature of many activities in Cairo and say in Damascus or Amman, but the scale was so different that it made the Egypt operation seem very distinct. In these other posts I had far more leeway to decide what the post and I did, where to put its concentration. In other words I had more control in determining the activities, while in Cairo the pace and extent of things forced on me and the operation left much less of that luxury.

I must single out two on the staff, who spectacularly facilitated my overall management of the post, the successive administrative assistants, Gerry Bernier and Joy Boss, who ran the financial, budgetary side of things, took on their shoulders administrative dealings and problems with the embassy, were an alarm system for things needed, upcoming and to be avoideand perhaps most of all relieved me of getting personally involved in much of this stuff, so I could concentrate of operational substance. My confidence in both was total.

In my other PAO assignments, I've been able to keep all of the essential parts of the operation in my head, but the size and scope of Cairo made that clearly impossible. Delegation was the only answer. I always felt I delegated quite easily, but I have had my price, and that is that I must be kept informed on things that are important, so that I am not caught out by surprises. With a couple of Americans on the staff, it was a price they obviously found too high, and with them I had to insist on being more personally involved. I know I've earned something of a reputation of all too often having my finger too much in the pie, but not by those who have accepted and abided by my fundamental rule of delegation. I have always liked to give staff members a relatively free hand, letting them make best use of their ideas and individual talents. In Cairo, I felt my managerial style worked as well as I had hoped it would, with, as I say, those two exceptions.

I have referred to our many top flight Egyptian employees. One thing any American officer has to do in coming to a new post is win the confidence of the senior FSNs. You always find among them a certain amount of built in institutional loyalty, but it is never sufficient, for there is also a completely understandable initial questioning or uneasiness concerning the new boss. If you really want them on your side and totally candid with you, you've got to earn their trust and respect. It doesn't come automatically, and in a large post with ten rather than one or two, it was both more important and more complex. Unfortunately, I have known and know all too many USIS officers, including some senior ones who have served in Cairo and elsewhere, who have not accepted this part of the job as a basic fact of life, or at least have not given it the weight it deserves. With me, given my strong pro-FSN feelings from the outset of my career, it was among my first orders of business after arriving at a post. In addition to being essential, it went far in making the job agreeable. To repeat, what I have gotten from FSNs has been absolutely central to the way I have operated. I could not think of starting a work day without finding out what they had on their minds as the first order of business.

When I arrived, I found the American secretary had developed such poisonous relations with our Egyptian staff that reform on her part was clearly impossible. She had to go, period. After failing to get her, on her own, to seek a transfer or to get personnel in Washington and the area office to send her elsewhere, I saw no solution but to eliminate her position, filling it, I might add, with a superb local hire, Jocelyn Baskey, the wife of the administrative officer. Washington reluctantly went along with me, after letting me know I was doing something unique in their experience.

Cairo was of far more interest to Washington than the other places I had been, which in part was reflected in our doing more reporting, including a great deal on what was appearing in the local media. USIA's and State's appetite for media reaction cables was insatiable, indeed more than I knew made sense, as the content was coming from government run radio and television stations and a pretty firmly controlled press, at least on all matters the Egyptian authorities considered significant. It was useful in telling us about the regime's policies, fears and priorities, but not that much about what was really going on and about public opinion. I have always believed in USIS reporting, as a key part of what we should do, but it always struck me as far more relevant when it was on events, the local scene and real public opinion, as well as what our operation was doing, rather than regurgitating what we knew didn't mean much.

Q: Now, let's go into some of these things. The Egyptian press is always quoted, particularly Al Ahram. Did you find that this press, despite the fact that Egypt technically was isolated in the Arab World, was in a leadership position, that is, that Arabs elsewhere read its papers and magazines And also, could you talk about your dealing with the press?

UNDELAND: The Egyptian press, despite the Arab League having official suspended Egypt's membership, was widely read inside and outside Egypt and often cited by the media in other Arab countries. As you indicate, Al Ahram had a special prestige because of its long history and also because of its willingness to stray occasionally a little bit further from the official line than the other papers. Its chief editor Salama Salama, loyalist that he was, wanted it to become still a little freer, At the same time, it was the government's preferred, though by no means exclusive, vehicle for indirectly getting out policy pronouncements, trial balloons and "unofficial" criticisms. The fact it had these two seemingly contradictory roles did not bother Egyptians, astute decipherers of the media that they were. They easily knew what was up, as did, I imagine, many, maybe most, Arabs elsewhere. The close relationship between all but the largely ignored opposition fringe of the Egyptian print media and the government was widely known and taken as a given.

From Egyptians I heard relatively little direct criticism of their press on this count, although there was widespread unwillingness to accept at face value much of what it said of a policy/political nature, unless it happened to fit in with the person's own already held views. It wasn't really as complicated or confusing as one might think, for editors and journalists knew how far they could go and didn't often seriously test these limits, though occasionally they pressed gently at the outer edges, a la Salama. During my time in Cairo, I felt there was perhaps an oh-so-slight increase in the its independence, but nothing that would bring it significantly closer to the independence you'd find in the United States, England and other Western countries, or in Israel. It should be noted that the tenor of the Egyptian press fit in quite well with Egyptian society, modern history and thinking. Looked at another way, government had been deeply into the lives of Egyptians since the time of the Pharaohs, so what it was now was not a particularly big deal. We found the information USIS put outexts, policy statements, White House and State briefings and occasionally those of Defense, some stuff from Congreswas generally appreciated by editors and newsmen, but was almost never the source for what was carried. The media got what was sufficient for their purposes through commercial services earlier than we could deliver it to them and, a significant point, they didn't want to have to be concerned about possible charges of promoting the policies or aims of another government. Our materials were sometimes used indirectly by people writing columns, editorials, features, special reports and the like, but not very often. There was one exception, the regular "Middle East Reporting in the American Media", that we included in our daily bulletins, which was quite often cited and even excerpted at length, of course without attribution to us. We clearly stated the usage prohibition it carried, but beyond that formality looked the other way, using the feeble justification that how could we have categorically proven it came from us?

During my tour, we were just beginning to get into online computer searches, and some feature writers used them to obtain information for articles on American universities and American circuses, to dredge up two cases I recall. We were gradually becoming more of a source for background and information, which I found healthy. I should add that we got into the agency's WorldNet during my tenure, which was another huge source of information, though with a handful of exceptions we didn't get around to putting it to use very effectively. It was new and we were literally overwhelmed by the quantity of this stuff dumped in our laps every day.

Q: You mentioned WorldNet here and in connection with Wick's visit to Saudi Arabia. What exactly is it?

UNDELAND: WorldNet was the brain child and commanding interest of Director Wick. It provided posts via satellite with a tremendous body of televised programming, supposedly to be used in support of our aims and programs. A new activity, it required us to establish a separate section to handle it, which demanded considerable technical and programming expertise from American officers and FSNs alike. It was, in short, the biggest innovation that had come from the agency in a long time. Although derided by some officers and having a few inherent flaws, Wick had come up with something important and was right to push it and consider its detractors just plain wrong. The materials were mainly taken from C-span, with other special programs in a number of fields, a huge body of television programming acquired at little or no cost. As I remember, we were getting nearly 18 hours a day which, as I've said, was vastly more than we could handle, let alone intelligently program use.

Wick's real interest, however, centered on a small portion of the overall transmissions, the interactives, which brought together knowledgeable Americans and foreigners for two way audio and one way video conversations. The fundamental idea of these dialogues were unfortunately usually better than the reality, for rarely did they have much true give and take between equals or at least persons dealing with each other on more or less the same level. Instead, it was the American expert answering questions posed by the foreigner. In some instances, this was fine, indeed what was called for, but in all too many cases it was not, and more often than not limited its impact. Anyhow, I didn't and don't think Wick should be blamed for that. He was ahead of his time, at least for us, in actively promoting this communication technique.

Sometimes the interactives worked very well. Orchestrated and led by Nimet, another last name that has escaped me, one of our brightest and most dynamic FSNs and an accomplished actress herself, we brought together leading lights from Egypt's stage and screen for a series of fascinating conversations with like Americans from this world. Though these exchanges largely dealt with the performing arts, they also got fascinatingly into Egyptian and American perceptions of each other, which was no small matter, given the way American TV shows and films portray Arabs, and vise versa the often sardonic presentation of the U.S. and Americans in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab World. There was a fair amount of admission on both sides that what came out was often slanted and unfair. I have thought back on these programs and how hard it is to find the chemistry that makes for such openness and honesty across cultural gaps, indeed chasms.

But there was a serious problem in that Wick tended to oversell WorldNet, and his TV minions, most blatantly the head the TV service, continually made misleading and downright false claims as to all it was supposedly achieving, the size of the audiences being reached, its influence on public opinion. I and most others in the field were thoroughly put off by this hype and exaggeration, indeed which resulted in falsification.

Q: Egypt was a friendly country, relying heavily on our help. Why were they hesitant to accept our TV materials?

UNDELAND: For a number of reasons. We can begin with the fact that Egypt's closeness to the U.S. made Egyptians feel particular need to assert their independence. Pride in their national identity came into play, as a matter of policy, as well as of personal feelings. They did not want to be or appear to be so beholden to us that they could be taken as nothing more that American lackeys, a charge their opponents and detractors were ever ready to lay on them. They are a proud people, with a long history and civilization, who react strongly to slights, be they real or merely perceived, and to sensing that others are taking them lightly.

They also felt they had to be constantly on guard to see that we didn't slip in anything potentially embarrassing to them, as they suspected we might try to do. They wanted to be sure they would not be dragged into issues, which concerned us but not them, and they were afraid we were devious and clever enough to slip such things past them, if they were not ever vigilant. In a backhanded way, it was a kind of a complement for us, showing a respect they didn't feel for the Russians or French or anybody else.

Another side of that same coin is that they saw it far easier to offer explanations and excuses and regrets to us than to most others, perhaps all others. They saw no contradiction in suspecting us, while at the same time both admiring us and yet looking on us as a softer touch. If you as a foreigner couldn't understand this, you didn't comprehend the Egyptian psyche and scene very well.

We were deeply into nearly every major economic development program or project in the country, and the leaders were particularly touchy to charges that they themselves were doing almost nothing, that it was all coming from the Americans. Certainly, we were involved in so much that that case could be made, or at least the charge leveled. Thus, they took credit for nearly every positive development, often without mentioning our role, giving credit only to Mubarak and his regime and almost pointedly ignoring us and other donors. Privately, they would justify this to us by saying that as he was supporting U.S. aims throughout the area, why wouldn't we want him to get the credit for these achievements at home, which would serve to strengthen him and disarm his detractors? How many times I heard that argument.

Egyptians have historically been in many ways highly skeptical of their rulerNasser's genius was that he largely overcame this attitude, by his commanding personality and proffering jobs and security in return for unquestioning loyaltand to counter this ingrained negative view, supporters of both Sadat and Mubarak went to great extremes to extol only their virtues and accomplishments. As a corollary, they would vigorously question and complain about any criticism from us by asking why we Americans wanted to detract from them or in any way put Egypt leadership in an unfavorable light?

There was, as always, the Israel factor that came into play. Most Egyptians supported the "cold peace" and while a fair number understood and a few of them appreciated the American role, years of looking on the U.S. as the blanket backer of Israel had taken its toll with public opinion. The ins and outs of this subject are long and complex, but the result was that most Egyptians, however much they liked us for our culture, ways, ideas, openness, many policies and products, they were still ready, rather had conditioned themselves, to believe the worst about our MidEast policies and our relations with Israel. It had become over the years almost a reflex reaction that prompted the old argument they therefore could not get publicly too close to us. It continued that to tar them with that brush could only diminish their influence in the area, which served so well our as well as their purposes. We surely saw that, didn't we, they would ask? That line of reasoning may see far fetched to many, but it wasn't to Egyptians of that day, or, for that matter, before or later.

Then there was refrain that if they used USIS materials, they would be under pressure also to take them from the Soviets, which invariably ended with, "you wouldn't want us to have to do that, would you?" This was true not just of Egypt, for I encountered variations of the same theme in Jordan, Kuwait and Tunisia, all friends of the U.S. I must admit to having some admiration for their wariness over materials provided by other governments, particularly anything political or having such overtones. Isn't that caution a sign of maturity? Would we ourselves want to put forth another nation's policies?

They did use a fair amount of our cultural, education, sports and other non "freight" items, but even here they rarely cited the source and almost always incorporating them or portions of them into local programs and articles within an Egyptian format and style. Thus, we were almost always an uncited source and nothing more, which was fine with me.

Q: I can think of two groups you'd want to try to reach, but with whom you'd probably have difficulties. One was the Egyptian military, and the other Islamic fundamentalists. How did you deal with them?

UNDELAND: You have put your finger on two important groups, though I hate the word "fundamentalist" as it usually comes across, for what you are really talking about is revolutionary, political Islam, which concerns a small, very small, part of the Islamic community, even of the conservative part of it. The overwhelming majority of devout Muslims, who have traditional religious views, fundamental views if you will, are peaceable, decent citizens, who abhor violence and the violent image that the phrase Muslim fundamentalist conjures up. But back to your question.

Concerning the military, the Egyptians permitted us no contacts, except through a liaison officer, who was not at all forthcoming in the approaches I made to him. We did, at the army's request, provide him a batch of each issue of our Arabic magazine, Al Majal, and we indirectly came to know they were spread around at least fairly widely among the military units, but we never had any feed-back, so I have no feel for what, in any, impact they had. We sent the Egyptian army spokesman to the States on a group IV project, which was political and wholly civilian in nature. We wanted to send another on a political science project, but at the last minute the military authorities would not agree to let him go and withdrew his name. I was informally told the reason was because it bore the American government imprimatur. There were a few who used the library of the Cairo center, maybe the one in Alexandria as well, but only in their private, off-duty capacity. We didn't push very hard to open the military door, but were ready to latch onto opportunities as they arose. Few however did. Those in the offices of the military attache and military assistance program had far more contact, but even for them, access to the Egyptian military was hardly an open door.

I remember talking with a retired senior generahe had commanded Egyptian forces in the Yemen during the fighting therabout this lack of willingness to have contact with us, and he explained the Egyptian military had a history of aversion to foreigners, which had been heightened by their unpleasant ties with the Soviets, who had tried to put the Egyptians under their thumb, to indoctrinate them, but it also went back to the days of British control, when it was believed the Brits wanted information and control to make sure the Egyptians acted wholly in accordance with their interests. Then there was Israel. He said it was commonly believed that anything we learned about the Egyptian armed forces would be immediately passed on to the Israelis. Hard to argue with that one.

On the other question, almost everyone in the religious community was not only available to us, but welcomed us with open arms. Those who supported the government treated us as friends and furthermore, wanted to "educate" us about the "real" Islam, which they presented as tolerant, decent, responsible and far removed from violence and terrorism. "Real" is in quotes for thethe grand mufti, the leadership at Al Azhar and others, whom I called on at regular intervalsaw with dismay Americans equating all Islam with terrorism, the religion with the bombings and assassinations. They wanted to set us straight. I did not spend as much time as I would have liked at Al Azhar University, but went there every other month or so to give my declining Arabic a workout and to keep up these contacts, which they also wanted, and to learn what they had on their minds. I was always given the warmest of welcomes by the Rector and other senior people. They would have liked us to do much more programming with them than we did or could have and, if that were not possible, at least to see us more often. A professor of Islamic law came by our offices regularly, and largely through frank discussions with him kept myself fairly well informed and up to date on what was happening at that institution.

There were some devout Muslims, who were secularists at the same time. My favorite among them was Farag Foda, who fearlessly took on the Muslim Brotherhood and others of like mind. Some years after I left Egypt, I was saddened to hear he had been assassinated by Muslim extremists. A wonderful, tolerant person, full of ideas and questioning, I came away from every session with him enthused, stimulated and anticipating our next get-together. A number of medical doctors, professors, journalists and writers fit into this same category. Simply stated, they were among the most interesting Egyptians I came to know.

As to the practitioners and supporters of a radical Islam aimed at replacing the existing government and many institutions and establishing a theocratic state, I encountered a few of them from time to time, almost always in chance meetings, but otherwise for the most part kept my distance. Many of them eagerly welcomed contacts with Americans, particularly from the embassy, for in their eyes, these meetings constituted a sort of recognition and gave them an importance, a legitimacy and a status they eagerly sought. Substantively we shared almost no common ground with what they stood for and wanted. The Egypt and world of their agenda was so far removed from ours that we had little if any real chance of influencing them and their thinking. I saw no reason why we should let them use us for their own ends, which were so antipathetic to our own. I continually made this case at the embassy, but without much effect, for political officers continued to seek them out far too much and too often and then write up lengthy cables, which were well enough done, but many of which I felt added little to what we already knew. At the embassy, I found all too little concern for the impressions that these contacts made.

On a couple of occasions, and at their request, I took along political officers on visits I had arranged for myself. Here I am not talking about the religious extremists of the last paragraph. But I stopped doing this after a couple of experiences where they kept boring in and dominating the conversation, rather than sitting back and listening to what the interesting interlocutor had on his mind and entering into real dialogue, which meant, as far as I was concerned, in large part listening to what the other person had on his mind. This was what I was there for. I might add, rather repeat, that almost always you make your case best by first hearing out his, stated in his own way at his own pace.

Q: You were making the point that we were just enhancing the prestige of religious leaders, particularly the more minor ones who were opposed to what we want, basically those opposed to Western culture.

UNDELAND: That's a fair statement, so long as it's understood we are referring to religious leaders with radical political platforms and agendas aimed against the Egyptian government and the kind of Middle East we wanted to see evolve. I do not mean we should never have had quiet contacts with them, so that we know what was and is going on, but these should have been discreet and not more frequent than needed for information purposes. My point is that we overdid it, and, in so doing, we didn't do ourselves or our causes any good. We raised unnecessary doubts with the very Egyptians who meant the most to us, both inside and outside their government.

Q: Well, here was a country where we were, almost as a payoff for peace, giving it a lot of money. You're an old Middle East hand. What was your impression of the impact and the value of our aid program there?

UNDELAND: In one work, immense. As I noted a short while back, it was so great and pervasive it would have been embarrassing to the Egyptian government had it admitted publicly its size and scope. I have said that the Tunisian program in the late '50s and early '60s had particular effectiveness, and I stand by that, but what we were doing in Egypt was also most impressive. Let me cite a few examples of where this assistance made a huge difference:

We brought a modern phone system to Cairo to replace a hopelessly inadequate and antiquated one, which had gotten so bad that Cairo was in reality almost phoneless. You can imagine what that meant to an important, populous capital city that was struggling to keep going. In place of telephones, a whole under class of couriers had arisen, thousands going on bicycles, by foot and by bus to carry messages from one office to another, from one house to another throughout that huge city. The AID installed microwave system was revolutionary in that it never had been tried anywhere in the world on anything approaching such a large scale. It worked beautifully, surpassing all expectations, functioning better than AID experts or anyone else thought possible. Of course, it increased unemployment by putting the couriers out of work, but that is another issue. It went into operation shortly before my arrival.

When the police riots broke out, Caireens feared and believed that the situation was far worse than it really was and that the government was, as usual, lying or at least downplaying it. The new phones came to the rescue, for people in one part of the city could and did call friends and relatives in another and learn that things were calm, just as the authorities were claiming. Knowing that they could now easily and reliably communicate not only defused the situation, but bred a confidence and provided on different occasions an antidote to the ever working negative rumor mills.

Another. AID designed and put in a new clean water system for Cairo, drawing it from the Nile, an immense undertaking, to meet the needs of a city that had swelled to over 15 million persons. It was completed during my time, with the official grand opening and much hoopla for this achievement of the government played large in the media, but with barest mention of our central role in the planning, financing, engineering and constructing. It replaced a worn out old system, dating back to the early part of the Twentieth Century, which even if it still were still working welit wasn'would have been wholly inadequate to the city's vastly expanded needs. I might add that many Caireens were fully aware of AID's central role, even though that aspect was ignored in the media.

Another project of similar magnitude was the complete redoing of the Cairo sewage system, to replace one designed for a city of one million or less in 1908. The British and West Germans were doing a share of it, but the biggest portion was ours. Just getting underway when my tour was up, it was another immense accomplishment. In my many rambles through the old city with its Islamic architectural and artistic treasures to be seen at every turn, I several times came upon streets awash with stinking raw sewage, sometimes to a depth of up to a foot. It did not deter me but it was pretty disgusting and posed a major health menace.

It was AID funded American generators that replaced those the Soviets had initially put in in the Aswan High Dam, which from when they were first installed had needed to be constantly repaired and when operating correctly had power output that was below specification. These General Electric turbines were towed upstream on huge barges, a first class show in itself which elicited from Cairo's citizens applause and one favorable comment after the other about the U.S., as they passed by. They didn't have or need the AID clasped hand shields or other identification. Everybody knew. Once in place, they worked splendidly, that is, so long as they received adequate water intake, which later on became a problem.

Making agricultural loans available to small farmers was another large AID program accomplishment, as was the effort to get more decision making and funding more down to governorate and local levels, which stimulated better central government-provinces relationships by putting more influence and power in the hands of the latter.

Scholarships and training and a whole host of smaller projects and programs greatly benefited the country. I think it safe to say that without our aid, and I'm talking about the economic and not the equally large military side, Egypt could not have functioned as well as it did, and in parochial terms, would not have been the kind of friend and ally to the United States that it was and has continued to be.

Yet, Egypt with its ballooning population, its residual statist legacy from the Nasser era and his compact with the people, its inefficiencies and top- down power structurwith all these, I encountered little belief, let alone optimism, it could move out from being a very poor country in the foreseeable future. People talked some about corruption, of which of course there was all too much, but it played a less important role than many foreigners expected or believed. How often I encountered from Egyptians variations on the resignation theme: we can't see how things are going to get much better, but we cannot permit ourselves to get too discouraged, for, after all, our prospects haven't been very good for thousands of years, and here we still are. We'll somehow get through the present and the future, as we did in the past, but in any case it doesn't help if we spend our time fussing and complaining about it.

We in USIS had the task of publicizing U.S. economic assistance activities and for the assistant information officer, it was the main part in his job description. Yet, as I have said before, I was always uncomfortable with this USIS role, for reasons I have already given. If our aim was to build up Egypt, the Egypt of Mubarak, why weren't we happy to let the regime take the credit, all of it, if that's what it wanted, as indeed it did? I put this idea earlier in the mouths of Egyptians; here I state it as mine. Few in the mission agreed with me, but as it was part of our charter, we went ahead with it. I had to wonder why when we contribute to charity in the U.S., we don't expect the recipients to stand up on a soap box to bow and scrape and say, "thank you for your generosity, sir." Why shouldn't that be our attitude with what we're doing overseas?

At a lunch at the residence, the managing editor of Cairo's largest daily, Al Akhbar, turned to Ambassador Wisner and said that Egyptians didn't fully realize the extent of our help and why didn't we do more to make it known? He then went on to say there was next to nothing on this subject in the daily papers. Wisner turned rather accusingly to me to answer, which I did by noting the hesitancy of media editors and directors to run much on our aid projects, let alone play up the American angle, whether on their own or using stories provided by us. But I could not resist adding that Al Akhbar had that very day had a small front page item on an activity we were funding, which was in passing mentioned, and another similar report on an interior page. The editor blithely replied he had not noticed them and went on to other things. End of story, but it points out the Egyptian ambivalence and the fact that making the assistance story interesting to readers and viewers is no easy task, whatever the slant or intentions. I had the sneaking reaction that the editor was playing games with Wisner, perhaps with a chuckle deep down inside. If this coverage were deemed important to Egyptians, their own reporters would have done it. Then our role could shift to little more than answering questions, when they came to us for information. There was not one time that a newsman did.

Q: You had the Reagan administration with its strong anti-abortion, anti- birth control bias; and Egypt's major problem, according to many observers, was too many people for that narrow strip of arable land. How did you handle this?

UNDELAND: The growth in population was staggering. It went from about 17 million when I was there as a student in the mid 1950s to some 52 million when I left in 1988. And Cairo alone rose from a little under three million to over 15 million, with an additional up to two million coming into the city from the countryside every day in search of work. If you wanted a terrifying sight, you only had to go to the main railroad station in the morning and see the trains pulling in, with hundreds of men riding atop the cars or precariously hanging on to the sides.

There were Egyptian individuals, groups and institutions trying to promote family planning, with which and whom we were in contact, but always at their initiative. We got them some information and helped put them in touch with American counterparts, but this was a small and minor effort on our part, outside of our mandate. We tried to be responsive to their approaches, and I think it a mark of the standing USIS had that they came to us, often before going to anyone else. You know, AID was into family planning, though gingerly, and in the main, these concerned Egyptians were not greatly impressed by the AID types charged with this effort. I must add, neither was I. Lackadaisical is a word that comes to my mind about them.

We did send off an IV grantee, who had a main interest in women's organizations dealing with this topic. The answer to your question is basically that, immense as the issue was in the larger sense, it had little to do with our aims and activities. In retrospect, I personally wish we had been able to show more interest, but we had to keep in mind the views put forth by the Reagan administration, which were pretty negative and restricting.

Abortion was totally outside the scope of our concerns, although it had become more prevalent and was officially, though without publicity, accepted. It was a subject on which the Grand Mufti and other Islamic leaders occasionally spoke out, at least as I recall, and on at least two occasions, they brought it up in my meetings with them, though in what precise context has slipped away from me.

Q: How about your own perspective?

UNDELAND: Well, I felt personally that over-population was Egypt's single greatest problem and would remain so. I did not see how significant progress towards better lives for the people was possible, while resources were being eaten up by trying merely to keep up with more mouths to feed, more bodies to clothe and more shelter to build. Only education and information can change ideas and values so that smaller families become seen as both desirable and feasible. Bringing about this kind of social and cultural change is never easy. Privately, I applauded the efforts of those Egyptians, who were trying to make a dent in this problem.

Put another way, I have little use for the idea that you can promote and achieve development in an overpopulated, poor country like Egypt and not have vigorous family planning an integral part of it.

As to abortion, my personal view on it is strong in that it is the woman's right to decide and no one else's period, but it was immaterial to my job. I didn't seek to speak out on this subject, even privately that I can recall.

One of my more not knowing what to say moments came when a returned grantee from the provinces, a very traditional sort, asked to see me in my office. After the usual pleasantries, he got down to why he was there, saying that he already had six children and didn't want any more, and would I tell him how he should go about preventing this from happening. I turned him over to one of our more outspoken FSNs, who must have done the necessary quite well, for in leaving he stopped by to thank me with a happy expression on his face.

Q: The universities there. You'd had very close relations elsewhere with them. Did you sense any difference in working with them in Cairo in the 1980s and in Alexandria two decades before?

UNDELAND: On both occasions I, as you say, worked closely with them. It is an area that has always interested me and which I feel is central to USIS concerns in Egypt and in every other country where I have served. Egypt, however, presented a special problem. The system had continued to expand at an appalling pace, without having the human, financial and material resources that were anywhere near sufficient. Many good professors and administrators were doing their best, and lots of talented students got their degrees, but that was largely because of their innate abilities and drive, seeming often to have succeeded in spite of the system. But many more did not, those who could and would have become worthy graduates, had the system been better able to help them unleash their talents and abilities.

It is far too complicated to get into all the ins and outs of the problems, but let me say I ruefully concluded that despite many efforts and some noteworthy achievements, the situation had already gotten alarmingly bad and was steadily getting still worse. Academic standards had fallen significantly, disastrously, between the early '60s and mid '80s. By the time I left Egypt in 1988, I had reluctantly come to the conclusion that, while one must keep working on reforms and improvements, these alone would never be enough, and the only answer lay in somehow setting up parallel institutions at all levels, in which high, at least higher, standards would be set and rigorously maintained. Of course the system in place also had to remain. I saw no other realistic solution. The idea that Egypt junk all that was in place and start over again was clearly impossible for many reasons, but for starters because it would have caused a revolution.

A fundamental problem lay in the miserable pay, which loomed large in taking a traditionally honored and respected profession and turning it into one looked down on as corrupt and inferior, and rightfully so. Let me explain. Because teachers in primary and secondary schools could not make ends meet on their pitiful salaries, thousands of them resorted to private tutoring, of course paid for by parents and done after school hours. It was no large step from that to handling their classroom instruction in such a way that only those who got the outside tutoring would be able to pass the stiff country wide examinations. It was a scandal, but what to do about it? One step was private schools, a few of which were very good, but they could handle only a small fraction of the student population. The vast majority were as bad as, and often worse than, the state schools, and anyway suffered from the same tutoring scam.

Each of Egypt's four main universities had in excess of 100,000 students, and the largest, Cairo, more than 150,000, all of them with facilities and resources that could not handle student bodies of more than a quarter of this number. I repeat there were admirable teachers and scholars, dedicated to their work and striving not only to do their jobs well, but also to make a difference. Given the difficulties under which they worked, it took a lot of character and dedication to keep going and not just fall into a rut or give up or not do more than go through the motions.

Professors also had financial woes, though not quite as dire, which they solved by outside tutoring, by selling lecture notes upon which exam questions were based, by teaching in several institutions, so they would have contract pay in addition to the basic salary, and by outside employment. I knew one professor advising students on graduate theses, who could only find time to meet with them on trains as he traveled from one university to another on a different city. He abashedly admitted this was wrong, but added that he had no other choice.

Nonetheless, Egypt's universities were among the nation's most important institutions and professors, deans and others readily moved back a forth between academia and senior government positions. There were always a half dozen or so professors in the cabinet. Long standing ties existed between American and Egyptian university education, stretching back to the late 1940's. I found among the professor crowd, some of the most stimulating Egyptians I encountered anywhere. I was convinced that despite the myriad shortcomings of the system, we had ample reason to focus major attention on persons in education and particularly the universities.

How and where was USIS involved? We had a very active Fulbright operation, with its two-way flow of Fulbright graduate students, researchers and lecturers, i.e. teaching professors. Large as it was, there were never enough grants to handle all the qualified Egyptians who applied, a talented lot, who with rare exceptions far exceeded meeting the program's scholarly requirements. The Fulbright office was run by a dynamic, extraordinary American, Ann Radwan, who was still doing a commendable job as its boss a decade later. There was the usual Fulbright Commission, which was outside USIS direct jurisdiction, but which I and the cultural affairs officer followed closely, participating on selection panels and in its other activities.

We had a major English teaching project with Ain Shams University, co- headed by the post's English teaching officer and his equally competent British Council counterpart, with ten American teachers funded by AID and administered by the Fulbright office, a nice arrangement on all counts. It had an admirable, able Egyptian co-director and other worthy counterparts and was making considerable headway in its program to expand the quality of English teaching throughout Egypt's universities. Yet, even with this excellent cooperation, with everything falling pretty well into place and ten years experience under its belt, it still had a long way to go to achieve its stated aim. It demonstrated, perhaps better than anything else we were involved in, what a huge and time consuming challenge it was to achieve significant and concrete results in education spheres. University students made up the main clientele for the libraries at our Cairo and Alexandria centers, and we put on a fair amount of special programming on campuses. One of the best was having former Assistant Secretary Hal Saunders, who came out as an Ampart, take up MidEast peace negotiations with graduate students from Cairo University's Political Science Department. He met with some 15 of them, who were initially loaded for bear in their total antagonism towards Israel, but who gradually came around, as he skillfully broke down the problem of negotiations between the Arabs and Israel into its component parts. They, to their own amazement, came to see there was a great deal on which they could agree with the Israelis, where they had previously seen only stark differences. This meeting was on a Thursday afternoon and went over so well I asked Hal if he would come back for another session the next day, which was supposed to be his day off, as well as that of the students'. He agreed, as did they, and together they put in another two hours in some of the best political communication I have witnessed anywhere in my career. I don't mean it solved anything or changed basic attitudes, but it did get these future Egyptian teachers and leaders to look at themselves and their ideas in new, frankly pretty dramatic, ways. Of course, it is not every day you can rely on the wit and skill of a Hal Saunders. I wished we could have more of this kind of intense programming in these academic institutions.

We sponsored activities at universities by writers, economists, poets, environmentalists and a dance instructor, to mention those Amparts who immediately come to mind. From these activities came, among other things, more use of our facilities, our libraries, in both cities.

I regretted that I personally did not have more time to spend at them, much less than when I was in Riyadh, Damascus, Amman and Alexandria. There were just too many demands on my time to be able to break loose for the required a couple of hours or so that were needed. I missed being able to shove everything aside and say, as I had elsewhere, I'll just go out to the university and see what our friends there have on their minds. The all too few times I did do this were rewarding and useful to my own thinking and to what we as a post should be up to. Also, they led to recounting these experiences and insights into the local scene gained from them at embassy staff meetings, other gatherings and in occasionally in cables sent out to Washington and other Arab World posts, which were well received.

Q: Well, administration takes its toll.

UNDELAND: It certainly does. I've already noted the organizational demands of an operation of this size. To expand on it a bit, I had to spend one of the two supposed weekend days in the office just to keep up with the traffic and reporting. I usually made it Friday because on that day Washington was open. Although I tried to leave some of my Saturdays free, it was rare when I could so, for the combination of post affairs and coping with the unending flow of visitors spared no day of the week. Sunday was a normal work day for all of us. A great deal of what fell on USIS's plate and mine personally was dictated by outside forces rather than by anything we/I selected. At times, this got frustrating, but I had known before coming to Cairo, I was getting into a pressure cooker unlike any I had previously known.

I have never been a happy paper pusher and have seen to it that a fair amount of my time was spent out of the office and in personally doing things. I handled some of those activities connected with museums, archaeology and institutions in which we had a stake. I took on a central role in the selection part of the IV program. I threw myself into trying to work out borrowing from the Khalil Museum collection a Gauguin painting, Les Femmes Baignants, for the National Gallery of Art and Petit Palais' major perspective on that painter. Despite personal roles played by three ministers, nearly two years of effort and a paper trail that filed a file two inches thick, we couldn't in the end pull it off. (Sometime after it was all over, I learned the problem, as I had come to suspect, was that the painting needed restoration, and all the Egyptians who had been concerned with it or who had an overall charge felt they might be accused of or personally held responsible for its deterioration.) Then there was the incessant personal involvement in Wisner projects, most of which paid solid dividends. Like that chap in Greek mythology, I kept up my strength by continually touching the ground.

Q: Well, now, could you talk a bit about how Nicholas Veliotes, who was ambassador when you arrived, operated?

UNDELAND: He was in ways controversial and misunderstood, although his relationships at the presidency and other upper echelons were close and, from all I knew, very good. He suffered most at slightly lower government reaches and at unofficial levels, where he was incorrectly seen by some as not having that personal interest in Egypt and Egyptians they had come to expect from the top American in the country. It was more a matter of miss perception of personality, style and the way that he projected himself rather than what he really was, i.e. a thoughtful, caring person and thoroughly professional. Although wide open to discussion and ideas on almost any substantive subject, on the question of him personally and his standing, he wouldn't listen to me or anyone else. God knows, I tried. There was the Achille Lauro incident.

Q: Were you involved with the Achille Lauro?

UNDELAND: Not directly, but yes, in that we were dealing with the press...

Q: This was an Italian ship hijacked by Palestinians extremists who brutally killed a wheel chair bound American.

UNDELAND: Klinghoffer.

Q: Klinghoffer, yes. Tell us about it.

UNDELAND: Sliding over some of the details, the hi-jacked Achille Lauro came into Egyptian waters, then moved to the coast of Syria before coming back. Abu Abbas and his gang, who had grabbed the ship and did the brutal killing, were removed and held by the Egyptian authorities. Nick went out to the ship as soon as he could and there learned of the atrocity committed against this crippled American Jew. In a phone or radio call back to the embassy, he called Abu Abbas and his cohorts "sons of bitches". This somehow got out and was widely spread around, twisted to be taken as a defamation of Arabs, particularly of Arab motherhood. It was a stupid reaction, but in an Arab context of that time not wholly to be unexpected. I wanted to turn loose several of our talented, well connected FSN staff, for I was confident they could have had some beneficial impact with the many of the right people we could reach, i.e. editors, officials, professors et al. I also wanted to do a little of it myself. But, Nick would not even consider it, rather accepting to let that negative impression stand unchallenged, without trying to do anything. In making this pitch, I was supported by Political Counselor George Sherman, a particular confidant of Nick's, but he made no more impact than I. We both were finally told to "bug off". In retrospect, I wish we had gone ahead and done it anyway. That negative story kept cropping up as long as he stayed in Egypt.

Having said this, he was splendid to work with, dedicated, fair, with a sense of humor and without an iota of ego or self promotion. I felt I got relatively close to him and certainly thoroughly enjoyed being on his staff.

Q: And how about Frank Wisner, to whom you have made a couple of tantalizing references? He has a reputation in State of being very competent and at the same time not easy to work with.

UNDELAND: That puts it rather well, and I know that's how more than a few feel about him. I want to start by saying he was the right person for Egypt at that time. Egyptians responded very well to his ready smile and flair for the theatrical, to his plunging into Egyptian life and institutions with obvious relish, to his, at times flamboyant, interest in and concern for the country and people in virtually all aspects. He did not restrict himself to those areas more traditionally connected with diplomacy and diplomats, but spread himself widely across the Egyptian scene. He was ever the activist and used USIS more fully than any ambassador I have known. The PAO was his PAO in the fullest sense. A couple of illustrative examples.

He personally came up with a project of using some $5 million of USG owned Egyptian pounds, generated by PL 480 food sales, to repair and restore five mamluk mosques in the old city, which had badly deteriorated and needed urgent attention. He threw himself, and me, into this with his typical vigor, chaffing that things did not go faster and that getting reports on progress and expenditures from the Egyptians was so pains taking and usually tardy. I was his point man and, given my personal interest in Egypt, its amazing history and specifically the mamluks, relished my role in it. Egyptians applauded his effort and rightly gave him the credit he deserved. Another case of many knowing well about something that was going on without any media mention.

Similar was his backing for Carter Brown's attempt to pull off the loan of 125 of the Egyptian National Museum's finest, some very delicate, treasures for an exhibit at the National Gallery of Art in Washington. Again, I was Frank's agent and a party to the negotiating sessions. The Department of Antiquities' Zahi Hawass, with an Egyptology PhD from Pennsylvania and a tough as nails bargainer, represented the Egyptian side and proved more than a match for NGA Director Brown, who assumed a simple, ah shucks stance of a boy from the old South. Again, I reveled in my involvement. As a footnote, the loan never came off. I might add that in Egypt, one had to get accustomed to things not working out or, at least not fully or as planned.

Frank wrote perhaps the best OER ever done on me, and yet my relationship with him was strained from the outset, indeed before he arrived. It began when I vigorously opposed his desire, in which he was egged on by his Egyptian Arabic tutor in Washington, to respond to a scurrilous article in a Cairo weekly newspaper, a Libyan financed rag, which claimed that his CIA father's suicide came from his remorse over having treated Arabs so badly. That paper had little readership and virtually no influence. Nothing would have pleased its editor, whom I knew pretty well and thoroughly distrusted, more or given him greater standing than for an American ambassador to deem his weekly important enough to merit an answer back. Without mincing words, I insisted on telling him so in Washington, and he finally backed off. The charge and then DCM, Jock Covey, didn't want to send my message to him, but finally did so, when I told him if he didn't I would get it through using my own channels. Once on the scene, he never brought it up with me. Still, at the time I wondered what this new ambassador, whom I had never met, would think of his PAO.

Another incident. Wisner eliminated the post's English teaching officer position over my strong objection and to USIA's dismay, as part of his ballyhooed, but in fact only nominal, effort to downsize the mission, in which he particularly went after USIS for reasons I could only guess. He expression grew steely when the Ain Shams English language professor, to whom I have earlier referred, bluntly told him before others at a reception that this was one big mistake, one likely to cause irreparable damage to the program that was moving ahead so well, ending with a strong plea he reconsider this decision. I told the still irate ambassador the next day that this outburst came as a total surprise to me, but added it was certainly understandable, in not predictable. I never knew whether Frank really believed my denial of complicity in staging it. By the way, as soon as the next ambassador, Bob Pelletreau, got there, he moved rapidly and effectively to restore the English teaching slot.

I recall one of my periodic sessions with him, at which he outlined 17 different new activities he wanted USIS to undertake. He bristled when I told him to pick out the two or three that had his top priority, for there was no way the already busy USIS could take on any more. He grumbled, but selected them, and we got on with carrying them out.

In looking back, perhaps my willingness to take him on, to stand up to him, combined with what was, at least to me, total loyalty led to respect from him. I found myself in one incident after another. He unfairly, and most uncharacteristically, went after the senior Egyptian in the embassy's science office, whom I saw often and vigorously defended, saying if anyone was at fault, it was the economic counselor, who was the unfortunate person's boss. Frank's reaction was typical. He tried to get the scientist put on permanent loan to USIS, which would have pleased me greatly, but that maneuver was too much for embassy admin, and he backed down. He demanded directly to USIA in Washington that the information officer/press attachï¿½, who had handled a couple of things not too well and was inept in explaining himself, be replaced. I told Frank he had not made clear what he wanted, and that he was being unfair, for a fair share of the fault for what happened really lay with me. But he wouldn't listen, and he and NEA Director Pistor worked it out for a new IO to come out. By the way it was the superb Marcelle Wahba, about whom I had some initial qualms, but who not only proved I was dead wrong, for she not only did a first rate job in that position, but further proved her mettle by going on to become our ambassador in one of the Gulf states.

Director of the State Information Service Mamdouh Beltagi, whom I thoroughly respected, called me in one day to ask me to tell the ambassador of the palace's displeasure over his inviting Egyptian journalists to accompany him on his trips around the country and, in general, his cutting such a public figure. I did of course carry the word back as I was asked, not wholly without a certain relish. Wisner took it well, in fact in a rather bemused way, but didn't really accept it or seriously reduce his profile, at least not for long, but at least he did stop taking journalists with him.

I have gone on about Wisner all too long, but there are so many stories that involved me that I could tell, indeed many more than I already have. I must add/repeat that working for him was a unique experience in my career. There is so much that is positive to say about him, but also a sizable volume of negatives, as I trust I've shown. One thing was certaito show weakness before him was to get trod on. I must close this portion by reiterating that in instance after instance, he demonstrated he was exactly what we needed in Egypt at that juncture, and both he and the Egyptians knew it.

Q: Before we move on to Tunis, do you have anything else you'd like to say?

UNDELAND: Our relationship with Egypt was close, basically good and positive, as I've already said. At the same time, there were glitches, nagging problems, differing perceptions and the like. Egyptians constantly expected the United States would provide more, do more, than we wanted to or was feasible or even possible. They thought we should accept almost automatically their ways and to overlook what they were doing that we found questionable or wrong. In USIS, our programs and projects required constant monitoring, managing and fine tuning. Given a moment's lapse or an averted gaze, things could easily come unstuck and fall apart, and do so with amazing rapidity. They could often be put back together, but this sometimes took more time, patience and effort than we had available or were willing to apply. It meant we were continually lowering our sights, so that the outcome of many, perhaps most, of our projects requiring major local inputs has lesser results than what we had hoped and planned for at the outset.

All blame for this does not belong on the Egyptians, by any means, for what we were being asked by Washington to get the Egyptians to do was all too often not realistic and unacceptable from their standpoint. I all too often had to answer to queries that were essentially, "what the hell is wrong with these Egyptians? Why don't they act as we want them to? It's doesn't cost them much and anyway aren't they our friends? We're giving them all this aid. Don't they appreciate it?..." Just as we often tried to take them for granted, so it is hardly strange they wanted to do the same with us. Still, it kept us on our mettle, and maybe that's for the best.

While filling in time together, awaiting the arrival of Secretary Shultz on one of his periodic visits, Mamdouh Beltagi said to me, "Dick, you know, you Americans just don't understand the Egyptian government and its governing ways as well as you should. You think we are the same as you are, but we are not and cannot be. We want democratic institutions. We want a responsible government, a parliament with several parties, a concerned and effective administration, an honest and not repressive police, an independent judiciary and real justice we can depend on, a press that expresses different ideas. We don't want any midnight knocks on the door from security forces. But what we don't want and won't accept is your democracy. The first three of our presidents came from the military and I expect that the next three also will. We are not going to lay this country open to extremists, religious or other, who, by getting the most votes, can come to power. We're not going to run that risk. If they did take over, we could never get them out by another vote, by the democratic process, because they don't accept it and would not permit it. You just are going to have to realize this Egyptian reality, but unfortunately you don't." I must admit I personally agreed with him at that time and, for that matter, think the basic elements of his analysis still has merit. (This is what he said nearly 20 years ago. I wonder if he would put it quite this way today. By the way Beltagi went on to be longtime minister of tourism and then of information.)

As I have already indicated, they were very sensitive about our perceived or real attempts to twist their arms. This was true in several areas, but particularly when it concerned Israel. The peace agreement had brought about ready acceptance of the end of hostilities and a conviction that war must never be permitted to break out again, but few Egyptians were at that time ready for much in the way of relations beyond some technical and scientific cooperation, and that only so long as it was kept out of the glare of publicity. I personally arranged to get Israeli oceanographic studies for Egyptian counterparts, but with their firmly stated proviso it had to be kept quiet.

Two young Egyptians had gotten accepted to attend an Israeli medical school, but when the association of Cairo doctors learned of it, they warned that if they studied in Israel, they would never be permitted to practice in Egypt. They bowed to this warning and didn't go. We were constantly pressured, indeed badgered, to push the normalization button. It came from parts of the U.S. government, but also from American universities, foundations and other institutions with Zionist/Israeli links or interests, and they almost always wanted whatever it was to be accompanied by hoopla, bells and whistles. A Brandeis University project to bring Egyptians and Israeli professionals together offered a case in point. It had Egyptian support, up to the point that Brandeis wanted to give it some modest publicity. I have never seen anything fall through faster. I had to go through mere motions more often than I care to remember, when a public focus was applied to an agreement or activity that killed it outright. How hard it was to get this point across in advance, and how often there were recriminations afterwards.

I sought out and got to know reasonably well the Israeli press and cultural attaches (a most likable couple) and the director of the Israeli scholarly institute in Giza. The first two had a lonely existence, for contacts with Egyptians on any basis were extremely difficult for them or anyone else to arrange. They were included in only a very few, very official functions, and I do not believe they ever saw the inside of an Egyptian home. The normally gregarious Egyptians would never come to their place. The institute had quite an active program, with its events, mostly lectures, fairly well attended, although it was said that the Egyptians who came were all present or prospective members of the mukhabarat. Ain Shams University had a Hebrew department, whose students, according to a senior university official, already had that security affiliation or were preparing for it. Thoroughly realistic about their prospects, these three Israelis got on with their jobs as best they could. All were dismayed over what they saw as the naive, uninformed, unsubtle attitudes and actions of their American supporters. On not just this but many other things as well, I found myself on the same wave length with them. I was impressed at how professional and openly honest, also long suffering, they were.

Before closing this section, I must note how many fascinating, stimulating Egyptians I got to know. They looked on themselves as the intellectuals, the thinkers, the artistic and cultural leaders, the most dynamic nationality in the Arab World, and it is a case, for which there is more than a little evidence to back it up. Their sense of humor was a joy. Nothing was too sacred for the barbs of their pointed satiric wit and irony, and particularly their delight was in going after officials, from the president on down. What story tellers they were. They are a people who smile a lot. Walking down a crowded street surrounded by them, it is easy to come under the spell of their good humor.

One of the frustrating aspects of being assigned there was that there was just no way I could keep up with all those who interested me and were of rightful importance to the post. Still, how much better it is to have it this way rather than the other way round.

And one more point that I should have put in earlier. While I've been negative in talking about many Egyptian institutions, there were a few which were outstanding. The Diplomatic Institute, which under the inspired leadership of Ambassador Abdel Latif was turning out first class young diplomats. We let no opportunity slip by not to collaborate with it, including speakers, lining up scholarships and helping with its library collection. Another was the Al Ahram Center, a wide ranging think tank, which sponsored Egypt's most outspoken views of what was happening inside the country, and almost equally what was going on outside. I looked on its often sharply critical viewing of everything, including our policies and actions, as healthy and to be applauded. It didn't want much from us, but welcomed our continuing contact, and we from our side strove to maintain it with them. Still, rarely did individual achievements not outshine those of institutions. Why were the sum total of individual talents, with rare exceptions, almost always greater that when combined?

Tunis: Public Affairs Officer

Q: I see you were in Tunis from 1988 to 1992. You had already been at the pinnacle, so this would mean a step down. Why Tunis and how did it work out for you?

UNDELAND: You've hit the nail on the head, in that it was a question for me. Going from Cairo to Tunis was in the bureaucratic world a large step down, but there were a number of factors that made being assigned there have a good deal of appeal. I had spent a career in the Arab World and wanted to remain there, if I could, on what was likely to be my last post before retiring, certainly my next to last. Secondly, Tunis was open and not much else was. Thirdly, I had served there 30 years ago and was intrigued by the idea of what differences I would find. I also cannot ignore that it's a very pleasant place to be and live.

But there were still other reasons. Bob Pelletreau was the ambassador, and I have encountered none finer, professionally and personally. The long Bourguiba era had recently ended, and I envisaged challenging times as Tunisia came to grips with its new leadership, its new reality, under the guidance of Abidine Ben Ali. Moreover, the headquarters of the Arab League and the PLO were there, which gave it an enhanced regional prominence. Yet, after adding up all these positive factors, I still wasn't sure how my ego would react to the much smaller program and budget in a country commanding far less importance for U.S. interests. I wondered whether the real me would be ready to welcome a lengthy time in Tunis, or whether I would come to resent what many others would see as a tremendous come-down. However, once there, any misgivings or doubts immediately vanished. There was more than enough to do, more than enough to stimulate and please, so that after only a couple of months, I requested the assignment be extended from three to four years. USIA immediately agreed.

In addition to running the operation and to coming to terms with the Tunisia of Ben Ali, we were from the outset involved in taking up new quarters away from the center of the city, where we'd always been, so there was a challenge in reestablishing ourselves. We had to make this move, because the security types in Washington had applied those rigid formulae, of which they are so fond, and determined that our downtown premises lacked the required setback from the street, and we were therefore not safe from terrorist attack. Indeed, buildings in the middle of the city had no setback whatsoever, so it meant moving away from the hub of the city. This decision was first taken back in 1983, but after an incredible series of expensive missteps, we were still in the old place five years later. Anyhow, move we did, and we had to find the building, adapt it to our needs and recast our thinking to operating in what was essentially a residential area.

Our grand opening was quite an affair, attended by over 800, a crowd we could handle because it was springtime and could be held outside. Pelletreau and I made remarks in Arabic, and then the minister of culture responded for the Tunisian government, speaking in French! This was doubly strange, for he was a professor of Arabic. Apparently unaware of how negatively this was being received, he caught himself near the end and gave a summary of his speech in Arabic, but the damage had been done. He wasn't booed, but derisive comments coursed through the crowd. This undoubtedly explains why I kept getting words of appreciation for Bob's and my statements and praise of our command of Arabic as long as I was in Tunisia. I could only accept the latter with an inward smile. But no matter. It was a great launch of the center.

We had a fairly typical USIS program, working with the media and the information side of the Tunisian government, running the center with its small but quite active library, handling nearly the full range of exchanges, putting on the occasional exhibit and cultural presentation, working with the ministry of education on English teaching and the like. USIA's Arabic magazine, Al Majal had its main office in Tunis, which also was the home base for the regional librarian. Later, we added the regional English teaching officer position, which was transferred from MoroccWisner was not, after all, the only ambassador who shortsightedly eliminated this slot. The Al Majal office was later closed with the functions moved back to Washington. We didn't have a branch post or a book translation program. One main difference with Cairo was we had no Fulbright commission or office. Instead, we handled that ourselves working closely with AMIDEAST. In sum, a good and varied program, a nice place to be PAO.

Q: Did you get involved at all with the PLO or not? Were you under restrictions on that count?

UNDELAND: I had no contact with the PLO, in according with the dictates of Washington. We did, however, at its indirect request, see that they got copies of our information bulletins in English and Arabic and our publications. During the time of the US-PLO talks conducted on our side by Bob Pelletreau, we worked closely with the Tunisian information authorities in dealing with the visiting press,. I had the lovely job of being American spokesman, lovely because I was instructed never to have anything to say about anything, not even being authorized to confirm after the fact that meetings had taken place. That and all else had to come from Washington. I was reminded of my friend in Jordan, Mahmud Ghul, who once told me he, as the vice president for research at Yarmuk University, had the best job at that institution. Why, I asked? "Because there is no research at Yarmuk" he responded.

Until the direct talks began and after they were suspended, we learned about what the PLO had on its mind largely from diplomats of other embassies, who were in close contact with them and us. I personally was not directly involved in this, although in Tunis you could not fail to pick up tid-bits on the PLO all the time. I might add that I did not come across a single Tunisian, who did not think it stupid that we so religiously kept our distance from the PLO before the talks and after they were suspended.

We regularly had opera listening evenings at our home, to which a minor PLO functionary regularly came, until I had to dis-invite him. He was also a local journalist, but that cachet was deemed insufficient cover by the embassy.

Q: How was America received and perceived there, say at the universities and in the press?

UNDELAND: We were looked on very positively, our ties with Israel apart, based in large measure on the excellent bilateral relations that had existed ever since Tunisian independence in the mid 1960s. There was widespread admiration for our institutions, culture, products, openness and prosperity. There were a few, very much a minority, who felt we had become too beholden, too close, to Bourguiba, particularly during his troubled last years in power. There were also a few Ben Ali loyalists, particularly in the government but also in the official party and media, who feared he would not get from the U.S. the same regard and respect that had been given to his predecessor. These reservations were of course expressed only privately. In the press, there were the occasional anti-American digs, but little that was outlandish, except on the old, almost automatic, issue of our support for Israel. That is, apart from the Gulf war days, when other factors came into play.

We were very well received at the universities, constantly asked to do much more than our limited means would allow. When we put on a modest book exhibit at one of the engineering faculties in Tunis, the dean expressed his appreciation, but added that it was not enough. He wanted Fulbright professors, study and research grants for the teaching staff, guest speakers and anything else we could come up with, including more regular visits by the cultural officer and myself. It was pretty much like that in every division of every university in the country.

Our small Fulbright program, which gave us two to five American lecturers per academic year during my time there, was minuscule in comparison to what the French provided, but still had high standing and was much desired. Two political scientists and a museologist, all of whom were renewed twice to stay for three years were the American Fulbrighter high point. They deserve special mention. Jim Richerson oversaw the complete redoing of the Carthage Archaeological Museum, using only local materials and turning a stodgy, dour place into an airy and memorable presentation of Tunisia's spectacular past. The other two were political scientists, Rhys Payne and Lynette Rummel, who during and in the aftermath of the Gulf war played key roles in keeping the American scholarly light burning bright in Tunis' universities. But we also had others who did commendable jobs, primarily in American/English literature and language studies. Competition for Fulbright grants awarded to Tunisians to do research in the States and work towards their doctorates was intense, resulting in our getting among the very best applicants the country had to offer. The Tunisian universities and the Ministry of Higher Education clamored for more, many more, of these scholarships and grants. But times were getting harder with reduced funds, so that where we had formerly grantees remaining in the States to get their degrees from Yale, Duke and other leading schools, the grants were during my last two years for only a few months of research, with the doctorates being given by Tunisian universities. Maybe essential, but it was our loss.

I cannot talk about USIS without mentioning two extraordinary American women, long time residents of Tunis, who headed institutions that were vital to American standing in the community and country. The first is Patricia Payne, who for decades had run the local AMIDEAST office that handled educational counseling for those contemplating studying in the U.S., including Fulbrighters, and a number of other exchange programs. Pat helped organize two associations of those who had returned after attending American universities. AMIDEAST and Pat were enthusiastically admired in local circles, government and other. The second was CEMAT (Centre des Etudes Maghrebines a Tunis), a scholarly research organization for Americans that was built up from nothing by the efforts of Jeanne Mrad into a viable, vibrant organization that strengthened American -Tunisian scholarly relations. To indicate its effectiveness, the French used it as their model in creating their own similar institution. I called it "the house that Jeanne built" with good reason. Both were wholly independent from USIS, but in key functional ways acted almost as adjuncts. Pat and Jeanne were rightly looked up to as representing the best of America to by myriads of Tunisians. USIA supported both of these institutions with annual money grants. Justifying these moneys was one of my easiest tasks.

We put a special emphasis on working with the Ecole Nationale d'Administration, or ENA, which was based on that most grand of the French grandes ecoles of the same name, which had as its primary mission to turn out a new Tunisian elite, enarques slated to became governors and other senior officials. Again, we could never do enough to satisfy ENA insatiable appetite for things American. It was the rare political scientist or historian that we brought out who was not programmed there.

Relations with the press, indeed all the media, were cordial. They welcomed contacts and liked to receive our materials, although they rarely carried or excerpted them. What little they did run was devoid of "freight", that is, political content. As I have said earlier, that did not bother me. Whatever the reasons, I silently applauded them for refusing handouts from any foreign government, except for information and background purposes.

A few editors and journalists were among my most stimulating interlocutors, but the media's output was dull, turgid stuff. It was carefully controlled, slavishly reflecting official stands and policies in the state operated radio and television, while the press never roamed far afield from the instructions it regularly received. The government would issue orders on virtually all coverage aspects of things it considered important, but these instructions were hardly necessary, for editors and writers knew how far they could go and rarely, even on minor subjects, tried to exceed these limits. Educated Tunisians often chafed at their tame media, I should say tamed media, but were accustomed to it, for the strict controls under Ben Ali followed in the footsteps of those from the Bourguiba era. LE MONDE and other French publications, whose entry was carefully controlled by the censors, had great following, with each issue being eagerly snapped up. When an issue was seized, which happened fairly often, there were a lot of unhappy people.

Nobody likes to be on the receiving end of criticism, but the Tunisian authorities seemed particularly touchy. One of the two most important weekly news magazines, Al Maghreb, was closed down and its Director arrested, tried, convicted and given a long prison sentence for ostensibly breaking a law, which may technically have been true, but the cardinal fact was that he was being punished for pointedly criticizing a couple of ministers and therefore, by extension, the government itself. I might add he was one of my most stimulating media interlocutors. Al Maghreb never reappeared, at least not while I was in Tunisia.

As always exchanges of all sorts had a top priority with me, International Visitors, Fulbrights, Eisenhowers and others. Not only did they hugely impact on most recipients, but also on those with whom they were in contact. Nothing new here, as that has been the case almost everywhere I've been. We could not handle but a small proportion of the able candidates for Fulbright research grants, and out efforts to up our allocation fell on deaf ears in Washington. Times had changed and budgets were tighter. It wasn't like the good old days in Syria and Jordan. We had a problem with the ministry of foreign affairs, when it demanded that everyone we wanted to invite be initially cleared by it. We would have none of this, to the point of considering stopping awarding them altogether as we told them, but the ministry still kept up its campaign. Then, in a session, it all came out, and what it really was after was not so much control, though it would have liked that, but the fact that we were not giving enough of these grants to ministry officials. As a senior official put it, "you're not treating us fairly." When we explained that the Ministry's people were being assigned all over the world and we wanted to reach others, it backed off. Here was one more example of what we had going for us with the IV Program.

Let me change the subject. Thirty years had seen the disappearance of that stand-offishness and prickly criticism of things American, which had so riled us when I was assigned to Tunisia the first time. It was an amazing change in that the turn around was so total. Now, Tunisians desired social as well as business relations, invited us into their homes and in turn wanted to be invited into ours. Except for purely business affairs, wives not only desired to be included, but expected it. This was a 180 degree shift. For two evening stag events at the residence, word, and in no uncertain terms, got to me that the exclusion of wives was not appreciated and would I personally please pass this message in unambiguous terms on to the ambassador and then call back. I gladly, perhaps gleefully, did so, for I felt precisely the same way. With Joan also not invited, I declined attending either of them myself. Pelletreau accepted my staying away without comment.

Q: Was Libya seen as a problem? Did you feel somewhat in competition with the Libyans, and what they were doing?

UNDELAND: Libya was inconsequential, as far as our activities and my contacts with Tunisians were concerned. Many of them thought us silly to spend so much time worrying about Qadhafi. He, to their thinking, was not important enough to warrant what they saw as an American obsession. In general, Tunisians looked down on Libyans and saw their leader as perhaps a minor threat, but more as a clown. After his occasional visits, stories would make the rounds of stupid things he said and did. When one of his young, uniformed women guards took a spill and fell on her fanny while running along with his caravan, the onlookers roared with laughter, one turning to me and saying her fall so well summed it all up. Still, Tunisians wanted to get along with him, for he was their neighbor, had money, was touchy and could make mischief. There were some 15,000 Tunisians working in Libya, whose welfare also had to be considered, and the two countries had mutual oil interests, particularly in some off-shore oil fields they shared.

The Tunisians watched the border carefully and those concerned with security took him more seriously than the population at large. There was a fairly widespread feeling that by having cordial relations with him and the Libyans in general, Tunisia was keeping him and his mercurial ways under control, which they would point out was to the benefit not only of Libya's neighbors, but also of the U.S. I should add I had often heard this same line from the Egyptians during my previous assignment in Cairo about their relations with him. One other element fit into this picture. During the year of the extreme drought in the southern part of the country, Libyans came in droves across the border to purchase all sorts of things in Gabes, Sfax and other cities in the south. This helped get many Tunisians through those bad times and was not forgotten. Indeed, some merchants in these places geared most of their commerce toward meeting Libyan needs. In the Sfax souk, there was a sizable section called the Libyan market.

Q: Tunisia was seen as lining up with Saddam Hussein on the Gulf war and things leading up to it. It was hard to understand this from a friend of America. Could you sort this out for me?

UNDELAND: There were many factors at play, and I think I can best tackle your question by first approaching it historically. When Ben Ali came to poweNovember 7, 198one of his early moves was to have Tunisia take on a more pan-Arab stance, which had been such an anathema to his predecessor, while at the same time maintaining good relations with France, the U.S. and the West in general. With many in Tunisia, this more even handedness or playing both sides of the street struck a responsive chord. However, it inevitably brought into question whether being more pan-Arab didn't necessitate a loosening of the Western ties and the special relationships Bourguiba had had with France and the U.S.

Given this altered emphasis and Bourguiba's popularity with Americans, there was a question on whether Ben Ali would be well received and accepted by us, which I heard a number of times shortly after my arrival. Then came his unofficial visit to Washington in late 1988, with a state visit the following April. Both came off well, pleasing the Palace and people in general. There was a sort of a national sigh of relief. The test had been passed, and fears were dispelled. American-Tunisian relations were taken to be as good and secure as ever. There was, however, one tense moment on the state visit, when Bush, at the outset of their White House meeting, asked how "his old friend" Habib Bourguiba was getting along, but Ben Ali, after reportedly hesitating, came up with an anodyne answer, the moment passed and the incident was nothing more than a mere blip on the screen, soon forgotten.

The conservative, slow paced, authoritarian ways of the Ben Ali regime were being increasingly asserted, with the ruling partRCD (Ressemblement Constitutionnel et Democratique), as we always called it, replacing the Neo-Destour of Bourguiband government, the two wheels of the one bicycle. The widely felt enthusiasm over the end of Bourguiba's increasingly erratic and violent ways, which marked his first year in power faded with amazing speed under challenges from Islamist groups, which began to test the waters, by demonstrating and creating disturbances on campuses and in the capital city's center. At that time, parliamentary elections were held, and Islamist candidates, which by law could only run as independents, though not elected, had garnered enough votes to frighten the regime. It responded with a major crack- down, making many arrests. Security forces were seen everywhere. Whispered stories of torture and other abuse of prisoners abounded. Ben Ali's earlier popularity disappeared with many of the people. It came to be seen as only a brief interlude in the past and not a true picture. From then on the regime acted, I think sincerely, as if were seriously threatened and saw police/security control as the one viable answer to the threats it faced.

Some four months after the Ben Ali, in Tunisian eyes triumphal, state visit to Washington, Saddam invaded Kuwait, and while Tunisia did not overtly support him, it didn't stand up as some other Arab nations did to oppose him either. In fact, it showed where it really stood in its strident and widespread condemnation of the U.S. for answering Saudi Arabia's call for help and for sending American forces to the Arabian peninsula. Nothing was said officially, but the eruption of negative media coverage and comment and stands taken in international councils left no doubt where the Ben Ali government in fact stood. Why had this happened? First, there was no love lost between it and Saudi Arabia, or Kuwait, and, secondly, Tunisians raised the pan-Arab banner and saw the invasion of Kuwait as an Arab affair to be properly dealt with by the Arabs alone. The basis for serious U.S.- Tunisian differences was thus in place, and as events moved inexorably forward, the distance separating our two governments became more pronounced. Moreover, Tunisian public opinion lined up solidly behind Saddam Hussein, egged on by the media and therefore government stance.

Our protestations, and we vigorously made them, were rebuffed on basically two counts. The first was the considerable popular support for Saddam, ably promoted by the Iraqis and their friends, for his standing up "fearlessly" to Israel and its backehow often I heard that linand dislike of Saudis and Persian/Arab Gulf Arabs, with whom we were acting in concert. The small Iraqi embassy effectively exploited this line. But there was another angle, a local one that carried even greater weight. It lay in the purported "weakness" of the Ben Ali government as "proven" by the fact that the Islamist challenges that had broken out. Therefore, the line went, the authorities had to get out in front of their opponents to assure they neutralize the pro-Saddam line, and the only effective way to do this was to be there first with the same arguments. Our Tunisian interlocutors, including some of our best friends, told us this public stance was needed to disarm the regime's local enemies, pointing out these types were our foes as well as theirs. I believed, and still do, that this reasoning was both honestly believed and, at the same time, dishonestly self-serving, but in any case, it left little question on where Tunisia, though not baldly or directly so stated, was coming down.

Q: What happened during the war? I mean, how did the Tunisians react? Were we in any danger? Tell me how thing evolved.

As events ground inexorably toward the outbreak of military action, more and more security was seen in the city and when the air attacks started, the streets near the embassy were closed off. APCs with soldiers in battle dress were stationed around it, and we were assured we need have no fear, for we and our buildings would be protected unconditionally. The USIS center had concertina wire strung out in front of it, and two trucks with 50 caliber machine guns were parked in front of the entrance. At one point, a pro-Saddam demonstration come down a nearby street until it got to only a few blocks away, when the police diverted it away from approaching our place. It continued on for a few blocks, heading towards the city center, but was broken up and dispersed. Its path would have taken it near the embassy.

I shut down all public parts of the our operation, but we remained fairly busy, getting out a sizable flow of information materials received from Washington, which we delivered to the government offices and those of the media and a number of Tunisian institutions. Fortunately, we had just bought a big new Xerox copying machine that supposedly could handle any load, but we used it so much it was constantly breaking down, and for a while the Xerox people actually assigned a repair man full time to our office. For safety's sake, our drivers did the delivering in taxis, as it would not have been prudent to have American cars or any others with diplomatic/foreigner plates on the streets, particularly since each embassy had its identifying number on every plate. One of the ironies of the situation was that only the rear portion of the playing field of the main French run school separated the Iraqi embassy from the USIS building. Another was the "error" in an issue of Al Maghreb, shortly thereafter shut down as I have already noted, which transposed captions under pictures of visits to its offices, so that I was turned into an Iraqi diplomat and two Iraqis became Americans. Even handedly, the pictures were on the same page and exactly the same size. Was it done intentionally? Let me just say I'm from Missouri on this one.

A main task we took on was to get out and see people even more than usual, to find out what they had on their minds, to explain and justify what the U.S. was doing, to keep up relations and to demonstrate that we valued them then as much as anytime. Also, we were showing we were not just hunkering down, an important factor not to be overlooked. I relished these sessions, for which I had paved the way by making a major part of my business to get around as soon as I had arrived. I was never turned away or dissuaded from coming again. Rather, it was just the opposite.

We in USIS were charged with keeping tabs on public and media opinion, writing reports for Washington, and perhaps most tellingly doing a daily cable on media reaction. As I have indicated, Tunisians in the media and elsewhere were as available to us as ever. I sometimes went out of the way to tell them of my media reporting duty, adding that what I was personally responsible for sending back to the States was not doing Tunisian standing in Washington any good. With many of my contacts, I encountered a defensive attitude and the hope that once the war was over, things could rapidly get back to normal. Indeed, everywhere there was the belief that they would. The sentence, "il faut tourner la page" became a veritable refrain. At that time, I could not be all that optimistic that it would, as I unmistakably let them know.

I discovered that our highest ranking FSN, Jalal ben Smida, had taken on himself a very similar task of tirelessly seeking out his legion of important friends and contacts, cautioning them not to say and do things they would later regret, for after the conflict ended, they would want to see Tunisia reestablish cordial ties with the U.S., and it was not wise for them to put this extra burden on themselves. For this initiative, I put him in for the top USIA award, which he received.

To indicate how emotional the times were, the dean of the one of the two law faculties at Tunis University stated in a meeting that Saudi Arabia had the legal right under the U.N. charter to seek defensive support from wherever and whomever it wanted, and it was therefore legally justified, though he added unwise, to have turned to the Americans. For this statement, which somehow got reported in the press, he received a number of menacing phone calls, including death threats, and was so shaken he hurriedly went to France and stayed there until things cooled down.

The wild Iraqi versions of the war were given wide credence, going far beyond anything that could be rationally believed. One was the front paged claim that the Iraqi army had scored a huge military victory, in the course of which they had captured 2,000 French legionnaires. A political scientist contact, who claimed to be a strategic expert, commented on television there was a very good chance the Iraqis were going to win, or at least so bloody the Americans, we would have to break off fighting and go home. The next day he came unannounced to my office, as he often did, and in our discussion I asked him if he really believed this nonsense, adding we would have to revisit this claim again after a month or so to see if he had been right or not, for the one thing a real expert cannot permit himself to be is flat out wrong. When I later saw and challenged him as I said I would, he sheepishly brushed off what he had stated as a product of those emotional times and therefore not later to be taken seriously. That was not an isolated incident among Tunisians I knew. There were numerous others.

Let me end this portion by saying that Tunisian friends and some we did not know at all well came to Joan and myself, saying that if we ever felt uncomfortable or personally threatened, we should immediately come to them and, if we wished, stay in their homes until things blew over. They would always be ready to help and protect us. The political and personal were two worlds, often widely apart.

Q: But here you've got a relatively sophisticated country, at least the people you're reaching. The issue was not really our support for Israel, but rather an outrageous land grab by a vicious dictator. I'm surprised, from what I'm gathering from you, that the Tunisians were really quite solidly behind Iraq.

UNDELAND: I've touched on some of the reasons, but I'll go into it a bit more. You're wrong about the lack of relevance of the Israeli factor as seen through the Tunisian optic, for it played a leading role in determining attitudes towards Iraq and the Gulf war. Saddam's firing off his Scud missiles against Israeli cities was widely, albeit mostly privately, applauded. I heard more than a few Tunisians praise him as the only Arab leader who not only took on the Israelis verbally, but backed up his words with action. Though the media did not come right out and say so directly, their coverage made it clear they agreed.

Another element was the widespread belief that although some Arab governments lined up with us and the Kuwaitis and Saudis, the vast majority of their people did not. This was held to be true in Egypt and Syria, for, as they said, the people really felt the same way that they, the Tunisians, did, adding that the Egyptians and Syrians had no means of expressing how they really felt. And the same was held to be true in other Arab countries. This view on what Arab attitudes really were was as true among the Tunisian elites as with that elusive "man in the street".

One should not underestimate the degree of antipathy and downright contempt felt towards the Saudis and the Kuwaitis, and it didn't take very much to bring it to the surface. They were looked on as arrogant and insulting towards other Arabs, an embarrassment, hopelessly corrupt and self-indulgent, engaged in all forms of sinful and other bad behavior, while at the same time using but little of their immense wealth to help their Arab brothers. One Tunisian, who had been an ambassador several times, told me, "we really don't care what happens to these people; they're an insult to us Arabs."

Another aspect was the phenomenon of the Tunisian government being popularly expected to take a leading role on this and other such issues. Let me explain. Many of the citizenry were accustomed and willing to follow, at times almost blindly, the official line, so long as it went along with, rather did not clash with, already held beliefs. It had happened under Bourguiba; it happened under Ben Ali. Leaders and their governments were expected to lead in most circumstances. What would It require to oppose this guidance or direction? Two things: (1) were the matter seen as running opposite to their immediate, personal concerns, which directly affecting their lives, or (2) were it clash in a big way with their already held thinking on whatever the issue might be. Neither of these elements came into play.

We also must not discount or underestimate the psychological effect of actions taken by the Iraqi government, the information/propaganda emanating from Baghdad, and, as I have already noted, the efforts of the few talented officials stationed in the small Iraqi embassy in Tunis. You may not like the work of these diplomats, but you have to give them credit for achieving a lot with very few resources. They knew how to play on existing prejudices and beliefs and did so, I would say, brilliantly. They were tireless in making their rounds and presenting their case. They got out thousands of color pictures of a smiling, confident Saddam Hussein, which were plastered everywhere, creating a visual reminder at every turn of this Arab leader, i.e. commanding in his uniform yet smiling and looking fatherly. His local popularity was not to be gainsaid.

Q: During the war, I mean the war stretches two periods. There was the invasion, the building up of the defenses, and then our offensive. What were you getting from Washington? This was pretty much a black and white thing in its eyes.

UNDELAND: We had no shortage of materials, with one key exception I'll get to. I've told you of our stepped up distribution of statements, background pieces, reports and news stories. I should add we were sending quantities of visuals coming over WorldNet to the TV station. There were interviews on the horrors of the Iraqi occupation and then visual reports after our forces entered the city. Supply wasn't the problem, though a lot of it would never have been suited to the Tunisian "market". In sum, the non-usage was total, nothing even with sourcing to the American government, which we urged them to clearly state. The exception was three WorldNet interactive interviews, where questions posed by Tunisian journalists were answered by senior American officials. No real exchange of ideas and perceptions, but then that was beyond expectation. Portions of the answers were carried in the newspapers. We clamored for more of these programs, but that was all we got throughout the whole crisis. They offered the only instances of the official American viewpoint appearing more or less in tact in the Tunisian media.

While I have stated elsewhere I have not been a great fan of media placement of political items, this was different. I felt we were absolutely right to seek to have our side of the story at least made available to Tunisians, however they may have reacted to it. The climate demanded, we held, as well as justified, this balance. Yet, I knew full well this was not the Tunisian way and was not one whit surprised by the refusal. Pelletreau and I went over this at length, and we fully agreed that we had to go on trying to make our case, regardless of how futile our efforts were and indeed well knowing they were just that.

This lack of coverage of our side of the story wasn't something that could be affected by views or decisions of editors or directors, not that we probably would have had much influence on them anyway, for the whats and hows came from the highest levels of the government, i.e. the presidential palace. My repeated protestations to the secretary of state for information, the Tunisian version of the minister of information, and to the press radio and television bigwigs were received with a shrug and an unwillingness to argue the case in more than perfunctory terms, because they had no authority on this matter, and, moreover, they knew that I also knew it. It wasn't their decision to make, though I am pretty sure that a whole lot of the junk would have been carried the way it was anyway, given the existing climate and passions.

CNN coverage contributed to determining and reinforcing pro-Saddam attitudes, for its reporting on the bombing of Baghdad, particularly the bunker full of civilians (only purportedly entirely civilians, as we learned later), was played over and over on Tunisian TV. That and other stories of mayhem presented no credibility problems, for it was what was coming from the Americans themselves, wasn't it?

A vignette on the security aspect, showing how every effort was made to see that nothing bad happened physically to us and our interests. As I've stated, it was my joy to tramp over the fields of Carthage, with their wheat and barley crops, wild flowers and archaeological ruins, as I had 30 years earlier. On one of these outings just after the bombing began, I went around the back and sides of the American North African Cemetery for our World War II dead, which lies amidst these fields and came upon an encampment of a dozen or so soldiers, newly bivouacked just outside the cemetery wall. They had been hurriedly stationed there to make sure no hotheads tried to desecrate the graves or cause other damage. In like manner, a unit of soldiers was stationed around the American school.

There was another factor playing a role in determining how the authorities acted. I am convinced that they did not consider what people thought and said and what the media carried as being at all that important and therefore looked on the pro-Iraqi, anti-American stuff as an easy way out. I encountered this train of thinking quite regularly and never got a fully satisfying answer to my query on whether there might not be unfortunate lasting effects from continued exposure to this stream of nasty stuff that put the U.S. in such a bad light.

It was reinforced by the following story. A couple of days after the fighting ended, I got up one morning to find the media had stopped all criticism of the U.S. and all support for Saddam. The spigot had been abruptly turned off, literally overnight. My first order of business was to set up an appointment with the secretary of state for information. In his office not more than an hour later, he could not have greeted me more cordially. I asked him what had happened? He answered, "well, now that the war is over, there is no reason for us to continue what we have been doing, so we called in the editors and directors to tell them to stop it, and all, except the editor who is out of control, did." He went on, "you're happy with this, aren't you?" I agreed that having the attacks against the United States come to an end was a good thing, particularly as they had been so absurd and unjustified in the first place. Then I asked him what effect this abrupt change would have on the media's credibility? "How do you think your readers and listeners and viewers reacted when they get up this morning and found this total change?" He replied that it was not a big deal; they'd soon become accustomed to it and forget about what had gone before. He went on, that even if the media's credibility were affected, "it's better that we stop it, rather than have it senselessly drag on."

I told him I would of course fully report his comments back to Washington, adding I expected some who read my cable would be perplexed and probably pretty derisive. He looked at me quizzically and said, "well, you don't want us to continue, do you?" I told him certainly not, but that it only proved it never should have occurred in the first place. He said, "don't worry about it. This is the decision that has been taken, and that's the end of it." I subsequently heard from others who were well placed, including a couple of ministerial rank, that this stop and desist order had been made directly by the president, not that I or anyone else who kept up with the way things worked needed to be told. From no one else could it have come, and I thought I could guess pretty well who had advised him.

Their optic on their media was plainly quite different from the one we have on ours. They do have a massive credibility gap with their own citizens, but, as the secretary said, "does it really matter?" That is probably a good question about the media in any authoritarian state. Not that we don't get some pretty reprehensible stuff in our own, I might add.

I had long questioned the value of regular reporting on press, radio and television content in countries where the media cannot operate independently and freely. Are we really passing on much that is worth while? I have put together many more of these cables than I would have, had I been the one to decide on their usefulness. However, ambassadors and Washington have liked them, and on they flowed.

Q: How about after the war, when the absolute humiliation of the Iraqi army was plain to see.

UNDELAND: Maybe to you, but that was not the view among many, and probably most, Tunisians. It was widely believed the Iraqis had fought gallantly against overwhelming odds and deserved credit for having bravely taken on the world greatest military power. The thinking was that they had stood up for their rights, for justified opposition to Israel, for Arab pride, and the fact they'd been defeated in no way diminished their stature. It was victory in defeat. As time went on, these views faded somewhat, but when I left more than a year later, they were still fairly widely held, though by then not a subject often brought up, at lest not with me. They had gotten on to other things and the emotionalism had greatly dissipated, though not quite wholly disappeared.

Q: What happened after the Gulf war?

UNDELAND: It was clear the palace saw it had made a tremendous error, almost as if Tunisia woke up one morning to find itself strangely in bed with Arafat, Saddam, Qadhafi and Saleh of South Yemen and quizzically asked, "how did we ever end up with these bedfellows?" Fundamental changes were made with a new foreign minister, Ben Yahia, who had been one of the country's most effective ambassadors in Washington and was favorably disposed towards the U.S. and with the assigning of a new ambassador in Washington of similar outlook. Those who had been the major promoters of the move to pan-Arabism and the supporters of Saddam were not fired, but in typical Tunisian fashion gently and firmly shoved aside. When I was making my farewell calls, two ministers confirmed to me point blank that the above is an accurate rendering of the switch that transpired.

We in USIS got back into normal operations more rapidly than I had expected, and we found ourselves accepted everywhere as if nothing had happened, as if an unpleasant interlude had now passed and was to be wholly forgotten. I do not recall one case of resentment over our liberation of Kuwait expressed to me or others on the staff, even though a fair amount of Saddam's popularity remained. We got past those six months of tension more rapidly and completely than I had thought possible.

A few months after the end of the war, Pelletreau left for Cairo, replaced by John McCarthy. In his, the new ambassador's, pre departure meeting with President Bush, the later told him that after 40 years of excellent relations with Tunisia, the few bad months over Saddam could not be let outweigh the four decades of friendship, cooperation and common interests. He charged him with working to get things back on an even keel. McCarthy repeated these instructions over and over to Tunisians, beginning with Ben Ali. It went down very well. In his farewell call at the palace, Pelletreau, as it was related to me, was prepared to discuss ways to help restore the former closeness, but Ben Ali cut this short by saying that there was no need to bring this up, as he'd already taken care of it, had seen to it that it would never happen again. Indeed, he had made the changes, whatever the future may hold.

Q: You've spoken about how much you admired Pelletreau. How did you find working with McCarthy?

UNDELAND: I had a fairly big run-in with him early on, and he felt at first I was overly prone to question his thinking, but these bumps in the road were soon relegated to the past, and we were professionally much in tune. It was pretty evident he was not accustomed to having those on his staff be as outspoken as is my wont, but it is also fair to say, he came in relatively short time to expect and welcome my candor and what I had to say about Tunisia and Tunisians. We were never personally close, and I found him at times overly mercurial, but it became for me a satisfactory working relationship. He included me in his deliberations as much as any ambassador with whom I have worked.

At the outset, he embarked on a round of calls on ministers and other ranking Tunisians without reference to this staff, to those who dealt in these areas, let along include them on his visits. Learning by chance of a planned call on the highly competent, political and controversial minister of education, Mohamed Charfi, I wrote him a two page memo on who Charfi was and what his mandate and real importance were, which were very political, reaching far beyond only education concerns. John thanked me for my initiative, based his conversation on this memo and thereafter asked me to accompany him on all of his visits relevant to USIS and my often broader interests.

There's another story. The details are not relevant to the point I want to make, so I'll skip them, but I sent him in a memo containing a contribution I had made for an embassy cable that was not included, telling of a proposed special IV grant for former Prime Minister Hedi Baccouche, that never came off, because the palace had put the kibosh on it. This had occurred before McCarthy arrived, and I thought he should know about it. Back came my memo with a penned margin comment that he "didn't like to be blind sided" and I must never let it happen again. I immediately went to him and told him that his DCM and political section head knew all about it, and it was hardly my fault they hadn't informed him, but my real point was I was trying to be useful to him, found his reaction unacceptable and didn't ever want to receive another like it. Then came his startling reply, "but it's the first note like that I've ever sent you." (I was well aware of similar outbursts he had made to other officers.) I shot back, "I want it to be the last." It was.

Whatever the reactions to him were in the mission, Tunisians responded positively to his outgoing manner, to his campaign of actively seeking them out, to his flair. They saw in him a likable friend. He had a huge advantage going for him in that virtually every official went out of his way to see that in the aftermath of the Gulf war, no blips arose on the screen of America-Tunisia relations. However, I don't think his methods would have worked so well, maybe not well at all, in tenser times, such as those we had just gone through.

Maybe some of the ways he acted went back to his having entered the Foreign Service in the same class as Pelletreau and Wisner and the big time competition that he saw they represented. At least that's the way it struck me.

His embassy was diminished in size and stature from that of Bob's, for the Arab League had gone back to Cairo and the PLO headquarters to the West Bank. The AID mission was going out of business, the Peace Corps was closing ouwhat a stupid mistake that was, for it gave us tremendous reach throughout the countrbudgets of every section were being cut, including USIS's, and it was clear that big time downsizing of our Tunisia presence was underway.

Returning to Pelletreau for a moment, his wisdom, calm and realistic leadership stood us particularly in good stead during the Gulf war period. His matter of fact approach at every turn and his understanding of forces and factors at play in Tunisia contributed much to our getting through this time relatively unscathed. There was nothing false or misleading about that man in anything. He quietly but pointedly got this across his message to interlocutors and absorbed well what they had on their minds. He didn't have press sessions with the local media and that sort of exposure, for he did not want to have to shade his remarks or be other that fully candid, as he inevitably would have had to be. One very important factor was that he had the full confidence of Washington, something McCarthy never acquired.

While always the consummate diplomat, he also had a streak of independence which he demonstrated by seeing Bourguiba-ites and others out of power and favor. Moreover, he welcomed a somewhat similar streak in me. His choosing to sit next to Mohammad Sayeh at CEMAT and other public events and seeking out Habib Bourguiba Jr. at functions did not go unnoticed. Sayeh, one of the former president's closest confidants was not quite under house arrest, but was carefully watched and wasn't permitted to travel abroad. I also got to know them both of them well. Indeed, at a dinner at our home with the Sayehs, Bourguibas Jr., Pelletreaus and ourselves, our place had more "guests" outside, being surrounded by more than 30 police watchers and guards. I suggested we both visit Hedi Baccouche in his home, which we did, riding there in the ambassadorial car, which made the point. There was a point to this in manifesting, without ever saying a word, that the U.S. was not happy with Tunisia being politically so closed, so under wraps, and looked forward to it becoming more open. Some of our Tunisian friends silently, rather privately, applauded. I am convinced it was a small but useful part of the official American presence in the country.

Q: You've talked a great deal about the Gulf war and political situation. Would you like to get into some of the projects that involved you and the USIS post? You clearly liked to move around and get into lots of things.

UNDELAND: The largest single project we had was a three day North African regional seminar on the rule of law staged jointly with the a local scholarly society, headed by Rachid Driss, who had been Tunisia's ambassador to the U.S. and then the U.N. for many years. We brought five French/Arabic speaking experts from the U.S. to interact with the participants from Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania, Egypt and of course Tunisia. It was quite a show, though it frustrated the participating Americans due to the lack of candor in open sessions, which contrasted so strongly with the far greater frankness around dinner tables and in small informal get-togethers. We saw to it that there was a lot of the latter. One of these Americans asked an Algerian participant in exasperated tones why there was so little honesty in the big meetings and so much in the small settings. She answered, "But the former are public, and we can be criticized for what we say. Only in the latter can we state what we really know and believe." He came back, "Why is it that ten of you sitting around the dining table not public?", to which she calmly replied, "because we have decided it isn't." One of the Tunisians told me that there can be no democracy until it is accepted by all, and particularly the authorities, that there is to be no difference between being private and going public. He was absolutely right. This event pushed the envelope open just as far as the authorities would permit. Rachid was adroit in knowing just how close to the edge things could be taken in dealing with democratic ways and ideas and then doing just that. I relied on his wisdom more than just this time.

Another one that worked out well was simulated Middle East peace talks at ENA in which the enarques became Palestinian and Israeli negotiators. Organizing and overseeing it was Ampart Dr. Abdel Aziz Said of American University, aided by the Palestinian Mubarak Awad, the two of them having come to Tunisia together, though we were not officially involved with Mubarak. These sessions that went on for several days recalled to me in both content, objectivity and intensity what Hal Saunders had achieved with the budding political scientists at Cairo University. The participating future high level officials were similarly amazed at how much agreement they could find from both the Israeli and Palestinian sides they were acting out. So were ENA's director and senior staff. This outcome came as no surprise to me, for I had programmed Abdel Aziz earlier in both Egypt and Jordan and had deep appreciation for his cultural and political skills.

We regularly used the speakers bureau in USIS-Paris to find talent for our programming, for they could lecture in French. One was the caustic journalist, Flora Lewis of New York Times and other fame, who started her day long seminar at Tunis University's School of Journalist with the statement that the first priority for being a serious journalist was to question, if not mistrust, what your government tells you. The dean nearly fell out of his seat, but the students lapped it an all else she said up. Two came by my office later to tell me that this had been their most stimulating day they'd had at the school, but, alas, that wasn't the journalism of Tunisia.

Another was political scientist Steven Ekovich, who taught at the Polytechnique, and who told students in the direct aftermath of the Gulf war that if they did not think through political issues for themselves, others stood ready to do it for them. But to do so they needed to know the real from the false, the truth by their own lights. His friendly challenging of them had him surrounded after two classes that I attended. He also lectured at ENA. We were delighted to get him subsequently as a Fulbright lecturer. He had more teaching demands in the local academia than could be handled.

And now a story of a puzzling failure. We had what Pelletreau and I looked on as an inexplicable inability to develop the close relations we desired with Education Minister Mohamed Charfi, though we got through se well and did so well with others in that ministry. How we tried, using personal contacts, AID and Fulbright scholarships, a prospective special relationship with Princeton through its MidEast professor, Carl Brown and IV grants for ministry officials. We were urged on in this effort by the cream of Tunisian academia, but Charfi, while ever cordial when we saw him, rebuffed us at every turn. We could never quite figure out why, for the development, maybe evolution is a better work, of Tunisian education for which he was striving to have his ministry achieve so closely paralleled what we ourselves wanted to see happen and in some modest ways thought we could help bring about. But the best that emerged was that we were given credit by some for having tried.

Back to the positive. We got into English teaching in a big way, not by doing it directly, but by working with the ministry of education and the Bourguiba Institute that we had helped set up thirty years earlier. We, along with the British Council, hosted annual summer seminars for English teachers, collaborated through our English teaching officer with curriculum reforms, but perhaps most important got into developing a whole series of new teaching texts. The problem here was not only linguistic, though the existing textbooks were sadly deficient, but also because passages took unnecessary digs at things and ways American. The British Council director agreed that they, written years earlier by an Englishmen, should go. However, a problem lay in continuing obstruction by a key textbook committee member, the Sousse English inspector, whom I had come to know quite well, rarely passing through that city without stopping by briefly to chat with him, and he when in Tunis usually dropped by to see me. With some trepidation, I went to Sousse to ask him to resign from the committee. I was relieved, when he, with almost a sigh of relief, readily agreed, later telling me he knew he was causing problems and wanted out, but until he had the excuse of me asking him didn't know how to go about it. I cite this not flatter myself, but only to indicate the real influence that can occasionally come through well honed personal contacts and appreciation of the other fellow, his ideas and where he is coming from.

Relatedly, I honed in on the Francophile and initially suspicious director of other foreign languages, particularly English, in the ministry of education, with numerous visits to his office and culminating with an IV grant, which opened up a new world to him. It was almost a visit of transformation, for he became a wholehearted backer of expanded English instruction in the schools, relying mainly on American instructional methods and materials. It all started with my patiently listening at length to him, his theories, musings and questions. Take the time to hear someone out, and how often he then welcomes what you have to say and becomes a welcoming colleague.

Another story, if you can bear one more. In Tunis I learned the misery of being a fund raiser, at least for me. The Bourguiba Institute and the University of Minnesota had for years had an annual exchange program, of which we in USIS were well aware but in which we had no involvement, whereby one Minnesota student intensively studied Arabic for a summer in Tunis and, in return, a Bourguiba student had a graduate year at Minnesota. The local AMIDEAST office that handled the arrangements came to me to say that the ministry had for some reason reneged on paying the international travel for the Tunisian, as it had done in previous years. It claimed it had to refuse, as it had not been sufficiently consulted and involved. The Tunisian student was a young woman from a poor family, with a hearing impediment, making it necessary for her to read lips. I took it on myself to protest to the ministry, but got nowhere, only thoroughly angry. So, I took it on myself and raised the necessary funds for a round trip ticket by hitting up American and British firms in Tunis, never dreaming that latching onto money for such a worthy cause could be so time consuming and wearying.

Telling this matter rather irately one day to As Sabah's lead editor, Abdellatif Fourati, he asked if he could publish it. Perhaps unwisely I agreed, and what appeared across several columns had me, I must add accurately, roundly criticizing the ministry. The minister was personally incensed and demanded an explanation. Taken in tow by our FSN, Jalal ben Smida, to right the ship, we called on him, a session in which I ate more crow than at any other time I can recall during my career. Jalal was superb, and we left with the incident undoubtedly not forgotten, but at least never brought up to me/us again. Here was one more instance showing how much we rely on our FSNs for things large and small. They are a post's backbone, as was proven here and time after time elsewhere. I might add that my personal standing with more than a few Tunisians got a boost, more than I deserve, for "taking on" a government body, winning what I wanted and then making it public. And a farewell lunch for me at the residence, this minister was downright embarrassing in all the kind things he said. I'm not quite sure whether it was being polite or showing respect, or perhaps even a mixture of the two.

The beauty of a PAO assignment in Tunisia or another country with friendly, open people like it is that so many stimulating and varied things happen, if you only get out, see the place, seek out contacts, appreciate the society's driving forces, and most of all listen and really take in what you hear. Dialogue almost automatically ensues. There are many more events and encounters during this tour, which I saw as instructive, that I could recount, but I hope those I have stated give enough of the flavor of the place to get my points across. Since retiring in 1992, I have returned to Tunis four times, and on each I have met with many of those I got to know well. The years have passed, but it has been as if I had only left yesterday, and my interlocutors and I took up where we had left off.

To close this portion on a personal note, I had looked around re a possible follow-on assignment, but saw nothing that greatly appealed, so nearly a year ahead of when my tour was slated to be up, I decided that June 30, 1992 would be my last day before retiring from the Foreign Service, and that I would do it while still in Tunisia. At my last mission staff meeting, one officer rued that they were "losing their only curmudgeon, with no replacement in sight." I liked going out on that note.

USIMy Perspectives

UNDELAND: This interview has been in the Department of State series, and I have been asked about all the ambassadors under whom I served. Fair enough, but in thinking back over the ground I have covered, the question of USIA leadership has been almost wholly ignored. I not only worked for the NEA director as a PAO for nearly 18 years, but they did annual performance reports on me, covering the same periods as those done by DCMs/ambassadors. In most cases, but alas by no means all, these reports by different persons in different places presented very similar pictures of what I had been doing and lent support to each other. In turn, I usually found myself on the same wave length with both of them, but again not always. All in all, I was usually closer to the former, which is hardly surprising, since they were the ones I dealt with face-to-face on a daily basis. The overseas reality of interacting with persons, societies and institutions brought about everyday concerns, problems and issues not always totally in tune with those in Washington. I don't say this critically, but only to point out a reality.

(From here on I am assuming the role of interviewer as well as being the interviewee. I do so to keep the same style and format.)

Q.You may have set some kind of record for number of years as a PAO, working under many USIA NEA leaders as well as ambassadors. How did you find them and did having two bosses thousands of miles apart cause problems?

UNDELAND: With a couple of exceptions, one of them fairly major for me, my PAOships and I personally have been extraordinarily well served by NEA leadership, but let me begin on this broad subject by going back to before my stints as PAO.

I cannot say enough good things about Ned Roberts, indeed have done so, whom I first met when he, as head of the African area, came to Tunis around 1960, and then when I was temporarily assigned to Rabat, where he was PAO. He was worth ten personnel and career development officers, who were supposedly looking out after me, my development and my interests.

My next encounter with an area director was a far cry from that with Ned. Earlier in this narrative, I mentioned that NEA and personnel wanted to assign me to the Yemen, then a one American officer post, after I returned from Vietnam. It would almost certainly have meant going from one family evacuation/separation to another, given that Yemen was in the throes of an increasingly violent and brutal civil war. I balked at this prospect. I hadn't mentioned names when I brought this up before, but will here. Director Alan Carter personally blustered and tried to browbeat me into accepting, saying that in NEA I had the choice of that assignment or nothing. I refused and, as I have said, ended up in Algiers, but my point here is that my two very unpleasant sessions with Carter were something I don't believe any officer should have to face. My views of him have ever since been colored by this experience. His loose canon approach to managemenhe once said in front of me and others that he would try any number of things and if one-third of them worked out well, that was a good averagwas to my thinking a bizarre way to go about our business. In my book he has always been something of a blow-hard, albeit at times not an unimaginative one.

Next came David Nalle, who in my mind stands out as one of the best, most perceptive and brightest I have encountered in USIA, with his under- spoken ways, open mind, perceptiveness, along with some strongly held views and stands, most of which I agreed with. As is so often true, it is much harder to remember the specifics of things that have gone easily, well and smoothly, particularly years ago, and I must admit this is the case in my attempts to look back on him, what exactly he did and how I responded.

For my first PAO assignmenttemporarily Kuwait, Jordan and then back to Kuwaiand the 1970 Arabic language training in Beirut, I could not have fared better in area directors, that is, David Nalle, Mike Pistor and Bill Payeff. They were understanding, supportive, open to ideas and initiatives and an ever ready to hear me out and deal with actual or possible problems and glitches. They came across to me as wanting to go out of their way to see that the post and its PAO did well.

It was in Jordan I had my first encounter with Bill Rugh as the deputy director, who was little supportive, indeed just the opposite. Without the slightest inkling of what was coming, he confronted me with a performance rating (OER), full of innuendos, half truths and just plain misstatements, treatment the like of which I had never encountered in my career, but would again from him. Worse by far than that, he seemed other directed, as if purposely avoiding getting on the same wave length.

Let me digress for a minute here on doing OERs, which are so hugely important to careers. From the first time I ever did one, I had made it a firm, no exceptions, policy for myself and anyone on my staff that an officer or other employee (including FSNs) being rated had to have been confronted with criticisms or complaints or anything negative prior to the rating report, or there was no justification for having those charges, or suggestions or whatever included in the document. Evaluation was only a part of them, necessary in its own right to be sure, but equally useful was their importance as a powerful tool in helping employees progress and become more effective contributors to post objectives and activities. It was no place for springing surprises,. Moreover, simple fairness and decency demanded this prior openness. When PAO in Cairo, I told a rater either to remove an undiscussed criticism from the report he had drafted on a subordinate or expect me to take him to task for it in my report on him. Needless to say, the offending passage disappeared pronto. Also in Cairo, another officer I was rating, argued I had not gone over in sufficiently depth a criticism I had put into the draft of the report. I thought I had, but he raised enough doubt in my mind that I struck it out entirely. The departing branch PAO in Alexandria, Bill Murphey, did such a shoddy job on FSN reports, I felt compelled to redo all of them myself, of course pointedly noting this in my report on him. That was intolerable.

I was, indeed, very fortunate that Mike Pistor was back as the NEA director during almost all of the time I was PAO in Cairo, for it was an operation that demanded constant support from headquarters, and he saw that I got it. Many needs from many sides, but most of all because of the demands of Ambassador Wisner. I have detailed earlier the up and down relationship I had with him, but here would point out that these vicissitudes were made much more tenable knowing I could unfailingly rely on a sympathetic reading form Pistor. One more instance to those I have already related was Frank's proposal to eliminate the English teaching and exchanges officer slots, as part of his ballyhooed mission downsizing scheme. He then quietly told me that he would relent on the latter if I used officer development as the argument, but only if a forceful request to do so was made by the NEA director personally. What shenanigans! However, Pistor played the game on those terms and that slot was spared. In this and at so many other turns, Mike devoted time and effort and showed chutzpah and almost unlimited patience.

From this high in came another Rugh stint, for he replaced Mike for the years of my last assignment in Tunis. Our relationship started out with a series of slashing objections my proposed annual country plan, which Pelletreau and the political counselor had not only approved but singled out for praise. And again, those out of the blue surprises in his performance ratings. Mind you, I did get from him some credit for my reporting, for my wordhow he loved words on papebut almost nothing for what I had done. Enough on Rugh. My negative experiences with him could fill pages. I drew little consolation from I learning that other PAOs fared worse at is hands than I had. Thank goodness for the superb Tunisia desk officer, Magda Siekert, and NEA's deputy director, Ed Bernier during those years. Of all desk officers who have handled countries where I was PAO, Magda tops my list. She was like being my branch PAO in Washington. I can't say enough good things about Ed, in his most trying and often delicate situation. He was ever the voice of reason, among many other things manfully putting the kibosh on his superior's efforts to limit academics, journalists and others we sponsored only to those who would slavishly parrot the party line. Who ever found, let alone programmed, a parrot worth listening to? By the way, Ed had been the most competent information officer in Cairo when I was PAO and a couple of years later was my superior in Washington, but no matter, for at both times, we had acted as equals.

All in all, I found I had a very healthy area office-field relationship that in no small measure was responsible for making it possible to get as much done as I am convinced we did in the posts where I served.

Q. And your views on USIA's top leadership? Many have found major fault with it. Did you?

UNDELAND: I am not alone in holding that the last truly great head of USIA was Ed Murrow, going back to the Kennedy days. Since then all of them seemed to me to have had serious faults of one sort or another, some shortcomings so marked it is hard to understand how, except for politics, they ever could have been even considered for this position. Now, there may be a lot I do not know, having been overseas so much of the time, but it seems and seemed clear to me that the essential problem has been two-fold: USIA was small enough that it didn't usually attract the best talent for directors and, far more serous, it was all too often used by the White House for political pay-offs or other rewards for friends and supporters. I don't know how else one could explain the people who have held to top position, and I'm referring to those put there by both Democrat and Republican administrations. Fortunately, the effectiveness of the area and functional bureaus, staffed and in fairly large measure led by professionals, conducted most of the vital business, often giving lip service but not seeming to pay all that much attention to those in the top echelon who were brought in from outside.

My few encounters with the agency's directors in the field would have been more surprising and embarrassing, if what I had picked up from colleagues had led me to expect anything much more. As heads of the U.S. government's overseas information efforts, one would think that they would be fully conversant on American foreign policies and interests and effective spokesmen of them, but it was just the opposite. Let me cite three examples. In the mid-1970's, the pleasant and congenial James Keogh visited Bahrain for a couple of days. I, then PAO for Kuwait/Qatar/Bahrain, accompanied him, along with of course the ambassador, in his calls on ministers and the emir. In the last, he was asked about developments and current Washington thinking on the Middle East and particularly details on our relations with Arab countries. He turned his head and looked blankly at the ambassador, who stepped in and responded fully and at appropriate length. The lay of the land was clear, and the emir's next question was something vague and general about American prosperity. Yes, purely a courtesy call.

(I shortly thereafter while on home leave visited longtime family friend, the Omaha World Herald's renowned city editor Ben Sylvester, who asked about Keogh, saying that as a young reporter, he had worked under him on the OWH. I replied he was an agreeable person and told of his call on the emir. Sylvester shook his head and said he wasn't surprised, for it fit in well with thoughts of him while he was on the Omaha paper.)

Frank Shakespeare's visit to Jordan, accompanied by his son and Len Garment, was as bizarre as they come. Dean Brown and I both knew he was a Nixon man and not much more, who had an overriding concern with things military. So, the visit of three days was organized to include a 20 minute stop at USIS, a dinner hosted by the minister of information, an ambassadorial reception at the residence and the call on King Hussein at the palace. All else was military. To set the framework, it was shortly after the '73 war and Syrian incursions into northern Jordan. Brown and the Jordanian chief of staff took over the military planning, and what a job they did, with numerous helicopter rides, battle and defense narrations, plastic sheet overlay briefings, mansifs, i.e. meals, with officers, and a blow-by-blow description of the 1970 battle with the Fedayeen for control of Amman. Shakespeare lapped it up like a ten year old boy, telling the White House after his return that Dean was one of our very best ambassadorone occasion when he was totally righfor the story went that after every overseas trip he made he took it on himself to evaluate all ambassadors. I also "earned" high marks from him, though for what I never had the foggiest idea, except perhaps that I didn't bore him with anything about USIS.

He had little to say about our Middle East or other policies, beyond in broad terms of anti-communism, and he didn't even try to tackle U.S.- Jordanian relations. However, he showed a memory that staggered me and the Jordanians alike. Information Minister Adnan abu Odeh's stylish dinner was attended by some 20 high ranking officials. In the half hour reception before going to the table, Shakespeare made the rounds chatting with everyone, appearing to do nothing more than exchange pleasantries. After the dinner, abu Odeh made remarks on importance of the visit and the ties between the two countries and then turned to Shakespeare. He rose and replied graciously, going around the table, with flattering words for each of the invitees, identifying them and pronouncing their names almost correctly, commenting specifically on the important things they were doing and drawing parallels between them and, by name, key American officials similarly engaged. He absorbed all that from chatting during the half hour reception. It was a performance that bowled them over. Me too.

And the Shakespeare departure. The ambassador pulled the old official Chrysler out of storage, spruced it up, assigned his driver George to drive the four of uShakespeare, his son, Garment and myselthrough Jordan, Syria and Lebanon to the Beirut's Khalde Airport. I cannot recall why they didn't fly out of Amman, but maybe it was because it wasn't served by an American airline. Anyway, we had an uneventful drive to Damascus, during which Shakespeare pontificated on Jewish history, drawing an occasional factual demur from Garment, but undeterred, on he spoke. In Damascus, we stopped for lunch at an outdoor restaurant along the Barada River, where he continued this monologue in a loud voice. I tried to shush him gently, pointing out that some of the other diners undoubtedly knew English and would understood what he was saying, and that the Syria of those days was no place for this kind of talk in public. He paid no attention to me, until I reached over and grabbed him by the shoulder, telling him that if he went on with this stuff, we could end up being arrested. I still don't think he would have stopped the flow if Garment hadn't forcefully chimed in and shut him up. We rode on, and after a harrowing ride down the winding mountain highway reached the airport. Once there, up strode our Lebanon PAO Boulos Malik, smiling, with hand outstretched. Shakespeare recoiled and blurted out, "who is that?" I answered, "why it's Boulos Malik, your PAO here." Then came back in incredulous tones, "you mean he's one of ours?" Bigotry right at our top.

After they departed, I mentioned to George that it was a hairy ride down the mountain and asked if something had gone wrong. He said he was praying the whole way, for the brakes had given out half way down and we were lucky to have made it in one piece. What a trip. By the way, we stayed on another day in Beirut to have the brakes fixed.

I met only in passing Carl Rowan, i.e. a handshake and a hello, when he visited Vietnam, so have no personal memories, but some others in JUSPAO commented on his visit, saying he was something of a clown, interested, to put it mildly, only in partying and having a good time. There was the widespread belief that he never took the USIA directorship seriously. I have to pit that against my high respect for him as a journalist and commentator. That he was a major player in vigorously promoting a level playing field for blacks, a fierce, outspoken foe of anti-black prejudice and a leader in promoting black education, willing and fully able to take on all comers, makes him for me one of the very best, whatever he did or did not do for USIA.

I have already talked about Wick in the Saudi section and while the stories about him are legion, I do not want to be too negative in considering him. Certainly, he was no mental giant and the practice and content of foreign policy could never have been more than a mystery to him. But he had the capacity to be influenced and convinced, and, once he got behind something, to provide solid backing for it and, perhaps most important, get the funding it needed. The Wick years were good times as far as resources went. Posts had ample budgets, and PAOs could usually glom onto more if they made a strong case.

It was Wick who most clearly recognized the potential of interactive television, indeed the interactive future in communicating. He saw to it that posts were armed with this tool. He was ahead of everyone else, as I said in my comments on my time in Cairo.

A story I have been assured is true is perhaps illustrative of the man. In his early days as director, he believing that television almost alone should be the agency's focus, and with this in mind, he started off by wanting to get the funds he needed for it by cutting drastically Fulbright exchanges, and other things as well, but my story concerns just Fulbright. Former grantees, universities, foundations and others protested the cuts, mounting letter campaigns addressed to USIA, Congress, the White House and undoubtedly elsewhere. Wick was unmoved, until at a social function, a person put his arm around his shoulder and said, "Charlie, let's go over to the corner and have a little talk." In less than half an hour, Wick had done a 180 degree turn, returning to USIA not only converted to the Fulbright program, but wanting it expanded and better funded, which indeed is exactly what he made sure happened, in fact to the extent that existing supports for handling it were not adequate until beefed up. And who was the converter? Notre Dame's President Father Hesburgh, who in Wick's book was part of the elite that so impressed and influenced him. He had all the right political and other credentials. Here was Wick at his best and worst, both at the same time.

So much for the story hour on USIA directors. A country PAO for 18 years, often in places of considerable political interest and focus for us at that timJordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt for sure, and in the minds of some, Syria, Kuwait and Tunisia as well would have thought there might have been some front office interest in seeing me and hearing first hand about what was going on in these posts, when I was at the agency for consultations during home leaves and at other times I was in Washington. But, I never received even a glimmer. Mind you, the same was true for all of my Middle East PAO colleagues, and at least many from other areas. Sure, the NEA directors filtered our thinking up the line, but indirectly and without the chance to interact and answer question by those of us on the ground. Was it that they weren't really interested?

Let me, however, point out I never worked closely with any agency director or his deputy and thus have not had the direct contact that might have altered or softened or ameliorated or something else my sentiments as I have given them. I have not been impressed by them, much as I have been by most of what we were doing.

Closing Comments

Q: In closing this series of interviews, is there anything else you would like to say or add?

UNDELAND: Yes. I append the paper I wrote to USIA Director Duffey a year after I retired, i.e. July 1993, which has suggestions on emphases and improvements for USIA, gleaned from my 35 year career. I doubt that he ever even glanced at it, given the hum-drum, thank-you-so-much three or four line reply I got back, but it encapsulates much of my thinking about USIA(S), what I feel is important and where emphases should be placed. Treat it as an appendix, but one central to where I come down. It goes over again some events and observations covered in the interview, but I look on it as a whole, and therefore think it best to let it stand, leaving in the repetitions.

The above paragraph was written more than a dozen years ago, and while USIA/S no longer exista huge mistake the Helms-Albright "deal" to put it into Statmuch of what I say is, I believe, as valid today as it was back then. Indeed, in ways it may be even more so now than it was back in the Cold War days.

I must mention the role of my wife, Joan, and all she has meant to me, my job, my and our achievements and those of her own. I cannot think of the career without her, for in so many ways, we did it together. Back in the 1950s during the Washington JOT training, agency types unashamedly told us they liked married officers, as they felt they were getting two for the price of one. Though spoken with an air of levity, it was all too true in the Undeland case. Joan never got the credit or recognition she deserved. We were in so many aspects a team, and although she has been referred to here and there in my answers and comments to you, she has appeared much less often and prominently than justice should have demanded.

The Arab World is very much a family oriented part of the world. Many people we got to know, who were central to USIS aims and operations, we dealt with in key ways on a family basis. I cannot conceive of the representation part of the job, which was an essential element, except in terms of Joan's talents and graciousness, her contributions in many cases dwarfing mine.

Then, she did a great deal on her own, teaching English in Alexandria, organizing and directing an English teaching program for the Faculty of Science at Jordan University, teaching elementary school in Syria and Saudi Arabia, formally advising the University of Kuwait on its English teaching program, participating in archaeological excavations in Jordan and Egypt, conducting an English language study and heading up the International Women's Association in Tunisia and more. Indeed, the list goes on and on. In each of these activities, valuable in its own right, she got to know many persons, who were useful to the interests of the USIS, the mission and the United States in the widest sense.

I must also mention the personal side. It was the rich family life with Joan and the four kids that provided the cement, the rationale, for the lives we led and, by extension, what I did.

It seems to me that the great majority of the most involved and effective Foreign Service officers I knew, be they State or AID or USIS, were married and made their families an integral part of their careers. This comes almost as a given.

I hope it is already apparent to anyone who has waded through all these pages, that I have had an absolute ball. The never ending variety of experiences, the memorable people I got to know, the historic richness of the Arab World, the struggles for better lives, the strengthening of our ties on may levels, the wanderings over a rich landscape, the challenges of working across wide conceptual gaps, the representing of American policies, interests and society/culture, the adventures in and out of the job, the working equally on both the political/information and cultural education sides of the streeall of these made it an ideal career for me. Indeed, I could double the length of this already far too long recounting, for I have left out nearly as much of what I found stimulating and relevant as I have included. In looking back, I firmly believe that the activities in which I was involved had importance that added materially to what the U.S. government was fostering and seeking to achieve in the countries where I was posted.

I cannot close out this recitation without coming back to the importance of identity and the huge role it has played and still plays, i.e. the having it and/or the seeking it among those of prime interest to us, but others as well, in all the countries where I have served. Moreover, I am pretty sure it looms large everywhere else as well. It is such a basic element in peoples' lives and affects the what and how we go about our dealings with them. We must recognize and keep in the forefront this fundamental factor in all its variety and depth or we face a huge gap in trying to communicate with any real effectiveness. I trust that this truth has emerged in my depicting of events in the places I have been and what I have tried to help us achieve. Thus, my aim of repeating it here is not to offer something new, but only to reemphasize it.

Relatedly, and again I have referred to it numerous times in the previous pages, is the fact that the United States over the time of my career has consistently stood for more openness, more participation in decision making, more rule by just law, more freedom of expression, more being held responsible, more social fairness, more advances in citizenship. We, moreover, have not only held up ideas and models, but have pushed to try to bring about the "mores" I have just listed. Indeed, to have been a part of activities with these goals has been among the main satisfactions of my USIS years. But while we make abundantly clear where we come from, where we stand and what we seek, we must never forget we are on the other fellow's soil and that he not only believes he therefore has proprietary rights, but is going to move at his own speed, in his own ways and according to his own beliefs, guided by his own history. We can urge, suggest, even criticize, but almost never can we order him around. We only set ourselves up to lose when he doesn't see us as concerned, as a friend, and not a dictator. For this role, we need every bit of cultural awareness and appreciation we can muster.

When we lecture or preach, or are taken to be doing so, we are rarely communicating with any real effectiveness, but rather are setting up defense mechanisms that almost always work against us and our aims and interests. All too often, and most notably in recent times, we have lacked the modesty and intelligence that getting along with and through to the other fellow requires. There may be times calling for us to threaten, to take him on, but they should come as the last resort and then never be employed when we are not prepared to back them fully with what we have at our disposal. And when we do, we must be prepared for a negative reaction, grudging acceptance, lack of real commitment, and the desire to ditch whatever it is as soon as possible. At the same time, the U.S. has power, standing and values, with which the other chap usually wants to find accommodation, if not agreement, and is willing to go a fair distance to achieve it. At least, that is what I have come away with from by nearly 35 USIS years in Arab World affairs, and, though things march ahead, I find it impossible to think that the essence of it does not still obtain as strongly today.

Let me be absolutely clear. We have our national interests, and they are to be promoted and protected, using those assets of ours, which we deem proper to achieve our ends. Sometimes, I suppose we will have to stand alone, or backed by that fig leaf, a "coalition of the willing", but in the vast majority of cases, we need solid international legitimacy, for only with it in hand can we hope to achieve what we want. Our record in the post World War II American era of overly relying on the military, unparalleled as our is, and going it alone has had too many downs as well as the ups not to counsel caution. Strong as we are and without real competition from other states, we are not so powerful that we can usually dictate to a diverse world that now has far greater access to a wide range of ideas and opinions than it did in the past, including during much of my time overseas. Simply stated, others also have the ability to thwart us and in cases do us major damage. Whether by our lights rightly or wrongly, that legitimacy to which I refer comes mainly through international organizations, starting with the United Nations and its branches, but extending somewhat down on the scale to established and accepted regional groupings, Organization of American States, NATO, GATT, etc. In them we have huge influence and every right to exert it, but we also must be willing to accept conclusions that do not exactly accord to our wishes, or more often with some aspects that do and some that do not. Put another way, we need to have and to promote a more truly cooperative and collaborative world, and to be clearly seen as doing so.

And one other thing. I wish we had a little less Gott mit uns on our belt buckles, all of us, but particularly those in leadership.

Back to a narrower focus. In a sense we were cold warriors during my time in harness, but our outlook in theory and practice went far beyond that. We felt every country and every people were important in themselves and to the U.S., and we in USIS/USIA had a role to play in promoting relations and relationships with them. In this process, we liked ideas, new ways to get at issues, the views of others and the conviction that American standing, ideas and ideals had significance over both short and long hauls, so long as we could make what we were about meaningful to the other chap.

Revised here nearly a decade and a half after the interviews occurred, and extensively expanded, I am convinced that we need to do everything we can to get back to many of the essentials of that environment in which we operated and helped create during my active years, the late1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and into the early 1990s. Whatever our policy differences with others and they were sometimes real and large, America was looked up to as the beacon on the hill and Americans as the world's most fortunate people. That alas has been sadly degraded. Attitudes about the U.S. have so soured that it will not be easy for us to regain our former eminence, though we must try big time to do it. We must start by being realists, by seeing things as they are, not at we would like them to be. We must see it is much more the product itself rather than just how it is the advertised.

One admittedly very small, and given my background parochial, step in this direction would be to recreate what USIS stood for and did, but to achieve this will require not just the wish, money and techniques, but attitudes and policies that have inherent appeal to others and that means the firm will to live in a world, in which we show as much give and take on our part as we seek from others. We must listen. We must understand.

Appendix

4110 North 23rd Street

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July 1, 1993

Dear Dr. Duffey:

Exactly a year ago I retired after 35 years in USIS(A), all but 6 in overseas assignments and for 18 years CPAO in 6 different posts. A stimulating, varied career with so much that appealed to me, having, I felt, meaning and value to the United States and to the countries where I was assigned. In years hence when it comes time for today's young officers to retire, I hope they will look back on where they have been and what they have done with a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment similar to my own. Times and outlook have changed, but were I 40 years younger, the prospect of again becoming a JOT would have strong appeal.

The following pages with my comments, gripes, emphases and suggestions should be viewed as the musings of an admirer, who wants to see an already good organization and operation emphasize what is most important and make the required corrections and amendments to become even better. My paper contains much which is negative, but I trust that when taken as a whole, its essentially positive character comes through. That certainly is my intent.

I know no one else in USIS(A) who has a stronger field bias than myself. Indeed, I regarded my relatively brief times in Washington as interims dictated by the system and eagerly looked forward to getting overseas again where our real task lies. Trying to communicate across cultural gaps and align our aims and goals with the views and attitudes of others has been what gets my vital juices flowing. Perhaps you will find this overseas perspective different, at least in nuance, from much of what you have encountered in USIA. In any case, this is among the reasons prompting me to move to the computer and put down my thoughts.

I found the USIS marriage of cultural and informational activities congenial and natural, perhaps because I am a political animal, domestic and foreign, who is also very much at home with the arts, education and social services. Add my somewhat outgoing nature and specific area interest and you have the formula for what has made me the kind of USIS officer I was.

I believe what I have written has relevance for much, if not most, of the "Third World", though it reflects my own career spent almost exclusively in one area, the Middle East. If others find this a reason to argue with my findings and conclusions, that is fine. I like quibbles, at least in moderation.

An exhilarating time lies ahead for USIS(A), with a new generation of American leadership working to come to terms with this messy post-Cold War, i.e. an environment in which the kinds of things USIS does should loom large now and still larger in the future. The contests of ideas and values are becoming more complex, less black and white, more varied and liable to change. It should be a stimulating time for everyone in the agency, though far from easy or simple.

My best wishes to you and to USIS(A),

Sincerely,

Richard E. UNDELAND

FE-MC - retired

Comments and Suggestions

1. DIRECT CONTACT:

In my USIS experience, there has been no effective substitute for face-to-face contact, at least not when dealing with ideas or trying to change or modify opinion. Activities bringing together appropriate Americans and citizens of other countries in frameworks where they react to each other, catch nuances and are forced to think through, if not defend, already held views have the only real potential to be effective in this area. Our main tools are all exchange of persons programs, visiting speakers and other experts and personal contact efforts of American and FSN staffs. Because of their power to influence and convince others, these activities have had my highest priority.

USIA media and products are of course importanl place at the top of this list the Wireless Filfor providing accurate, thorough and reliable information, but we must recognize their limitations as well as what they can achieve. Putting out the full story, i.e. being the reliable source, is rightfully a main USIS task. We usually do it very well. These materials are valuable sources and at times reinforce views already held. However, taken by themselves, they rarely have the ability to alter opinion, at least not in the countries where I have been.

(Reasons for this limited role of media, deeply rooted in culture and local institutions, are complex. Discussion is beyond the scope of these few pages, but I feel it perhaps useful to cite the following reality. I have often found in the same persons mistrust of Western, including USIA, media for their "bias" and side-by-side near total reliance on these same sources for the accurate, objective and complete information they know they do not get from their own media. However, regardless of the trust and mistrust factor, I cannot recall an instance where our or any other foreign press, radio and television products have been primarily responsible for significantly altering a person's political attitudes. My "survey" stretches over decades and covers Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Jordan, to mention places where I have directed the USIS operation.)

My plea here is to maintain and, as possible, strengthen efforts to bring together knowledgeable, articulate Americans and our audiences in the give and take of dialogue and idea exchange. While electronic dialogues and WorldNet interactives have meaningful roles and are important in our programming, they have a built-in distance which makes them an addition to reality/the real thing, and not a substitute for it.

2. FSN STAFF:

I have been most fortunate in having highly talented FSNs in all of my posts; they have been without exception the most impressive and effective FSNs in embassies/missions where I have served. Why? largely because we consistently do the best job in recruiting, training and using their talents. They provide us with vital information and counsel, unsnarl messy situations, fine tune relationships in the community and are the kingpins behind so many of our achievements. As PAO, I would not think of starting a work day without consulting them as my first order of business. Time after time I have been deeply touched by their commitment and loyalty, even under intense pressure and at personal risk. Examples are legion.

While the agency's record for recognition and reward has been pretty good over the years, indeed the best of any branch of the USG, it is by no means perfect. We must at all levels and places continue to give the FSNs and their status the closest and most sympathetic backing possible. To cite a bad case, never again should we try for any reason to cajole them into or out of something not in their true interest. We, in this case all USG branches with FSNs, did precisely that in seeking to convince as many as possible to withdraw from the U.S. Civil Service Retirement Plan in order to save a little money. Although this happened more than a decade ago, when I was in Syria, it still rankles with FSNs and me alike. (At that time, I did not buy it and strongly cautioned those on my staff against accepting this "offer"; most took my advice.)

I suggest you personally and the front office as an institution seize suitable opportunities to make clear that FSNs have the agency's attention, concern and support. This would have additional utility as a reminder to their American superiors, some of whom, alas, tend to take FSNs for granted, or worse. (Eliminating a permanent position was the only way I could get rid of an American staffer in Cairo some years back, whose horrible relationship with the FSNs was poisoning the operation. I saw no other viable solution and took this extreme step without the slightest hesitation or doubt.)

USIA should assure FSN training and award programs are fully maintained.

3. OPERATIONAL REALISM AND HONESTY:

We must fully accept what it means to operate in other cultures and societies, whose backgrounds, value systems and ways differ from our own. We must recognize we almost never exercise control over situations on the ground and, thus, can have effect only through example and/or convincing, backed by our products and programs. We should not fool ourselves into thinking we select our audiences, for in reality they choose us. We can make approaches, but they decide whether to accept us and permit follow-up. Nearly everyone with whom we interact wants ties or contacts or programs or materials or something else from us. I have found contacts rarely impolite or confrontational, even when they have fundamental political, social or cultural differences with the U.S.

To operate effectively, we must have far more than shallow, surface understanding of our audiences, where they come from and what they want and need. We must have the wit and honesty to put our messages to them in ways they can understand on their own terms, which relate to their interests as they perceive them. (It is a given we have to understand thoroughly and in detail what we want our messages to be, what we are trying to get across. I can recall far too many cases where officers went into sessions insufficiently prepared on these fundamentals.) We must not be fooled into equating lack of stated opposition as meaning acceptance or approval. We have to recognize the inherent limits of what persuasion can achieve.

The above may seem too common place and basic to merit singling out, but I have been caught up in more times than I feel I should have been by instances where the required knowledge and sensitivity were in short supply or just plain absent.

The other part of the equation is honesty with ourselves, our colleagues and particularly with Washington, the last deserving special mention. We must have the will and character to tell headquarters the facts, to pass on unpopular news in an unvarnisheit need not be impolitstate. But also, this has to be what Washington wants. I relate two instances in my career, each involving one of your predecessors, to illustrate what I mean.

Mr. Catto personally wrote a press article to commemorate the first anniversary of the Gulf War, and PAOs were instructed to try and place it in the local media. I was in Tunisia. Knowing right off it was a total non- starter in that country, I nonetheless sought the reaction of one of my closest and most valued contacts, the editor-in-chief of the leading Arabic daily. With tell-tale politeness and understatement, he pointed out why it was wholly unsuitable, for were it to appear, it would embarrass the government and reinforce popular attitudes against the U.S. on this issue. He concluded it would have exactly the opposite impact from that the USG desired and intended. I immediately phoned his and my parallel views to the Area office and, as directed, sent in a written summary of these reactions, but, on Washington instructions, only by fax. Though nothing more was requested, I followed up at my own initiative with a letter containing all details. I was never told where my reports went, but suspect their circulation was not wide.

Mr. Wick used a call on Saudi Arabia's King Fahd to seek approval for Saudi participation in WorldNet interactives. The King listened dutifully, smiled and posed no questions nor raised any objections. Director Wick was elated with his "agreement". He was in turn unhappy and bristled a bit when I told him I would of course follow up, but was certain the King had in fact said no, not yes, and this would be confirmed by our subsequent approaches receiving no answer whatsoever. Our discussion of this continued intermittently during his visit; at his departure, we left it amicably with a "we will see." I had called it correctly and so reported back to Washington. No repercussions ever came my way and when I later PAO in Cairo, Mr. Wick sought out my views on an Egyptian matter which was in ways similar. So was my answer, and again I was borne out by events. I think (would certainly like to think) my understanding of the Saudis and later the Egyptians and my frankness with the then agency directors earned their respect.

It is your businesfar be it from minbut I believe you would be well served to make clear in unmistakable terms to USIA elements and the field you expect expertise and sensitivity in the conduct of our operations and forthright honesty in our reporting. I do not recall any former USIA director coming right out and saying this. Rather, there has been a tendency to avoid bringing up such differences at superior levels, be it in Washington or abroad.

4. PUBLIC OPINION EXPERTS:

PAOs and some other USIS officers are usually those best placed in embassies/missions to learn, understand and evaluate local opinion, and when they have done so, it has stood them well in establishing and maintaining status with ambassadors and their ranking subordinates. Yet, emphasis on this expertise has not been sufficiently mandated for job descriptions, OER criteria, the PAO Handbook, etc. How many times, PAOs have seen ambassadors look primarily to political sections and stations for information on what the public has on its mind. However, once a PAO has demonstrated interest and ability in this area, his/her views are usually sought, and he/she is more included in important deliberations. Also the status of USIS on the country team rises. It has happened to me and others, but I have also seen the opposite, officers who try to limit themselves to what they consider the purely USIS responsibility. They want to manage our facilities, conduct programs, disseminate information, (often reluctantly) do media reaction cables, but shy away from the larger picture under the guise/excuse "that's the embassy's business." It works against their being taken seriously.

It should not be this way, nor should any officer be permitted to think it is. There is so much going for us to assist in gaining this expertise. We have ready entree into the community and are usually less suspect than, for example, political officers. Our programming brings us into daily contact with a wide range of important persons and institutions. Our FSNs, once we have gained their confidence, and that is a key element, give us powerful eyes and ears into the local community, its concerns and attitudes. No other parts of the mission have these advantages, at least none have them to the same extent.

Personally, my coming to understand Middle Eastern societies, their motivations and ways, and my use of this knowledge to relate our aims, products and activities to our audiences have given me satisfaction and quite often a sense of accomplishment. It has made the job both challenging and fun.

My suggestion is pretty obvious: make this expertise far more central to the PAO job and post objectives, with suitable recognition for those who do it well.

5. ENGLISH TEACHING:

Through most of my career, English teaching has had the agency's emphasis and usually sufficient funding, which I hold is no more than giving this activity the importance it deserves. Its impact can be immensaided in no small measure in Syria, Egypt, Tunisia and elsewhere by close cooperation with the British Counciand it lies at the heart of our center and library operations, or at least it should. It finds perhaps the most positive local acceptance of anything we do. (In our quest for seriousness and policy, we should not belittle the importance of being the good guys. Our international relations benefit from having some of them around.) In the Middle East, rarely does any other USIA officer have higher local standing than the ETO.

English teaching has taken on a special importance in countries of my experience, which will certainly continue and probably increase. Elites during liberation struggles and early independence decadeEgypt, Jordan and otherwere relatively small in numbers, well educated and in many cases highly competent in English. Whatever our political differences, we were able to communicate easily with them on complex issues and ideas and regularly did so. However, they have been/are being replaced by far more numerous successor generations, which are less well educated, less able to cross cultural frontiers, less open to Western ideas and weaker in English. It is considerably more difficult for us to deal effectively with them for a host of reasons, but we can start with language. (The business community is something of an exception, along with officer corps in military/security services, but they are not usually among our main clientele.) Our direct teaching programs and, more important, our working with ministries of education, universities, individual schools and other institutions in helping train teachers and setting up programs are ameliorating the situation and promoting English proficiency with greater effectiveness than is often realized. An immense problem/huge gap remains, but we can take some satisfaction from knowing that without our efforts, the dialogue situation would be far worse.

Keep English teaching among our top priorities.

6. WRITING:

All too often, I have had to contend with a discouraging lack of writing skills among officers on my staff. I have found myself devoting large chunks of time, which should have gone elsewhere, to editing and rewriting. Different styles do not bother me, but I have insisted on clear, cogent prose that does the job it sets out to. I admit I have been at times overly fussy about messages going out over my name, but better that than the other way round.

While some of the writing shortcomings could be attributable to haste and slapdash (maybe also a why bother attitude because anything on the computer is so easy to change or correct), much has stemmed from lack of clear thinking, lack of understanding the purpose and/or lack of appreciating likely reactions by recipients. As I often felt compelled to say, sloppy thinking and sloppy writing are more often than not hand- maidens. At one point, I was driven to draw up and distribute a list of dos and don'ts in trying to cut back on the worse offenses.

Of course, there is also a lot of very good, indeed impressive, writing in USIS(A), but for a communication organization, the overall competence and proficiency level should be considerably higher.

I have encountered enough flim-flam and hyperbole in reporting program "successes" (at my last post I struck this word from our vocabulary) that a red flag went up whenever I saw it in messages. All too often I had good reason to be on guard, in fact deeply suspicious. I wondered if honesty and, perish the thought, modesty might not dictate a lighter hand in describing and evaluating what we are doing.

I have had the impression the OER section on writing ability is not always afforded the importance it deserves, with too many raters falling back on banalities of "successes".

The agency would do itself a service to upgrade its appreciation of and insistence on effective, accurate writing. Perhaps, there should be special training for those who do not measure up.

7. IN DEPTH REPORTING:

We are doing only a part of the job when we do not share our knowledge and analyses with colleagues where we are assigned overseas and in Washington. It is largely a waste of time and efforours and our interlocutorand of agency funding, if we keep these valuable acquisitions locked up in ourselves. However, this view is far from universal among officers I have known; more than a few, including some who are highly regarded, have looked on reporting anything beyond "successes" and nuts and bolts as a burden to be avoided, for, as they see it, it is irrelevant to performance of the job. We should guard against letting ourselves have get so parochial and limited in our outlook and activities.

I do not mean we should shelve other responsibilities or get into competition with embassy officers, for whom the reporting function is their bread and butter, but we should regard it a duty to let others benefit from what we know. For me, wide ranging discussions have usually lead to well received reports, verbal and in writing, and have gone far in helping develop close relations with the most interesting persons in our clientele. On the other side, an IO on my staff told me after an hour with a senior journalist he could find nothing that transpired between them important enough to merit passing on; I reacted, what a waste of time that session must have been and what a poor basis for an ongoing relationship.

NEA in recent years may have carried to extremes its reporting penchant, but I am a supporter. I found the weekly public opinion/atmospherics cables helped focus the post's attention on what is most important. Likewise, so did NEA's emphasis on the content and details of what we did and heard. Receiving similar telegrams from other posts gave us useful ideas and perspectives. Reporting also spurred us to keep on our thinking caps.

Surely, USIA, beginning perhaps with your office, should want this flow of information for both internal planning and inter-agency deliberations.

8. YOUNG OFFICER DEVELOPMENT:

Our JOT system, in my experience, has worked very well. However, the record is not so good on what happens next. To have institutional concern for further development during ensuing assignments largely disappear, as now happens, is a mistake. Most young officers still have a good bit to learn and would benefit from a flexible, yet systemized, approach to help bring them along. At one of my last posts, three officers in their second and third post-JOT assignments showed large and fairly basic, to me unreasonable, gaps in grasping essentials they should have mastered earlier. In working with them to fill in the holes, each of them told me no one had given them this kind of attention since their JOT days. Their superiors at previous posts should have.

I believe PAOs should be required to treat young officer development as a high priority and should be themselves judged in their own OERs on how well they have done as teachers. Area directors could institute this easily, by including it among PAO work requirements.

9. PERSONNEL AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT SECTIONS IN USIA:

Over the years I have been more critical of this part of the USIA establishment than any other. While I have found some personnel and career development officers competent, hard working, helpful and effective, I know of too many "horror stories" featuring misinformation, misleading advice, missed opportunities, lack of support when needed, withheld information and unthinking and/or inconsiderate bureaucratic ways. Some complaints undoubtedly stem from resentment and sour grapes, but the more than few cases to which I'm referring cannot be brushed aside purely on these grounds.

I believe personnel and career development officers have had responsibility for more dossiers than the best of them could handle effectively. In fact, I have heard several of the most conscientious and capable bemoan this over-burdening.

More serious to my thinking is the question of overall quality. Too often, these offices have not attracted the Agency's best talent, but instead drawn officers unable to find places in more prestigious offices. I would be hesitant to make this statement did I not know of others in the Agency sharing this view.

Thirdly, I have had the impression personnel and career development officers spend an inordinate amount of time in meetings and in bureaucracy. The assignment process and other responsibilities are, of course, complex and difficult, requiring much consultation and group deliberation. However, if this aspect could be reduced, as I suspect it can, there could be more time for better action and answers and avoidance of the kind of situations which led to the mixed reputation of these sections.

My suggestions are pretty obvious, assignment of more (why not over- complement?) and better officers and a good look at trying to make the bureaucracy less onerous, maybe even less bureaucratic.

I have another idea which may not be so obvioumake service in these offices and possibly add recruiting a card to be punched by the Agency's best officers before they can move into senior positions in Washington or the field. In retrospect, I would have benefited from such experience, though I must admit I did not seek it, despite having had plenty of chance to do so. (On both occasions I was posted back to Washingtoancient history to be sure, going back to the '60s and '70the system came up with no remotely suitable position possibilities for me, so I walked the halls seeking places on my own. I found pretty fair assignments, but with no thanks to those who in theory had the responsibility.) I draw attention to the Marine Corps, where proficiency in recruiting and management of people is essential for advancement in the officer ranks. Why not the same for USIA?

10. EMPHASIS ON THE FIELD:

Policy and money come from Washington. Administration, and at times Congressional, concerns impose certain directions and frameworks. USIA elements have their priorities, prerogatives and requirements. American interestacademia, preservation and conservation, the media, to name threare to be accommodated. Yet despite the many domestic considerations, the fundamental work of USIA is USIS, i.e. the field, and our effectiveness depends on it remaining this way. It is a reality reasserted during every new administration, but in one way or another brought in question with each new president and consequent changing of the guard at USIA. Those of us in the field always felt relieved when the reassurance became apparent.

Even during the dark days of the Vietnam War, when our Agency put out some atrocious stuff and many officers swallowed hard on more than one count, the field character of the Agency remained paramount, though not without challenge. It has had history on its side and, fortunately, is supported by the wise way the post budget process works.

I have every confidence the field will continue to keep its importancit's not difficult to associate this view with the style and outlook of President Clintobut I would feel remiss not to mention it, even at the risk of repeating the obvious and bringing up something not at issue.

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