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

WAYNE WHITE

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is 21 April 2005. This is an interview with Wayne White. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies, and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. You go by Wayne?

WHITE: Wayne.

Q: All right. Well to start off with, when and where were you born?

WHITE: I was born in Philadelphia January 30, 1950.

Q: OK, let's start just to get a little feel for the family. Tell me about your father's side of the family. What do you know about it?

WHITE: Oh, like so many people, I could go on forever, but I will try to avoid that. On my father's side, half German, half English, with just enough Irish from one ancestor to get me into St. Patrick's Day parties. They are both amusing in the sense that the German half of the family came here in the late 19th century and set up a liquor distributing business in Philadelphia, and were quite successful. Then their business collapsed in 1920, as you can imagine it might when Prohibition came. The other half were also fairly well-to-do by, say, 1900, breaking into the white collar upper middle class through the shoe industry, but starting at the bottom and attaining ownership of a shoe business in one generation. My great grandfather apprenticed as a leather-maker in Birmingham, England, immigrating first to Camden, N.J., briefly, and then, finally, Philadelphia, where he set up a small factory. Everything apparently was just going great until something called the Great Depression came along, and that left the family shoe business in ruins. They all had to go and find real jobs. They were left with a fleet of Buicks, several nice homes in Philadelphia, and a one large vacation home on the Jersey Shore.

My mother's side of the family, is also German/English. The more interesting story was my grandfather on the German side; his father, from Stuttgart, came to the United States during the Civil War - 1863 to be exact. He was a cabin boy on ship bound for Philadelphia and then to Bombay. He jumped ship in Philadelphia, hoping to be a Union drummer boy, perhaps inspired by Franz Seigel's poorly-led, but largely German corps in the Union Army (another "political general"). But they apparently didn't need any more drummer boys (at least at that moment), so he ended up hanging around Philadelphia and eventually became a smith (in his case, a tad different from a regular blacksmith in that he only made wrought iron tools instead of also shoeing horses). My Grandfather in the early 20th century was apprenticed to a master stone mason and became one himself. Perhaps more lasting than what I did in government and I am now doing here in these sessions, working out of a firm in Philadelphia, between 1928 and 1940, he spent much of his time in Washington and Annapolis working on monumental architecture. He built the extension on the chapel in Annapolis, for example, which makes up most of the chapel we see today.

Q: This was when?

WHITE: Around 1939-1940.

Q: Yeah it was. I went to the chapel in Annapolis as a kid when that was being put on.

WHITE: He built both of the extensions to Bancroft Hall, the stone work that is. He was a stone mason, although that meant setting bronze windows and things like that too to keep the stone work going. In the district, he built the Scottish Right Temple on 16th Street. He did much of the interior stone work on the Supreme Court building, mainly the actual court room inside. It is very beautiful. He worked a little bit on the justice Department, but that job was temporary. He built the Bureau of Engraving and Printing Building (the structure next to the Holocaust Museum), which is the most interesting of his jobs because that is the only one he did absolutely from the bottom up, which meant going to the quarry, selecting the stone, arranging for them to be brought to the job site via railroad tracks that at that time extended right up to the site, and then setting or overseeing the setting of every stone in the building. We have some pictures from that era which are quite fascinating, including engineering photos of Bancroft Hall's wings.

The most amusing story if this is not taking too much time, is when he and his boss, the company supervisor, were asked to go over and see whether they could finish the mason's monument in old town Alexandria (the obelisk across from the train station now contianing the George Washington Museum). They found the job simple enough, so his boss said, "Yeah, I think we can do it. Do you have any problem?" "No." They then strolled into old town so his boss could get a shot of whiskey (being a hard-drinking Irishman) and found out that Virginia was still dry. That was the end of the project in Alexandria, with the job supervisor remarking: "If I can't get a drink within three blocks of the job, we are not doing it."

Q: Well how about let's take your mother and father. Did your father go to college or not?

WHITE: One portion of that story is unfortunate. He was very good in sports. He lettered in high school at the time when high school was more important, and one of the best ones in Philadelphia, Simon Graz High School, lettering in basketball, soccer, and baseball. He also played minor league baseball in the days when there was something called D Ball, where you were paid per game. He was a first baseman. The University of Delaware offered him a sports scholarship. The family which was still struggling because of the failure of the shoe factory, which made him feel rather guilty about going off to college and not getting a job. This is something that I always thought was very wrong. A family should make sacrifices for their child, where this family didn't. They encouraged him to help out, and so he went to work instead of college.

Soon after, he was drafted in the peace time draft in September 1941, went off to the war, and thought he was going to be thrown into the struggle at the deep end of the pool because he was trained by December, 1941, infantry. He was sent out on the convoy, not so famous but getting more historical attention now, into the Pacific at the time when Bataan was besieged (very early on-January 1942). Things were in horrendous shape. George Marshall and others wanted to use the troops on the convoy to secure islands on the route to Australia and in order to protect lines of communication to the southwest Pacific, whereas Macarthur was screaming that it should go right to the Philippines in a forlorn attempt to relieve US forces there. Anyway, Marshall won and my father, concerned that he was going to be thrown quickly into battle, flat-topped WWI helmet, WWI gear and all, was instead dropped on Bora Bora in the Tahiti island group as part of Operation Bobcat (securing strategic island groups), and spent much of the war on Bora Bora quite happily, switching over to quartermaster (Americal Division) and eventually moving on to New Caledonia where he played with the New Caledonia army baseball league. I understand generals bet on the league, and with some major leaguers on the island with the army, my father had a grand old time in the Pacific playing for them until returning to the States with sufficient overseas "points" in November 1944.

Q: Then what did he do when he came out of the military.

WHITE: Well just before he was drafted, he had gotten a job with Sears and Roebuck, so he eventually returned to that job in the fall of 1945 and spent his whole career with Sears on the mail order side of the business, the company's original cachet. He ended as a division head in Sears and Roebuck, Philadelphia. I at one point wondered when I was a division chief in INR (until 2002, when I was elevated to the deputy director's position), that I had never really gone any further than my father!

Q: How about your mother? What was her background?

WHITE: I told you about my grandfather, the master stone mason, who was her father. She basically did the usual thing in those days, and went no further than high school. She graduated from high school during WWII, went to Sears, and at age 19 was managing an entire department because all the men were off fighting the war. Then, when all the men came back, she was relegated to sort of clerking, and met my father there. After they were married in 1947, she did what most women did in that era, left work, and became a homemaker, but clearly was frustrated at the time, doing a lot of sketching, some of which survive.

Q: Where did you live in Philadelphia?

WHITE: In Philadelphia there is an area called West Oak Lane. But various parts of Philadelphia were home to generations of the Whites over the many decades: Frankfurt, Germantown, etc., but we settled in West Oak Lane for a few years in the 1950's, and then moved into the suburbs, a place called Willow Grove, which is known to many people because there is a naval air station there, and it also is the name of an interchange on the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

Q: Well did you grow up there?

WHITE: In Willow Grove? Yes, from early 1957 until I went off to college in 1969.

Q: Where did you go to school? Elementary school there?

WHITE: I started in Philadelphia (William Rowen Elementary School), but in second grade we moved out into Willow Grove in the suburbs before the end of the school year in March. I went to the Upper Moreland Township public school district and graduated from High School there in 1967. In fact, in recent years the high school established the Upper Moreland High School Hall of Fame into which I was inducted in 2001. They pick 5 alums per year and induct them into the hall of fame in a big auditorium ceremony with all the kids. You basically go into your life story, sort of what you are doing here with me (but a lot more compressed!), and they tell kids how graduating from Upper Moreland and moving on to something else in life that is very exciting can bring them back to become part of the Upper Moreland Hall of Fame. It's actually very nice and, for the kids, motivational.

Q: Did you have brothers and sisters?

WHITE: One sister.

Q: Let's start with home life. Did you sit around and listen to the radio or watch TV together and have discussions. Some families do, and some don't. What about you?

WHITE: It was a very close family, a very religious family, albeit not too extreme. We were raised mainly in the reformed Presbyterian Church. It was reformed in a more conservative direction, not like reformed Judaism which, by contrast, is more liberal. The Reformed Presbyterian Church broke off form the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936 because the Orthodox Presbyterian Church was considered insufficiently fundamentalist. So it was a rather tiny Protestant denomination, probably only 100 congregations and maybe about 5,000 members when we were with it, but I have to admit, considering what has been happening today, that it was wonderfully apolitical - in fact rigorously so. None of this nonsense you see going on today with the politically-oriented preacher, you know, TV evangelists and what have you. Not to say that some of them aren't OK, but all too many get too far into politics - often way over their heads and dangerously ill-informed on certain issues. That was verboten at Calvary Presbyterian Church in Willow Grove. Now the Reformed Presbyterian denomination doesn't exist anymore. It merged again with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. They reconciled their differences, and now it is called the Presbyterian Church in America. For example, my sister and I (not to mention my mother) probably watched too much TV. We were, I suppose, rather normal kids for those times. We also ran around with the Catholic kids and the Jewish kids in the neighborhood. There was nothing along the lines of religious prejudice or whatever, aside from a few seemingly harmless wisecracks.

Q: Well did your mother and father go into any part of the political spectrum or was politics something you knew about?

WHITE: Bedrock Republican, but not fanatical by any means. The church didn't get involved in that. There were Democrats in the church too. My father was originally Lutheran, but my mother was Presbyterian, and she prevailed eventually after they got married. Anyway, my father always voted straight Republican (as had his father before him) and was always joshing my mother for feeling sorry for Harry Truman and then breaking ranks gain and voting for Lyndon Johnson in '64. My father would never admit who he voted for in '64. The rest of the family were all very leery of Barry Goldwater, but my Dad didn't say anything (and was generally more reserved than my mother in any case), so we assumed he must have voted for Goldwater and maintained his absolutely clean Republican voting record.

As a kid, I was very much involved in politics - distributing over 5,000 pamphlets for the Nixon/Lodge campaign in 1960 when I was only 10 years old. One amusing anecdote, despite my Republican roots, was having my hand shaken by Jack Kennedy when he came to Willow Grove to campaign in 1960. He was almost an hour late for a campaign stop in a shopping center parking lot, the heavily Republican but curious crowd was getting a bit rowdy, and I was standing, wearing several Nixon buttons (along with a couple of my 6th grade sidekicks) next to the stairway leading up to the wooden platform from which he would speak. He probably saw a nice local publicity photo op in this Republican community, when he did finally arrive, and grabbed my hand. But the sun was still very high, and all I can remember is the strength of his warm, large hand, and looking up, sun behind his head, and seeing not much more than a lot of reddish brown hair, with his face almost totally obscured in shadow save for the teeth of a broad smile shining through. Local news cameras were clicking, but it didn't make the one of the two local papers we received, probably buried in the photo archives of one of the them, one now out of print. I remember thinking for days thereafter: "I wanted to shake NIXON'S hand, not Kennedy's because Kennedy was sure to lose."

Q: Were political events or international events a topic of conversation in the family?

WHITE: My mother was very much interested in travel, even though we didn't really have enough money to do much of it except North America, around Canada, some in the lower 48, and, very heavily, the Jersey Shore. My father, because of being in the Pacific during WWII, was greatly interested in the Second World War more generally. I can remember being taken by him to see "Victory at Sea." My mother gave me, while still very young, POW letters sent her from a former beau during WWII and some German Luftwaffe insignia he brought home. All this peaked my interest in military history especially. Yes, that definitely had a lot to do with me becoming interested in foreign affairs, all manner of military subjects, etc.

Q: What about reading? Were you much of a reader?

WHITE: I was an absolutely voracious reader. That was something I picked up from my mother. My father was not much of an in-depth reader - much more sports-oriented and the local, national and international news of the day - relying on two newspapers per day in lieu of books for his information. That said, I must admit the newspapers were a sight better in some cases in those days of several competing city papers that may well have been a tad less vanilla than, for example, the national chain that bought out the Philadelphia Inquirer some years ago or, say, USA Today.

Q: Do you recall as a kid, any books that were influential or grabbed your interest?

WHITE: You know I read so many I can't really single any out as unique. I have to admit that maybe being typical of a lot of boys in my neighborhood, I probably read too many military histories and related autobiographies. I didn't read a lot of novels. To this day I am overwhelmingly a non-fiction reader. I am a very broad non-fiction reader, but it is very rare for me to read fiction, and the bulk of the fiction I have read was probably limited to what was assigned in elementary school, junior high, high school, and college, or, later in life, some historical fiction, such as the famous "Children of the Arbat" trilogy about life during the Stalinist years in the Soviet Union.

Q: In elementary school, any courses you liked or particularly didn't like?

WHITE: Yes. Consistently throughout my educational life, math - in virtually any form, save geometry - was definitely my least favorite subject. I didn't do well in it at all. I did everything I could to avoid it, and my grades showed that. I guess I was the standard sort of liberal arts-oriented individual without a mathematical mind whatsoever, enjoying most of all history and English. In fact, the only math I did well in and even enjoyed a bit was geometry, probably because it is visual-perhaps some of my mother's interest in things artistic kicking in.

Q: What was your neighborhood like? Was it what we would call a mixed neighborhood or not?

WHITE: Well, it was all-white, which cuts down on one's ability to call it mixed in a universal sense. But, it was "mixed" in the sense of Polish, Italian, Irish and German/English or Jewish, Protestant and Catholic. Moving to the suburbs in 1957 did insert some manner of additional diversity when contrasted with a relatively unchanging Philadelphia neighborhood of row homes in which I lived until I was seven years old. When we move into the more mobile suburbs, there were still people from Philadelphia, but also Minnesota, Ohio, New Jersey, North Carolina, etc. who had more distinct regional accents and other differences than they do today. So, with a Jewish neighbor on one side, a Polish Catholic on the other, an Italian Catholic across the street, and two elderly Russian ladies owning large, still rural properties about 150 yards away, the milieu was mixed at least to some degree, which made it a lot more fun to live in.

Q: Well by the time you got to high school, were there any subjects that you were concentrating on?

WHITE: I loved history. That defined me for, you, know, my entire life's interest. I also loved baseball, but that had relatively little serious influence on my life by contrast since I really wasn't much good at it. I was more slim and small-boned than my father, so I was your .275 hitting pesky shortstop, not what he was: a hard-slugging .400 hitting and heavier first baseman. I had his eyes, however. Almost no-one could strike me out; I might not have hit with much power, but I hit the ball nonetheless. With respect to history or related non-fiction, I probably read 300-400 books between ages 7 and 17. History in one form or another was very much at the center of that concentration.

Q: Did you find there was a concentration, you mentioned military history, but American or European or world?

WHITE: European and Pacific. First World War, Second World War, and there was reading related to the U.S. Civil War I forgot to mention. I had a Civil War ancestor, my great great grandfather on my mother's side. Only in my adult life did I actually discover there was a trove of documents relating to him that we could use for research. He was with the 2nd New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment. New York had over 200 regiments, and the 2nd was recruited very, very early. The only reason he joined a New York regiment was that he happened to be a sailor on the Hudson River in 1861. When Lincoln's call for 75,000 volunteers came in April 1861, this patriotic 23 year old went to the nearest place he could sign up, and ended up in a regiment from another state, and actually deserted in order to come home and visit Philadelphia at one point after the 1862 Peninsula Campaign. He was caught, and sent back to his unit. For desertion in the Civil War, the penalty ranged from firing squad, hanging, etc. to a $5.00 fine. He got the $5.00 fine and was charged train fare back to his unit in northern Virginia. He was wounded, captured briefly, and survived the war. We have a lot of documentation on him. In fact, I have written a 30 page history for the family. It blends the history of the regiment with his personal history drawn from the regimental papers and various other sources. Only very recently did I discover that his brother, my great-great uncle also served in that war, with the well-known 23rd Pa. Volunteer Infantry ("Birney's Zouaves"), who was also wounded.

Q: The Army of the Potomac I take it.

WHITE: Army of the Potomac, Sixth Corps, for both brothers, although after re-enlisting in 1864 my great-great uncle was placed in another Pennsylvania regiment (the 23rd was disbanded as a unit at the end of its 3-year enlistment obligation) and ended up fighting under Phil Sheridan in the Shenandoah Valley Campaign of late 1864, where he was wounded near Winchester.

Q: Well then in high school did you get involved in dramatics, sports, music or anything like that?

WHITE: Well I was involved in baseball, but did not achieve what my father could because we were built totally differently. I went out for the baseball team, but not being the player my father was, I didn't make the cut. There was baseball, interest in teaching history, and, last but not least, our very vibrant church young peoples' group and related activities, which played a greater role in my life during that period than school activities. So, in those days I spent more time in church-related activities like Boy's Brigade (a more religious version of the Boy Scouts), softball, and other youth group outings than I ever did at school which, frankly, at that stage of my life, I didn't really enjoy.

Q: Up through the high school, did you get interested in current events at all. You were about 13 or 12 when the Cuban missile crisis came and up through the cold war, and actually you were 18 when Vietnam came around.

WHITE: Yes, they affected me very much, as in the Nixon-Kennedy race I already mentions. I can remember Sputnik-and what would I have been? Seven years old? Seven years old and I felt the pain of this distant, national humiliation in the "space race." Now because my family was Republican, when Kennedy won in 1960 I was utterly crestfallen, despite the handshake episode. The Nixon campaign chairman for the township lived across the street, and I became a Nixon fanatic. I distributed 5,000 or so leaflets to homes and handed out still more election material at a local polling station on election day. Coming from a very conservative family, I was sort of out of step with some of my peers on the issue of Vietnam during my undergraduate college years. I went to Penn State, but started at what is called a Commonwealth (or satellite) Campus. It was (and is) the largest such Campus, located just outside Philadelphia, called Ogontz campus, and with the main building being formerly a girls school named Abington College, but since re-named Penn State Abington.

Q: Ogontz, yeah.

WHITE: You know about Ogontz?

Q: I know Ogontz, you see, I graduated from college in 1950, the year you were born. It sort of shows the difference. In fact I knew a girl that went to Ogontz.

WHITE: How about that. I was literally just up there last weekend doing a speaking gig that is one requirement related to being named a Penn State Alumni fellow - giving back something of your experience to the university. I spent two years at that campus and then went off to the main campus, University Park, in State College, Pa. Earlier you asked about political involvement. They were just beginning to recover a lot of old records for a major historical display about the old Ogontz College and going through its early origins as a Penn State institution. I was actually handling some of the materials. I helped lead the first political party-oriented slate at Ogontz Campus. I lost by 9 votes.

Anyway, far more important to me at the time was ROTC. Stemming from my interest in things military, I decided on a military career as I entered college. As I told you I was reading a lot of military histories and things like that. So I was very active in ROTC in college, and moved up the ROTC ranks the first two years rapidly to cadet lieutenant, and was utterly devastated when I was released from the program because I had allergies. I had a lot of allergies when I was a little kid, and all the way through that period: so-called Hay fever allergies in the fall and some asthma, but asthma was not all that that bad. I mean between August and October I was miserable. The rest of the year the only thing that affected me was getting an allergy shot every month as a preventative related to the asthma. It didn't seem to have much of an effect on anything. My allergist who was a brigadier general in the army medical corps reserves warned me that I could encounter some problems passing from the first two years of the ROTC program to the second two years, when a medical exam is required. Sure enough, there are 50% of the medical examiners who don't care about allergies, and the other half who were fanatics. I got a fanatic who rejected me from the program. I had to find something else to do, and I was crushed. I was drifting for awhile. That was in 1969. I had a scholarship-the works. The outraged army colonel who was the head of the ROTC program teamed up with my allergist and appealed to the US First Army for a waiver to a non-combatant arm, ironically in the letter of appeal it said an arm of the service such as intelligence. That appeal was rejected, even though I was one of the top cadets, 2nd in my class as a college freshman in Military Science I.

Q: What about while you were in Penn State, were you majoring in history?

WHITE: Yes.

Q: Did you have any thought in mind what you were going to do with it.

WHITE: I thought I would be going into the Army with an undergraduate degree in history and my gold lieutenant's bars. This was during Vietnam. I thought it was an appalling mess, but if that was the only way you make your mark in the army and move on up, I was going to go and do my best. My specialty of choice was infantry. I was willing to die for my country. I hung out with an ROTC crowd, but I also had numerous other less military-oriented friends who were saying when I was ousted from the program that it was the best thing that ever happened because of the draft, and I was exempt. They were all vulnerable whereas I had this 1-Y deferment that came along with being bounced from the ROTC program for medical reasons which meant that I could only be called up in the event of declared war or national emergency.

Q: Well then what did you, you were going to graduate in '72?

WHITE: 1971, actually.

Q: '71. What were you pointed toward? Did you have anything in mind?

WHITE: This becomes very interesting. There are a lot of kids who have some burning desire to do something, have something very specific in mind. After having to give up a military career, I just switched to well I guess I will be a high school history teacher or if I do as well as I might, go on to be a college professor. Although I haven't said it, in high school I was a pretty lazy student. I had decent grades, but they could have been much, much better. With the exception of ROTC and history, in my first 18 months or so in college, I also was a fairly lazy student, for which a tough, brilliant faculty advisor, Dr. Natalie Isser, scolded me at the time, saying I was trying to get through college by the skin of my teeth. Ironically, as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) at Penn State less than 4 years later, I would have Natalie's daughter in one of my History 181 discussion sections - and this talented young woman was not really living up to HER potential at that point her academic life. Natalie and I reconnected in recent years. She is now a very dear friend - but grieving over losing that daughter only a couple of years ago to breast cancer, the same dreadful disease that killed my wife's only sister in 1998.

Then in my junior year I was going through the archaic system of picking courses in which you picked up computer punch cards for courses in Recreation Hall at State College. I went over to the History Dept. table, and I was trying to get a card for a 400-level European Diplomatic History or some such course. But I didn't get it. I was also very interested in Soviet and East European affairs, which would become interesting later when I married Sonia Melnikoff, whose father was a 2nd generation Russian, a teacher, and fascinated with foreign affairs and government. Anyway, I couldn't get the course I wanted. A very solicitous grad student who I knew said, "Wayne, take History 481. It's advanced modern Middle East. I said, "I haven't even had the basic modern Middle East course, and I am not all that interested in the modern Middle East in any case (as opposed to the ancient world)." He said, "Oh come on. It's really interesting. Round out your portfolio. And Art Goldschmidt who teaches that course is a really great guy. You'll read in so fast that you'll make up for not having the intro course." So, I took History 481 with Arthur Goldschmidt Jr., who once had tried to become a foreign service officer, but had problems with getting a security clearance, even though he passed the written exam with I think a near record score, because his parents had made a major donation to the loyalist cause in Spain back in the 1930's. Art was wonderful, and is a dear friend to this day. I quickly became fascinated with the Islamic Middle East. By the end of the course, even though I was only just finishing my junior year, Art asked if I had ever thought of a career in Middle East studies. Everything just took off from there.

Q: Well what did Penn State have to offer in Middle East studies? I mean you have got this essentially a blanket course I take it this was. It covered the waterfront?

WHITE: That's an interesting story, too. Actually there was a basic course called History 181, and that was the blanket course, you know, sort of the history of the Islamic Middle East since Mohammed. Then there were two 400-level courses, 481 and 482, which were much smaller, maybe 25-30 students, and, finally, two 500-level courses. But that relatively slim set of offerings was quite nicely supplemented by a visiting Egyptian Art History professor from Cairo and a visiting Islamic Religious Studies professor. I supplemented this with visits to the National Archives to do primary research, as well as being one of the first few researchers to get into the first, unvarnished microfilms of the British occupation of Egypt (released only about two years before I needed them by Nasser). History 181 focused on the origins of the modern Middle East. Mainly you are talking about the origins of Islam and its subsequent evolution, early Arab expansion, the Crusader period, the so-called Islamic "Gunpowder Empires," late 19th century and the early 20th century European encroachment, rising nationalism, the Arab-Israeli dispute, etc. I found the Ottoman Empire the most fascinating. Anyway, although those later courses were very concentrated, which was why I was initially concerned about not having the first basic one, not having History 181 didn't become a problem because of my extra work on the side. I simply did a lot of crash Middle East work in my senior year.

Art Goldschmidt ran a robust program, not continued in nearly that depth beyond his retirement in 2000, which is a major issue I have actually taken up with the president of Penn State (and with some success). In fact, History 181 (unknown to us at the time) was the largest introductory modern or Islamic Middle East course in the United States. It had roughly 140-180 students a trimester, which is a lot. Not a semester, a trimester, three groups of that many per academic year. I was asked to stay for graduate school and become Art's Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA)-salary, free tuition, the whole deal. I was accepted at Columbia's School of International Studies (where I really wanted to go and recently spoke), but Columbia wouldn't give me a graduate teaching assistantship, and my family was still a little bit tight on money, so I was sort of bribed to stay at Penn State, get my Masters Degree there, and help Art run history 181, which turned out to be just great in a variety of ways. Most importantly, I met my lovely wife while a GTA in History 181. She was in one of my Discussion Sections. There were two lectures a week, and then for the third class, Art, me and the another GTA (that is how large the course was) split everybody up into smaller groups to review the material more up close and personal to make sure students were actually taking aboard the material.

Q: Well this would be during the 70's that you were doing this.

WHITE: '71 to '73.

Q: How would you describe the approach to the Middle East, because this as anybody who dealt with it knows, this is sort of the third rail of studies. It can be lethal because of Israel. How were they treating Arabs and Israelis at that time?

WHITE: I really think Art did a fantastic job in maintaining balance. It was good that he did because there were large Jewish communities in Pennsylvania, from which Penn State drew large portions of its student body, particularly in Philadelphia, but also in Pittsburgh and many smaller towns. I would guess that probably History 181 classes were usually about one-third Jewish. But, that said, there is an even lesser known proliferation of small, but rather vigorous, old Arab communities in central Pennsylvania, and many of the sons and daughters of these communities also took History 181. Art, fortunately was drawn to a middling point of view regarding the Arab-Israeli issue, due in part to an upbringing in an extremely progressive and tolerant family. Anyhow, he split the difference quite nicely and fairly, open to all views if well-argued. That, in addition to his public speaking skills, was probably why so many people took the course. If you came to the course from a non-Israeli perspective, you could find very interesting course offerings relating to Israel's origins, current policies, etc., and if you were Jewish, and you were interested in stepping beyond the world of Israel, Hebrew studies and the like, you could find in the course a rich introduction to Islam, as well as fascinating aspects of Persian, Turkish and Arab culture and history.

Amusingly, Art was so frustrated by the fact that because Middle East studies in some ways was still in its infancy compared to what it is now that the poor kids in the introductory course had to buy five or six different textbooks in order to bridge all the various things they had to review - you know, the Koran, early Islam, the Ottoman Empire, the contemporary Middle East, that he decided to sit down and write his own textbook. Art's Concise History of the Middle East, now, I believe, in its 8th edition with Westview Press, first launched in the mid to late 1970's is now the core textbook in a variety of basic Middle East college courses across the United States and was even being used by several of my State Dept. colleagues as a reference in their offices.

Q: Well were you sort of a grad assistant, would you call it that?

WHITE: Yes, in many colleges it is just called a TA. We called it a Graduate Teaching Assistant or GTA

Q: I am just trying to capture the atmosphere in middle east studies, was it implied or were you specifically told be careful on the Arab Israeli equation?

WHITE: It is important that you mention that because although there are places where that kind of thing is a problem because of professorial slant, Art was absolutely straight with the material: I never met a fairer, sensitive and more caring man. He didn't - and doesn't - harbor prejudice in any way. In fact he bent over backwards to accommodate every possible angle (in other words patiently explaining to kids who brought to History 181 very strong pro-Israeli or anti-Israeli leanings why there was an another side to the story, and vice versa).

We actually did a survey during one year when I was a GTA, a little form that we gave out at the beginning of each class. It was very simple. Do you regard yourself as being pro-Israeli, pro-Arab or undecided? And probably reflecting the general population in the United States at the time, the results were usually about 80% pro Israeli, 10% pro Arab and 10% undecided. At the end of the course that exposed students to Islamic history and the rich flow of events in the region overall, it was amazing to see the change. We would hand out the same form at the end of the course. The lineup would change to something like 40% pro Israeli, 30% pro Arab, and 30% undecided. It really helped even out the playing field in a very healthy manner.

Q: So you finished two years and you had a Masters. When did you get your Masters?

WHITE: In 1973.

Q: '73. then what?

WHITE: Things happened very quickly. I was taking also at the time, a lot of History and Political Science courses related to foreign policy overall. I virtually minored in Soviet Political Science. Anyway, I was encouraged by several professors to consider the Foreign Service - even by Art, even though he had had a bad experience relating to entering it. By the way Art ultimately got his security clearance, but only after he had already become an assistant professor at Penn State, and so he declined to join up that late in the game. Anyway, he very strongly encouraged me to take the written exam. I took it, passed it the first time easily, passed the oral exam in February of 1973 as "highly recommended," and so the clock already was ticking toward going into the Foreign Service while I was finishing up at Penn State. I did the usual two months back-packing through Europe thing that so many were doing at the time (in my case, from London to Istanbul with my undergraduate college roommate, but not with my future wife. She was hectically finishing up her studies at Penn State, going to school in the summer in order for us to be able to get married before going overseas. Everything came nicely together. I was called into the Foreign Service three weeks after I came back from Europe in October of '73. Sonia and I were formally engaged in November '73 and married in January, '74 (during little more than 2 days-plus a weekend) I could squeeze out of the Introductory Admin. Course, because I was assigned to a GSO/Consular position in Niamey, Niger.

Q: How did you find the basic foreign service officer's course I guess this would be in early '74.

WHITE: Our class came in on 2 October 1973.

Q: How would you describe the course as far as people in it?

WHITE: The people were great. It was a mixed group. The recruitment people had begun by that time truly emphasizing diversity: we had a number of Latinos, Afro-Americans and women - and from a wide variety of colleges. It was a great group, and I enjoyed socializing with other members of the class. I have never rally done any research into whether there was any age discrimination, but the prime candidates for the foreign service seemed to fall in the early 20's age bracket, whereas by the 1980's it seemed that more people in their 30's or even 40's were coming in. I would rub shoulders with older entry-level FSO's as an INR analyst in the 1980's and as their division chief or deputy director in the 1990-2005 period.

Q: There had been a cut off of around 32 or so. And that descends.

WHITE: In that class we had only three people, I believe, who were in their early to middle 30's. Anyway, otherwise, and including women, the mix of the class was about as good could be expected in those days, and we all bonded together rather nicely. Turning to the course itself, I have to admit that after I hear descriptions of the way the course is run now, ours was sort of a classroom experience with quite a lot of fairly dull lectures on the various sections of the Foreign Affairs Manual and the like. I understand that those aspects of the course have now been compressed and more mind-expanding stuff has been inserted. I found a lot of the course material rather dry, boring and bureaucratic, but, of course, it was my first introduction to the U.S. government!

Q: That has been my experience too. Given your Middle East courses, is that where you wanted to go?

WHITE: Very much so. That said, I was not dealt a great hand to start with, as was typical of first assignment offerings in those days. I could have gone, for example, to Phnom Penh, Cambodia where there already were B-52 "arc light" strikes taking place within 20 miles of the city's center, pretty far from the Middle East, and I had to think of Sonia. We got married in January '74. There were two assignments in Vietnam that would have fascinated me, but Sonia, as with Phnom Penh, would have been safe havened in Bangkok. That didn't appeal to people who had just gotten married and were deeply in love (and still are). The one Middle East choice was running the motor pool in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia without any Arabic training. Penn State's program had been deficient in one area, Arabic - no really solid Arabic language program. There was an experimental Arabic program that I was in. It was basically a failure. It involved native speakers, period, with very little formal course work, and I only had one trimester of even that, so I really needed some Arabic training, and I was not going to Jeddah without it.

Then there was Niamey, Niger where I would be in an Islamic country on the edge of the Sahara, rather tough, major responsibilities, consular, admin-even pol-mil would be added after I got there, so I reasoned, "I am going to Niger. Better to be a big fish in a pond' (or however that goes) and be at least on the fringe of the Middle East and within the outer Muslim world. I have to admit my wife was wonderful. She came down from Penn State on a long weekend at the end of my basic Foreign Service Officer course. I didn't consult her (hard to believe in retrospect) about my choice. Maybe this reflects something about how guys and gals handled their affairs in those days, although the process of making posting choices was rather rushed, as I recall. In any case, I picked my assignment without talking to Sonia (aside from ruling out those Southeast Asia assignments). I got a map out of the State Dept. Map Library, and I spread it out on the sofa in my apartment. After she walked in and was putting her stuff down, I said: "Sonia, that's where we are going." Sonia just sort of glanced at the map and said, "OK, great. What are we doing tonight." She was bold, and a happy camper. Her father was a tremendous advocate of international travel, even the more adventurous ones, like his many trips to the USSR.

Q: What was his background?

WHITE: You have probably heard all these stories about people who say my great grandfather was actually a Russian Prince, German Duke or whatever, and you roll your eyes. Well, her grandfather was actually an ensign on the Russian battleship Potemkin - no kidding. He graduated from the Imperial Naval Engineering School and was commissioned at the Metropol Hotel in central Moscow in a big ceremony with the grand duke presiding. Then he went off to the Potemkin. There, he hung out with 3 other young ensigns who would stick together for quite some time. It was their first assignment. It was their Niger. To be on the new battleship Potemkin must have been a thrill. But the sailors' revolt happened only months after their arrival on the ship, and they all had to run the gauntlet over the side with the other officers. I never met him, and neither did Sonia. He died in a car accident in 1935. He apparently had a scar, a hand wounded pushing away a rifle bayonet, and there was actually both a bayonet and gun shot wound in his hand. Anyway he didn't like the career opportunities in the imperial fleet after that and went into the merchant marine with his buddies, and the all settled in Philadelphia. They bounced around in Philadelphia not really knowing what to do with themselves and trying various things until prohibition. Then Sonia's father, proficient in steam technology, became a major bootlegger in the Chester area near Philadelphia. Sonia's grandfather became extremely proficient in not only bootlegging but, drawing from all that naval engineering background, also building fine stills for others to triple distill vodka, which was considered the high end speakeasy vodka in Philadelphia. Sonia's father - born in 1916 - was already old enough in those days to guard stills, keep the fires burning and even drive a delivery truck for the stuff some years later.

Anyway I guess maybe with the Russian background and these former ensigns having great discussions about the old times in his father's kitchen, a mother who was Russian-Tanscarpathian/Ukrainian, Sonia's father became very interested in both scientific matters and the international scene. He also was very liberal in his political views. He was a labor organizer down south during the depression as a college student. He went to West Chester where he picked up a teaching degree, thought he might need it, but really was interested in physics and, during a couple years before World War II, was a physics Ph.D. candidate at NYU and a graduate teaching assistant (living in the same cheap apartment building with a young Jackson Pollock (who used to bum Sunday breakfasts off of Sonia's father & his college roommate!). Very patriotic and interested in international affairs when the war broke out, he lied about the fact that he had full vision in only one eye, and apparently had a friend get the eye chart and memorized parts of it and finally got in. But, in the end, he was eventually recognized as having some eyesight problems, so he was put in a medical unit as the laboratory officer, and a member of the now-defunct U.S. Army Sanitary Corps with the 76th Station Hospital, which was organized in Hawaii.

His future wife was a nurse, who also volunteered. She was from western Pennsylvania, coal country (she was not a regular army nurse, having received her nursing degree from a private nursing school near Pittsburgh). They met in the '76th, served in the Leyte beachhead in the Philippines (he was ashore on D-Day there), and later in the occupation of Japan in Sendai. Anyway, that fostered even more an attitude on the part of her father that made him determined that his two daughters would hear a lot about international affairs. It really struck home in Sonia's case; it didn't on her sister Alexis, although that didn't stop Alexis from being very opinionated in such matters at the dinner table. Sonia went on trips with her father to Hawaii and Europe and then, eventually, 4 of the many yearly tours to Russia her father led from 1968 through 1992, as sort of a hobby. By the way, her father never got his PHD in Physics. He opened several businesses in the Poconos (where he worked at a prominent resort for several college summers), and, bored with a purely business life, became a Social Studies teacher at Pocono Mountain High School from around 1967 through 1984.

Q: Well then Niger, you were in Niger from when to when?

WHITE: I was in Niger from June, 1974 to the middle of July, '76.

Q: What was Niger like at the time you got there?

WHITE: It was our first real third world experience. In other words before Niger, the only thing that approached the third world was a week in Istanbul during my European trek, and there is no comparison between Turkey and Niger. It was quite primitive in ways that we could notice right off, the smell, the flies, the heat, the lack of medical facilities. There was one very small French hospital (actually, a clinic). The national hospital you didn't go near - incredibly filthy. As a consular officer, I was there a few times, but you wouldn't use it for medical support. I was pulling people out of there or steering them away, getting them to the French clinic instead (or out of the country) for meaningful care. A number of casual visitors, desert crossers mainly, got sick and needed assistance on the southern end of their Sahara treks (mainly due to malaria) and didn't know what they were getting into entering Niger. Judging from some reading about Niger I've done long since leaving is that we were there in probably its best time: at least from, say, 1973 to the present - even throwing in the drought. It was under fairly capable and responsible leadership. The army was still highly disciplined and flecked thickly with French seconded personnel all the way down to non-commissioned officers. The small army was still rather spit and polish. The streets were fairly clean. The road net, on which we did a considerable amount of in-country travel, was mainly earthen, but kept nicely graded and maintained - a lot of "washboarding," but very few potholes. If you drove over 60 miles and hour, you skimmed the washboard, you couldn't even feel it. In the city were a number of quality asphalt roads which frankly I wish portions of DC had. There was also a cluster of some nice restaurants, Vietnamese restaurants, things like that. It was our first experience overseas in a country stricken by drought, but still harboring hope. Now, however, Niger has been through very rough patches, bordering on failed state status at times, and trying desperately now to feed over twice the number of people than were there when we were there.

Q: What was your job in Niger?

WHITE: It was interesting actually because I was supposed to have been mainly the GSO, but the GSO was, in my case, also the Consular Officer. And it was great to have another sideline - another window into Niger. When I arrived there was no Pol/Mil Officer. When they found out I was a military buff of sorts, enjoyed rubbing shoulders with the regional Defense Attache people, etc. I became, effectively, Embassy Niamey's version of the Pol/Mil Officer. It was pretty funny, some of the things you would do as "Pol/Mil Officer" in Niger, like, on instructions from Washington for our E & E Plan, prepare maps of all airfields in the country and rate them according to runway length, state of the runway (almost always earthen and not so great), this sort of thing. Crafting maps using colored pencils and tracing paper, things that people now would think are relegated to an elementary school was fun because I always likely mapmaking and was pretty good at it. Anyway, I got to fly around with the Defense Attache folks who were based in Monrovia when they came up on visits. I saw a lot of the country in their new C-12, which, replacing the more durable C-47 previously used, and which was damaged during one of our landings on one of those sub-par dirt airstrips.

The post tripled in size while I was there because of the Sahel Drought Emergency which had been declared in 1973, and for which Niamey was designated the regional USAID headquarters. Many have come to believe since then that there quite possibly was no such thing as the drought emergency. The Sahara was simply expanding once again, and more of Niger (like neighboring Chad) was slowly being absorbed by that great desert. There have been better rainy seasons since the time I was out there, but apparently never like the early 20th Century, and made worse by overpopulation. A country that had a population of 2,000,000 I think in back in the 1930's had well more than 4,000,000 while we were there, and now has something like 8 or 9 million. They could spread out before in the early days in response to droughts; they can't now.

Anyway, returning to the Foreign Service side of this story, I was 24 years old, and found myself supervising between 100 to 120 local employees, many of them guards. About a dozen spoke English. I had French training at FSI. I was pulled out of French training prematurely before I could finish my 20 weeks and get my 3-3 rating, which I was very upset about since that prevented me from getting off language probation. There was supposedly an emergency at post that demanded my urgent presence, 4 weeks ahead of schedule. Here comes the kind of thing that make people leave the Foreign Service: I got to post as fast as possible with Sonia and found that the emergency at post was that the Administrative Officer wanted to go on recreational leave. I was denied my 3-3 for that. I was assured that I could not get a 3-3 in Niger via tutoring by the folks at FSI. I would have to secure an assignment to another Francophone post in order to qualify for the additional language training required to take care of the problem of language probation, at least in French, further postponing my ability to get to the Middle East.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

WHITE: Douglas Heck.

Q: And the DCM?

WHITE: John Buche to start with the first year, and then Jack Davison. Jack went on to become ambassador to at least one and maybe two African posts. One of them was Niger. Doug went on to be ambassador in Nepal.

Q: Well now Doug was a Turkish had basically wasn't he, and Iran too?

WHITE: Actually, that is an interesting question. We were never all that close to the Heck's. But Doug never really tried to put himself forward in a way that revealed his deepest interests on that score. I know nothing about Turkey, but he served as DCM in Iran under Richard Helms just before coming to Niger. And he had served previously in Nepal, and I really think Doug saw himself primarily as a South Asian expert. In fact, when entered INR, even Iran was still considered "South Asia." That changed during my service with INR, with the Iran portfolio shifting into the core Middle East.

Q: Yeah he was in India too.

WHITE: Yes, in the conversations I had with Doug, he was always talking about India and Nepal, not so much Iran, which I was actually far more interested in considering what some of his experiences under Helms must have been. Perhaps there was some unpleasantness there. Who knows? His wife Ernie Heck was a Foreign Service Officer, who had to take administrative leave or whatever to accompany him to Niger.

Q: I know, we were close friends in Vietnam. Was there much contact with the Nigeriens, the people in Niger or not?

WHITE: That is always an important question to ask. I believe the general answer in my case should be no, and I will tell you why. I had plenty of contact with some of the lowest levels of society as GSO, as did my wife, Recreation Center Director for awhile and a hire in the Administrative Section a bit later. In other words our gardener was Nigerien, as were most of those at the embassy and ambassador's residence. A scattering of the house guards were Nigerien. And, of course, there was dickering with the ladies at the market in the course of daily shopping, and during one wild evening, with the desert Tuaregs arranged by our one Tuareg guard, who tried to sell me a 12-year old girl! That sort of thing, however, gives one only a rather superficial view. Niger had very low educational and skill levels. So, in the office, for example, I mainly operated through more highly skilled Togolese, Nigerians, and Beninois. Those were the Africans I most often dealt with even down to the level of houseboys. I never had a Nigerien houseboy. Because it became law while I was there, I had to institute the first program in our Administrative Section to begin replacing other Africans with Nigeriens. I brought in a Nigerien to train in our procurement unit, who showed some real promise, but it was a tough slog at times. I persevered with that, however. I really felt sorry for the Nigeriens because there was a sort of Togolese mafia (as we used to jokingly refer to the number of Togolese employees) that comprised much of the embassy's Foreign Service National staff, followed by Nigerians and others from Benin. Even beyond the one Nigerien young man I mentioned, I was trying to break up that Togolese monopoly and move in some Nigeriens at least some of the entry level positions. As a supervisor, I was always trying to balance bringing in more Nigeriens, which pitted lower levels of productivity, against the rising demands of an expanding embassy.

Q: What about you mentioned the hospital facilities were pretty abysmal unless you went to the French hospital.

WHITE: Yes. The French hospital called the Gamcalle Clinic was very small, probably only about 30-40 beds, and fairly primitive by our standards. It was, however, much cleaner than the National Hospital. The National Hospital essentially lived on borrowed doctors, mainly from eastern bloc countries, such as Polish dentists. I remember my last visit there taking an African-American guy, who had crossed the desert, and had contracted malaria rather predictably in Niger, not having been told about taking suppressants by his physician back in California. Almost two weeks to the day upon entering the malarial zone south of the Sahara (the usual time for incubation), he came down with a raging case. He didn't think that people at home would help him out, and so he wanted to go to the cheapest place. I said, "You do not want to go to the National Hospital, no matter what." But to prove my point, I had to take him there, with him shaking with fever. I had had him at my house, but he said, "I can't do this." I said, "Why not. Just stay at my house." We went to one of the wards, and of course it was families living under beds, crude, soiled beds, cooking on the concrete floors in the halls, etc. The nurses' station, if there could be anything called that, was an old desk. It was covered up to about three to four inches with old dressings, half eaten meals, mixed in with new stuff and syringes and scattered cockroaches running around the floor, the desk and the walls.

Q: You mentioned desert Sahara crossing. What is this all about?

WHITE: Oh it was a big phenomenon at the time. In fact, some of the USAID local hires in Niamey in those days were American desert crossers who ran out of money before being able to get home. Doug and Ernie Heck crossed with Carlton Coon, then our DCM in Morocco, while we were there. Doug or Ernie wrote a fascinating 30-odd page account of the crossing. I think it is becoming interesting again because a route made very dangerous during the 1990's because of Algerian Islamic militants was becoming more safe, but now there reports of more trouble.

Q: Polisario?

WHITE: No, actually Algerian militants, primarily the GSPC.

Q: Fundamentalists.

WHITE: These militants were fighting the old authoritarian regime in Algiers. Desert crossing became very dangerous. But in those days it was a common thing to have the most adventurous kids who had done their European backpacking thing, try to prove how tough they were by doing a desert crossing. And for every three or four I had to take care of as Consular Officer, there would one who would join up with the embassy, which again tripled in size while I was there, on contract. USAID could not supply enough people, and so, USAID was thriving as were we at times off of ex-Peace Corps volunteers, who didn't want to return home and just stayed on, as well as desert crossers, of various types, Canadians, Americans, Brits, male, and female. At one point to show you the sad state of USAID in Niger, in 1975 I suppose, a desert crossing young American woman on contract named Laura, smart as a whip, in her mid-20's with a BA from a good school, was, effectively, the 3rd best program officer in USAID. That wasn't her job description, but she had an office near the USAID director in the main embassy building, supervising personnel, writing reports, and working on major procurement contracts!

Q: What was AID doing there?

WHITE: Oh, various things. There were fishery projects, trying to build fisheries out of ponding from the Niger, in cooperation with the Peace Corps. There was, believe it or not, a forestry project, one thing which I felt was rather bizarre because there was virtually nothing there to work with. But there was a little forest between the airport and the city which USAID had built up over the years. There were various sort of village self help projects throughout the country, water pumps for villages, sanitation projects related to which USAID often would go on the road and check out on long road trips, and bring their vehicles back to Niamey desperately needing the services of my GSO section because they were pretty beaten up. There was even an experimental cloud-seeding project employing an old B-17, but I can't recall whether that was USAID, funded by another country, Niger government, or a combination of same.

We were strapped for American administrative officers because although USAID kept authorizing more GSO positions, up to three more by the spring of 1975, none could be filled because Vietnam was still absorbing the bulk of USAID's people, and nobody but nobody wanted to come to what was regarded as a rather forlorn posting. Then in April-May, 1975, we had a groundswell of USAID personnel applying for every opening in Niger as Vietnam fell and there were RIF's, (terminating people who couldn't find a job to justify their continued USG employment). At that point, I ended up very quickly with three AID officers, all compared to me, ancient. I am 55 now, and I can see all this in greater perspective. None were under the age of 50, none were acclimated very well to the difficult environment in Niger, and, believe it or not, despite coming from francophone Vietnam, none were at all proficient in French. So I became the French translator for them, which was great because here you are, an FSO-8, and you are acting in some capacities as their supervisor (well, I guess I had become an FSO-7 by mid-tour). My language skill also allowed me to get all of the best stuff to do - anything white collar because it involved interaction & negotiation in French or French paper work. Meanwhile, my seniors were stuck with maintenance, vehicle repair, etc. while I was out working on customs clearances, contracting for real estate, security, and mingling with some senior Nigerien officials (who owned much of the real estate in town and ran security from the very top-even seemingly trivial matters). I can't tell you how many times an outraged 55 year old USAID officer who outranked me by three grades or so came storming into my spacious office with an FSN in tow saying, "You tell him that if he ever does X again..." They could hardly speak a word of French to the staff. It was hilarious at times, terribly frustrating at others, and pretty shocking overall.

Q: I wonder do you feel that it was very effective, what we were doing there?

WHITE: Not in the end, because I didn't think much of what USAID was doing was building up a strong base of Nigerien personnel who, without USAID, could sustain what they were doing. The Peace Corps was working on a variety of things, from the more urban projects like Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) programs to village sanitation and things like that, right down to the level where the proverbial "rubber meets the road," and they could count on some people carrying on after they left, or being replaced by another volunteer picking up from them. The fish farming I mentioned earlier was, in part, a Peace Corps project. In many small ways, here and there, Peace Corps probably left the most enduring, country-wide legacy. And they helped the embassy a lot because Peace Corps was so large, and becoming the regional center for the drought, we had a regional Peace Corps doctor. We had a regional State Dept. nurse, so I helped combine them into a Niamey-based American regional medical clinic. Without Peace Corps, we could have never gotten that together. And we had two terrific Peace Corps doctors in succession during my time in Niger.

Q: Did you get any feel for Ambassador Heck and his relations with the Nigerien government, or was there much going on?

WHITE: I did not really circulate as much as some others in the political sphere. But I got the impression that he was very interested in what was going on-very enthusiastic and highly professional-and was trying to spend as much of his time getting acclimated, going around the country, moving about to get a sense of what was going on - all the way across the country to Lake Chad on one occasion. I got the impression that sometimes he was unhappy with USAID because he could see what I was just telling you about. He didn't think it was having nearly as much impact and that USAID was wasting resources. I can give you a hilarious story about a meeting that relates to this problem. It was a little bit later in my tour, and would involve using foul language (although not by me). Is this allowed?

Q: Oh Absolutely.

WHITE: Anyway, it occurred at a country team meeting. I was present because the Administrative Officer was out of country. It was a meeting mainly to discuss a crisis of sorts over a Nigerien demand for a customs payment related to a shipment of gift grain from the US. There was something like eight or nine thousand tons of gift grain coming by rail via Togo and at the time sitting at the railhead for loading into trucks. The Nigerien government had recently informed the USAID director that there was over a quarter of a million dollars in customs fees that had to be paid on the gift grain. The USAID Controller attended to brief on the financial situation.

He said he could extract from various funds, enough money to pay the entire amount. I was sitting there thinking: "Is everyone here insane? Customs payments for giving them gift grain?" This sounded like a real scam to line some official pockets. Just about the time I was quietly reaching my private boiling point, DCM Jack Davison shouted, "Fuck 'em!" Doug Heck nodded and said, "Absolutely! Go back and tell them that it's now gift grain for Togo. There will be no customs payments on gift grain to this country. There never has and never will be." The USAID controller and the USAID director got very upset, arguing: "How can we do that? It's not gift grain to Togo; it's tagged for Niger." Doug said, "They don't know that; They don't know how difficult it is to change who gets the grain. Only you and I know that. Just go and tell them: if there is to be a customs charge, there will be no gift grain for Niger this time around." It was very nicely played, and worked like a charm.

But USAID was quite ready to fork over nearly $300,000, which showed just how much was sloshing around in the USAID fiscal bilges. This was typical. State's year end spending in Niger for I believe the year 1975, for roughly the same number of people there as USAID had, was around $15,000. USAID had roughly a quarter of a million, and they were asking me to throw it into any asinine project possible, like paving the entire GSO compound (which was a former Citroen dealership and was quite nicely done in river gravel, thank you) in order to eat up the funds so they would not be cut in the next fiscal year. They came to me, desperate to spend money. But how many air conditioners can you buy for such a small mission - 200, 300? As low man on the proverbial totem pole, and trying to help, I bought as much stuff as I could for the mission to bleed down the USAID money, but I refused to simply waste the final, I don't remember exactly, $150,000. The ambassador supported me, and so did Jack Davidson. The USAID director went ballistic over this and ordered a USAID director's aircraft with the money just to get it obligated, some kind of Cessna or whatever, a used one, I believe. He thought he had cleverly solved his budgetary problem. In the end, it was disallowed by USAID Washington. USAID had money to burn in Niger - hundreds of thousands of dollars for "operations" - while State had to agonize over every hundred bucks.

Q: Was there any sort of political organization going on in Niger at the time?

WHITE: You know you are a mind reader. I was just about to mention the failed coup attempt. There was in April 1976, a Libyan-backed coup attempt to overthrow the president, Colonel Seyni Kountche. Just before my arrival, Kountche had overthrown the sort of lingering post-colonial, pro-French government of Hamadi Diori. That was viewed in Washington as negative because Kountche was considerably more leftist and far less sympathetic toward the U.S. That is when the Soviet mission there was built up hugely, the Chinese replaced the Taiwanese in working on a large riverine rice project, and relations with Israel were broken. So when we arrived, our relations with this government were not all that wonderful. I mean they loved the USAID program, were generally friendly, etc., but relations were a little chilly on the political level, and the new regime clearly was wary of us. Doug Heck did a great job with the foreign ministry and the president, keeping matters on an even keel despite the Kountche coup.

Anyway in April 1976, two years after he Kountche seized power, there was a rather violent coup attempt against him, initiated by elements of Niger's small army stationed in Niamey. It involved some ethnic elements that were not well represented in the government. Around the capital Djerma was the main tribal and lingual group, but it was a relatively small area centered on Niamey. Outside Niamey were Hausa, Fulani, Tuareg and other lingual and tribal groups. Djerma dominance was much resented in certain circles. The coup involved quite a lot of fighting, but you might be amused by the way first I found out about it. On one of my fairly common pre-dawn visits to the bathroom (my latest attack of amoebic dysentery), I heard Pop, Pop, Pop. I thought: "That sounds very odd." I knew what an automatic weapon sounds like, having been in ROTC. But, well, this was Niger, and I just went back to bed for another hour, but not feeling all that well. So, at the crack of dawn, I went out, found my gardener (who had been an enlisted man in the Nigerien army). I said, "Soumana, what was that machine gun fire?" He said, "Oh, it's hunters in the woods near the airport." I said, "Hunters with a machine gun, and there's no game in that little patch of woods anyway?" In any case, that was the silly information I managed to glean from the Nigerien "street" early that morning. Without any other news or phone calls, Sonia and I (at this time, Sonia was employed at in our Administrative/Consular Section, which was very nice), drove together to work, as usual. Many Nigerians, however, instead of going about their normal business, were standing on sidewalks and other areas along the road watching cars go by - definitely odd, but there had been no other gunfire. This was, however, a clear indication that something was up. So when I reached my office in our downtown compound (only about a 10-minute ride from home), I called the embassy. The move to a spacious, former Citroen dealership had been part of the USAID buildup. The embassy was about five miles away in an area called the diplomatic quarter, but which contained only two embassies, us and the French. This was along a curve in the River Niger and way up on what was called the plateau, say about 70 or 80 feet higher than we were downtown, and there must have been some sort of an acoustic anomaly because between us and the plateau because we still could hear absolutely nothing.

When I finally got through to the embassy, Jack Davidson was under his desk saying, "You can't hear this? It is mortar, machine gun, and rifle fire. They are even near the French embassy. They are within a couple of hundred yards of here. You actually can't hear anything down there? Listen." He held the phone up. I could faintly hear the sound of some shooting over the phone. He said, "Why don't you go down and check out the military camps." There were two large military camps near our home at the other end of the town in the direction of the airport. So probably just like some other adventurous (and often foolhardy) foreign service officers, I got in our little Renault 12, drove Sonia home, and went off to look at the military camps nearby, which faced each other, separated by a desert-like field about 200 meters wide. And there they were - soldiers digging in under concrete wash basins and the like, emplacing machine guns and other light weaponry along the perimeter of the camp, sighting their rifles (they were armed with Belgian FN rifles and probably French machine guns), etc. So there I am, driving along the camp perimeter, taking all this in, waving disarmingly to some of the soldiers, and thinking how interested the embassy will be that this camp is clearly gearing up for combat. I could see some indications that the other camp was doing likewise in the distance. I had heard that the company housed in one camp was Djerma and the other heavily Fulani. What a great a chance to do some on the spot Pol/Mil reporting. Then a Cascavel rolled out of the camp, blocked the road, rotated its turret, aiming its light cannon at me and my car. The Cascavel is a Brazilian armored vehicle with multiple heavy-duty tires mounting a 37mm cannon in the turret. So I got out and talked to the Cascavel (must have looked pretty funny), telling its crew (well, various apertures that presumably contained Nigerien eyes and ears) that I had simply made a wrong turn on my way to the clinic, slowly walked back to the car, gently turned it around, and left without incident.

Later, in the early afternoon, there was a fire fight between the two camps, with tracers going over our house, which was nearby. In fact, with our house so near the military camps, taking Sonia home probably was not such a great idea. In the course of that same afternoon, a Cascavel pulled almost up to the entrance to our yard while pivoting around in order to secure a better position on the main road to the airport. Anyway, all this ended up as a "coup de force" (failed coup d'etat). The Libyans were behind it, but evidently provided virtually no concrete support. By evening it was all over. The president rallied his forces and crushed the coup plotters and their supporters.

There is another interesting little story related to the coup attempt, however. I was deeply involved in security at the embassy, getting identity cards, building up physical security, and such. I had as one of my major contacts, the Nigerian Director of National Security, the Nigerian equivalent of our CIA and FBI directors combined. He was a very interesting, hard-working, and still fairly young, man. We had had some great conversations - beyond what I needed to have done involving the business at hand during several visits to his office. We really connected. He was arrested as a key conspirator, and executed on the spot. He also happened the best source for the regional CIA officer, who also much regretted his passing. Apparently he was a very honorable man, and one reason why many of the major coup plotters escaped is that he was sending all the para-military, police and military forces in the wrong directions - away from where he thought his compatriots were moving so they could have the best chance of getting away. Finally, someone put two and two together and thought: "Wait a minute here..." The authorities confronted him. He reportedly stood up and said: "Yes I am a conspirator," and that was that. He was shot in the courtyard in front of his headquarters building where I used to park during business calls. It was an exciting - and very sad - time.

Q: Were you aware of Libyans messing around in the area?

WHITE: No, but the embassy did. Little old me in the Admin/Consular section was unaware - even though they had a decent-sized embassy, and I was naturally suspicious. They didn't come to the American Recreation Center, which by the way was right next to our home. We had two horses and a little stable in the back of the house. The stable we inherited in very shoddy condition and I had it all fixed up. I mention the Libyans in the context of the Rec. Center because all sorts of people used to show up at our bingos, even the Soviet ambassador! We had a very Kruschevian Soviet ambassador. He was one of those bear hugging little fireplugs of a man. He had already been an ambassador in a couple of other African posts, and seemed rather undisciplined. He drove himself around in his own Peugeot all over town. His family only visited occasionally from Moscow.

But returning to the coup de force and the Libyans, I learned in embassy country team meetings (because I didn't see it for myself), that the main coup plotter, and I can't remember his name, showed up in the President's Cadillac at the Libyan embassy, stood on the hood thanking the Libyans for all their help, with the Libyans shouting that the fight wasn't over and to please go away. The upshot of the coup was that our erstwhile iffy relations with Colonel Kountche changed dramatically. Doug Heck had a meeting the next day with the president. In a county team meeting shortly after that, Doug was very excited about all this, with the president telling him, "We had it all wrong; you can have what you want if you assist us against further Libyan mischief." Obviously, Doug had been giving them material to scare them about Libyans subversion that had been going in one ear and out the other, doubtless dismissed by the regime as propaganda. Anyway Kountche said, "I'm yours. Anything you want." Unfortunately, it all happened only three months before my departure, so I didn't have much time to enjoy the new Kountche as our good buddy era, although, frankly, at my level, we were doing quite well even before that.

Q: Had the Toyota war started in Chad by this time or not?

WHITE: The only Toyota wars that were going on when I was in Niger involved Toyota's success in aggressively displacing Land Rover as the premier marketer of all-terrain vehicles in the area, in part because Land Rover's marketing operation was just plain arrogant and lazy.

Q: In other words this is before the Libyans started to move into Chad.

WHITE: Absolutely. That happened in my first years in INR. No, aside from the coup attempt, I suppose it was a fairly routine sub-Saharan African experience in Niger, all things said and done.

I have to admit, however, that if you recall what my religious background was, one of my first missions in my career to be quite memorable - in this case in a very sad way - took place during my second weekend in Niger. I was called on Sunday by Doug Heck. He said, "Come over to the residence. It's an emergency. Oh, and bring your wife." So I went over to the residence, and he sat us down and he said, "The most well-known missionary in the country, who had been very close to the pre-Kountche, pro- French president (Hamani Diori, who had been ousted in April of 1974), was now being PNG'd" (in July 1974). The missionary apparently had even flown Diori around the country in his missionary plane once or twice. But the excuse being used to PNG (declare them persona non grata, to be expelled) the missionary and his wife was that they were promoting dangerous and highly-suspect baby feeding programs which were alternatives to breast feeding, running counter to Nigerien custom and posing a health risk (a sham). Anyway, somebody had to travel 90 miles into the bush northeast along the Niger River and inform this missionary and his wife on a Sunday morning that they were being kicked out the country and had one week to settle their affairs, hence the reason to bring Sonia along to help comfort the wife. They had been in country for over 20 years. I had a driver, the best embassy driver, because being so new to the country, we didn't know the way. We had this great Agfa camera that Sonia's father had given her, and it was the only time in Niger we would see a herd of giraffes (on the way to the mission in a rather barren area with a few isolated clumps of trees here and there which wasn't savannah but the more like the edge of the desert). This was a small herd of about 12 or 13, with three young giraffes. I got out of the car and walked toward them very slowly. I always thought giraffes were very thin and lithe - very light animals. But when the 12 or so of them take off about 50 yards away from me, the ground shook. Then on the way back to Niamey some of them were spread-legged near the road drinking out of puddles - very classic. There had been a little rainstorm which had gone through after we passed by. But anyway that was our first mission: to hand this devastating, mission-ending diplomatic note to a crestfallen missionary and his wife, both of whom took it very well. He admitted, as we sat in their small adobe living room after Sunday services, that they sort of expected it. But, in retrospect, it was ironic for the young man raised as a fundamentalist Presbyterian to be handing this terrible piece of paper to fundamentalist Protestant missionaries in Africa. So there it is: my first diplomatic mission.

Q: Well I was looking at the time, and probably I would like to put at the end of this where we were so we can pick up the next time. We will pick this up in 1976 when you left Niger and whither?

WHITE: To Haiti.

Q: All right, so you are off to Haiti.

Q: This is tape 2 side 1 with Wayne White. Wayne, you are off to Haiti in 1976?

WHITE: Correct.

Q: And you were in Haiti for how long?

WHITE: Not quite a full tour because of things that you will hear. And it was not the happiest tour.

Q: To 1977 about?

WHITE: No, I arrived in late October of 1976 and left a little bit ahead of time around mid-August of '78.

Q: OK just to give us a framework. Other than being a junior officer and at the beck and call of personnel, was there any rationale for Haiti?

WHITE: I main reason I accepted the assignment to Haiti was because I needed to get off language probation in French. I think much of what I am going to tell you about Haiti relates to why some people go sour on the Foreign Service. I was pulled out of language training prematurely before going to Niger, before getting my 3/3, because there was a contrived "emergency" at post (as you'll recall, the Admin Officer wanting to go on leave), forcing me to seek out yet another Francophone post if I wanted to get the language training to get off probation in French. I was told that I could not possibly achieve a 3/3 in French in Niger, even with tutoring. So I had to schedule Haiti as the next assignment, the most "challenging" Francophone assignment available at the time. I went into a consular job, Chief of the Non-Immigrant Visa Section a very large consular section, for the first half of the tour, and then Deputy Chief of the larger Immigrant Visa Section for the second half.

Anyway, between Niamey and Port-au-Prince, I went back to Washington with almost two months of French language training scheduled. Upon my return I tested 3+/3 in French. They didn't realize I would have over a hundred employees working under me who didn't speak English, so the learning curve was far beyond their expectations, which seem to be limited to tutoring regimes, not real life. So there we go, I picked Haiti for all the wrong reasons, once more frustrating a Middle East expert simply trying to get a posting in his area of expertise - and to take my wife there. That said, there are a number of FSO'S - many now retired - who are Middle East experts, a few of them to become ambassadors, who also served in Haiti. This small group sometimes compared an aspect of their experience in Haiti to what they encountered serving in Syria, . When I was Syrian analyst, along with them, I discovered at least one compelling analogy involving some rather unfortunate similarities between those two countries in the political arena.

Once again, off to Haiti. They used the two months I had in DC to put me in the fraud unit in the Visa Office, then in the old SA-1. This is very good training under a veteran FSO named Corodino Gotti, who was THE expert on visa fraud and had been our Consul General in Santo Domingo. I learned a lot under Cori, knowing I was going into a high fraud post. So I went down to Haiti pretty charged up to, you know, take on visa fraud and get the train firmly on the rails. Moreover, I was arriving there approximately a year after one of the officers in the NIV Section, named Carolyn King, I believe, had been caught in a visa fraud ring, and had been prosecuted in either Georgia or South Carolina, and had received a federal sentence. So things were a little bit dicey, and that only further reinforced my desire to lay down the law and get things fully back in order.

Q: Before we get into what you were doing, could you set the stage. First who was the ambassador, and second, what was the situation in Haiti, and then we will get to your work.WHITE: This is a good question because I think, sweeping across recent decades of Haitian history, we may have been there in the best of times, but I must emphasize that all that is relative. Papa Doc was gone. His son, Baby Doc was there, and it was still a dictatorship, but in response to the international community, and the weariness of many Haitians themselves, the murders and much of the terror that characterized Papa Doc's Haiti, were largely a thing of the past. What people read in books like "The Comedians" (which, from what I saw and heard while in Haiti, is pretty accurate), was behind us several years. The worst you encountered was occasionally a human rights advocate or an opposition figure being beaten up or what have you, and even that seemed fairly infrequent. Many of the infamous Tonton Macoutes had been reduced to guys placed in doubtless ill-fitting (and relatively non-violent) jobs as well-heeled government bureaucrats, like the Chief of Protocol, with whom I had to deal on occasion. Other less senior foot-soldiers of the reign of terror , uniforms made of the same cloth with which we make blue-jeans, armed with pre-WWIGerman export bolt-action Mausers (which seemed poorly maintained), manned sleepy checkpoints on anything from crude benches to lawn chairs, just waving people through along some of the main roads outside the capital (which seemed pretty meaningless).

Q: I assume they had dark glasses on.

WHITE: A few. But, for the most part, the dark glasses were gone. It is funny you should ask that because of course people used to associate that with the Tonton Macoutes, and also those early to mid-1960's pseudo-stylish hats as well. Those guys were sort of the Tonton Macoutes secret police, and they had been essentially disbanded, folded into the regular police or the government bureaucracy. At checkpoints were the bottom rung of the once far more formidable Tonton Macoutes organization, pretty much the only visible presence left. During Carnival 1977 and 1978, the parade was preceded by about a dozen or so security types dressed in T-shirts and regular pants wielding Israeli Uzi sub-machine guns. Outside the context of Carnival, I never saw those men. So things were getting better in Haiti - well, as much as was possible in such an appallingly poor, corrupt and still sadly misgoverned country. So a number of Americans were going down there and setting up assembly industries, similar factories, etc. I associated with some of these people. The economy in this country was pitiful, and I say that even though I had just come from Niger. When I traveled to especially remote portions of the country (later I will get into why I had to log a lot of business travel throughout the country), I saw poverty that eclipsed Niger during the Sahel Drought Emergency. It was really awful there, either in the dirt-poor rural areas or the squalid, teeming slums of the capital. But there was a burgeoning micro middle class that was beginning to prosper, and things were sort of picking up a bit. And, with the terror largely gone, Haitians also could speak to us fairly openly.

But, turning back to the dark side, Haiti was an ecological disaster. As I traveled throughout the country, a land once described by Columbus as heavily forested (we have reason to believe that Columbus's landing was in northern Hispaniola probably on the Haitian side-I've been to the most likely sector of beach up there) had largely been stripped for charcoal. You had to go to a tiny little corner of Haiti way up in the mountains near the Dominican border called Foret des Pines (Pine Forest) to the find one tiny virgin forest at a pretty high elevation. In fact, there were whole swaths of Haiti that no longer had trees. Instead, there was mainly thorny scrub brush and cacti as ground cover, like some forlorn place in the American West, with much rock shelving exposed by erosion. When it rained, this ecological disaster area did exactly what happens under conditions of mass deforestation. There would be a brown ring around the island. I saw it many times. Two or three hundred yards of muddy water would line the coast, which, in turn, killed reefs, destroying the marine ecosystem around the island. Quite a sad situation all round.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

WHITE: Heyward Isham was the ambassador, and I would come into conflict with him, but even more directly, his DCM, over policies related to visa issuance.

Q: All right, well go ahead with what you are up to.

WHITE: So anyway I came down there and took over the Non-Immigrant Visa Section. We were not a Consulate General, merely a very large embassy Consular Section. The Consular Section was separate from the embassy, and about two months after my arrival moved into a large new whitewashed building across town (as opposed to the former one, a much smaller, older and cluttered structure across the street from the embassy) that housed perhaps 1/4 of all those working for the embassy (including USIS). Walter Burke, a very distinguished diplomat, whom you might have known because he came out of Vietnam, was the head of the Consular Section when I arrived.

Q: Yeah, I knew Walter.

WHITE: Tall and with a waxed mustache, he cut a very impressive figure, and he was quite an intellect. Anyhow, this morally upright and strong-willed individual was in the midst of a knock 'em down, drag 'em out fight with the DCM and the ambassador over visa policy. The ambassador - and the especially the DCM - wanted very much to improve relations with the Duvalier regime, and we, on the other hand, wanted to enforce the visa regulations (in most cases, U.S. law). These goals, in the corrupt, fraud-ridden environment that was Haiti, and in view of the way the ambassador and DCM wanted to interact with the government, appeared mutually exclusive.

During my time as Head of the Non-Immigrant Visa Section, I took the first time refusal rate from 86 to 92%, just to give you an idea of how tough it was at the visa window for both officers and applicants.This involved quite a lot of tension and tremendous pressure on visa officers, even had there not been rather aggressive attempts at interference on the part of the ambassador and DCM. We would get, for example, diplomatic notes from the notoriously corrupt foreign minister, Edner Brutus, demanding visas for clearly unqualified applicants who were paying him for his services. By the way, going back to Edner Brutus, Haitians loved Roman names which I found fascinating as a Roman coin collector - really obscure ones too, like some of the little-known so-called Barrack Emperors of the 3rd Century, such as Aurellian and Probus. Hence, a name like Edner Brutus. We had been reliably informed that he was receiving about $1500 for each individual he could get into the United States misusing diplomatic notes. We received diplomatic notes that would have lists of 30 or so people. Breaking protocol, as had my predecessor, we would ask such people to appear for interviews, and maybe only 15 would show up and 10 of them would be unemployed waiters and others who had no connection to the foreign ministry whatsoever.

I can provide you with a really interesting tale that would give you an idea of how bad things were at the time. The Haitian national soccer club, which was the equivalent of their national team, was invited to go to New York to play the Cosmos. First, we received a diplomatic note listing a suspiciously high number of team members - about 35. We saw a problem right off, so we asked them to appear for interviews. Suddenly, in came in a new diplomatic note with the names reduced to, I believe, 22. So we obviously had shaken off some of the fake soccer team members. We interviewed the 22, and determined that we could give visas to only nine.

Q: That leaves one man shy.

WHITE: Yes, and no reserves to allow others to rest on the bench, so there were bitter recriminations on the part of the foreign ministry. The embassy called us and squeezed hard, not caring much at all about qualifications, and finally pressuring the Visa Office in Washington to recommend bonding these people individually at $2000 each. AND, it was made a collective bond. We didn't set those terms; the Visa Office did. This meant that if one guy jumped, the whole bond was forfeit. The Cosmos put up the bond. So the team, now pared down to around 16-18 because of our vigilance and the cost of the bond, went off to New York. I feared the worst, and at this point, even the Haitian government did, so nervous that someone would jump ship and embarrass them that they had two policemen go up with the team to patrol the hotel at night, forbidding team members to make phone calls. Well, during the game, at the end of the 1st period, five of the players fled into a waiting car outside the stadium and skipped town. The bond was forfeit; the rest of the game was a disaster. This was just the kind of thing we were trying to preclude and had warned the embassy about when the issue of the collective bond came up. If the visas hadn't been issued in the first place (especially with this collective bond), this embarrassing mess never would have happened, but they just wouldn't listen.

There was constant pressure from the ambassador and DCM. I arrived at the post, still only an FSO-7 3rd Secretary, but within the first two or three months there, I was called three times by Edner Brutus, who wanted me to issue visas previously refused. I would always offer to review the cases, which one has to do with a foreign minister. He would say: "No I don't want you to review the cases, I want you to issue the visas." I would say: "I can't make any assurances along those lines." Then he would start yelling at me, reminding me that he was a foreign minister, and I was only a 3rd Secretary. It would become a kabuki dance through three such calls on separate cases, which would degenerate on his end of the line into a rant that I had affronted Haiti, I had affronted his dignity etc. by not simply giving him what he demanded, concluding with a call to the ambassador or DCM charging that I had been deliberately rude to him. Finally, by the last call, my Philly "attitude" did poke through a bit, and I said, "Listen, you called me; I didn't call you. A Third Secretary didn't set out to insult you. You are the one who makes these calls to someone who is supposedly too lowly for you to speak with and who you know is not in a position to grant such requests." Anyway, Walter Burke stood up for me (and the rest of the consular officers) and shielded us from much of the pressure from the embassy and the foreign minister - and the accusations. Walter was a very good man. Then Walter left post, and that would lead to another sad story. I don't know whether I can use names here because this is rather sensitive.

Q: Use the names and we can look at it afterwards and see how it goes and take them out.

WHITE: On second thought, I'm going to leave them out. A new Consular Section chief was sent down to replace Walter. He met me shortly after he arrived, and had me over to his virtually empty residence for drinks. His wife and his family were not yet in Haiti, and the place was pretty bare. Over drinks, he put it something like this: "Wayne, I was sent down to end this rift between the embassy and the consular section. Now that Walter Burke is gone, you're one maintaining the line on visas. Here is the deal. You will get the best EER's you have ever gotten in your entire career, if you ease up a bit. Then I will get the best EER's of my career because of how pleased the embassy will be over how well everything worked out. Everything that has happened up till now can be blamed on Walter Burke." I remember staring out into the lush trees in the garden around the house and thinking: "Is this really happening?" I said, "I can't do that sort of thing. I can't believe you are even proposing such a thing to me."

What I didn't know at that moment was - and this was incredibly sad - that this individual apparently had some sort of history of some sort of emotional or mental issues. When I said, effectively, "Forget it," I had no idea what unique stresses this man must have been subject to in view of his medical history. Within a fairly short period of time, he had what I suppose was a nervous breakdown. They doubtless have a more sophisticated clinical name for such a condition (or event) now, but one of my junior officers who saw him at his home before he was medically evacuated painted a pretty grim picture. The embassy and everyone else, particularly the Visa Office, should have known about that background. They should never have put this otherwise kind and caring man in that position and then assume, running against all my previous behavior, that I would sign on to such a deal. I've felt awful about what happened ever since. After he returned, Sonia and I socialized a lot with him and his wonderful wife for the rest of our tour, as if nothing had ever happened. I sometimes wondered if his wife knew what had transpired between he and I, and, if so, what version she might have heard.If I had known, even though I could not have accepted the proposal, I could have at least offered to work together on some tough cases that fell into gray areas, explained our position at greater length-even just spent more time with him. Who knows?

Q: Do you feel the deal was in this to get to the workings, where did the visa office stand, with Walter Burke or with...

WHITE: It's unclear because the individual concerned said something like he had a green light from the Visa Office. Was that true? I don't know. He could have been making that up or, possibly, exaggerated whatever he had been told.

Q: That is so odd.

WHITE: It sure was odd - and tragic. And, again, maybe he didn't have any authority at all to do that. He could have been doing this on his own, perhaps even in part because of a personal yearning to reduce stress levels (which would have been great all-round),but I only know what I heard. I even checked with my wife, and she recalls me returning from that evening meeting with much the same version you've just heard, and a bit shell-shocked.

Q: Or it may have been somewhere...

WHITE: Somewhere in between? Again, that is quite possible.

Q: You run across this the desk or the desk or something like this saying God we have a problem here.

WHITE: Right. But it really went to the heart of why we were in Haiti. We had a serious illegal immigration problem which of course has continued in decades following my tour. In fact, it is a HUGE issue right now in the context of the homeland security debate, Lou Dobbs' quest, night after night on CNN, etc. I remember one Saturday when the DCM, summoned me to his office for a rather stern chat (the trigger for the exchange might have been the last of Edner Brutus' calls). We spent several hours talking, and the sum of the conversation was: "I just want you to issue visas more liberally because I want things to improve between the embassy and the host government." My position was: "You mean you want me to essentially violate the law and State Department regulations and doubtless let in more Haitian illegals to be a burden on our country and take jobs from fellow Americans who desperately need them in order for you to be able to have good relations with a woefully corrupt, dysfunctional, and repressive Duvalierist dictatorship vastly weaker than, and heavily dependent upon, the United States? Instead, why don't we press this notoriously rotten - and weak - regime to back off in just about any area employing one strong demarche. When I related all this to Walter Burke, who was still with us at the time, he just shook his head in disgust. Walter told me to sit down in my office and write down everything I remembered about the meeting for the record, which I did at some length in a document I still have somewhere in my personal files, along with a lot of other papers from this ugly period.

About 10 months into my tour, I went over to the immigrant visa side. There is where another interesting saga unfolded and where I got to travel the country and really get to know Haiti from one end to the other. On the immigrant visa side, I quickly fund out that there was a serious problem because the Haitian National Archives was issuing documents to quite a number of our applicants alleging relationships but 25, 30 or 40 even years after the fact, merely based on the statement of someone walking into the archives. But these things were official documents, and we are supposed to treat them as such. Yet, they were not period originals from the era of an actual birth or what have you which would render such information authentic. Anyhow, after we mulled this over for a month or so, I and the head of the immigrant visa section agreed that this wouldn't work, and we switched, at my suggestion, to accepting only baptismal certificates from parishes derived from their ledgers which we could review.

So I went on the road with stacks of baptismal certificates visiting parishes, sometimes in terribly isolated and impoverished parts of the country. Sonia came along on two of these trips. I will never forget going through a village in the north which was so remote that my driver and I actually had to repair a small bridge in order to make it to where we were going. In one village, the kids came out to watch our SUV go by, and every single child had a horribly distended abdomen and had flaming orange hair (which I found out later was caused by serious protein deficiency). I had never seen that in Niger. Anyway, the system of using these baptismal certificates worked beautifully. We went out and found that about 75% of the certificates were fine, and without making it known, we would quietly give additional certificates from parishes that checked out a six month writ for acceptance without a field check. The other 25% were fraudulent. We left parishes many times hearing in the background the parish priest angrily firing his clerk for misusing the parish seal. Most of the parish priests were not Haitian. They were Canadian, American, Belgians and French. Apparently, many in the Haitian clergy didn't want to serve out in some of these impoverished places far from the captial.

Then a major problem arose. The Archbishop of Port-au-Prince, who was actually only a monsignor by rank and who apparently was the successor of, I believe, two or three prior archbishops of Port-au-Prince who had essentially been fired because they would not play ball with the Duvaliers, banned all parishes from cooperating with the American Embassy's Consular Section. So it appeared that we had hit a brick wall. The Visa Office, after several weeks, told us that we were just going to have to issue visas based on documents from the archives, which astounded most all of us in the Consular Section.

Just as it looked like all was lost, the head of the Consular Section (who had now returned from medical leave), was invited, along with me, to have lunch with the Papal Nuncio. It was delightful. Then the papal Nuncio said, "Now you probably are wondering why two Protestants have been invited for lunch with the Papal Nuncio. I will explain. You probably know as little about Roman Catholic tradition and law as most Roman Catholics. No bishop has the authority to exercise day to day administrative authority over parish priests. He only has the ability to exercise 'moral authority,' which is rather more vague." This may no longer be true, but this is what he laid out back in 1977 or 1978. He continued, "We have observed this unfortunate situation regarding visas, and here are letters (as he handed me a stack of envelopes about six inches thick) sealed by the Vatican to every single one of the parish priests in Haiti, including the Archbishop of Port-au-Prince, urging them at the request of the Vatican and the Papal Nuncio to open up their records to the American Consulate on humanitarian grounds." I went on the road with those letters. It was fabulous. Every single priest outside Port-au-Prince (accept one in a town near the capital named St. Marc) immediately opened their records to us, many with obvious delight. The Archbishop of Port au Prince held out for about another month until the pressure on him was so great (as people were getting visas from all the other parishes save one) that he caved in too. I still have as a souvenir the one unopened letter and sealed letter to the Archbishop of Port-au-Prince, which he had refused to receive.

Q: What did you do, just put him on hold, his applications on hold?

WHITE: That's right. All Port-au-Prince (and San Marc) cases were put on hold.

Q: Wow, that was nasty.

WHITE: It worked like a charm because we knew that a parade of people coming in and getting their visas with legitimate records checks would spread the word, putting tremendous pressure on him. And, sure enough, we were getting reports that some people actually were demonstrating in front of the cathedral, demanding that he allow the same thing to happen that had happened in the other parishes. It was quite a victory. But Haiti was not an enjoyable tour. First, getting there by accident because of a language snafu related to what FSI thought one could attain in Africa regarding French language skills, then the incredibly nasty battle between the embassy and the consulate, and, finally, the battle with the archbiship.

By the way, I came up for tenure in Haiti. This also gets very interesting. Now as an FSO-6 (old ranking system), I came up for tenure, and at that time you achieved tenure by writing out your own mission statement, career goals, etc. Then the DCM would rate you as to whether he thought you should be tenured. Of course the DCM and I had squared off in separate corners, so I pretty much concluded that I had no hope of getting tenured as he would doubtless see a golden opportunity for payback, and most weren't getting tenured on the first shot in any case. He wrote a very clever statement. Following good old Foreign Service tradition, he said, effectively, "Wayne walks on water," going on and on about my terrific work, diligence, etc., but ending with a flat statement to the effect that I should not perform consular work in the future, which should have been the absolute killer, since I was in the Consular Cone at the time. To everyone's surprise, I was given tenure on the first review. When I made discreet inquiries in Washington after leaving Haiti, I heard that board members were aware of what was going on down there, and wanted to send a message to the DCM and the Country Team. Sometimes the Foreign Service acts in mysterious ways.

But, again, the tour was painful in so many ways. We were isolated: there were members of the mission in who would not invite my wife and me to events because they knew we were at odds with the DCM and ambassador. But I don't regret having served there. It gave me, as with Niger, the added perspective I think everyone needs if they try to specialize in an area such as the Middle East, to understand that many issues are not regional, but are ones that are widespread in the developing world. This provides a variety of case studies that thicken the depth of your ability to analyze. So anyway, about 6 months before my tour was up, we received an urgent cable that the Sinai field Mission needed volunteers. It was so desperate that qualified volunteers, once approved by the Sinai Support Mission in Washington, would depart their current post, overriding any ambassadorial considerations, so I beamed myself out of Haiti and into the Middle East.

Q: Well tell me, while you were there, how, I am not talking about the embassy but the consular officers. This must have been sort of rough but was there an esprit that brought them together? I mean what was the spirit of the consular officers dealing with this problem?

WHITE: That is a good question because, in this high-pressure situation, there were a few problems. Most of them, however, had an esprit that you describe, and continued to do their jobs with exceptional diligence. There was one very nice fellow who wanted to be more of a part of the embassy, as well as Haitian, communities - and received some encouragement along those lines from the DCM, if you know what I mean. I don't want to paint this too negatively because he simply fascinated with Haitian culture (as all of us were) and was a very interesting young man in his own right. But he started issuing visas more liberally, parted ways with the tougher standards of others. This is after I left the Non- Immigrant Visa Section, and he had replaced me there. All I could do is warn him that he was straying unwisely.

He quite rapidly ran into trouble in two respects. He started getting a stream of those notifications that would come back from the Immigration and Naturalization Service about how people had violated their visas that he had issued, which confirmed that he was issuing too many. On that, the rest of us had been right on target, receiving virtually none. The second thing, which was really very distressing, involved an illicit approach on the part of one of our USIA FSN's on behalf of her and her husband. USIA was on the second floor of the separate consulate building in which we worked. The FSN this officer to meet her husband outside, near the building (they had met socially before), and this FSN's husband approached the officer in question with a bribery scheme tied to visa issuance. The fact that he was being more liberal was interpreted incorrectly to mean that he was also dishonest. He, of course, blew the whole thing wide open. When the FSN wife was fired, we lost one of the best USIA FSN's - well, she had been up to that point. After that incident, this officer came much more in line with the rest of the consulate on visa issuance, appalled by the mess he had unintentionally set in motion.

Q: Did you have a problem. I mean sometimes, this is my field consular sections. Sometimes often the consular sections get too types. One rather idealistic officers and two some of the old hands who have been there, done that, seen this, and they can walk it too tight. You never get in trouble by issuing a visa. That is not really correct, but the other one would say screw them all, I am not going to give them. They are all crooks. I mean did you run into these personalities?

WHITE: Yes, I had one very special first tour officer with whom I was very friendly. We and our wives spent a lot of time together. He and his wife and, after not so long, their first baby, were wonderful. They were deeply religious, kind, well-intentioned all-round, and both had a great sense of humor. In trying to be rather careful like me toward visa issuance, however, at one point he went just a little too far, and I had to nudge him back a tad. I described one end of the issuance spectrum, so I should have balanced it with a glimpse into the other end. By far, however, our problems related to occasional officers who had difficulty holding the line. In fact, one new officer who arrived very shortly before I left found it difficult to refuse practically anyone without advice from others, like the young officer I mentioned above.

Q: What about visa applicants, we are talking about non immigrant, because immigrant applicants came in with far too many documents that is that.

WHITE: I worked both sides, and, yes, the immigrant side is far more complex, with a very large amount of paperwork, not to mention the extensive field investigatory work that we assigned ourselves in the context of the checking of baptismal records. So getting to the bottom of an immigrant case could take weeks.

Q: Your problem of rooting out that, but we are talking about the non immigrant. Somebody appears at the window. You know at one point there was a great to do about saying we were profiling people. This was in Brazil I think. Well of course we profile people. It had gotten in to the papers. What was sort of the profile of the people appearing?

WHITE: You mean the refusals?

Q: Yeah.

WHITE: Sad to say, most refusals were pretty obvious. In fact about mid-tour I was saying how unfortunate it was that in the course of our interviews, the profiling got so well developed, your own instincts and such, that you could sometimes spend 30 seconds looking over the materials and the person, and you knew there was a 95% chance of refusal, and for the rest of the interview you were only at the window for three minutes or so explaining why you weren't going to issue a visa. A decision could come very quickly. The profile was usually someone with poor French, dressed shabbily (or in a way that suggested that the better clothes were ill-fitting), somebody with documentation that looked clumsy, evasive responses to the first one or two questions, etc. And many thought they needed to have a bank account and a decent amount of money in it. The bank book with a typed in entry for a bank deposit for a date, say, only two days before the application for the visa, but little else, was common, and a dead give-away. Then there were others that had previous refusals. There was a little system in the Caribbean at the time among the various consular sections of putting a little initial between the last page and back cover of a person's passport hidden in the spine. They got onto it after awhile. But I would see the mark down there and would not even have to do a visa lookout request by teletype to find out, sure enough, that they had also been refused at another location. 99% of the business coming through was Haitian, not people from other countries unless they were in the foreign diplomatic corps there in Haiti. We didn't have the problems of a post like London to which people are coming in from all different places, such Iran, Eastern Europe, what have you.

Q: You mentioned the person who speaks inadequate French, but French isn't the language of the country is it? It is Creole.

WHITE: Well it was my introduction to probably the most extreme example of what is often described in Latin America as countries that essentially lack a sizeable middle class. That there was a very small, very well-heeled elite making up maybe one or two or three percent of the population, all too many with utter scorn for the rest. Then there was a vast mass of absolutely piteously poor individuals in the countryside eking out a living in tiny dirt-floored huts with access to no education or medical care. And then there was the vast urban poor, often living in small, pathetic ramshackle homes made of cast-off lumber with corrugated tin roofs. Then there was a middle class of, say, five percent. It was growing though at the time. You know, even in our consular work we saw the arrogance of that upper class I mentioned earlier. Most of the middle class were mulatto, light colored indigenous Haitians who heavily intermarried with their French masters prior to the 1796-1804 rebellion and then only married amongst themselves since.

Q: This is the middle class.

WHITE: No, the upper class, in this instance. To the extent there was a middle class, it followed a similar profile, but with actual blacks, many given opportunities by the Duvalier's - the first true, non-Mulatto black ever to rule Haiti - in the minority. There was terrible internal prejudice in this society. The rest of the upper class, ironically in light of my Middle East focus, was filled in by a rather significant community of Lebanese expats who had long been in Haiti, some of them since the turn of the century, along with some Syrians and Palestinians (also long-time residents). I spent a lot of time mingling with the Lebanese community, getting regular reports-even from fleeing relatives, in some cases-of the ongoing civil war back in Lebanon.

I have to admit, referring to a small niche in between the poor and middle class, one of the most exciting things I saw in the consular window. It relates in some ways to something that we are seeing in South Asia-and in portions of Africa-in a lot of experimental projects over the past decade and a half, empowering women, through so-called micro-loans. In Haiti at that time, I am talking about gutsy, enterprising women, often single women, middle-aged, with a child or two, abandoned by men, who, although barely educated, were intelligent, smart and savvy. They were called "Commercantes" or merchants. They would travel the Caribbean buying relatively cheap goods, mainly clothing and shoes and other rather low end goods, moving around the Caribbean finding where the cheap stuff was, and then coming back to Haiti with many boxes of this stuff, and then going down to the market and making several hundred bucks, then turning around and going on another trip. I loved my expanding clutch of Commercantes. There were a number of women who wanted to break into this loop. By the time I left I would say we were catering to about 100-150 of these enterprising women. They were fantastic. They were proud. I had ones who would sometimes stand two hours in a visa line, not to get another visa. They had already gotten their first visa to Puerto Rico, which was the point at which they finally broke into the U.S. market and earned real prestige in their neighborhoods. So some, having gotten their first visa to Puerto Rico a couple of weeks before, would stand in the visa line for two hours just to show me that they had come back, could be trusted, and were damn proud of it.

Q: That is wonderful. I mean you know, we got involved in, we sent a constitution down one time I think around 1812. It was before we got involved in a war between the mulattos and the natives. That unfortunately had been going on I guess, well the whole conflict continues today.

WHITE: It does. We had a Creole translator, used as needed because many spoke French well enough to be interviewed in that language. Let me digress on the issue language for a moment. The upper class spoke French, but they also spoke Creole. But there are two kinds of Creole. There is so-called high Creole and low Creole. High Creole was basically modified French with African words blended in, just to describe it briefly. Low Creole was a very West African-oriented language with French flourishes. Everyone in the Consular Section memorized in low Creole the phrase "I cannot give you a visa," which in Creole, rendered phonetically, is "Pa capab bao visa." This was a bastardization of the French phrase, "Je ne suis pas capable de vous donnez une visa." But we had somebody we could call to the window who spoke low Creole when we needed a translator. Our translator came form one of the most prominent, upper class mulatto families. She probably had to know low Creole in order to communicate with family servants. I remember there was one sad lady who came for a visa interview. She couldn't speak French or high Creole at all. So I called our translator over, and the applicant proceeded to describe her tiny farm. She was very poor and had virtually no reason to come back and could not be issued a visa. But I let her have her say at some length, feeling rather sorry for her. In the middle of the interview, our translator stopped translating abruptly, turned to me and said quietly, "Mr. White, you are not going to give this pig a visa, are you?" This was the kind of prejudice that existed in that country on the part of the small upper crust. And this young woman had been educated at a small college in Pennsylvania.

Q: One last thing. You have sort of answered it but something that I have heard people in Haiti that at the embassy the officers often got captured by the upper class and you know I am not sure it wasn't that they had to to deal with the people who ran the country, but that there wasn't much contact except for the consular section with anyone else. Did you, was there a concern on the part of consular officers that they would end up in the laps of the upper class being entertained by them?

WHITE: This is a very good question because it brings back a memory that is very important. All the time I was struggling with the the DCM (and ambassador) over visas, they were constantly at odds with us, but seemingly quite comfortable working with the Duvalierist regime. In all this, I thought I was essentially fighting alone. In a way, I felt resentful. But, as it turned out, we were not alone. Yet, for reasons unknown, this wasn't brought to my attention by the party concerned. There was a political officer who was engaged in a sort of parallel debate, or at least experiencing some related problems. Should I use a name here?

Q: Sure, why not.WHITE: On second thought, as before, better that I don't. This man impressed me as an extremely intelligent officer. Since I wasn't invited to many events where we could talk and were in separate buildings during the day, I didn't really know what he was up to. I assumed that he was probably falling in with the DCM and the ambassador in the same general line of thinking. I found out several years later that shortly after I left post, and after his own agonizing battle, apparently with the DCM, this FSO lodged a dissent channel message about what our policy in Haiti should be and that there were still sufficient human rights violations, corruption and other misbehavior on the part of the regime that we should not be cuddling up to the regime as he thought we were. So, in effect and on different fronts, we were fighting similar battles. But he never let on that he was having these doubts in the few brief encounters he had with me. In recent years, I reconnected with him. It just so happened that he had an office in the State Department near INR from the late 90's on, and had a few pleasant conversations. But I would have loved to have known about his doubts at the time, so, for example, when I had that long chat with the DCM I could have said: "Well what about the Political Officer's views on all this? He seems to have related concerns."

Q: Well then you got off to Sinai. You were established with the foreign service.

WHITE: Yes, recently tenured.

Q: Well let's talk about, you went to Sinai???

WHITE: Yes it was the old Sinai field mission, not the MFO out there now. When I went out there, - FINALLY! - I felt sort of like the proverbial kid in the candy shop. I finally had gotten to my Middle East.

Q: Could you explain what the background of this was?

WHITE: The Sinai field Mission, under the disengagement agreement between Israel and Egypt following the 1973 war, was charged with helping the United Nations Expeditionary Force (UNEF) guarantee the peace.Henry Kissinger had come up with the idea of placing a small clutch of U.S. observers in the buffer zone between the Egyptian and Israeli armies to offset Israeli mistrust of the UN. The buffer zone was largely manned by members of UNEF. Anyway, in the buffer zone there was UNEF, but the jewel of the buffer zone was the Sinai Field Mission or SFM. We were there primarily to guard electronically and by observation the two strategic passes, the Gidi and the Mitla, as well as the Israeli and Egyptian bases inside the zone. We had technicians (for maintaining the sensor fields and 3 watch stations) and support staff for the entire mission, contractors who won the U.S. Government bid, making up probably 85% of the population of our base camp of about 160-odd people. They were mainly from Texas because the contractor was E-Systems of Greenville, Texas.

Then there were 23 Foreign Service personnel there who led the overall mission, functioned as liaison officers in Cairo and Jerusalem and Tel Aviv with the defense and foreign ministries there for ten days out of every 30 of the month, two Admin types, and a small State C&R section. For the liaison officers like me, for 20 days out of 30 in the month, you live and worked side by side with the Egyptians at a base (E-1) which overlooked the Israeli side of the buffer zone, and doing the same at the Israeli base (J-1) that overlooked the Egyptian approaches to the buffer zone. You lived during 24-hour shifts with an Egyptian liaison officer (or an Israeli liaison officer) on the perimeter of their bases in a elongated, cheaply-built office & living quarters with two desks, a lot of communications equipment, a little bathroom, a tiny kitchenette, and two bunks in the back separated by a little partition. This was a great arrangement because you got to interact, particularly on the Israeli side, with some fascinating personalities, and got to really know the Israeli and Egyptian militaries, how they worked, their politics, etc. It was a fantastic experience. MFO, the organization that replaced SFM in 1982, is far less interesting, with officers helicoptering around in a far more distant role, counting tanks and the like and living on a largely U.S. military base. We had a much richer hands-on experience.

Q: You were doing this from 1978?

WHITE: Yes, I arrived there in October of '78 and left in September of '79, mainly because INR wanted me a little earlier. They were one-year tours because they were considered hardship tours. For one thing, my wife had to stay in the States.

Q: What was the Arab Israeli situation in '78-'79?I wonder if you could describe what type of thing was the Sinai field mission doing at the time; how did you operate?

WHITE: Well, I have already described some of that. For liaison officers like me, there would be the duty officer for the day job (all of this on rotation) overseeing and troubleshooting various things from base camp on certain days. It even involved taking weather reports from a little weather station. The national weather service had us take weather readings regarding several areas of data twice per day. I remember one time when one of my colleagues installed the chart paper incorrectly on one device, and we were recording 165% humidity in the Sinai. We knew it was surprisingly high in the early morning, but it didn't get quite up to above 100%, let alone an impossible 165%! You could get involved in all manner of issues like reporting on repeated Bedouin attacks on water lines that ran all the way from Israel through an Israeli base to us, tapping into water lines to water camels and such, and protesting to get the Israelis to sent patrols out along the line.

But out at the bases with the Egyptians and Israelis, we were mainly checking convoys of varying size moving in and out of these small facilities. We also were on the lookout for arms not permitted according to the agreements that might be brought in, maintaining a count because both bases had to be below a certain number of even personnel and small arms, monitoring scheduled (or illegal) reconnaissance overflights, etc. Some of this could be hilarious. I remember one such time while checking the arms coming out of the Egyptian base. Apparently they were sending virtually their entire inventory (or a large part of it) back to Cairo for refitting. Here I was in the back of a truck, and there were AK-47's stacked nicely in gun racks by base personnel, and the Egyptian lieutenant who was my counterpart would hold each rifle up to me, so I could record the serial number on my clipboard, and then he would toss the rifle onto the metal floor of the truck. Nothing was reloaded into the gun racks, and this truck went down the very bumpy hill, with some AK's visibly bouncing up as high as the closed rear of the truck.

Q: We were also flying U-2's weren't we?

WHITE: Yes. In fact, because of my service with SFM, the moment I set foot in INR they said: "You are in charge of the Olive Harvest program from the INR side," which were the U-2 flights that flew over Sinai (and the Golan Heights). We never saw the U-2 from the ground in Sinai; it flew too high (around 65,000 feet, as opposed to approved Israeli or Egyptian reconnaissance flights no higher than 35,000 feet). T he Egyptian base commander had his entire office wallpapered, not as a map but just to be kitschy, in U-2 footage from these missions. It was my first glance at the U-2 film that we sent out routinely to both parties. But we monitored the other visible over-flights, so we all had to go down to compass training at Fort Belvoir before going out, one day down there, out on the golf course, which was a hoot. In Sinai, what we did was, every time there was an over flight, we had to time carefully what was going to happen. Each one of us had to get outside with a compass and in order to triangulate its course by feeding our results back to base camp for computations to make sure it didn't break the plane of the other end of the buffer zone and constituted a "violation." The quality of those kinds of results varied considerably, depending on the skill - or lack thereof - on the part of the observers. Just before I got there, the Egyptians laid concrete block as part of several steps in front of our Egyptian liaison hut, and a terribly lazy and rather inept compass-reading predecessor had taken the wet concrete and had rather nicely engraved north, south, east, west, so he didn't have to use the compass anymore. One can only imagine how crude his readings must have been.

Q: Well one of the things, I have interviewed various people who have been in Sinai. One of the two things that have come up, the impressions that I would get, was one, just as you have described your Egyptian colleague throwing stuff down, that the Egyptians really were not very I mean they were sort of laid back. This was a time in the sun. The Israelis were always pushing, trying to get stuff in. But did you find one, the Egyptians you really didn't have to pay a hell of a lot of attention to because they really weren't trying to do anything, and the Israelis essentially weren't either, but they were always trying to test the bounds. Did you find that?

WHITE: Absolutely. I can see you have interviewed other people because that was the situation exactly. We were summoned occasionally by the UNEF observers to examine tire tracks and things like that, left behind by Israeli military elements during apparent probes. The Israelis used to play games with us to test what they could get away with, such as by running vehicles up wadis quietly to see if we or UNEF could detect the activity in foggy conditions or heavy rain. We had one horrendous rain and wind storm out there during the winter of 1978-1979 that lasted three days, with 50 mph winds. The Israelis executed a ground probe during that storm. I went out and reported on the tracks and everything else indicating a penetration of, say, a mile or so into the Buffer Zone, reported by an especially alert Argentine major with UNEF.

Toward the end of my tour it became apparent that we had a problem with some of our Texans related to the Israelis. Some of the Texans made it quite clear that they disliked the Israelis and very much preferred the Egyptians. Why? At least in my view, some of the Texans and Israelis were, in fact, too much alike in certain ways. In many cases, they both could be sort of extremely proud, hard hitting and "in your face;" back in Philly, it would be called "attitude." It got so bad that one time, as was permitted occasionally, I invited two Israeli liaison officers to have dinner at our SFM cafeteria, which had very nice food. It was Tex-Mex night. There was a going away soiree for somebody the next night. I was cornered by several drunken Texans asking why I had invited those "damn Jews" to the base camp. They were pulled away from me by their supervisor (a good friend of mine) who read the riot act to them, and threatened to fire them if they didn't change their attitude. That said, I want to emphasize that most of our Texans were terrific and never showed any such prejudice.

The irony was that, in part, a number of Texans liked the Egyptians, only because the Egyptians were so pleasant, but also capable of tricking them so deftly in doing business that some of the Texans never caught on. There were mail runs every day to the Suez Canal and then to base camp also with passengers coming out from R&R (E Systems staff), State liaison officers rotating, etc. The E-Systems people got a week out of every month off in either Jerusalem or Tel Aviv. Once I was returning to base camp on the mail run from Cairo with two Texans. They are in the back seat of our Carryall, with our veteran Egyptian driver, Hanna, a Coptic Christian, up front. The Texans in the back wanted to have one last shwarma in Cairo and pestered Hanna and I to stop at a shwarma stand before leaving the city. It is basically shaved beef or lamb in the pouch like Arabic pita bread with onions, spices, etc. Each of them handed Hanna an Egyptian pound note. Meanwhile, I was sort of quietly laughing. Hanna said, "What is this? Why two pounds?" He handed one of them back. He then took the one pound note, bought shwarma for each of us, and returned to the Texans some small change. The Texans just looked at each other, stunned, only now realizing how badly they had been ripped off during the whole week in Cairo, which gave them a more balanced attitude as to what some Egyptians were like (i.e. not perfect angels who could always be compared positively to those so-called "pushy" Israelis).

I do want to return to one thing you were asking before about the vibrations or the overall atmosphere out there at the time of my posting. It was characterized by excitement and hope. Sadat had gone to Jerusalem. There was a tremendous amount of curiosity on the part of the Egyptians toward the Israelis. I can't speak too much about the Israeli side because the Israelis had always ready for engagement - and curious - wanting to be accepted, so that is not surprising. But on the Egyptian side, the curiosity was so intense that at the end of another shuttle run from the canal, when I was taking E-Systems personnel into Cairo and beginning a Cairo liaison officer stint, the E-Systems people momentarily forgot where they were and started tipping Egyptians with Israeli pound notes. I immediately went into damage-control mode, telling them: "Get the pound notes back!" The Egyptians (a small group of taxi drivers, and a several bellhops from the hotel) shouted: "No, no!" An even bigger crowd formed, and they all wanted souvenir Israeli pound notes. They were willing to pay double the exchange rate in Egyptian pounds just to be the first ones in Cairo to have Israeli pound notes. I also was at base camp for the first transfer of a slice of territory in Sinai to the Egyptians after the peace treaty. Prior to it there had to be a meeting in our cafeteria between Egyptian and Israeli officers, about a dozen on either side. At first, the Egyptians were quite standoffish. Then within ten minutes or so, out came the war stories, wisecracks, back slapping, etc. It was like a big military reunion. So these were very good days for Arab-Israeli relations, at least in that corner of the Middle East.

Q: Did you get any impression of the Israeli military and the Egyptian military during this?

WHITE: Most definitely. The Egyptian military, which was considered one of the best militaries in the Middle East, could be a pretty sad sight at times. I've seen portions of other Arab militaries - Iraqi, Jordanian, within some of the Arab Gulf states, etc. - and observed similar problems. Let me tell a little story. We had to inspect side compartments on Egyptian water tanker trucks entering the E-1 base in Sinai for possible weapons. They apparently rotated those trucks around to other, non-Sinai duties. In any case, there were plenty of water tankers around Cairo, Ismailia, etc. that had done the Sinai run. We could always recognize them in traffic because the compartments had all been bent open using crowbars. They always lost the keys, so they were regularly crow-barred open with their flaps bent out, which gives you some idea of how sloppy the Egyptian military could be. Attitudes were also interesting. The Egyptian liaison officers we served with were all young men in their early to mid twenties. They had gotten out of college and had to do their two years in the army. They hated universal conscription, and isolated duty in the Sinai. Only one of them was on a regular army officer career track. His brother - older brother - had been killed in the 1973 war serving as a tank commander. We got in a long conversation about the war one evening, and I asked him, "How do you feel about that now?" (Peace with Israel was just over the horizon). He said, "It was a complete waste. I don't blame the Israelis; I just blame the war. May we never have another war."

Q: How about the Israelis? Were they treating you with a certain amount of almost hostility? I have gotten some of this feeling, because of the challenge???

WHITE: Actually, the Israelis were a highly varied lot - as you might expect. But on duty in Sinai, we met an exceptionally narrow slice of them because they had to speak English, were reservists, were generally older men ranging in age from about late 30's to mid 50's. They were people like El Al navigators, the most prominent veterinarian in Jerusalem, an evening news anchor (literally the Dan Rather of Israel), the most prominent trial lawyer in Israel (a real a character), all doing their 30-day reservist stint, and most very cosmopolitan. The veterinarian was a Canadian who had emigrated about 15 years earlier. Of course, with the increasingly tough kosher laws in Israel, he couldn't get certain foods, even under the table. So when he found out that we could bring stuff from base camp, he said, "You can bring Bacon?" "Yes." "Ham?" "Yes." "Wow!" I remember the first morning after I brought the pork products, when I was trying to get some sleep around 4:30 before the first convoy check around 5:30, and I hear this sizzling and rattling from the stove: he just could not wait to get his hands on the bacon. We became fast friends with several Israeli liaison officers, even, in my case, socializing with three during stints in Israel. When Sonia came out to Egypt to visit around mid-tour, we did the same with an engaging Egyptian LO, who gave us the grand tour of Alexandria, his home town.

Across a narrow road from us at the Israeli site in Sinai was a bunker, surrounded with razor wire and two solid rock walls (rock sections in chicken wire) up to about 6 feet, and an M-60. These enlisted men - about 10, who rotated - were not only supposed to cover one portion of the base perimeter, but also protect us in case of whatever. I saw first-hand that there was a substantial gap between the Ashkenazi (or westernized Israelis, largely from Europe, who were officers) and the enlisted Israelis on the other side of the road (mostly Sephardim, from Jewish communities in Arab countries, such as Yemen). They were a bit wary of each other. I always made it a point to go over there and schmooze, have some coffee, etc. with the enlisted men to let them know that the Americans cared about all Israelis and didn't just deal with the officers. I should also mention that phone calls to the main base on the part of westernized Israeli officers, often speaking still-shaky Hebrew with Sephardim operators, frequently deteriorated into arguments, once again highlighting this gulf.

Q: Well then when you lift in '79, I take it there were no major incidents or anything of that nature or were there?

WHITE: Not really, no. Well, the Israelis accidentally machine gunned our base camp one night in the course of an authorized live fire exercise on a base just outside the buffer zone. At least one M-60 ended up pointed in the wrong direction, and tracer bullets were ricocheting off the top of our main administrative building on and off for about 10-15 minutes, behind which some of us were standing, peaking around the corner and looking up at all the action. You asked about our base camp; you know what it was? The USG found out that a Holiday Inn was not going to be constructed in Florida and learned that Holiday Inns were modularized. So they bought the Holiday Inn, and the modularized rooms were just spread out in rows; inside, the rooms were more spartan than those in a real Holiday Inn. But anyway, we came under machine gun fire, and in order to file a protest and back it up, come morning, I was asked to go up on the roof, which sounded like fun, to find the evidence. We needed a few buckled slugs or ricochet marks to photograph. I couldn't find anything, which was truly bizarre.

With that hostility toward Israelis among some of our Texans in mind, two hours later when we are inside writing up the report, we get a knock on the door. It is one of the Texans saying, "You didn't look hard enough." He also was one of those in base camp with a rather large collection of military souvenirs from around the Buffer Zone. So I went back up on the roof again where there now were over 100 rounds of ammunition, doubtless drawn from many scrounging expeditions past. Slugs were all over - pistol slugs, machine gun slugs. I was especially impressed with one 20mm automatic cannon round, and the amount of corrosion that could be found on a number of these planted rounds that were supposedly expended the night before.

Although not "incidents" by definition, aside from the great machine gun attack, I should mention the continuous hashish smuggling. The Bedouin were fairly regularly crossing the buffer zone leading small camel caravans. When encountered, the Bedouin would hide with incredible swiftness, but one always knew they were nearby - and armed. The hashish was carried in large rectangular pouches dyed to roughly the same color as camel fur and made very thin. This way, from a distance of, say, more than 100 yards, it was very difficult to tell the difference between a wandering camel without baggage and one carrying a load of Hashish. The Ghanaian UN battalion covering our sector of the buffer zone once tried to confiscate a group of camels, only to come under rifle fire from the hidden owners in an area only about a mile from our base camp. Once, driving in a deep defile to inspect a small old domed building in a very isolated area that was supposed to have been a way-station of sorts on the old overland route to Mecca, we stumbled upon a caravan of at least 20 Hashish-carrying camels. Knowing their rifle-totting owners were doubtless hidden nearby, watching our every move, I had to just about drag another overly enthusiastic liaison officer who wanted to take camel photos back into our Chevy Blazer and away from there as quickly as possible. On a hunt for prehistoric sites where I might find stone tools (found one nice site while in Sinai on a high ridge) on a day off, I stumbled upon a Bedouin encampment, with coffee still brewing in a crude pot. I was curious enough to spend about five minutes with another guy from SFM walking around and looking over their gear (but without bending over and touching anything), knowing they were certainly armed and watching from somewhere nearby.

And Sinai could be a very dangerous place otherwise. In an area of northern Sinai filled with vast mud flats behind the beaches where we would go to look over ancient ruins and trade with local Bedouin on Sunday excursions, we encountered a Bedouin who had had is foot blown off by a land mine. We were warned that mines from the various Arab-Israeli conflicts could drift oddly in the mud - and tides that sometimes penetrated the mud flats - making minefield maps rather useless. We were told not to leave the elevated roadbeds through the flats; this Bedouin had tripped a mine a few feet from the roadbed. He and his friend absolutely refused our assistance, so all we could do was call for a medical team from the nearby Swedish battalion headquarters, but the two would not accept transportation from us to get there faster. We stayed until the Swedish ambulance arrived.

Q: Then you say you got home and you left there in '79, got home back to Washington.

WHITE: Yes. It was interesting because, stuck at that time in the Consular Cone, I really had to bid on a Consular position after a so-called"political" tour. So, seeking an interesting Consular position, my lead bid was for a staff aide position in the Bureau of Consular Affairs. My second bid was for an INR Middle East analytical position, a way to edge my way deeper into the Mideast loop should bid #1 fail. So the head of the INR office I would work for, Phil Griffin, Director of the Office of Analysis for the Near East & South Asia (INR/NESA), called me up long distance and bent my ear for 45 minutes (more of a big deal in those days) about why I should flip INR into the number one slot, which I did (just couldn't resist something else related to the Middle East).

Q: So you were in INR form '79 to when?

WHITE: September 1979 until I retired in March of 2005.

Q: INR when you got there in '79, what were you up to at the beginning, and can you give me a feel for where INR fit within the policy State Department process?

WHITE: That is a very good question because only a few years earlier people might have said that INR was a bit of a backwater. In fact, with that impression in my mind, it was one of the hurdles Phil Griffin had to overcome in his discussion with me. Actually, I discovered when I arrived in NESA that it was an exciting office at an exciting time. A few short years earlier, Secretary Kissinger had changed INR into a current intelligence shop that served the Secretary more directly and it had become (guess what?) relevant. For example, my job was to be the editor of the six day per week Arab-Israeli Situation Report. It opened with a two-page in-depth analysis, and then had about a dozen compressed pieces in which, say, an interesting CIA report came in on Syria, and the analyst on that account would briefly summarize the key points, inserting an "INR Comment." It was a very sexy product. It was co-signed by NEA in the early days, something that would later stop because it was not only cumbersome to clear at 7:00 PM, but that interfered with INR's independence when NEA would try to edit out analysis with which it disagreed. But, most importantly, it was read and taken seriously on the 6th and 7th floors. It was so well-read that one of the earliest items done on Iraq when I was there came back with a note from Zbigniew Brzezinski, saying that President Carter had read one item particular closely and would like an expansion of one of its paragraphs. The reason Carter had it was that it went out to the White House, NSC, other intelligence agencies, relevant cabinet secretaries, all major military commands, and key embassies abroad. It was a tough job to produce, however. I came in about 7:30 in the morning and didn't leave until about 7:30 or 8:00 at night on weekdays, and had the editorial assistance of only one newly-minted Foreign Service officer. That said, she had served as a naval officer in the Morocco, and was absolutely terrific. Since it was a six-day per week product, one of us also had to come in each Sunday for about half the day.

Q: Well now here you are. You really didn't have on the ground experience in a major thing, the Sinai being sort of a parenthesis off to one side. Where did you get the information because, all right, current information keeps coming in, but there is an awful lot, there is a certain amount of history in the Middle East going back to biblical times. How did you get yourself up to snuff in the first place, and then we will talk about the currents.

WHITE: OK, that's a very fair question. First of all, I had studied a lot of relevant material in graduate school, so I had the historic background. And, actually, I had done some additional traveling I hadn't mentioned in Egypt and Israel (beyond Cairo, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem) while with the Sinai Field Mission, as well as almost a month in Morocco during my tour in Niger. Being embedded with the Egyptians was an incredible opportunity to gain some real feel for a culture and its psychology that I don't think even some Political-Military officers ever gain in the normal business during a full two-year tour, although I also did some of that sort of business with them in their offices and what have you in Cairo and Jerusalem. But I was interested in the world of intelligence, and in the highly classified world, in some key areas, there are many ways we got the information almost as if you were actually in a country. Later in my life in INR, when I got off the Arab-Israeli SITREP (the Iran-Iraq War would pull me off that duty and put me on nothing but Iraq), fate would take me out to all the Arab Gulf states, Iraq, Jordan, Israel, and Syria for many months as a briefer (including a 3-month tour as political officer in Iraq in 1983), giving me opportunities to interact with an Arab head of state, two crown princes, many Arab defense and foreign ministers, plus their senior military commanders and the heads of their intelligence services.

Q: Well let's talk about the situation when you get there in '79. What was the, well I guess Iran. Was that part of your portfolio or not?

WHITE: Oh, this is interesting. A tradition of sorts, even though the Arab-Israeli SITREP was only four years old at that point, had already been established that whomever headed the Arab-Israeli SITREP team, had the Iraq portfolio to run as well with their little pinky because it was so insignificant. Now we all know Iraq is huge on the Middle East stage, by right of history and size alone. But during the 1970's, Iraq sort of built itself into an isolated, radical corner of the Middle East and was really not a major player in the mainstream of Arab-Israeli diplomacy, the Arab League, regional issues, etc. So, honestly, when I left government, because of the current Iraq crisis, there could be 2,000 items of one type or another to scan or read per day. By contrast, when I started covering Iraq back in 1979, I was lucky if there were 20 or 30 pieces a day on the country. How little official Washington knew was just over the horizon.

Q: What did you find yourself when you were doing this? Was your main job sort of editing stuff that was given to you? What were you working on?

WHITE: We would try to scan as much of the traffic from the entire Middle East from Morocco to Iran as possible. We would then pick out (often in consultation with the appropriate intelligence analyst), the short items to be written up, mostly by us, but sometimes by contributing analysts, often with sexy insights and angles. On the longer essays, after sorting through priorities, we would schedule them out as best we could, with the help of the Office Director, assigning them to various analysts. Some, however, were written hastily in response to a request from the seventh floor or our INR director. We sort of charted things out, met with the Office Director (George Harris, for virtually the entire orun of this product while I was on board) around mid-morning, saying here is what we intend to do: "We are going to run with the cover memo that we had scheduled two days ago. The person who is writing it is making good progress. Here are our picks for shorter items, in addition to some that are interesting, but didn't make the cut." Sometimes we were the ones writing the longer items. If, for example, it was on Iraq, I was the analyst and would be the drafter. There was a lot of independence. George would say: "Yes, that sounds good. Let's roll." Or "Maybe you ought to do this one short item too, and drop that one." Then we were off.

Q: Who was Mr. Middle East when you got there?

WHITE: As far as we were concerned, George Harris, our director.

Q: What was his background?

WHITE: George was a Turkish specialist by trade, but had a solid grasp of the region as a whole, especially, I would say, Iraq and Iran. He was CIA originally, going through the old DO boot camp back in the 1950's. He joined INR/NESA as Deputy Director back in the early 1970's, I believe, and had just succeeded Phil Griffin as Director in 1979, only a few months before I arrived. George didn't retire until the end of 1995. Now even though his background was Turkish and his whole office contained lots of Turkish memorabilia George was, again, a very keen Middle East specialist, having written, I believe, a piecat CIA around 1970 predicting the fall of the Shah. In fact, for about a decade, mostly in the 1980's, George would go on an annual briefing tour to the region during which he would brief Sadat (followed by Mubarak), the Turkish Foreign Minister, and once or twice Hussein of Jordan. The Egyptian and Turkish legs of the trip remained unchanged, but there were some other substitutions, based on requests. George was very highly thought of, although low-key in style. And, perhaps aside from Henry Myers who presided for many years over the production of INR's flagship Secretary's Morning Summary (SMS), George probably was the best editor I ever knew.

Q: How did you find the desks related to INR when you got there?

WHITE: Actually I thought it was a very good relationship overall. The desks weren't our problem. We had a product that had to be co-signed by the NEA Assistant Secretary or one of his deputies each evening (at least in the early days of the SITREP). That was where we ran into problems. A DAS could edit and play with the analytic cover memo which interfered with INR's independence, and that's primarily why INR and NEA would go their separate ways eventually. I ran the SITREP from late Sept. 1979 through late Sept. 1980 - almost a year exactly, ending with the onset of the Iran-Iraq War. About a month or two after I left the team, NEA and INR parted ways, and it became a uniquely INR product.

I can jump ahead and tell you how hilarious some of our interaction with the country desks could be, just on an analyst to desk officer level. There was of something in the early 1980's that we still wrestle with today: which countries should be on the terrorist list? Well, we had become closer to Iraq, as with many countries, because of the Iran-Iraq War: a country practically everyone wanted to see hold its own, with so many other Arab states regarding it as the cork that could keep Khomeini's Iran in its bottle, but we hadn't establish full relations. We were coming out with the terrorist list a year or two prior to when Iraq would get off the list. The Iraq desk officer, wanting to improve relations, came over with something to clear with me saying that Iraq had no involvement in any terrorist acts for the previous year. So I said, "That's very interesting. The Arab Liberation Front (ALF), the Iraqi-backed faction in the PLO, (it was under the PLO umbrella, but was so heavily Iraqi - vice pro-Iraqi Palestinian - that out of its 2,000-odd members in, say, 1980, about 1,200 were believed to be seconded Iraqi military cadres), had launched a hang glider attack into northern Israel from southern Lebanon in the course of the year under consideration-an ALF man strapped with grenades, explosives, an AK, ammunition, and a map to the nearest kibbutz." The Israelis detected him at night from the buzz of the hang glider as it passed over the border. They killed him about a mile away from where he landed and about two miles form the kibbutz. I said, "Isn't that a terrorist attack?" And the desk officer replied, "It didn't work." I said. "I thought intent had something to do with the terrorist list. Not working doesn't mean it wasn't a terrorist attack." So it could be quite interesting. There was sometimes a bit of tugging and pulling.

Let me take this one step further because you are onto something pretty interesting. Back in the mid 90's, probably when Toby Gati was INR Director, Assistant Secretary of State for INR, a consumer survey of sorts was sent around to the various policy sides of the State Department, the 6th floor functional and regional bureaus and to the 7th floor consumers. What were the results? As for 7th floor consumers, essentially: "We really like what you are doing. Keep it coming." Regarding the 6th floor regional and functional bureaus, who also feed the seventh floor with paper: "We very much like the coordinating function of INR, but we can do without the analysis." (There was an operational intelligence coordination office in INR). Why the difference? Because on some occasions, policy bureaus send up a memo saying this is something we think should be done. In parallel with that, up had gone an INR assessment saying, in effect, if such were to happen, it could be problematic. So we were complicating the policy process in some cases, and they didn't like that. So there is tension between the policy and intelligence sides of the Department which has ebbed and flowed depending on who was, let's say, on INR/NESA's front, the NEA Assistant Secretary, with some being more interested in intelligence or open-minded and others not so inclined.

Q: When did you move out of the basically editing side?

WHITE: The Iran-Iraq war broke out on 22 September of 1980. Relations between Iran and Iraq, that little thing I handled with my pinky, had been steadily worsening since April 1980. By the time full-scale war erupted, I was already handling it with one whole hand, and the amount of traffic had gone from 20-30 items a day to over 100. The Iran analyst and I worked out of the NESA section of the INR SCIF (Secure Compartmented Information Facility) upstairs, turning a portion of it into an Iran-Iraq War Room of sorts. I camped out up there for 3 years; my counterpart covering Iran, who already had an office downstairs (the SITREP team worked out of the more secure SCIF), - and was far less involved in the military side of the war - operated out of NESA's 4th floor suite.

Q: Well for the time you had it just as you say with your little pinky doing Iraq, what were we saying or thinking about the Bath regime and Saddam Hussein at that point?

WHITE: It was viewed at that time as a loathsome dictatorial, leftist regime, closer to the USSR, and still fighting a low level Kurdish insurgency, involved in terrorism, as well as assassinations of Ba'thist dissidents throughout Western Europe and the Middle East, a regime with very few ties to the U. S. That last fact puts the lie to silly conspiracy theories still circulating that we put Saddam up to attacking Iran. Meaningful contact with senior Iraqi officials was almost nonexistent, and to the extent they listened to any major power, it was the USSR. So if someone else put him up to it (which I doubt very greatly), ask Moscow. We had a low-profile Interests Section under the aegis of the Belgian embassy. The Iraqis were embroiled in their own internal political struggles-and with revolutionary Iran. The year I joined the SITREP was the year Saddam Hussein shoved aside the army general who had fronted for the Ba'athist regime, using the pretext that the general was in ill-health (not true). He was moved aside as Saddam exploited a non-existent Syrian plot to eliminate potential rivals on the ruling Revolutionary Command Council, trotting out the entire council to witness personally the execution of the plotters , so that the blood would be on everyone's hands. It was very much along the lines of Stalin's artful, but utterly brutish, purges. So, I saw Iraq turn from an internally tormented radical state lunging out occasionally to wreak terror against its own dissidents abroad, generally not other people, supporting occasional pokes at the Israelis in south Lebanon through the ALF, and scrapping with the Iranians increasingly, into Persian Gulf regional power that would seize a piece of the world stage in a war that potentially threatened a substantial chunk of the world's oil supplies.

Q: When you start looking at Iraq, what did we feel about Soviet ties to Iraq?

WHITE: I worked hard on that issue because USSR-Iraqi ties were so close before and during the Iraq-Iran War. I prepared a number of INR assessments and one lengthy Intellignece Research Report (IRR).I believe the IRR already has been partially declassified, with my assistance. I had to look over various products of mine for declassification purposes all the way up to 1985 by the time I left. There was a huge Soviet presence in Iraq, another hindrance to our relations with them. There were virtually 3,000 Soviet advisors in the country, say, in 1980. But there was something very interesting about that. Although Saddam literally modeled himself virtually on Stalin, reading about both Stalin and Hitler, and behaving quite methodically in his repression, he was paranoid about the Soviet presence in Iraq. So, when the Soviets went into Afghanistan in 1980 to defend a frail new Communist regime, giving the Soviets the excuse to intervene there, he reacted quickly and violently against Iraqi communists, who had been affiliated with the government, along with a couple of other leftist parties, to make the regime look less monolithic. Very shortly after the invasion of Afghanistan, Saddam turned on and virtually exterminated the Communist Party of Iraq so it could never invite the Soviets into the country on its behalf. That began the gradual downturn in Iraqi-Soviet relations.

Q: Well then the Iran-Iraq war started. From the INR point of view, your point of view, how did we view this? What was happening?

WHITE: Well first of all, I will freely admit to being one of the few people in the intelligence community who didn't believe it was going to happen until it was almost upon us. I will explain. I thought that if Iraq went to war against Iran because of these rising tensions (in part, a rise in terrorism inside of Iraq by Iranian backed groups, such as an assassination attempt against Tariq Aziz and an attack on the funeral for students who were near Tariq Aziz). I thought the Iraqis would be very reluctant to go to war because the Iranians had an American trained air force which was quite intimidating, Iraq's majority Shia population was of untested reliability, Iran was three times the size of Iraq, and it had over double the population. I even used the analogy of the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, being drawn into a massive quagmire and getting in well over their heads. Finally, and our Iran analyst agreed, a conflict with Saddam would reinvigorate Khomeini's revolution at a time when it was flagging. But I finally realized Saddam was going to do this foolish thing about 36 hours before it happened, and went over to the other side, writing a stark warning memorandum on a hot Sunday afternoon. Once the war started, everything I had noted as potential problems for Iraq in such a war locked in and started playing out, with only one exception: the vast majority of Iraq's Shia would fight - perhaps not for Saddam - but for their country and against Khomeini's vision.

Q: What was your opinion of why Saddam did this?

WHITE: He stumbled into it in a thuggish manner. People often mischaracterize this moment in time. So many books that have been written, with a lot of amateurs leaping onto the Iraq journalistic stage - or many Iranians, who not only believe he planned the war as it unfolded, but that the U.S. egged Saddam on. Really good scholars and experienced former U.S. government officials who were there don't subscribe to this, but much of the literature out there on this period of time claims that Saddam went into Iran with certain clearly defined ambitions. This just isn't true. There was a simmering, steady rise in Iraqi-Iranian tension, with violence on both sides. Artillery barrages in early September 1980 were the culmination of a ladder of escalation. Finally, Saddam got sick of it, and being the thug he was, interpreting the situation from a thug's perspective, thought the Iranians needed a big punch in the chops. He even thought a good, strong blow along the border might humiliate and topple the Khomeini regime. But he wasn't thinking in terms of all-out war.

So he threw in a bunch of air strikes against Iranian airfields and cautiously moved some of his army divisions into Iran in three areas. But far from planning a war, he didn't even have his army deployed completely to the border. Much of the army was still in garrison, which supports an impulsive, rather than planned, act. Well, the Iranians decided to make this a war, and started bombing Iraqi economic targets, like petrochemical plants in the south. Then, using their far larger navy and access to the Persian Gulf, cut off his oil exports from the south (the majority of the flow). Saddam panicked. On day two of the war, he announced, in essence: "Fighting should not involve economic targets, and if Iran stop air attacks against such targets right now, we will not retaliate." He was really scared that he had stumbled into a major war. His offer regarding economic targets-a sign of weakness-only encouraged the Iranians to keep it up. Then he moved his entire army up to the border (as did the Iranians), hit back at economic targets, and an 8-year all-out war was started.

Q: Well how did we see the Iranians? Was this seen in a way as a good thing with the Khomeini regime and all? I mean there is nothing like a war to unite people and all.

WHITE: No, people were almost to a man or woman inside the Department were appalled by what was happening because there were so many potential consequences, such as the adverse impact on the availability and price of oil, and a belief that this would indeed strengthen the Khomeini's regime. You also have to remember that the hostage crisis was still ongoing, so people were still very upset over the potential impact on that situation. But, more than anything else, people were watching the oil. The production of the world's second largest oil producer, Iraq, had largely been eliminated by the Iranian blockade. The price of oil surged. There was also the first scare that the Iranians might try to close the Strait of Hormuz, something that I remained relatively unconcerned about because it would bring about international intervention against Iran and cut off Iran's oil exports too. All these phantoms of economic doom,oil market catastrophe, and harm to our hostages were floating in front of people, so the outbreak of this war was viewed with great consternation. Again, this attitude should be noted when the ill-informed or agenda-oriented argue that Washington pushed Iraq into attacking Iran.

Q: At the beginning of this how did we have at your side a military analysis, in other words a military analyst who was looking at this and where it goes.

WHITE: Analytically, I was well-positioned for all this because I became the military analyst, for all intents and purposes. As a military buff, with hundreds of volumes on WWI and WWII under his belt and walked battlefields, I was in my element. Essentially, the Iran-Iraq War was as some have described it: World War One with tanks. Actually, there were tanks in World War One, but not like the ones fielded since the late 1930's. To understand this huge land conflict, one had to break out of the analytic mindset of too many military analysts, who focused far too much on modern weapons systems and far too little in reading a battle map as if one was observing many battles of the Second World War and even a few of the First World War. This problem among the Intelligence Community's regular military analysts diminished over time, partly because some of the missionary work on the part of the pre-Vietnam focused military buffs like me. Not to belabor the point, but when I went on the road repeatedly with CENTCOM's J-2 (a general) and one or two of their military analysts to brief senior Jordanian and Gulf Arab officials, I frequently had to refine the CENTCOM military briefings. A case in point is a MSNBC military analyst, retired Lt. Col. Rick Francona, who I coached as a young officer on one of those trips; he was a terrific guy with a keen analytic mind, and grasped the unique nature of the conflict very quickly.

Q: This is tape 3 side 1 with Wayne White. Wayne, go ahead with what you were saying.

WHITE: Yes, it was fairly easy, given my background, the intelligence and reviewing the geographic alignment of the front line and the distribution and movement of forces for me to predict not only what the two sides were up to, but also to predict the outcome of many engagements. Essentially, the Iraqis went into Iran, gained pieces of some territory, not enough to make a difference (i.e. in weakening Iran strategically), and then just sat on their gains. They made virtually no attempt to better align their holdings. By not doing so, they left their forces in several dangerously exposed salients. Then the Iranians moved against them, learning as they went, in well-planned battles of encirclement. The Iraqi learning curve, in those first two years, was poor, so like a blundering, punch-drunk boxer getting beaten up by a far more agile opponent. They lost most of those gains and tens of thousands of prisoners to the Iranians during a series of well-planned Iranian counterattacks during 1981-1982.

Q: One I've heard said In INR you have got a war, a traditional war going on. If you are going to have good intelligence, it is fine to have somebody who knows the battlefields and all this, but at the same time I would think that INR would want to have somebody who understood logistics, order of battle. It seems, you are pointing to yourself but it seems if INR is going to do its job, it should have somebody who is a real military expert, because there are things about the capabilities of the Iraqi Mirages versus F-15's or whatever. Anyway you know what I am saying. Somebody who is a real military expert coming out of the Department of Defense. Did you have somebody?

WHITE: Good question. We actually had our own people, some very good, but occasionally we would get a DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency) analyst on loan. The reason why I became the military and political analyst for the war, going beyond what told you, is the fact that virtually every single Middle East military analyst had overly focused on one thing, the Arab-Israeli theater of war. They had much less experience relating to what was going on east of there. I had been covering Iraq, and I had been interested in military issues, had actually delved into a lot of military aspects of the Iraq portfolio, even with that little pinky I mentioned before (and a few other fingers as it got more serious), so that I was the expert on a unique battlefield to the east, hitherto largely unexplored territory for the vast majority of USG military experts. We had a succession of military analysts, a couple of whom felt uncomfortable because I was doing so much on the military side for INR, but none of them brought with them sufficient knowledge of the Iraqi (or Iranian) military. By the time we got into '82-'83-'84, I had been in Iraq, had considerable on the ground experience they didn't have at all. But, again, far too many essentially Levant-oriented Arab-Israeli military experts, which came as no surprise since that was so active up until then. One in particular sort of groused about my involvement, but that wasn't my problem. It was between George Harris (or the INR Director) and their bosses, and when it went up to the Front Office that one time - first to INR Directory Hugh Montgomery, as I recall - it was basically: "Leave Wayne alone." And then there were others who didn't really want to do what I was doing: "I am the Arab-Israeli guy, so you take that Iraq stuff, Wayne," and if you recall during the early years of the Iran-Iraq War, we had pretty serious developments taking place on the Arab-Israeli front, especially in Lebanon. The military side of INR needed - in a very small shop - an analyst giving those developments his or her undivided attention. So we specialized.

Q: Well one of the things you would think, by the time this war was started, the Iranian army had been trained I would assume in American military techniques, where the Iraqi army had been trained in Soviet military techniques which I am told was generally dig in and wait for winter.

WHITE: Oh, yes, Soviet training was obvious, generally detrimental, and the Iraqis had no Zhukov. They were hellishly ponderous. We saw amazing things take place on the ground. I remember one engagement early in the war in southern Iran in which one Iranian self propelled artillery company held off an Iraqi armored division. The Iranians were on a slight rise, well dug in, and were pounding away at the Iraqis, and at the end of the engagement, fairly prolonged (the better part of a full day), the company finally withdrew. The company didn't appear to lose much of anything, while the Iraqis lost scores of armored vehicles. The Iraqis never thought of flanking the Iranians. They just stood in front of them and tried to slam away at them even though these guys were in good cover and could sweep the battlefield with fairly accurate fire. Going back to Sinai for something related, one Israeli liaison officer who served in the '73 war told me he was a forward artillery observer when the Iraqis showed up belatedly on the Golan front. He said it was stunning. He was on a ridge with two enlisted men manning a radio. They had been warned of the Iraqis approaching by their superiors, but he said it was night at the time, and they couldn't see anything, even using night scopes, through heavy dust, compounded by a fog as dawn broke. The sun suddenly cut through the fog at about 6:00 A.M., and below him in lines as if they were on a parade ground was an Iraqi armored brigade. Naturally, he started calling in artillery. Within two hours the Iraqis had lost a hundred vehicles.

And this is what I was observing in about the first 20 months of the war, ponderous, foolhardy and unimaginative tactics. The thing that stunned the Iraqis so badly when yotalk about American training was the proficiency of the Iranian regulars with self propelled guns, tanks, etc., but even more startling, aircraft. F-14 Tomcats, F-4's, and F-5's. Two of the three superior to the Iraqis, training superior, and running rings around them. Now, admittedly the Iranians didn't have a lot to go around beyond, say, the first two years of war. A lot of aircraft were wearing out for lack of parts But there was a lot of pain involved when the Iraqis went up against a pretty decent third world air force - something they were not in terms of proficiency and improvisation. Saddam had been so suspicious of internal dissent and opposition that he permitted none of his pilots to go to the Soviet Union to get the superior training offered there. The Soviets had to come to Iraq without everything they had at the Soviet Union's favorite training bases and train them there. So the Iraqis got a second-rate Soviet training. The same thing went for the tank crews. The final kicker was that for years Saddam, self-promoted to "Staff Field Marshall" and having had no military training whatsoever, interfered repeatedly - and often damagingly - in day to day Iraqi military operations.

Q: Well at a certain point this thing turned into just a plain slugging match where you had the Iranians sort of wasting their youth by these martyr brigades you know. All this coming in. It sounded like World War I on the Russian front where the Russians were attacking and picking up guns from the guys who had fallen because they were just charging up the hill. How did that happen?

WHITE: The great mistake the Iranians made in the war was similar to, fishing here for an historical analogy, to one assumption the Japanese made in the Pacific war. Confronted by increasingly superior U.S. air and naval capabilities, and with amphibious landing forces which outclassed them tremendously to the extent they could deploy (and receive from offshore) devastating firepower and powerful air support, believed that sheer fanaticism could compensate for such conventional imbalance. Khomeini and his clerical colleagues, and some of the revolutionaries around them (also, like Saddam, militarily inexperienced), counted on brute revolutionary willpower driven by religious zeal to even the odds. They neglected the basics - acquisition of the vast quantities of the heavier tools of war - believing that it wasn't that necessary to order a lot of tanks and artillery. The Iraqis were ordering like crazy from practically everyone. They were getting as much in the way of heavy weapons as possible. In fact, at times, they should have been focusing more on changing tactics than piling up more military hardware. The Iranians were doing just the opposite, under-ordering seriously, and it usually wasn't a problem related to money.

That said, I was part of something I guess we can get into here, "Operation Staunch," which was aimed at reducing still further the flow of arms and ammunition to Iran. So not only was Iran under-ordering, we were trying our best to block countries from selling to Iran-even basic artillery ammunition. I was very active in my many briefing trips at the highest levels - and in highly-classified monthly updates that went to governments including Turkey, Egypt, and those previously mentioned - in pressing this agenda. But we didn't feel any guilt about it because of the hostage crisis, the hostility and the terrorism against us (especially in Lebanon), the deep seated fear of our Middle East allies, and Khomeini's twisted vision. Anyway the Iranians badly under ordered, regarded will power and Islamic fanaticism as factors that would offset serious disadvantages in materiel. And the longer the war went on, the Iraqis became more proficient and savvy in the use of their heap of equipment. They basically learned the World War I handbook, how to shred incoming infantry formations effectively with multiple lines of trenches into which one could fall back from one to another, all the while decimating Iranian assault forces. In many cases, with all this in place, they simply let the Iranians bash themselves to death against such improved defenses and kill zones.

Finally, at the end of the war in 1988, the Iraqis took the offensive, employing a World War I-style combination of massed artillery and poison gas. In addition, also from the First World War, they adopted what are called Hutier tactics (named after WWI German General Oskar von Hutier), in which one initially avoids attacking the strong points in the enemy line, instead using relatively small groups of elite storm troopers to bypass and strike deep, using these specially trained infantry units in haze of gas and artillery fire to isolate Iranian frontline units by tearing up communications, overrunning headquarters, etc. Most people think the German storm troopers as the Nazi brown shirts of the 1930's, but these street bullies, many of them World War I veterans, were named after the elite storm trooper battalions that began appearing in the Imperial German Army in 1917.

Q: In the first place were we looking at Iran, there was the military situation, but I suppose the thing that really concerned us was the internal dynamics within Iran during this time, because Iran had become the enemy and we were afraid of the spread of Khomeini's radical Islam and all of that. What were we seeing as this war developed inside of Iran?

WHITE: We saw an increase in the strength of the clerical regime as it fed off the war, especially in the early years. It quickly devastated its enemies in vicious purges of various leftist elements that helped Khomeini come to power. The main focus of U.S. attention with respect to Iran was, as with most of the rest of the international community, to make sure the Iraqis checkmated Iran on land. The other focus on our hostages in Lebanon (beyond January 1981) was one that would lead the Reagan Administration down the path into the Irangate minefield, basically giving them arms to fight their war against Iraq, but a pitiable little amount that I knew (once I found out about it after the fact) would mean very little in the overall military equation, in order to buy enough favor to release hostages. The Israelis in my consultations with them during the war period successfully used some money, under the table, in an effort to protect the large Jewish community in Iran. There is still a large Jewish community there. It bought such good will with the Iranians with respect to Iranian Jews that at one point late in the war, according to a conversation I had with the Israeli Defense Ministry's Uri Lubrani, the Israelis were asked to reduce levels of this aid by Jews in Iran because they thought they were being treated better than ordinary Iranians!

Q: Well were you aware of these things? I mean the Iran gate business and in a way the whole Israeli connection to Iran I imagine would be compartmented off from you.

WHITE: I became aware, after the fact, of what the Israelis were up to at one point very early in the war merely because I accidentally saw, sometime later, a relevant file while looking for something else in another INR office. However, what I discovered was that the Israelis were, only very briefly, given a very iffy OK of sorts (I will explain "iffy" in a moment) to sell a small quantity of U.S. manufactured military items already in their possession to the Iranians. But that preliminary - and very tentative - U.S. response was very quickly reversed by, I believe, Al Haig. Regarding what had happened earlier, the Israelis essentially pestered us, and somebody gave them something like a "well wprobably will let you do it" (i.e. not a real OK). Yet, the Israelis lunged forward with their scheme, with the U.S. changing its mind shortly thereafter - and angrily - because a full and formal authorization to go ahead had not actually been given in the first place.

The Irangate thing hurt me very personally. I was one of the main officials working on "Operations Staunch," and I cannot recall how many times I was asked by Arab foreign ministers, defense ministers, etc. to assure them that we were not giving anything to Iran. At the time (1983-1986), I was unaware of any such thing, and gave them assurances, in good faith, that we were not doing anything along those lines. The last major Iraq-related meeting I had abroad in the Arab world before changing portfolios to become Deputy Chief of NESA's Arab-Israeli Division in 1986, finally dropping the Iraq portfolio, was a meeting with King Hussein of Jordan, a wonderful man. The Jordanian Prime Minister also was there, as was the Crown Prince, Foreign Minister. One main point of the meeting was to for me to persuade King Hussein to persuade Saddam Hussein to give us boxes of defused munitions that had been fired into Iraqi lines by the Iranians so that we could examine them and get a better fix on how to block munitions shipments to Iran.

We had had considerable success up to this point in "Operation Staunch" and very much wanted to sustain the momentum. It was, however, sad in a way (with respect to our reputation) because probably for every dollar's worth of stuff Ollie North sent the Iranians, I (and others) had stopped fifty or perhaps even 100 dollars worth from getting through. But that didn't mean much of anything after Irangate. It was all: "No, you were doing this behind our backs all the time - lying to us." But anyway in that last meeting around November 1, 1986 that I had with King Hussein, I did persuade him to call Saddam, and Saddam agreed to the shipments of defused munitions. Within days of my return to the United States, Irangate blew wide open. I was devastated. More than that, I was the source of several angry messages from King Hussein to President Reagan saying, in effect: "Your envoy assured me that this wasn't going on. I believed all of that. And I tried to help, even calling Saddam." He certainly had, and was deeply embarrassed for evidently passing along our false assurances. It was really a shame on a personal level, too, because I had gotten the impression that we had really bonded, Hussein and I. I became, effectively, the scape goat in Jordan for the U.S. blunder. And those relatively small shipments that had been sent to the Iranians discredited so much work that, in the military balance, meant so much more. The U.S. never seems to exhaust ways in which to squander goodwill. I suppose, with respect to credibility lost in this affair, a line from, I believe, a routine done by comedian Steve Martin applies to U.S. actions: "How I turned a million dollars of real estate into $25 in cash..."

Q: Well I think this is a good place to stop. We are talking about your time in the Iran-Iraq War, and outside of just a brief mention of Irangate and King Hussein and how you were discredited there. I wonder if next time you would talk about the trips you made, and what you were gathering from your contacts, also information you were getting from our intelligence agencies, the CIA, NSA and all, and how good these were. I mean where they were going, and also during this Iran-Iraq business, did you see a greater and greater tilt for Iraq, and was this disquieting and were we taking a look at the long term consequences and all. And also about the Arab-Israeli invasion of Lebanon and all of that. There are a lot of things to do. If you want to in your mind arrange all of this, but that is where we will be going.

WHITE: Remind me when we resume because there is a lot there. Remind me to mention a couple of foreshadowings in the Gulf, warnings in conversations with senior Arab officials that Iraq might become the next menace in the Gulf.

Q: Today is of all things Friday the 13th, May 13, 2005. Wayne I will turn you loose.

WHITE: Yes, I wanted to, this do relate to Iran at some point, even if backhandedly by reference to the terrorism it backed in Lebanon. While I was covering Iraq and Iran, I also was the backup analyst for Syria (yes, I know, INR is a REALLY small operation). In fact, during a wedding leave on the part of our Syrian Analyst the great Hama uprising occurred in Syria, and I had to step up to the plate on that front for a couple of weeks, so that shows how I had to commit to other things and work on other accounts, making everything that much more hectic. But covering Iran also drew one into matters involving Lebanon because of the presence of Hezbollah, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard presence in Lebanon (and Syria), related hostage taking in Lebanon, the bombing our embassy and 241 Marines - all bearing Iranian fingerprints to one degree or another.

But something relevant to today in 2005 - the controversy over the nomination of Mr. Bolton as ambassador to the UN which was reported to the full senate yesterday - connects in a way to events back in 1982 in which I was involved. Just as Mr. Bolton apparently tried to pressure an INR analyst to slant intelligence, I also was involved in such an episode. As I said, this occurred back in 1982 and related to our Marine deployment to Lebanon. I want to tell this story because it shows that when people try to suppress intelligence, rewrite intelligence, ignore intelligence, or, perhaps, a combination of all three, they can actually kill people.

I was the INR duty officer during a Saturday in the fall of 1982. I was asked to see Admiral Jonathan Howe, who was then the Assistant Secretary for Political and Military Affairs. I previously had many dealings with Admiral Howe because of the ongoing Iran-Iraq War. We had a good relationship, and in fact everything I am going to say did not happen in an abusive tone at all. It was more conversational although he was upset, and very frustrated (and probably surprised since we liked each other) that I would not do his bidding on this occasion. Me and our Lebanon Analyst at that time, Tom Wukitsch (now a retired FSO) recently compared our notes on this incident because of its similarity to the current snit over Mr. Bolton's behavior. So I am even more familiar with some of the details than I was the last time I sat here. Tom wrote an INR assessment for our daily SMS that went to the Secretary and, of course, many other recipients, both in hard copy and electronically, including all cabinet secretaries with foreign affairs equities, military commands, the White House, etc. The assessment warned that if we deployed Marines to Lebanon, we probably would suffer casualties and our troops could become embroiled, just become another party to the civil war.

Anyhow, Admiral Howe asked me to come over to his office, after this assessment had gone out both electronically and in hard copy to numerous recipients overnight, and said he wanted INR to retract it. He said he wanted to retract it because he disagreed with it. He had said he had personally written the Rules of Engagement (ROE) for the Marines deploying to Lebanon in a way that would prevent any casualties. He said the INR assessment was wrong and could cause problems on the Hill. I told him that problems on the Hill were not really INR's concern. He argued that since his ROE said Marines were not supposed to patrol, we would not lose people. Regardless of what the ROE stipulated, I said I did not think anyone could write an ROE that could preclude casualties, at least in Lebanon, and, honestly, not being clairvoyant, added: "Admiral, in Lebanon trouble comes to you." Anyway, he didn't get any satisfaction from me. I did ask whether the piece contained any factual errors. He said: "No, it's just wrong." So he went over my head. I was sitting there when he called INR Director Hugh Montgomery. Hugh did pretty much what I had done. As in the case involving Christian Westerman and Mr. Bolton much more recently (INR Asst. Secretary Carl Ford), Hugh backed me up. Hugh said, "If it is not factually incorrect it stays out there. We are not concerned about the Hill. We are concerned about putting out solid analysis."

I should add, however, that Howe, according to Tom Wukitsch, in a detail I forgot, set to work and wrote his own personal assessment and sent it up to the Secretary to counter our own. The rest is history. For a few months things went well. Then, starting in February, 1983, about four or five months after the deployment, it was clear the Marines were becoming a party to the civil war. They began to take fire. It was getting hot; the situation was changing for worse, just as we had foreseen. There was still time to get out. That didn't happen. Throughout the remaining months leading up to the events of October, the Marines (and elements working with them) did begin to take casualties and retaliate in ways that guaranteed more. It was clear the Marine mission had changed utterly, but they still weren't pulled out. In fact they were preparing to bring in another Marine contingent in rotation in November. Well, in October, 241 Marines were killed in their compound in a spectacular suicide attack. Again it shows that people who ignore intelligence, who want to squash it, repress it, re-write it, actually can in the end be the source of terrible consequences.

Q: Of course we are not here in a way we are not talking about, I don't know where you divide intelligence and analysis. Anybody who knows the Middle East, knows that if you put somebody in a place and you have got people like Hezbollah don't like him there, I mean, Hell, even without them there are a bunch of guys running around with guns shooting. It is just a dangerous place to be. But that is more analysis than intelligence isn't it? Intelligence is information that comes in.

WHITE: Yes. People often call "intelligence" only the raw data that comes in via various types of reporting. But it is really the combination of such raw data AND the analysis derived from same by veteran intelligence analysts, which often isn't much more than plain common sense. Probably more than anything else, in this case, we had primarily analysis. But as you said yourself, any rational observer of events in Lebanon (as were our analysts) could easily have told anybody that if you take a bunch of armed Marines and stick them in the middle of an ongoing civil war, particularly when the U.S. was viewed as supporting Israel and the Lebanese Christians, and there are parties to the civil war (like those backed by Iran) who were intensely hostile toward us, who could possibly think there would be no trouble?

Q: I think for the record we might mention Admiral Howe has also been "credited" with getting us overly involved in Somalia and getting us so that we lost troops in the so-called Blackhawk Down incident which led to our withdrawal, and eventual dislike of getting involved in any foreign affair. All were parts of a longer thing. But he as if he ???

WHITE: Right. We should at this point maybe continue on with where we left off.

Q: I think we can continue on. What were we talking about. We were talking about Iran-Iraq war. You are following this. How did you find, I mean in the first place, how was the intelligence coming in, and what did you use?

WHITE: That's a fair question. The intelligence was actually, if I was to rate it against other targets, not going into any sensitive details that haven't made there way into what we call "the open source world," rather good. When we are talking about how the armies were aligned, the ebb and flow of events (and military intent on the part of both parties), especially, again, on the military side of the Iran-Iraq War equation, it was not all that difficult to get enough intelligence to do the job. When you have massive forces in the field, you can detect them and follow them.

Q: We had satellites.

WHITE: Yes we did. The thing that is always hard to get is information on issues of intent within the senior leadership of both warring parties. This has always been the case, in various matters I covered in INR, whether it was Iranian, Iraqi, Israeli, Libyan or Syrian: getting information on exactly what the leader and key members of his government will do is consistently the most difficult thing to break into. In fact, as an aside relating to my coverage of Syria in the Arab-Israeli Division, in, I believe, 1986 there were reports that something extraordinary was going to be done by Hafez al-Assad. I won't go into details. Anyway, CIA concluded that the information was bad, but the embassy corroborated it from another source, and something had to be sent up by way of a warning to Secretary Schultz pretty urgently. I assessed that, contrary to CIA's conclusion, that the information is absolutely correct. The problem was that what we got was only a brief slice of the story." Assad had a temper tantrum and in the midst of a temper tantrum ordered something or said he would do something that was entirely out of character and potentially very politically self destructive. Since it was just a brief temper tantrum it would never happen. It never did. So even when you do get a glimpse inside the leadership loop, the results from that access can be highly misleading because it is fragmentary.

Q: Yeah well I mean it is what it goes back to King Henry II or something, won't somebody rid me of this pesky priest, you know, a temper tantrum at the time. A bunch of knights picked this up and when he sobered up he ended up crawling on his knees to Canterbury.

WHITE: If Assad had done what he said he was going to do, he might not have survived as president, and he was no dope. Unlike Saddam who, when we get further ahead in the course of the invasion of Kuwait, did act on a tantrum (I and some others believe), the more clever Assad cooled off and thought better of it. In any case, the intelligence loop is very hard to break into at the leadership level, and it seems that as you get higher and higher in the target's leadership, matters usually become ever more obscure, and the analysis subjective. Generally as you get requests for what is the leader thinking, or what the man behind the throne thinking, or what a the tight ruling group around him is thinking, that is where the analysis increases and hard intelligence becomes far more scarce. That's where the feel of a veteran analyst, basically riding by the seat of his or her pants based on long exposure and study of the subject, becomes so critical.

Q: Let me address sort of a technical thing, and then I want to go back to Iraq and the time. But you know the CIA and the FBI, they all use this trained psychiatrist looking at people to figure out what are they going to, you know what would a person do and all that. Did you ever run across this, in anything, and did you find this of any use or not?

WHITE: You mean CIA psychological analysis?

Q: Yes that sort of thing.

WHITE: I found that actually the CIA psychologists "Leadership analysis" were a mixed bag. But there was one such psychologist, one of those working on the Middle East, who was a truly brilliant man. I got to know him very well, and we kept in touch on various matters. He is retired now, and we still keep in touch. This man is incredibly insightful. I have seen him give confidential briefings in great detail on both Qadhafi and, when he was still in power, Saddam Hussein that were very revealing. They were right on the mark. And he was not only spot on as to behavior patterns, but related the origins of why these people were going to act such a way. He could really pick his subjects apart psychologically.

Q: I would think it would be hard for a psychiatrist who is brought up sort of in the European-American context to understand what turns on or turns off a Qadhafi or a Saddam Hussein.

WHITE: I think what it gets down to is that in every profession there will be certain people with highly subtle and insatiably curious minds, who can't resist delving ever deeper into the kinds of things that will give them insights they need to know on how some people will behave. This is, again, not just someone who just goes through the motions and just gets out this report or that report based largely on files, but somebody who really tries to get a grasp on the mindset of a foreign leader. This gentleman fit this mold, and did his work very well. In fact, in retirement, he has been asked to produce a series of more lengthy profiles for CIA. I reviewed two of them before I left government, and they were just outstanding. He needed our help here and there in these papers, but the overall thrust was very insightful. CIA just doesn't want to let this guy go, even though he is retired. He keeps being called back in for this and that.

Q: Well to go back to the main thing. You found at least in your field, you had, this was not one of these things that was produced and you would roll your eyes and push off the desk.

WHITE: We have seen those. I saw analytic products that were awful. While covering the Iran-Iraq War, for example, one such analysis was the source of such a snit that sent me all the way to Riyadh on briefing trip to resolve the mess. An economic analyst from CIA was going out to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) capitals to brief on vulnerability of oil facilities in case of like an Iranian attack. Well, he happened to pass through the Iran-Iraq War shop at CIA headquarters during his pre-trip consultations. There was a senior analyst who concocted an intelligence analysis, quite detailed, saying that Iran was about to attack Saudi Arabia. Later, they would forget that he had come through when they had just completed their first draft. The piece was garbage. It was a helter-skelter collection of facts taken out of context which INR vetoed for publication; I proved it wrong on 3 or 4 counts. Well this CIA oil economist didn't know that the piece had been shot down just after he left, so he went out and started briefing the GCC states using the likelihood that they were going to be attacked in order to focus their attention on his vulnerability briefing.

The Saudis went absolutely nuts, and well they should. Richard Murphy was our ambassador at the time, and he asked for an analysis from INR because he really had his hands full, and the Iranian attack scare just didn't seem right based on what he had been reading. So I sent out a two-page explanatory rebuttal which I was instructed to word so that it wouldn't look like the CIA had made a serious mistake, but said instead that subsequent analysis and information allowed us to conclude that the original analysis was mistaken. Dick used it with the Saudis, but they were so wrought up that it just wasn't enough, and he asked for a briefer to come out personally. So an entire trip to the Gulf resulted from this misguided piece of analysis. It involved a briefing for Prince Turki al-Faisal (the formidable head of the Saudi General Intelligence Directorate) by me, a CIA analyst not associated with the original analysis who just happened to be in the region, plus a DIA military analyst who would work that side of this issue. We calmed things down, but the U.S. government probably lost about $15,000 in travel funding as a result of that one wrong-headed piece of analysis.

Q: On this thing, what did you tell the Saudis?

WHITE: I walked Turki through a few of the pieces of intelligence that had come in earlier, showing him how they had been misinterpreted. I wrote the original piece trying to make everyone look OK, but I had to be more frank with Turki in order to be more convincing the second time around. In other words, I had to admit that indications that the Iranians were preparing a cross-Gulf amphibious attack were wrongly assessed, and that the force was, instead, clearly to be used in the huge marshes in southern Iraq along the Iraqi-Iranian battlefront for tactical operations, and their association with activity in the Persian Gulf was simply a bad call. The force in question simply wasn't designed for major operations over large stretches of open water. It was my first of many meetings over the years with Turki, and we made a definite connection. It was nice to see him again at a reception after his arrival as the new Saudi ambassador in 2005.

Q: How did this, just to get a feel for this, what was the CIA's guy doing? If he was a higher up, was he sort of cringing and letting you take the ball?

WHITE: They just let me take the ball, wanted damage-control, and I think the senior CIA analyst at the briefing was a bit bemused by how bad another analyst had done, regardless of which agency he came from. He was a very pleasant fellow.

Q: Do you know what happened to the analyst?

WHITE: Absolutely nothing, thank heavens. His analysis just went into the wastebasket - or should I say the classified burn bag.

Q: But on something like that, I am sure that somebody in the analytical community, somebody is keeping book aren't they?

WHITE: I am not so sure about that because I have seen so many errors made, especially over at CIA, seemingly without much accountability. And, to be fair, this same analyst did some other very high-quality work, which is what made this piece of terribly flawed analysis really stand out.

Q: Well did you ever find, I am sure that somebody is keeping book. I would imagine somebody is keeping book on you. Somebody else saying this guy White, most of the time he is right on the mark, so pay attention to him or he is off somewhere something like that. I am talking about the users at the desk or somewhere else. Or did you feel there is a monitor over this.

WHITE: You do acquire a sort of a street reputation inside the classified Middle East community in government. All the way from the GCC cabinet members I would huddle with on my trips to the Gulf to Asst. Secretaries of State, one would get a certain reputation for quality work (that you are someone worth listening to). In fact, I can recall one instance while briefing out in the Gulf in which I was going to brief in Bahrain and the foreign and interior ministers to be briefed did not get the word on who would be briefing them. As I walked through these huge double doors into the foreign minister's office alongside the ambassador, I could see the foreign minister leaning noticeably to get a glimpse of exactly who had come from Washington to do the honors, saw me, and literally shouted, "Ah, Mr. White!" and embraced me. Clearly, he had sat through some pretty dreary briefings on the part of others. That is, of course, gratifying, but also of considerable use in gaining the ability to authoritatively shoot down sub-standard analysis.

A year later, with the same official, the Bahraini armed forces chief sat in. When I briefed that the Iraqis were about to initiate attacks on tankers, the general literally sneered and said that he knew Saddam Hussein, Wayne White didn't, and there would be no attacks on tankers. As the general got up to leave, the foreign minister stayed seated and said quietly: "Please ignore him; I would like to hear more about this threat." A few weeks later, the tanker war began.

You know, it's often that warm feeling that you are doing a good job that keeps you going, despite the many other hassles and long hours along the way. I have plenty of State Dept. and Intelligence Community awards, but people approaching me in retirement to join think tanks, appear or function as a resource for the media, assist those writing books on several subjects in which I was a participant, join a major bi-partisan task force on Iraq, to continue some of my contacts with foreign diplomats are doing this because of that reputation. I treasure that more than anything, and it allows me to keep on having an impact in the greater arena of foreign affairs beyond leaving the Department.

Q: We will be coming back to these various things, but let's talk about Iran. During the war, how were you seeing getting information and all, what were the power centers in Iran. Who were calling the shots or testing each other?

WHITE: I will give you two anecdotes. Various subordinate power centers within the Iranian leadership didn't matter very much back in the 80's. There was one all-powerful center of the revolutionary government: Khomeini. He truly dominated the scene. If anyone did something that was at variance with what Khomeini wanted, they were smacked down. We found this out very early on in the hostage crisis when there were a lot of little feelers from Iran at lower levels that we were involved and which gave certain State Dept. officials unwarranted hope that the American hostages were going to be released much earlier. In the end, only the old man would make that calls.

Q: You are talking about the embassy hostages.

WHITE: Exactly. I am talking about the 1979-1981 affair that, because Khomeini personally wanted to humiliate Jimmy Carter, wasn't resolved in the hours after Ronald Reagan's inauguration on 20 January 1981. There were all these odd little things going on like the Iranian foreign minister meeting with our people in disguise in Europe. NEA and others were becoming very hopeful because of these meetings whereas INR, and I won't take credit for this, our Iran Analyst Steve Grumman in particular, maintained that such talks were probably of no value. Khomeini, in repeated statements, had indicated there was no give - no give, unless we made a long line of concessions, including the release of Iranian property, all the things we had done to retaliate, apologies, etc. NEA Asst. Sec. Hal Saunders apparently became angry and actually called over my boss and our Iran analyst to give them a piece of his mind. Hal is a wonderful man, but he had been under terrible pressure, and probably just lost it that one time. "You keep saying everything we are doing is worthless. You have a negative attitude. This isn't helping anything," etc.

Well everything the USG was doing on that front soon fell apart. The Iranian foreign ministry channel collapsed, and Hal, being the honorable man he is, did something that is unusual in high levels of government; he called over my boss and Steve and apologized, saying, in effect: "I will be thankful in the future to listen to anything you have to say because clearly we were completely off base, you were right on target, and I apologize for what I said in that previous meeting."

Another example of Khomeini calling the shots came toward the middle of the war. Hashemi Rafsanjani, who would eventually become president of Iran, and then a defeated presidential candidate in the runoff with Ahmadinejad, made a statement that hinted of negotiating with Baghdad. The Iranians captured a significant piece of territory inside Iraq within the southern marshes in 1984 called the Majnoon Islands. These "islands" were artificial dry areas created in the marshes for oil exploration -the water had been pumped out of these areas that were below water level after they had been walled off by earthen berms in huge squares forming artificial islands of a sort to protect oil derricks. The Iranians moved in and seized the islands in a lightning assault with speed boats. After their fall, Rafsanjani made a public statement that we all immediately recognized was very significant, saying these islands will be useful bargaining chips in future talks with the Iraqis. We knew Rafsanjani was a pragmatist, but we were amazed by the statement because Khomeini had said there weren't going to be any talks with the Iraqi government. One of his war aims was the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime. Within hours, Khomeini spoke out, utterly denouncing anyone who would even think of negotiating with the Iraqi regime. He just smacked Rafsanjani right down. Any variance from Khomeini's singular mind and stark goals was immediately beyond the pale and designated as such. Khomeini, of course, following terrible military reverses in 1988, would be forced to swallow the bitter poison of being compelled to negotiate with that same Iraqi regime, but not until perhaps another 200,000 troops were killed or wounded on both sides.

Q: Well were you seeing , I imagine here I mean obviously you have got a war going on the military side and the military intentions are so very important. How about on the defense side, defense intelligence did you see. How did they work. I mean were they seeing, because they had to understand where Khomeini was coming from because for all intents and purposes he was the supreme commander.

WHITE: Right. You mentioned earlier when I was talking about how easy in many ways it was for me to address the Iran-Iraq War analytically if one had studied WWI and WWII. You said something like, "Yes, but there are a lot of analysts who have to help you by dealing with weapons systems and things that maybe I was not up on." I dealt continually with DIA in particular, and they had almost an obsession with the relative quantities of military hardware on the two sides, which often drew them off beam during, say, the first 12-18 months of the conflict, as to its likely flow on the battlefield. We call that "bean counting." It doesn't take sufficient account of factors such as morale, battlefield tactics, and proficiency with those weapon systems. As late as a year into the war, they (and CIA) counted all the hardware on the two sides and concluded that Iraq was going to make additional conquests, which of course never happened in those early years of the war. Over time, amounts of materiel on the two sides did begin to count more heavily in the equation - and very much in Iraq's favor. I could see this as Khomeini continued to bank too heavily on revolutionary fervor rather than ordering enough of the necessary military hardware to sustain a modern war effort, while the Iraqis were frantically ordering and ordering more and more heavy weaponry. The disparity between the two sides in major weapons systems got so out of whack that the Iraqis, learning some more advanced infantry tactics in particular that I mentioned, were finally able to really punish the Iranians on the battlefield and seize the initiative. But early on in the war DIA and CIA were predicting more victories for Iraq, well after the Iraqis had ground to a halt, pretty much because the Iraqis simply had more tanks, etc.

Q: Well were you seeing in the say of at least the majority of the major part of the war sort of a triumph of American training and tactics or not, or was it a more indigenous?

WHITE: It was a combination of both. The Iranians dominated the war on the ground for the first 18 months and for nearly seven years held the initiative, with the Iraqis effecting a stunning reverse only in the last year of the war. But Tehran had badly weakened its forces by not ordering the necessary hardware, grinding down their military's valuable human resources, suffering immense numbers of casualties, with cadres replacing them who were less well trained and had possessed of less zeal. Initially, it was clear that American training had put the Iranians in an advantageous position in certain areas. In fact, initially, we even underestimated the effect of our training in that respect. This is because there is always that tendency to look down upon Third World militaries and say "Ah, they can't do it nearly as well as we can." That is probably true in many cases, but what they can do is quite sufficient in certain situations. This is the sort of the thing that happened in 1956 (much written about) in which Nasser seized the Suez Canal and once the crisis was over everyone said, "So what, he won't be able to run it anyway." The Egyptians ran it just fine.

Q: You know the Egyptian pilots just can't deal with that.

WHITE: Right. Soviet-trained Arab air forces are generally 2nd or 3rd rate. In Iran, however, the fascinating thing was that the main factor that was discounted was Iran's ability to continue flying complex F-14 Tomcats. No one had them other than Iran - not even the Israelis. Nixon gave in to the Shah and sold him considerable numbers of them. The head of DIA made an incredible statement at the beginning of the war - something to the effect that "the Iranians won't be able to keep those F-14's in the air more than ten days." Not only did the Iranians fly them beyond that 10-day period, seemingly without problems (with some still operational in 2005!), they showed amazing proficiency and an ability to improvise. They demonstrated, for example, cut off from spare parts as they were, to manufacture their own in certain categories. We are not talking about whole engine assemblies, but rather nuts, bolts, wing sections, etc. They did not have the fine metallurgy to produce such parts in the high quality way we could. What they simply did was produce them as best they could with inferior metals and replace the parts maybe two or three times more frequently. I believe they were manufacturing several hundred different spare parts for the F-14 by the end of the war.

Q: Well were we, you say Khomeini was the source of all power. Were we getting basically a continuous flow of what he was thinking about, what he was doing? I take ipronouncements were almost public weren't they?

WHITE: Exactly, you are correct. It is much like today in Iraq when we are talking about Ayatollah Sistani, who is the premier Shia source of emulation there, although he tries to stay above the fray to a great degree. You don't need a lot of intelligence on Sistani because he makes his pronouncements public. In fact, in the modern world you can go to Sistani's website, where they are posted. But on Khomeini, our intelligence access was rather poor, but it wasn't as important relative to some other cases because, as you say, he made public pronouncements. He just laid it right on the line, and our Iran analyst was probably working from 90% open source material at any given time.

Q: What about Iraq from the beginning of the war up through? What were we getting from them?

WHITE: It was hard because in Iraq, with that kind of a regime, with intense counterintelligence, and a Baath party structure down to the neighborhood level, trying to get a source to report on the inner workings of that regime was extremely difficult; being shot or hanged (and after being tortured) was a very real and potentially immediate threat facing any potential source. Even some merely suspected of doing anything like that were executed. So that was a very hard loop to break into. That also doubtless speaks to some of the misunderstandings over WMD in the context of the 2003 Iraq War.

In the previous tape, you mentioned something about our attitude towards Iraq during that period. Some people continue to criticize the involvement of the USG - and all other world governments wielding some measure of global power (except Israel) - with such a government. Again, I would have to say it was primarily a reaction to Iran - a violent and aggressive Iran, challenging the status quo, threatening U.S. interests in the region and our allies there as well, and helping to further destabilize Lebanon. Iran had simply become a serious menace. The United States and revolutionary Iran were on a collision course, and Tehran's actions had much to do with that. Many other actors on the world stage, including the U.S., had huge stakes in Gulf oil, so most everyone supported Iraq. Iraq began describing itself as the eastern flank of the Arab world, and it probably was. If the Iranians had broken through, defeated Iraq, God only knows what sort of a threat they would have posed to the greater Middle East region. So with the Gulf Arabs pleading with us for protection, other Sunni Arab governments farther afield opposing Iran, and with the French, the Germans, Japanese, Italians, etc. at our side, there was a determination to make sure that Iraq did not collapse. There is where you get into those huge loans that the Saudis and the Kuwaitis and others gave Iraq. In time, Iraq would build oil new pipelines bypassing the Iranian blockade in the Gulf, expand others, and would not be so desperate for such loans. But at the beginning, Baghdad lived off of her hard currency reserves, and when they were nearly exhausted, she lived off credit, readily provided because practically everyone just wanted her to hold on.

Q: Well were we trying to figure, I mean we were wanting the Iraqis to succeed but was there a certain amount of you know, let these two scorpions diminish their capabilities and be less of a menace or was that a factor?

WHITE: Yes, some of that is true. This question is useful because I sometimes heard this from Gulf Arabs at the time, who greatly feared Saddam, his brutish regime, and could see that if he were somehow to prevail decisively in the war, he might represent a heavily armed menace to the far weaker Arab Gulf states. I think the ideal scenario for everyone concerned would have been the emergence of a stalemate, tying down both Iraq and Iran even after the war ended, and an early end to the war. That scenario didn't play out however. Iraq finally administered a thumping defeat on Iran at the end of the war, eventually freeing up these enormous forces which went north into Kurdistan and committed genocide in Kurdistan, which, by the way, even though that was a horrendous thing, using poison gas against women and children and hauling off tens of thousands of men to be shot, the Kurds were not entirely blameless. Anfal was an incredibly horrible affair-an outright atrocity. But, during the war, Kurdish leaders chose to side with the Iranians, admitted Iranian Revolutionary Guards into Iraq in order to attack the Iraqi northern flank, essentially what would pass for treason in any other context, and placed their people in great peril. I personally warned one senior Kurdish official before the outlines of Anfal became entirely clear to make his peace with Baghdad before Saddam turned on the Kurds to administer the vicious payback I feared was looming.

Q: Anfal was the name of what?

WHITE: Anfal was the name of the ruthless campaign that Iraq conducted as soon as it could free up a large force of battle-hardened troops from the battlefront in order to re-subjugate its Kurdish provinces. I warned this Kurdish official, telling him that to the south the war is changing. This was in the first real meeting between U.S. government officials and this leader. I warned him that the tables were turning; the war wasn't a stalemate anymore. Iraq was winning, and forces would soon be free to come up and go after him and other Kurdish elements. I had no idea that poison gas would be involved and that there would be such genocide, but I knew it wouldn't be pretty, and warned him to talk to Baghdad (there had been peace feelers from time to time as Baghdad sought to get rid of the wartime Kurdish problem). He said he didn't have to because he could defeat anything Saddam could send against him. I told him that he didn't have a clue as to what Saddam could send against the Kurds because he and his Kurdish fighters had been fighting second-rate, burnt-out army divisions and less motivated Kurdish militias while crack Iraqi combat units were used almost exclusively at the front. He had never fought even one brigade of the elite Republican Guard. And that is exactly what would go after him and the other Kurds. When Saddam went into Kurdistan in 1988, the Kurds were pushed back across the border in a fairly short period of time because of the overpowering force Saddam could now muster against them. It was really a tragedy that this official apparently did not attempt to negotiate-anything-to somehow bury the hatchet with Baghdad (if only to buy a little time) in order to stave off the worst of the horror to come (until far too late). It might sound like an impossible mission. Why would Baghdad agree to that when it wanted to go get the Kurds for what Saddam saw as treason? Well, at the time, when Iraq was still trapped in a seemingly endless war - even in the later phases with the battlefront situation rapidly improving - it might just have made some sort of a deal to get the Kurds off its back. Virtually no-one thought Khomeini would throw in the towel, even after those defeats in the first half of 1988. Who knows, any attempted peace feelers on the part of the Kurds might have failed, but it pains me greatly that no-one really tried, at least before many Kurds already had died and many others driven across the border.

Q: Well you say you would mention this. Were there others, I mean was this a policy of ours to say, I mean how good were our contacts with the Iraqis during that this war?

WHITE: At the beginning of the war we were nothing but an interest section of the Belgian embassy. Even then I will have to admit, the Belgian embassy had like five people; our interest section had like 25 people with a little Belgian flag fluttering above it. Relations improved steadily through 1982-1984, and a bit abruptly, in 1985, the Iraqis restored full diplomatic relations when my friend David Newton was there as head of our Interests Section. By late war we had pretty decent relations with them. We exacted a price though. I say that because I don't want this to feed into the usual accusation that we shamelessly fell into the arms of Saddam. We knew what he was. We were especially concerned about international terrorism. He was behind several groups. We wouldn't accept any formal relationship with him until he got out of the terrorist business. A lot of pressure was placed on him on that front. And he did get out of that business as a result of largely American pressure, once he discovered that our demands were non-negotiable. All too many times, on various issues in this region, people are complaining that the United States doesn't do enough. And I agree, quite frankly, in some of these cases. However, while we are not doing enough, in many cases the Western Europeans and others were doing virtually nothing because they want to preserve their economic interests, trade, access to oil, etc., allowing the U.S. to take on the tough job of trying to moderate this ugly regime. If they had gone and criticized or pressured that government to the extent we did, they knew they would suffer. We go out; we take the hits, and even if we are not doing enough, we are at least doing something.

Q: Oh just because people I hope will be reading this some centuries from now, try to explain what blogging is because I am sure this is a word that will come and go in a couple of years.

WHITE: Blogging? OK, I will expand on blogging in an interesting way. Blogging is E-mail-driven editorializing and opinionizing. You can post something in E-mail which can be the equivalent of a small op-ed. In other instances, it is just a reaction to someone who has done one of those. I "blog" frequently, for example, on a sort of online chat room called Gulf2000 run out of Columbia University.

Q: We are talking about the internet.

WHITE: Exactly. To illustrate how organized this can be, there is an e-mail chat room of sorts, which means that people can e-mail to a certain E-mail address, and a large group participating will see the "posting." There is a mechanism on the other end that turns your message into addressed to everyone who is affiliated with this particular system. It was started by former National Security Advisor for Middle East Gary Sick. It is run out of Columbia University, and it deals with Iranian issues, Iraqi issues, the Arabian Peninsula and some regional and Islamic questions. Much of what I do in the "blogging" world is in this particular context. Its growing membership contains think tankers, U.S. government officials, officials of other governments, retired government officials, journalists, academics, etc.. It is a very interesting group of about 1,200 professionals who exchange views regularly.

Q: How about our military analysts? Were they kind of looking at American versus Soviet equipment and all? I mean was there a certain amount of ??? Particularly at the beginning of seeing American equipment being so much better than Soviet equipment or not?

WHITE: Oh sure there was a lot of that. In the Iran-Iraq case it diminished, however, because when you got to two, three, four years into the war, the Iranians could of course get only very limited parts for their American-made weapon systems. They couldn't even get parts for civilian airliners from us because they were cut off utterly, and deserved to be the way they were behaving. Iran's U.S.- related inventory just kept grinding down through attrition as they shifted into ordering from the Chinese and other overseas sellers, replacing American equipment with substandard "equivalents" of Eastern Bloc design. By the end of the conflict, probably well more than half of their American-origin equipment (tanks, heavy artillery, self propelled artillery, and aircraft) was gone, and, as I noted earlier, they fell far behind in replacing these relative to the Iraqis.

Q: What about the Stark incident? Can you describe what that was and how did we view that at the time?

WHITE: Well I don't think anyone viewed it as anything more than an accident.

Q: You might explain what it was.

WHITE: Sure. Because Iraqi oil had been cut off while Iran continued to export from her terminals out in the Persian Gulf, something the Iraqis thought of as quite unfair, the Iraqis opened what we called the "Tanker War." The main Iranian offshore terminal, unfortunately for Iran, was within only perhaps 80 miles or so of the Iraqi coast. So the Iraqis acquired Super Etendard aircraft from France, not the U.S., mind you - yet another Western country trying to bolster the Iraqis against the Iranians. These aircraft launched Exocet sea-skimming anti-ship missiles. So starting with the Super Etendard and then later improving with a much more advanced French aircraft that delivered the same weapon, the Iraqis started going ship-hunting in the Gulf in 1984, hammering tankers that were on the way to Iran's Kharg Island facility, bombing the Kharg Island facility itself, and attacking other Iranian-bound merchant shipping via missiles or mine-laying. But people kept lifting oil there. Oil prices were high enough that despite the increased insurance rates, tankers kept loading at Kharg as long as Kharg's facilities remained even partly operational. Some of these people were wildcat lifters and taking a lot of risk. Anyway, the Iraqis had a problem - the Iranians had direct access to Gulf shipping lanes to which they were denied.

Now, let's go back to the Stark. There was a fear factor involved in firing the Exocet missile at a ship. In order to get a solid missile lock on the target, you released the missile about 30 miles away from the target using locking radar on the attacking aircraft itself. You had to wait, guiding the missile, as you remained in the area marking time (the military calls it loitering) until the sea skimming missile got within about five kilometers, which is darn close, to the intended maritime target. Then the missile's own short-range radar got a final lock and sent a signal back to the aircraft that no further assistance was required. What the Iraqi pilots were doing, with Iranian aircraft frequently scrambling against them, would be to leave the area before the aircraft had fully guided the missile to the point at which the missile itself locked onto the target. In this situation, the missile would go wandering around a portion of the Gulf looking for a target, which often wasn't the intended target.

So sometimes the missiles would do some pretty crazy things. For example, there is a lot of controversy surrounding the Iranian nuclear infrastructure right now and Iran's nuclear intentions. Well, Iran's first nuclear plant was practically right on the Gulf at Bushehr, not too far from Kharg Island. The Bushehr reactor had a high dome profile. The dome was being constructed before the machinery was being installed. One of the sea skimming missiles hit the nuclear reactor dome. Why? Missiles went for a high radar profile, which is why all the tankers were hit in the rear. A tanker is a long flat vessel with a big superstructure in the rear, so the sea skimmer would go toward the rear. It was mainly designed to destroy warships, because of their smoke stacks, bridge, radars, etc., created the highest profile in the center of the vessel. But the tanker was not an ideal target for this missile. It always hit the rear. With respect to the Stark, what happened was that one of these Iraqi aircraft went down into the Gulf tanker-hunting, released its sea skimmer at a tanker, and bugged-out before it got his final missile lock. The missile went wandering and found the U.S. destroyer Stark which was hit and very badly damaged. There were lots of casualties. But it was an example of Iraqi military sloppiness, not nefarious intent. I worried about the Stark and our other ships in the Gulf before this happened. I used to go and brief when I was doing briefings for the GCC our naval commander in the Gulf. It is now the fifth fleet. It had a different name in those days: COMIDEASTFOR.

Q: ComMidEastFor.

WHITE: COMIDEASTFOR, exactly.

Q: I was vice consul in Dhahran in the 50's.

WHITE: Well then you are familiar with it. I would fly out from Manama, Bahrain. COMIDEASTFOR had a small portion of the airfield in Bahrain reserved for them, and the helicopter flights would go out form there. So I would go to the COMIDEASTFOR flagship, the USS LaSalle, and brief the Admiral and officers from various ships who came to these briefings. CENTCOM briefers would be there too. One time I was with the two-star admiral commanding COMIDEASTFOR. I can't remember which one it was because I spanned three admirals during the years of those trips. Well before the Stark happened, I said, "You know, Admiral, I am really concerned that you are operating so far north in the Gulf because the Iraqis are being rather sloppy with these missile locks on intended targets. The missiles are going astray." The nuclear facility had just been hit by accident, for example. He assured me over lunch that the ships were perfectly safe because they had the Vulcan 20mm system which was basically a 20mm rapid-fire Gatling gun. There was one on each side of the LaSalle. Whichever way the LaSalle was steaming she had one of these pointing north and could, theoretically, rip apart a sea skimmer with decent warning from radar of the missile's approach. The admiral was a tad indignant about me questioning his own military judgment. Anyhow, we had lunch, I did the briefing, and we went up on deck.

And there was on the LaSalle's Vulcan machine-cannon he had put such stock in lying completely disassembled all over the deck with five or six technicians working on it- completely inoperative. I never knew it had quite that many parts, now lying all over the deck like spaghetti. I said: "You know, admiral, this gun is not only totally inoperative, but it's is on the side of the ship pointing north toward where the Iraqis would come from." He ordered the ship completely about and was pretty pissed off, I think, at whoever was on the bridge at the time for not turning the ship around. But anyway, I was concerned about our fleet well before the Stark tragedy. We were operating too far north in the Gulf.

Q: Well tell me about, we are talking about the whole Iran-Iraq war period right now. Tell me about how you were used both in Washington but also these briefings. What were you up to?

WHITE: The Gulf States felt very much threatened and wanted to know keep track of what was transpiring. They wanted to know what the danger was of an Iran breakthrough, an Iraqi defeat, etc. Those were their major concerns. But, of course, the Tanker War, arriving on their front doorstep, became another in 1984. So we would brief them on the overall war situation. They wanted me because they wanted to get a bead on the political situation, the economic situation, how was Iraq holding up under all this, the status of our efforts under "Operation Staunch" to reduce weapons, ammunition and spare parts shipments to Iran. There was clearly a fear that Iraq would buckle at some point and of Iranian retaliation against them for their support of Iraq.

Q: Well did you go out very often?

WHITE: It was a twice per year exercise which sometimes got bumped up to a three times per year exercise by something extraordinary, like the 1982 tiff I told you about involving flawed intelligence analysis, which got the Saudis, quite justifiably, upset and panicky. The briefing flow could be very unusual at times: when I was in Kuwait once, in 1985 I believe, the Kuwaiti defense minister found out in the course of chit-chat on the margins of our briefing that I had been asked by NEA to travel to Iraq and take soundings on the economic situation because Washington was a little bit uncertain about its implications for Iraq's staying power. He asked me to return to Washington via Kuwait and also brief him as well. Now, that was rather bizarre first for me. I had to go back to NEA and INR and say, "Am I allowed to take orders from a minister of a foreign government involving USG travel funds?" Jim Placke, who was a good friend of mine and the deputy assistant secretary in NEA who covered Gulf issues, and very well I might add, said: "Sure, why not. We can hardly refuse." NEA even decided to put up the money for the whole extra leg of the trip. So I went up on behalf of both NEA and Sheik Salem and conducted an economic survey of inflation, availability of goods, Iraq debt, and matters like that, which, quite frankly, took me a bit deeper into the world of economics than was usually the case, but the embassy helped a lot. Then I returned and dutifully reported back to Sheik Salem at is lavish beachfront residence. Actually because we had been quite frank with these governments, the instructions were exactly what I wanted to do: "Go ahead and give him the full scoop on the situation" (the bottom line of which was that Iraq was still in a fairly robust economic situation).

Q: We must have been looking at the role of Ayatollahs or the ayatollah in Iran as this war continued. I mean the flower of their youth was being thrown away on the battlefield and all that. Particularly I was thinking of cities with the university students and the upper classes and all. I mean the religious rulers must have been under a certain amount of strain or threat or something of losing the mandate of their people or something like that.

WHITE: It is actually amazing that we saw very little indication of that. The Iranian population supported the regime pretty much blindly in what was perceived as a defensive war and, to many when the revolution was much fresher, sort of a holy cause. At least that is the way it appeared to us. Perhaps most people-especially so-called opionion-makers-who would have thought more the way you and I might have in this situation had fled into exile after the fall of the Shah. Much of the western-educated elite was in exile. The average Iranian, as I said before, perceived this much as Russians perceived WWII-as the "Great Patriotic War," even though a grave mistake had been made by their leadership at a point in 1982 when Iran had expelled Iraq from most all of its territory, but chose not to end the war. Most every Iraqi foothold in Iran, which were at some point quite extensive, had been eliminated. The big question was: does Iran press on with the war to destroy Saddam's regime, or does Iran stand down and say enough, you know, because of the bloodshed? Khomeini made the decision that it was not enough, and wanted to destroy Saddam and his regime. It was the most spectacular strategic mistake he ever made. Yet, the population to the end of the war, in the main, supported him. He didn't seem to have any trouble recruiting people to go to the front and die for the cause, supposedly securing a ticket to paradise through martyrdom. The flow of recruits never stopped. What changed, though, was their quality, well-trained regular army types were decimated, along with some erosion in fervor even among elite Revolutionary Guard units. Some of the quality we saw in early military units was diluted and diminished by massive losses.

Q: Let's talk about the end game. What were sort of the warning signs or something when you say, were we calling it and seeing Iraq gaining the upper hand? How did we see it and how did it play out?

WHITE: It came fairly quickly. In 1987 the Iranians launched a major offensive to try to take Basra for like the fifth time. The Iraqi response to that, for the first time, showed more tactical flexibility, and it was a large enough battle to showcase in a bigger way their proficiency with the armor and artillery that they had been accumulating and the bankruptcy of Iran's wasteful infantry assaults. The Iranians showed themselves as being somewhat worn down. The Iranians suffered perhaps their most lopsided offensive reverse. That got people's attention. But all in all, obseveres didn't see the Iraqis using tactics that were sufficiently clever or really moving decisively to the offensive in order to really change the character or course of the war. But then we did get some indications that the Iraqis had developed more advanced infantry tactics. There was a peninsula in southern Iraq, al-Faw, that had been taken in 1986 by the Iranians-something that really scared the Gulf Arabs because it was between Kuwait and Iraq. In a dramatic offensive in early 1988, employing WWI tactics of heaving in huge amounts of gas and heavy artillery immobilize command centers, key artillery positions, and then rushing forward with specialized storming battalions that were designed to penetrate deeply behind enemy lines, the Iraqis swept through, and retook the al-Faw in 24 hours. It was a stunning reverse for Tehran, and an example of what the Iraqis could do using more advanced tactics.

In fact, this style of warfare is quite brutal and costly. The Iraqis even used some of the same of tactics that were used commonly in late WWI with gas, in which you stacked behind your field guns gas shells on one side, high explosive on the other, and you fired them alternatively (i.e. mustard, high explosive, mustard, high explosive, etc.). Since mustard in particular, a very heavy gas, settled low and lingered in the trenches, the first thing many did wheunder mustard gas attack was to crawl outside the trenches to get away from the heavier concentrations of the gas, even though you had a mask on, because it could burn your skin. So if the enemy mixes high explosive in, the guys have to jump back in the trenches to escape the high explosive rounds. You get them caught betwixt and between. In addition the high explosive rounds, often because of concussion, would blow off masks and expose people to the gas that much more. The Iraqis learned these lethal but cunning tactics from 1917-1918 and applied them brilliantly (and ruthlessly) at al-Faw. After that it was all over. I remember being in the Hilton Hotel in Kuwait City during the massive exchanges of artillery fire prior to the Iraqi assault and feeling the glass of the sliding door trembling from the intense barrage (about 60 miles away across open water) just as Londoners would know when a major offensive took place in Flanders back in WWI by the rumble from across the channel. The Iraqis had finally found the key to victory, the will to take the offensive, and armed with a massive superiority in heavy weapons - those kinds of assault tactics backed up by masses of armor and artillery began inflicting on Iran defeat after defeat after defeat.

: Well were we beginning to re-evaluate and say all right, Iran is being knocked out, but whadoes this mean. I mean because we didn't know if it was going to settle down into status quo ante bellum.

WHITE: Yes, actually there was an intelligence mistake of sorts. In late 1986 I began covering Syria, and Lebanon, and was no longer the Iraq analyst. The entire Intelligence Community following then Iraq felt that the war could just remain a bloody stalemate. We had office discussions, and I initially felt the same way too. Iraq was exhausted by the war. She had lost a quarter of a million people killed or seriously wounded. She was deeply in debt, and all thought Iraq would pull inward to some degree and lick her wounds in the wake of this war (if she could get out of it). They were wrong. The first indication that Saddam wasn't staying home licking wounds and ignoring the world beyond was that deployment of armored personnel carriers to the Lebanese Christians, taking everyone by surprise. The Syrians throughout the entire Iran-Iraq War, with the two rival Baath parties in Syria and Iraq at bitter odds with each other, continued to support Iran. For Saddam, it was payback time. So in order to disrupt the Syrian presence in Lebanon, facing off with the Christians, he was aiding the Christians in order to screw the Syrians. So there he was only a short time after the war, projecting power deeply into an area that Iraq hadn't been involved in for almost a decade. We Levant analysts, I must say, drew the conclusion that Iraq had turned a corner, while the Iraq analyst (in INR) thought that the Lebanon arms shipment was an anomaly. That is, in part, one of the reasons why his intentions toward Kuwait were sorted out only one day before, by the Intelligence Community. The Gulf Arabs, however, were much more alarmed about his intentions than we were. He was on THEIR doorstep. The critical factor was that he was viewed as spent, worn out economically. What could he do when he was economically flat? People didn't think of the scenario that if he was so economically pressed, why not go bully people who had money, like the Kuwaitis.

Q: Was he almost a bank robber?

WHITE: You mean like Jesse James?

Q: Oh a modern bank robber. That is where the money is, and that is why he robbed banks he said, "Well that is where the money is." If you are out of money, you go to Kuwait. Where you go depends on what you want to do.

WHITE: Yes, that's it. We had incorrectly bought into this thesis that economic weakness meant that he would be compelled to passively sit back and try to slowly rebuild. Saddam didn't want to wait. He wanted instant gratification. He went for the money. He went to rob the bank

Q: Willie Sutton is who I am thinking of.

WHITE: Willie Sutton?

Q: This is tape 4 side 1 with Wayne White. Well we have moved to another tape. One thing before we move to Syria and all that. Would you talk a little bit about the problem of group think which is I am sure for an intelligence group it is a vicious virus. I mean everybody starts thinking alike. I interviewed David Mack. At one point right after at the very end of Gulf I when he went into Kuwait and all, he said he was at a meeting with all sorts of people who were involved in this. They were talking about after Saddam falls what will happen. Somebody said, "What if he doesn't fall?" and it was met by laughter. Could you talk a little about group think. Is this something you have to be very careful about?

WHITE: Group think is a problem. I have been a victim of it myself. Most thought Saddam was finished for all the usual reasons. Maybe conventional wisdom fits this particular episode of groupthink in the sense that people thought that anybody who suffered a humiliating defeat and shattered his army was finished, because in so many cases they have been. What was forgotten, which is why a lot of agencies that have a little extra money and have a few extra bodies are building what they call red cells, people who, regardless of mainstream analysis, take it and try to play devil's advocate. Nobody was playing devil's advocate and saying, "Wait a minute. He has a huge intelligence apparatus dedicated to his protection and the protection of the regime. How exactly are people going to battle their way through his various shields of protection in order to topple him? Are there any signs of disloyalty within his intelligence apparatus?" So it illustrates the importance of just having people who counter with a red cell or devil's advocate approach in order to get people thinking in a more 3-dimensional manner.

Q: Don't the Israelis have something like that?.

WHITE: Literally a few months before I retired, I had a meeting with something I didn't know existed before, this Israeli Devil's Advocate cell in the Israeli equivalent of INR. They have a very robust foreign ministry intelligence office. They have a much smaller intelligence operation than we have for their smaller foreign ministry, but they have about 50 or 60 veteran analysts. Three of them are dedicated to being, and they call it the same in Hebrew, the Devil's Advocate. They came to see me because they knew that I had been a devil's advocate on certain Iraq issues over the last two years.

Q: Was there within INR the whole time we are talking about, was there a structure to have the devil's advocate or it just depended on somebody has a rough personality? You know what I mean.

WHITE: Quite a few INR'niks tend to be devil's advocates by nature, and of course. More commonly what we have seen is INR standing fast confronted by a phalanx of other agencies, and saying, "No!" I did that in the last two years, most notably with regard to the Iraqi insurgency NIE at a time when every single other intelligence agency thought the insurgency was narrowly-based and would not become a significant threat. There wasn't anyone in the room - all the way down to Army intelligence, Navy intelligence, etc. - who felt the insurgency in Iraq in the late summer of 2003 was going to be significant. Yet, all the fundamentals, to me, pointed toward the very dangerous likelihood that a robust insurgency would steadily rise and gain strength as time went on. No one else saw that coming. I fought them for three months through five drafts of a National Intelligence Estimate. Then, toward the end of that period of time, with the number of attacks in Iraq steadily rising, the rest realized, uh-oh, it was actually happening. Anyway, yes, there is groupthink and you have to have people to fight against it as best as possible. Maybe I am the wrong person to ask because INR has been so persnickety in ferreting out key trends, in part because it has people on accounts long enough that they can probe deeper and maybe see some of the trends that warn against groupthink. But I have been trapped in it along with others, at times, most notoriously, I think, regarding the belief that Saddam would fall in 1991. The other thing is that groupthink is not limited to our own system. You get into groupthink in which all of the foreign intelligence agencies we deal with reinforce each other on an international level. There you are.

Q: OK just looking at the time, this is probably a good place to stop because we will be picking up not a completely different theme but the move over when you had the Syrian, Lebanon desk. I suppose Jordan kind of fell in there too or not.

WHITE: Not really. I didn't get involved with Jordan except to brief the king in an earlier incarnation.

Q: Well we will pick that up. You went over there when, '87?

WHITE: I wasn't over there; I just switched portfolios.

Q: Over to that...

WHITE: Yes, I switched portfolios in INR from being analyst for Iraq to becoming the Deputy Chief of the Arab-Israeli Division and Senior Analyst for Syria. I also had a Syria-Lebanon team comprised of me and the more junior Lebanon Analyst, sort of a three hat affair.

Q: OK so we will pick it up at that time and start going through the whole thing. Q: Today is 26 May 2005. Wayne, once again, obviously over time responsibilities change, but you did this, when did you start?

WHITE: In November of 1986, I switched from covering Iraq to being Arab-Israeli division deputy chief, Syrian Analyst, and head of the Lebanon crisis team. But as you know from before, an INR team could be hilariously small! I didn't really get out of the Iraq business completely because my replacement as Iraq analyst was a Foreign Service officer in the administrative cone who was extremely nice and very diligent in her own area of specialization, but had virtually no experience with Iraq or as an intelligence analyst coming in. So I was coaching her at least through about the first six months or so, on various things.

Q: Well let's talk about the Lebanon crisis that you dealt with. The we will move over. What was the Lebanon crisis and what were you all seeing?

WHITE: There was a major dust up in the ongoing and grinding civil war that people had been trying to resolve one way or another since 1976. But it got so dicey that our embassy came under artillery fire. I can remember one of the most poignant meetings I ever had, in this case with Larry Eagleburger when he was Undersecretary for Political Affairs. All concerned were in the room (mainly 6th Floor principals), and I was the senior intelligence briefer. I didn't know whether I was going to be invited to this one final meeting in a series of rather intense gatherings, so I went to the NEA PDAS and told him to slip in INR's view as a favor, which was that we should evacuate the embassy. It had no bomb shelter, and they were getting hit by artillery fire, and if there was a direct hit on the various areas where they had taken refuge above ground, we would have had killed and wounded people. The NEA PDAS said, "No, I'm going to tell Larry what he wants to hear, what a foreign service officer should tell him, which is that the Foreign Service is dangerous sometimes, and we will just have to be prepared to take the hits - even if it means losing people." I thought, Jesus, we're not accomplishing a thing out there. and we should risk people for that?

Fortunately, at the last minute I was invited to the meeting - there had been a communications foul-up. There were about 15 people around a circle with Larry. I briefed the grim details of the situation on the ground, sat down, and Larry said: "I will want your policy opinion, too." Anyhow, I have never seen mind-reading like I saw at that meeting. Larry started on the side where the NEA PDAS was sitting. He had just begun to say that the embassy people should stick it out before Larry interrupted and said, "Wait a minute. I don't want to hear what you think I want to hear. I want to hear a frank opinion about all this." The PDAS again started saying we should stay because the Foreign Service is supposed to hunker down and do the dangerous jobs, be ready to sacrifice, etc. before Larry said, "That's enough. I get it." Then Larry turned to me, and, mind you, intelligence analysts are not really supposed to be giving policy recommendations, but he said, "What do you think we should do?" I said, "Get out. Get those people out." Everyone else around the room said, "Out, out, out." So we evacuated the embassy. I guess that was about in 1989. I am glad people got out because I have a feeling that we would have had casualties if that decision hadn't been made.

Q: As you looked at it, what was the civil war? Who was fighting whom, and what was it about? What were American interests?

WHITE: The civil war, of course, but the most serious thing we watched as the main American interest was the Syrian presence in central Lebanon, and even toward the south in places. With the Israelis in the south - the extreme south - getting hit by various militias that were beholden to the Syrians and Iranians, it was constantly a flashpoint for a potentially serious Syrian-Israeli confrontation (which had occurred in 1982). That was what we were trying mainly to prevent. The war was simply triggered by a country that fell apart that never should have been assembled in the first place. You had Christian versus Druze, Shia versus Sunni, Palestinian versus Christian-even Shi'a vs. Shi'a. There were just too many sub-conflicts there to sort out easily. The common explanation given by Christian Lebanese was that the Palestinians started the civil war, but that is not entirely true. The Palestinians were just a catalyst for an explosion of some sort that was looming because an increasingly frail old oligarchy simply caving in due to various modern developments. The sad fact was that this probably never would have happened if Lebanon had been left as part of Syria by the French. Or, if the French, despite their zeal to create a large, viable Christian-dominated Lebanese state, had not added to the Christian enclave, which could have functioned as a small, compact country, large areas containing many Shias and Sunnis, that might have been another more enduring solution. Over time, higher Muslim birthrates out-populated the Christians, and then the Sunnis, Shia and Druze began questioning aggressively the Christian control of government.

Q: How did we view what was going on in Syria, Assad?

WHITE: It was a very difficult period in Syria. Assad, shortly after I took over, had a mysterious health crisis. He disappeared from view for seven weeks. Everyone speculated about it. The best information that we had was that he had gone into insulin shock, and in a very serious way. He had diabetes. When he did emerge, it was clear that he didn't just take a vacation. He had lost about 30 pounds or so. He was quite frail. Even his voice had weakened. There was a period there where we thought Assad would pass away creating the potential for domestic chaos in Syria. It was amusing, at least in one instance during that period, because George Schultz had a meeting with Assad (either in New York or Damascus), sufficiently soon after the health crisis that Assad still looked frail. Assad, like some people, could tell when someone was looking at him while otherwise engaging in conversation to see if something is wrong. Obviously Assad noticed this. When Assad said good-by to Schultz in the doorway, he shook Schultz's hand so hard that Schultz actually winced, and he is an ex-Marine. Assad said, "You know, I have my ups and downs, but I have a pact with God," which made everyone snicker upon hearing this because, of course, he wasn't very religious at all. "The pact is that no matter what problems I have, whenever there is a challenge, I will have all my strength." Meanwhile he is just crunching Schultz's hand. Obviously, this is the response to looking him over to see if he was still sick and in what way.

Inside Syria there also was a pretty serious economic situation at the time. It was the first time Syria actually considered what people are talking about with respect to reform, liberalization, etc. But Syria weathered that, and vast empires of corruption that dominated Syria beneath Assad among his cronies persisted and exist even today. But again there was overriding concern about an Israeli-Syrian confrontation. In our exchanges with the Israelis, they were terrified about something dubbed "Cold Start" in the late 1980's. Cold start essentially meant that instead of ponderously massing Syrian forces on the Golan in order to hit the Israelis, which the Israelis would easily detect, the Syrians would instead, with forces already there, suddenly lunge forward on the Golan. They (and we) did quite a lot of analytic work on cold start. It went on for probably nine months or so before being tossed aside as impractical. One of the incidents during the period however, that punctuated Israel's potential vulnerability to a certain degree, was a Syrian Mig-23 pilot defecting to Israel. I forget the exact motive, frankly. But he went in low. The Israelis didn't detect him until he was flying along the Galilee inside of Israel and finally, familiar with Syrian air force maps of Israel, located and landed at a small Israeli emergency fighter strip with his intact Mig-23, all of which the Israelis found rather stunning since if he had had bombs, he probably could have made it all the way tat least one major urban center, possibly even Tel Aviv.

Q: What were you getting from the Israelis. Syria was about the only serious force left, with Egypt out of the game, and was Egypt considered really out of the game at this time?

WHITE: Actually, by the early 1980's, the Israelis were making the case that the Egyptians were preparing at least for the contingency of war. Something that I had donsince joining INR, and only gave up when I left this phase of my career and became a supervisor, was INR's representative to the "Olive Harvest" Program. Olive Harvest was a program in which U-2's would fly over the Sinai and over the Golan and then we would generate a cabled readout from the U-2 film for both parties. NPIC (the National Photographic Intelligence Organization - now NIMA) produced a narrative. They would read out what they saw on the ground because there were certain permissible numbers of tanks and artillery within certain zones in the Golan and the Sinai, looking for violations. We would then give those cables (and the film) to the parties in order to show them our analysis was genuine. Our readouts didn't pull any punches.

The Egyptians in zone A of the Sinai, which is the one third of the Sinai closest to the Suez Canal, were busily building all kinds of fortifications, bunkers, reinforced headquarters etc., and the Israelis raised the issue: isn't this a violation of the agreement because it appeared to say that there should be a limit on fortifications and installations, appropriate for only one large Egyptian infantry division (mechanized, I believe). So it started a major brouhaha in the late 1980's requiring the intelligence community to get involved, employing both the lawyers at the State Dept. and the community's analysts. Legal interviewed people who participated in the drafting of the original agreements, which is how you determine what the original intents of such an agreement. You are not going to believe what they came up with. There was a comma at a spot in the language concerning fortifications and installations. State's Office of Legal Affairs came out with an opinion stating that fortifications were not limited, only installations, which seemed like a complete reversal of what the intent of the treaty would have been. Who cares about installations - the fortifications were the main issue. Anyway, the Israelis reallhit the roof over this, implying that the Egyptians could build all the fortifications they wanted in Zone A. Installations are like water tanks, a parking lot, etc., not command bunkers. It became known as the "great comma" affair. Since then or even I should say probably by the early 90's, the Egyptians had completed sufficient bunkering facilities and artillery drive through positions etc. (all fortifications) for the movement of three army corps forward into zone A of the Sinai to hunker down and hold that area of Sinai in case of war, which is quite astounding because they were, as I said before, only allowed to have infrastructure for one reinforced division in that area. Instead, they were preparing for the presence of perhaps 8 or 9 divisions.

Q: Well having also been an enlisted man for four years, it sounds like something you do to keep your troops busy.

WHITE: Well they were keeping the troops busy, but these things were elaborate. These were really good fortifications. There were massive corps headquarters that were deeply embedded in the earth with all kinds of concrete cubicles and ceilings covered with earth.

Q: Was there analysis of what was this? Was this a lack of trust? I mean had trust deteriorated at that point?

WHITE: Trust had deteriorated to some degree. The bloom was off the rose of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Many of the promised economic dividends of the Camp David Accords never really panned out. With various Israeli-related crises involving the Arab world on which Egypt had to take positions, like Lebanon, the Palestinian issue, etc, it became what the Israelis called a "cold peace." But I think the Egyptians were very defensive in their thinking. They learned their lesson at the canal in 1973 when they lunged across and hunkered down into defensive positions. The Israelis hit them, and they badly beat up the Israelis in a defensive battle. Then they decided to lunge forward themselves, in violation of the original plan, because the desperate Syrians on the Golan front asked for a diversionary attack. Only when they made this move did they get creamed by the Israelis. So they probably just wanted to hunker down in the event of a serious crisis and wouldn't be going anywhere.

Q: What were we figuring on Syria at the time? What was Syria up to?

WHITE: Well, Syria at the time wanted to reinforce its vast military arsenal, in order to sustain some measure of "strategic parity" with Israel - at least a credible threat. It was buying some new systems. This was a major issue for the United States and Israel at the time. We argued that the Syrians, despite a few new purchases, were really having money problems, could not substantially modernize their large military, and could never really achieve anything close to parity. They had too much old equipment and were quite unable to take on Israel, either in Lebanon or on the Golan front. The Israelis of course argued the other side. I was at this time the INR representative to something called the Joint Political-Military Group meetings (JPMG) in which the State Department Assistant Secretary for Political Military Affairs would lead a delegation to Israel once per year and Israel's defense ministry director general would return the favor, leading a delegation here. It would start with a briefing, and I was the U.S. briefer. There would be an Israeli briefer as well. Sometimes the difference between the two briefings was considerable enough to start a lot of debate right off the bat.

Q: Were the Soviets pumping a lot of stuff into the Arab world? I mean you mentioned the Mig-23 which is a fast plane. It seems like the training and equipment on the planes the Israelis seemed to be able to knock the Syrian planes out of the sky at will.

WHITE: Yes, they proved that, and during this period the Syrians were getting Mig-29's, which were more advanced, but they still didn't match up to the Israeli-piloted aircraft, and most of their air force was still made up of aircraft inferior to the Mig-29. But there was a problem between Syria and the Soviet Union at this time. Syria was broke, and the Soviets were angry over past purchases that hadn't been paid for, let alone giving them still more stuff on credit. The Soviets had become much more budget-oriented, so there was only a trickle of new systems coming in at times. The thing that most aggravated the Israelis was when the Russians gave the Syrians a long range missile system, the SA-5. The missile system was originally designed back in the early 60's to be placed in the northern Soviet Union facing the Arctic Circle with the objective of bringing down nuclear-capable B-52's 150 to 200 miles beyond Soviet airspace. The Syrians had several sites adjacent to the northern Lebanese-Syrian border. The thing that goosed the Israelis terribly was not so much that this obsolescent system could shoot down a combat plane, but rather that it had tremendous range, and if the Syrians uncorked one of these things in the direction of Lod Airport in Israel it could hit a jumbo jet landing or taking off from there. It could also bring down slower military aircraft such as AWAC's deep in the Israeli rear. But, despite all this, the Syrians were in a defensive mode. They weren't looking for a fight at the time.

Q: What was happening internally? What was the problem with the Syrian economy?

WHITE: The problem with the Syrian economy was that first it was dysfunctional, a socialist relic that never really gained any steam. The other problem with the economy was corruption. Assad himself wasn't involved all that much. He lived in a modest apartment. But those people around him were running the equivalent of a kleptocracy in which various corruption empires flourished. Assad's brother, the defense minister, and various other regime big-shots had huge financial and smuggling empires, skimming off of contracts, customs fees, etc. The place was an unmade bed economically.

Q: Were we looking at possible coups, civil unrest or anything like that in Syria?

WHITE: Not really. After the destruction of the Muslim Brotherhood and the horrendous Hama uprising in 1982, we were astonished at the extent to which the Muslim Brotherhood challenge faded. They put practically all of their fighters into Hama and allowed them to be surrounded and destroyed. I covered the Hama uprising (when I was Iraq Analyst, I was the backup analyst for Ba'thist Syria) and learned a lesson which was that if you look straight down on a city that might be very badly damaged, involving house to house fighting, direct tank fire into bottom floors, etc., you might not see it very easily. Most roofs are intact, but much below rooftop level is gutted. A lot of the damage in Fallujah in Nov. 2004 was of this nature. Speaking of Fallujah, it might have been worthwhile, despite the damage, if 90% of all the Iraqi insurgents had holed themselves up in there and were also destroyed in one fell swoop. But large numbers either never went there to fight or slipped away. That said, I think the Iraq insurgency is much larger than what the Muslim Brotherhood could field in Syria, so that probably wouldn't have worked nearly as well as Assad's bloody victory at Hama.

Q: What were we looking at for a replacement for Assad, and what would be the consequences as we saw them?

WHITE: Well, we saw something developing that would eventually collapse, spawning potential instability. We saw Assad carefully grooming his son, Basil to become the next Hafez al-Assad. That grooming started in the 80's. Basil started as an officer in the Republican Guard. He was given military training and other things he would need to rule the country. That was the track Assad was on, and one in fact that intensified after his health crisis. In the 1990's, far beyond the period we are discussing, Basil would die in a car accident. Assad would have to reach out to his other son, a young ophthalmologist in London, and bring him back and make him the designated successor, which has worked in a more iffy fashion. People are always writing about whether Bashar al-Assad is in charge or whether the other oligarchs, powerful empire builders around him, are in fact running the show now. I think it is a mix of both.

Q: Was this, Assad's role centered on, let me get the right name, Alawi Tribe or was it broader than that?

WHITE: Yes, the Alawis, a rather bizarre Muslim offshoot, were his base. But he recognized that he could not rule that narrowly, and reached out to the majority Sunni Arab power centers in Syria. I had many discussions when I was in Damascus on some business, with Sunnis - especially members of the Sunni merchant, professional and governmental classes in Damascus, who had, effectively, bought in. I think the fact that Bashar with his iffy credentials taking over after Assad's death almost seamlessly indicated that his father had successfully brought much of Syria's Sunni elite into the regime's mainstream. He gave them access to those huge empires of corruption, and even brought others into leading positions in his central government. At one point, perhaps the third or fourth most powerful man in Syria, now former Vice-President Khaddam, was Sunni. There simply weren't enough Alawis to go around, so Assad had to reach out to the Sunnis, and he did that quite successfully. The only Sunni Arab challenge was the Muslim Brotherhood, and it was crushed. They were crushed largely by elite units that were heavily Alawi, but there were Sunnis in them too.

Q: How did you find reporting form our embassy in Damascus and sort of the relations with the desk, because I know at one time, the name escapes me, Bob and I forget his last name, got into a difficulty with George Schultz. Do you remember the Ambassador?

WHITE: No, I don't. When I was working Syria, the two ambassadors there were Bill Eagleton and Ed Djerejian. I had had very good relations with both. Bill was a friend from my work on the Iraq side of the house, and Ed and I got to know each other very well and just got along famously from the start. Ed and I had a lot of fun. Every time I visited Damascus on TDY and came calling at his office for the first time, we had a standard gag routine. I would start calling him "Your Imperial Highness" and he woulask me not to soil his office carpet by rolling around on it in mock submission - great sense of humor.

Anyway, I wrote an INR paper at the time dealing with a host of these Syrian internal economic - and related political - problems with a lot of analytic angles. It was an IRR, as we referred to a special category of longer INR analyses called Intelligence Research Reports. This is something an analyst could take anywhere from two weeks to several months to research and draft. A copy of this Syrian one went off to Embassy Damascus, but I never heard anything. I thought, gee Ed, I did all this work and you weren't even interested. Why didn't I hear anything? Anyhow, in the course of business, I passed through Damascus once again. Ed asked me to come into the embassy conference room, and everyone was there from the mission, the Econ officer, Political officer, the DCM, and other key members of the "Country Team," such as our Military Attache. Anyway, Ed pulled out copies of my paper and hands them all around. He said, "All these months I have been taking little nuggets out of your paper at staff meetings and tossing them out for discussion." They all thought it was coming from me, but was all coming from this thing. Now I am letting them know where it all came from, they can all have copies, and we can discuss things more generally.

I thought the reporting was very high quality. There was one juncture though, which was very instructional. I believe it was mid-December 1987. Reporting came in from various sides of the house, mutually supporting, that Assad had decided to take action that could destabilize his entire government. This threw everyone into a panic because doing this would have been suicidal. He might not survive this kind of thing. Even if he succeeded it could cause destabilization. Everyone had to write it up in some form. Schultz wanted INR to do something with it. CIA concluded that the reporting was all bad. Since this was clearly way out of character, and he is a cold, calculating ruler with a lot of insight, this was all bogus reporting. I thought the reporting was so consistent from several sources that it couldn't be bogus. So I sent quite a different take up to Schultz. I said, "It is all true," but what had happened was that somebody who was close to Assad simply heard of a temper tantrum. Twenty minutes later it probably meant nothing. It was just like somebody says, "I'm going to kill that guy.' Of course you are not going to kill a friend, coworker, the plumber or whomever. It just means you are really angry at a certain point in time. So Schultz was told: "It is true, he said it, but it means nothing, and don't worry." And nothing ever happened. But it is funny how there are times when you wish you hadn't seen any intelligence in the first place.

Q: No I mean this...

WHITE: That kind of thing causes misplaced concern, panic, etc.

Q: It causes a panic but then there is always the problem of someone saying "Won't somebody rid me of this meddlesome priest," And all of a sudden all hell breaks loose

WHITE: But it is interesting to what degree intelligence analysis has to start with a dose of good old common sense. You've got to focus on the leadership, its center of gravity, and the psychology of it all. To the best of your ability, you must try to put yourselfin their shoes. There is simply not enough who can really do that sort of thing. Make the person you are evaluating human. Many analysts, especially the young, entry-level ones thought they were doing that, but primarily were just looking at the reporting. I was putting a lot of effort into trying to get deeper into a personality, despite having less time for such things in an understaffed INR - it just meant longer hours.

Q: How did you find the use of INR reports you gave an analyses, not reports but analyses. In NEA did you get a feel that people listened more to what we were talking about because of the complications of NEA as compared to analysts from Asia or European or African affairs?

WHITE: No, I am sorry Stu. I have never really done that kind of comparison. But there is another kind of comparison I referred to earlier when I said we found out that many in the regional bureaus wished that INR would go away so they could send up their own unchallenged advice to the seventh floor. On the Syrian issue at this time, NEA was less receptive to what we were saying than the embassy was. Ed Djerejian and Bill Eagleton knew me, had faith in me, and were very interested in the analysis, and would send in requests personally. NEA would get copies of whatever I sent out, but I got the impression, especially during NEA Asst. Sec. Kelly's tenure, that they were less interested, especially Kelly himself. The seventh floor was more receptive. Because I was involved with the JPMG, which was led by the assistant secretary for political and military affairs, I had a very personal relationship with PM assistant secretaries at that time. They were quite receptive.

Q: I want to come to the Arab Israeli thing in a minute, but first on the Syrian thing. How was Syria during the time you were dealing with relating or lack thereof to Iraq?

WHITE: Oh that is an interesting area.

Q: And Iran

WHITE: Iraq and Syria make for a terrific comparison, not only because they were both Ba'th Party states, but also because they were dominated by minorities. At that time in fact, I compared them in a paper (another IIR) entitled "Iraq and Syria: Ba'thism Beleaguered," most of which I believe was declassified shortly before I left government. Saddam was still mired in his war with Iran, and Assad had his health crises, dysfunctional government, and a struggling economy. Yesterday at MEI, somebody from an agency I won't identify working on a major paper wanted to interview me on this very subject, comparing the Syrian and Iraqi Ba'th parties, although your question went farther. There are dramatic differences. Iraqi Ba'thism was similar to Stalinism, with its intense internal controls, purges, sheer brutality on a larger scale, etc. Iraqis are very disciplined by nature, and Saddam was a real brute. It was a heavily-controlled operation and truly what was called in the title of a book, a "Republic of Fear." Syria was much different. Since I spent so much time in Iraq, I noticed the difference immediately - on my first visit to Syria in 1985. It was what I called Levantine Ba'thism. This was an authoritarian state, but with less of that almost obsessive control found in Iraq.

Q: You are making a slugging gesture.

WHITE: That gesture probably related to Iraq's hard-edged style of Ba'thism. I don't want to say it was (or is) anything goes in Syria, but there wasn't this incredible hands-on, in your face control where you would see the faces of officials you know go white in a meeting if somebody said something that was only slightly critical of the government. There always seemed to be, in Iraq, somebody in the room that would get back to one of the intelligence services or the Ba'th Party with any derogatory information, and the individual involved would be picked up and killed or imprisoned. Syria was much different.

I will just illustrate this with one interesting anecdote. I was in Syria on one of my TDY's there, and had lunch at the DCM's residence with a former Syrian major general who now served in the Syrian foreign ministry as their head of something a bit similar to INR. He didn't have what we had in the way of resources, to say the least. He only had a staff of about 20 people. He fed off of a lot of press reports and a few little bits of intelligence that he could glean from Syrian intelligence which usually held things close to the chest and wouldn't disseminate. He was interested in how he could make his operation more relevant, like INR. We actually sent him a brochure on INR. This was a nice little guidebook INR did under Hugh Montgomery in the early 1980's on what products we generate, what kind of work we do otherwise, etc. We gave him this unclassified brochure so he could do his little thing in the Syrian foreign ministry a tad better and especially so the embassy could have improved contact with him. In the midst of the lunch he just came out and said: "You know, I am a Sunni, not an Alawite. Those Alawites are weird. I don't understand what they believe." The Alawite sect is indeed pretty strange. Anyway, he said to me and David Ransom, our DCM, "Could either of you get me a book that has been published in Lebanon about the Alawites so I can pass it around, and we can find out about them?" This would have been unheard of in Iraq. You go into an office and you can have a fairly informative discussion with a Syrian official, at any level. They were much more open than their Iraqi counterparts.

Q: Was there any collusion or ties with Iran during the Iran Iraq war?

WHITE: Absolutely. There was a deep hatred between the two regimes.Q: You were saying?

WHITE: Yes, all the way to the end of the war there was an air bridge between Damascus International Airport and Mehrabad Airport (outside Tehran) in Iran. High value military cargoes that couldn't wait for shipment, often from Europe or the Far East, would fly the hump, skirting Iraq and moving over Turkey into Iran. Many people tried to stop this from happening by getting the Turks to try to block the flights. The Turks didn't want to get involved, so they just let it continue. But, yes, Syria was an active supporter of Iran. The only other country in the Arab world with a similar orientation was Libya; Qadhafi supported Iran for various bizarre reasons, but not to the extent Syria did. In any case, it kept going on and on. The Iraqis only tried to interfere with that air bridge once. You would think, as an Iraqi, "Lets pick off one of these jumbo jets full of high tech parts for Iranians," and they did - once. In 1982, the Iraqis lunged into that stream and pickled one plane. It is amazing how bad your luck can be at certain times.

Q: When you say pickled a plane what do you mean?

WHITE: Sent an air to air missile right up its tailpipe and blew it up. This is a military expression I picked up from those CENTCOM people I used to travel with so much. But of all the planes to nail going between Damascus and Tehran, they destroyed an executive jet, not a cargo plane, containing the Algerian foreign minister conducting shuttle diplomacy in an effort to produce truce in the Iran-Iraq War. Of all planes to hit, I mean it was probably a one in a thousand mistake. After that the Iraqis just forgot about doing anything about the Syrian-Iranian air bridge. And, yes, things like the air bridge just increased the bitterness between Assad and Saddam.

You know we talk about these two countries as being both Ba'th party regimes as if they have (or had) something very much in common. We have already talked about the different nature of the regimes, but essentially both maintained distinct identities. The Ba'th Party itself by the late 1980's played very little role in actual governance in either country. Both men felt they could only trust their family and a relatively small circle of longstanding cronies. Therefore, in order to bolster their rule, they put all the emphasis on those people, elite army units, intelligence services, etc. The Ba'th Party was used as a legitimizing rubber stamp for important state decisions. When you wanted to embark on a major new initiative, you would call Ba'th Party leaders together. I used to liken it to how Roman emperors from the first Century AD all the way to the end of the empire would constantly invoke the "Senate and People of Rome" (SPQR) as being the source of their legitimacy and power, when the senate and people of Rome had virtually no power at all. That is about where the Ba'th Party stood. We knew there was going to be a major change in policy when Assad or somebody would call a Baath Party conclave. It just meant he had made a decision and he want to announce it, wrapped in Ba'thist legitimacy.

Q: Did the oil situation raise its head for your point of view.

WHITE: Yes, Syria allowed an Iraqi pipeline to pass through initially back in the 70's, and then cut it off rather quickly over pricing disputes in the mid-70's, only reinforced when the two regimes had a big snit in 1979 when Saddam took over from Hassan al-Bakr, his sort of co-ruler. Bakr was shoved aside relatively gently as being in bad health (a lie). The way Saddam consolidated after that was by accusing a number of members of the Iraqi leadership of being part of a Syrian plot against the Iraqi government, a plot which never existed. It was like Stalin's purges of the 1930's ending in the early 1950's amidst the "Doctor's Plot," only because of Stalin's death. Saddam singled out various members of the Iraqi cabinet and Ba'th leadership that might challenge him in the future because of sympathy with Bakr's desire to reduce tensions with Syria, and had them executed with the entire surviving leadership present so they also would have "blood on their hands." That just did it because Assad had no plot going, and cut off all ties with Baghdad. Then, in 1982, in order to make money and indicate he wasn't entirely siding with Iran in the war, Assad reopened the pipeline again. Then the Hama uprising, which we discussed earlier, exploded. When Assad crushed the uprising in Hama, he apparently found some bits of evidence that the Iraqis had been supporting the Muslim Brothers. We assessed that the connection between Iraq and the Muslim Brothers was marginal. The Muslim Brothers were an indigenous and very powerful organization. They didn't need all that much external support. Whatever was really true, that did it. Assad shut the pipeline all over again, after being open only a few months, and it remained shut for the rest of the Iran-Iraq war.

Q: From our point of view, how did Syria stand regarding aid and comfort to terrorists during that time?

WHITE: They were in it up to their eyeballs supporting primarily Palestinian terrorist groups. There was even a group that broke off from Arafat that tried, with Syrian encouragement, to be an alternative PLO. In Syrian eyes, Arafat had become too moderate. They also helped Iran support Hezbollah, even giving them a major base on the road between Damascus and the Lebanese border, so they were deeply into terrorist activity and backed just about any group hitting the Israelis from the mess that was Lebanon. Among other things, they felt their support for these terrorist groups, all of whom were directed mainly against the Israelis, was a major card in any future negotiations with Israel. In other words: "If you give us the Golan back, we will neuter all of these groups, and you won't have any more problems."

I was at a Middle East conference, chairing a panel of State Department people down in Lexington, Va., about five years ago. The panel did a good job of giving a very frank presentation. They were talking about Syria, Lebanon, things like that. The panelists were mainly at the office director level. And the issue of Syria and terrorism came up. There was a Syrian gentleman, a scholar I suppose, who had come all the way from Damascus for the conference. He stood up to ask one of the last questions. He said, "I don't understand why you continue to talk about," meaning the whole panel, "Syrian terrorism." I have never seen any evidence of terrorism in Syria. My government has never said anything about such terrorism. This is a false claim." I had an opportunity in public to say something I had always wanted to say to people like that. I said: "I understand exactly what you are talking about. You are right in everything you say about not seeing or hearing anything. But any government involved in terrorism, involved in extremely damaging and bloody operations, is not going to publish it in the newspaper, and is not going to inform its own citizens about such dirty tricks. But, BELIEVE ME, your government is deeply involved in terrorism, and it is no surprise that you would be the last to know about it." He sat down; his face was ashen. It suddenly dawned on him: "Dear God, why would they tell me? They would hide it." A lot of others in the audience were laughing - or nodding seriously - by the end of my response.

Q: Did we have any cards to play with Syria?

WHITE: Just one. We were the only ones who had any influence with Israel. If Syria didn't want a war with Israel, which it did not, we were best positioned to lower the likelihood of something like that happening. The Israelis disagreed with this of course, like I have told you before. We could presumably lean on the Israelis at times of great tension, trouble in southern Lebanon, for example, and pass messages between the two, which we did, selectively. Sometimes there were messages we didn't want to pass, shamelessly self-serving and of no value in any meaningful exchange. But there were sometimes messages that were warnings and very interesting exchanges.

Q: Did we see any realistic solution to the Golan Heights and was that really the issue between Israel and Syria or was it more?

WHITE: It was (and is) very much the Golan. It has always been the Golan. There are other things, but the Golan is 90% of the game. Hafez al-Assad was determined to get the entire Golan back. Being defense minister when the Golan was lost made it a very personal mission to restore it to Syria. In fact there was an Israeli former head of Mossad who became a peacenik. He came visiting me. Long after I left the job of Senior Analyst for Syria and went on to became a division chief for things not involving Israel and Syria, he wanted to come to see me because he had gotten to know me during my official trips to Israel. He said, "I have a Golan peace plan, and I want to run it by you." The Golan peace plan was for the Syrians to get everything back except for a tiny little three or four kilometer strip along the Israeli border, just enough gave the Israelis a hold on the plateau for early warning purposes. It was also a nice little defensive feature. I said, "It won't work. They want the whole thing." He went public with his plan anyway, and it was just slapped down by the Syrians. They were determined to get everything back or remain in a state of war with Israel. If they made peace without getting it all back, much of the regime's propaganda about why it needed to have a large army, why it needed to have security, why it needed to divert resources away from desperately needed public projects and such would go up in smoke. Frankly, I think Assad was content not to get the Golan back, if necessary, because of all the problems it might cause, as consequences of peace, with Syria being in serious economic shape. These problems would become dramatically more apparent in the wake of peace between Israel and Syria.

Q: Did we see Syria as being a viable country and even a flourishing one if it got rid of its lousy political structure?

WHITE: Not really. The socialist economy and widespread corruption would have been very difficult to turn around.

Q: All right, end with peace. In other words, you know just looking at it, it looks like Syria could be quite a productive country.

WHITE: One major problem was that she relies, in part, on oil exports, and she has relatively low production figures and very low grade crude that only a few refineries in the Mediterranean process; it is so bad that it has a very high percentage of unwanted refining byproducts, and much of it is used for asphalt. So a lot of Syrian crude has paved roads in Italy. They only produce 4-5 hundred thousand barrels a day, and declining, which wasn't nearly sufficient. But with this faltering economy, and with a military badly in need of upgrades, the Israelis kept flagging the threat. In an amusing aside here, I had a meeting with an Israeli member of their military intelligence in the huge defense ministry complex in Tel Aviv. This is about '88-'89. The major involved would later go on to be head of assessments for DMI (Israeli Military Intelligence). It was him, me, and an Israeli reserve captain, an economist, sitting next to him. The major, who would later rise rapidly, couldn't see the Israeli officer sitting next to him at the table and what that guy was doing. The major was trying to give me the pitch about how great Syria was doing (pumping it up as a threat), and there were five or six times when I disagreed with him strongly. Before I even said anything, each time the major made what I thought was an especially exaggerated comment about Syria's strength, the captain next to him would shake his head side to side, indicating that he didn't agree at all. This is so Israeli. They are so individually precocious that while one Israeli is giving me the party line, the guy next to him is shaking his head side to side signalling that a lot of people at the Ministry of Defense don't believe the party line.

Q: We talked about oil, but what about water? How did water play in Syria at the time?

WHITE: Water shortages have been a real problem, one that is increasing. One main issue was the Assad Dam on the Euphrates. Turkey embarked on a vast development project to try to stabilize an unruly southeast Turkey by building massive dams and it was choking off the flow south, and really creating a significant shortfall of water down the line, especially while the dams were filling. We have gotten through that patch now, and I think that is pretty much over, but Damascus itself drew its water from other sources, and they have been increasingly troubled as well. You know, I think the most tragic water issue, which nobody ever talks about, is what was not done because of the long Syrian-Israeli-Jordanian face-off. Along the Syrian border with Jordan runs the Yarmuk River, which feeds into the Jordan. In winter, the flow from the Yarmuk can be quite considerable. But much of it runs down into the Jordan and then just sweeps into the Dead Sea and is lost. People since the 1950's have wanted to put a dam on the Yarmuk to catch that winter flow and then, using controlled releases into the Jordan, feed major Jordanian and Israeli needs. But with the tensions in the region, and with the Israelis saying they would attack the dam if it was built, the Yarmuk dam project, surveyed by USAID in the 1950's, just never happened. So, economic development in Israel and Jordan has been seriously hampered as a result of this continuing mess. There are many examples of where the Romans and people like the Nabateans before them were controlling water and using it more efficiently than the modern states that are there now, which is a pretty sad situation.

Q: Well to turn to the Arab-Israeli side, you were dealing with this from when to when?

WHITE: Late '86 to '90.

Q: In '86 what was the situation, the Arab Israeli situation?

WHITE: When I picked it up it was relatively inactive. The tensions were there, but there was a lull of sorts, in part because some of the focus in the Middle East at that time was on the Iraq-Iran War. I wrote a report that went out every month to interested regional governments called the Iraq-Iran "Monthly Report." It drew heavily from intelligence sources and analysis, and it was given to the leaderships of all the GCC states. The distribution kept expanding. The Jordanians wanted it. The Egyptians wanted it. Then it went to the Turks. This bridged the gap between my briefing trips. It was actually quite an extraordinary product. Recipients were greatly appreciative because I fought hard to get information cleared for release no matter where it came from because it was only going to a very narrow slice of their senior leadership, and we didn't have to worry all that much about abuse because most leaderships out there jealously guard information. In other words, it was viewed as a big benny for, say, the Emir, defense and foreign ministers, as well as intelligence chiefs, but they probably would never give it to anyone else. We got reports back from, for example, King Hussein and President Mubarak about the quality of this report. I put that thing out for four years. It was an exciting, albeit taxing, exercise.

Q: How did we view the situation between the west bank Palestinian and Israeli relationship?

WHITE: Well, during the period I was covering such matters, again very little was happening, especially at first. When we move forward to 1988, we get into the Palestinians' "First Intifada". Compared with what happened between 2000 and now (the especially bloody "Second Intifada"), that first one was relatively mild, but it really shocked the Israelis - you know, shades of a popular uprising. But it involved mainly rock throwing and that sort of thing the first time around, instead of car bombs, suicide bombings, and uglier things that would come later. In terms of casualties, the first Intifada was relatively limited, but it was a stunning statement politically that Palestinian patience finally was really running out. And, as I said, it was the first time the Israelis encountered not isolated terrorism on the part of the PLO or its various constituent groups, but something more akin to a popular uprising extending from civil disobedience to rock throwing to occasional shootings. The Israelis were agonizing throughout as to how they could possibly hold the bulk of the West Bank if it continued draining off their resources, both military and economic. They were also looking at a situation relating to their military, its readiness, and an angle that would become even more of a problem in the Second Intifada that started in 2000, following the collapse of negotiations between Barak and Arafat. They were much more concerned about an issue that we now have in front of us now here in the States because of Iraq, and that is one of an army designed for conventional warfare being dragged into a counterinsurgency mode for which it wasn't designed, and its readiness being worn down. The Israelis have a draft, so they didn't have to worry about people not going to recruiting stations, which has been problem at times for us because of Iraq. But there are parallels. They were very deeply worried about that issue alone, particularly at a time when they were whipping themselves up into a real state of concern about what I discussed before, the potential for a "cold start" Syrian offensive on the Golan. It turned out that it was as unlikely as we told them it was, but they truly believed it themselves at that time - at least many of them did.

Q: Well were we looking at intifada working on the Israeli public? I mean this is pretty awful watching kids throwing rocks at armed soldiers. PR Wise it was not a good situation with the Israelis.

WHITE: It made them look very bad, and many opposed measures taken against the Palestinians. Some of the things that they did in response to this, like developing a rock throwing vehicle, made them look either even worse - or damn silly - at times. This was a contraption that would go forward in a narrow street with a big flail hurling rocks just like the Palestinians throwing rocks, which was a rather bizarre, to say the least. But the Israelis found that there was no way to get a solid handle on this kind of thing. It began to disrupt something that today is very unfortunate. Despite some things thahad been happening positively between Israelis and Palestinians, and I am including that group of Israeli Arabs who essentially are also Palestinians, the intifada seized everyone's attention. Trust was being steadily undermined. People might think what trust? The Palestinians hate the Israelis. Not necessarily so, at least back then - hundreds of thousands of Palestinians would go into Israel every day to work on construction projects, Kibbutzim, agricultural projects, etc. Some even had white collar jobs in Israel in addition to Israel's own Arab population which had in some ways bonded with Israelis that lived near them or people at their job site. It was the beginning of closures during which Palestinians were not allowed to cross the frontier for a week or so to reach their jobs. It began a ripping effect between Palestinians and Israelis and the almost wholesale breakdown of much of what trust there was. In the second, violent and far bloodier Intifada, that kind of trust was badly shattered. The economic connections between Israel and the Palestinians were largely destroyed. The Israelis started importing labor from the Far East and South Asia in lieu of Palestinians.

Q: Well were we writing analyses of whither Israel and Palestine?

WHITE: Yes, a number of them. I was deputy office director, a division chief, and, earlier, deputy chief of the Arab-Israeli Division. In that earliest incarnation, I was writing mainly on the Syrian dimension and on Lebanon. But we had some really good analysts working the Palestinian issue. These analysts I believe were the best in their field at the time. Aaron Miller, who would go on to become part of the Dennis Ross negotiating team, probably was the best, but there were-and are-several other real standouts in INR/NESA.

Q: What about reports from Tel Aviv and reports from our consul general in Jerusalem? Were these, I mean how stood things. I mean these are two separate powers. It is a little bit, this has been going on for?

WHITE: There has been an assumption that the Consulate General in Jerusalem is there to serve the Palestinian population, all the way from visas to meetings, whereas Embassy Tel Aviv serves the Israeli side of the house. And, yes, there were little tiffs at times between the two missions, some amusing, some unfortunate. I was, however, struck a few times by the unrealistic nature of some of the reporting coming out of ConGen Jerusalem. Was the reporting out of Tel Aviv in some cases a tad tilted toward the Israeli side at times? Of course! But especially during the First Intifada, ConGen Jerusalem exaggerated the extent to which that challenge was going to turn things around for the Palestinians, maybe force the Israelis to give up the West Bank, etc. I went on a trip to Israel - another kind of briefing trip in which INR would exchange views with the Israeli foreign ministry's INR. As I've said before, the Israelis have a very vigorous analytic shop in their Israeli foreign ministry, very much like our own. It is badly outnumbered in the Israeli intelligence bureaucracy. Compared to DMI, the best counterpart to our CIA, the foreign ministry Office of Research is a little think tank. Their INR probably has 45 to 50 people. But they are very similar to our people. They were on accounts a long time, persnickety, and often right. I went over with Mort Abramowitz on a visit to the Israeli INR counterpart, Mort Abramowitz being INR director at the time.

In the course of that visit, Mort and I had a meeting with ConGen Jerusalem, at the Consul General's residence after some light late afternoon snacks. I don't think I should use names here. It would embarrass people. But anyway we were having drinks. They said to us that the Intifada can't go on much longer because the TV images were so outrageous and would have a serious impact on the American the public. The American public would turn against Israel and have greater sympathy for the Palestinians. Mort and I looked at each other and said: "What TV coverage are you talking about? You know if you watch the CBS, NBC or ABC evening news, maybe you will see something about it once per week." This was about a year into the Intifada. They said, "What? It's on all the Middle East stations every night." We had to tell them: "You are watching the wrong stuff, at least with respect to what Americans see. Track the American media, and most nights you won't see a damn thing on all this." They were shocked. But it showed how isolated they had become in their Palestinian world.

Q: Did you find in dealing with Israeli intelligence, INR and all, we have these very close relations, but they are also always trying to sell us a bill of goods.

WHITE: Actually, with the research department people, it wasn't that bad at all, and depended on the subject and, sometimes, the individual.

Q: Did you have a problem, in other words, something would come from Israeli intelligence, and I am sure it sent antennae going in Congress and maybe the Pentagon and there we would be in State. I am just guessing but saying wait a minute, because there is this myth about the Israelis really get it right. Of course they have really gotten it wrong a couple of times almost disaster, but could you talk about that relationship.

WHITE: Oh, that's a much bigger issue. The Israelis - mainly DMI, not so much our foreign ministry counterparts, as I said before - often would tailor their intelligence to prove a point and move policy, but they did provide a lot of useful information. At times, however, the pitching of certain angles was obvious at these JPMG exchanges. I would get up there as I said before and give a briefing - straight. The other guy would give a briefing that was not entirely inconsistent with mine, but usually a few notable departures, always portraying Israel as more threatened, of course, say, Syria, more threatening. But I will give you a more recent example of how aware the Israelis have become or had become by the late 1990's of their credibility problem on the intelligence side. The Israeli intelligence community writ large, especially DMI, apparently realized that they were losing credibility on this side of the Atlantic on key issues and did something about it, at least on one of those issues. INR saw eye to eye almost consistently with Israeli counterpart in the foreign ministry. We were almost in lockstep, at times. They were almost all viewed sometimes as intelligence rebels in their own system. They were about as clean as one could get, very frank, and sometimes engaged in squabbles with other parts of their own intelligence community.

But anyway, in the late 1990's, and I won't get into the subject (it is classified), the Israelis came here with a major road show involving all kinds of details that I had never seen them put forward before. We were called over to the Pentagon, me in my context of being head of the Iraq, Iran, Arabian Peninsula and Maghreb Division along with my superior, to see this along with the joint chiefs and a few other senior DIA and CIA people. The Israelis gave a different type of briefing. They put up slide after slide. They all had one new thing in common. It looked like the American flag if you can picture it. In the corner where the stars were (picture it as much enlarged), there was a list of bullets. The Israelis would list these as the facts - what they know for sure. Outside that box, where stripes would be in the American flag, was analysis, what they had extrapolated, what they assume those facts mean and a few other things that they have that they regarded as interesting, but didn't view as confirmed intelligence. It was a brilliant job, and the material inside the box was pretty darn good. It was the best Israeli briefing I had ever seen because they had realized their credibility problem was significant enough that they had to make clear that they were separating fact from analysis (or, possibly, spin). So there has been an evolution in their approach to us in the last five years, at least on one topic.

Q: ??? with all those transitions.

WHITE: Yes, there is one thing involving all those JPMG exchanges I should mention. It might have been the last one I participated in. It was out at Strategic Air Command. The Israelis began taking us to off sites in Israel, the Eilat seaside resort, for example. So we decided to take them to an off-site in the States. Part of my briefing was on Iraq, although the war had ended at least a year before. Our Iraq people had been wrong regarding the assumption that after an exhausting eight year war, Saddam would turn inward for awhile and try to get his economic house in order, which was badly needed. Anyway, with regard to the rest of the Middle East the judgment still was that, generally, he wasn't going to be all that active.

Going beyond that, I was briefing on that situation, and Saddam had just placed a few missile launchers in the western panhandle of Iraq aimed at Israel. But these were very odd. They were fixed launchers, not like a typical Scud or Scud-C, which move around with their support vehicle we called a TEL, a transporter, erector, launcher. No these launchers were just fixed in concrete pointing at Israel-terribly vulnerable. I dismissed the importance of these sites saying that only in case of a war, a war between you and him, a situation that was occurring involving him in some way that he would exploit by firing at Israel to get sympathy. That you fear, but these terribly vulnerable fixed launchers were just out there as sort of a statement (even a propaganda stunt), not first-strike platforms, to show that if you go after him again, like bombing his nuclear facility in 1981, he would respond. Ellie Rubenstein, who was the Israeli cabinet secretary, very close to the prime minister, just got up and he started a tirade. "He's a bastard. They are bastards. How can you say this. Of course they are going to use that stuff." I had to say, "Ellie, yes I know Saddam is a bastard, but that doesn't mean he is going to launch a surprise, first strike assault against you. There is no unilateral strike that is going to be launched against Israel, especially from these sites, because that would be virtually suicidal, particularly if carried out with chemically-tipped missiles." This was the beginning of Israel's deep fear that Saddam would indeed strike west. He wouldn't do it unilaterally, but in 1991 he began launching missiles against Israel to gain sympathy from other Arab states while under intense Coalition bombardment.

Q: Did you run into in the little buzz saws on our analysis of INR coming up with analysis about Israel or its Arab neighbors that didn't sit very well say with staff members of Congress or something like that?

WHITE: Well, you raise an interesting side issue on Congress. For reasons beyond my comprehension, INR analysis was not sent to the Hill for the longest time. That situation only changed in the 1990's, thank God, and the Hill found our analysis quite refreshing. That situation did not change until about six or seven years ago. So they weren't getting anything.

Q: Was the CIA giving their analyses?

WHITE: Oh, yes. That is what the Congress was working from - CIA and DIA analysis. They didn't see ours. If they heard about something and wanted a copy, it would be sent up to the Hill, but the daily Secretary's Morning Summary, which went everywhere else, did not go to the two intelligence committees on the Hill, again, until the 1990's.

Q: Did you get the feeling was this State Department's innate lack of ability to deal with Congress, or was this from somewhere else or something? Did you get any feel for why?

WHITE: There is something to that. INR's Congressional liaison assets were very thin. I twice raised the issue of sending our stuff to the Hill with our front office, I think once in the late 80's and once in the early to mid 90's. Maybe the mid 1990's prod helped get them started thinking about it. The response each time was very discouraging: "No, we don't want to get into that. This is for the Secretary." I said, "Well what do you mean it is for the Secretary? It goes to the NSC; it goes to the CIA; it goes to ambassadors in the field. It goes to the military commands. The Congressional intelligence committees in the Senate and the House are the only parties left that it is not going to." But there seemed to be some real push-back on this issue from within the INR Front Office, and I never really understood why, Stu.

Q: It sounds like a bit of our absolute lack of understanding power in the United States and the importance of getting Congress into the act. It is almost something within the State Department culture.

WHITE: I think you are right on the money. That said, it was very sad because we would of course show up for intelligence committee or the foreign relations committee gatherings to brief whenever they requested same on this or that from the broader Intelligence Community, sometimes just from INR. I remember on the day after Iraq invaded Kuwait the entire community was asked to appear before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in order to provide an explanation as to why we didn't see it coming. I represented INR. There was INR, CIA, DIA, and others. I don't know how many times we participated, not in that particular session which was rather rowdy, but in one other session Congressmen and Congresswomen come up to me afterwards to say that they really appreciated INR's perspective and how INR was more forthcoming than CIA: "You are so much more frank than these other agencies," said one Congresswoman, with several others nodding. And we were. I was struck by the way CIA sometimes would just hold back relevant information, and for no obvious reason. The most recent example was when in a closed session on Iraq WMD, when the Congress asked about the issue of political pressure on analysts, apparently some analysts who had been pressured held back.

Q: This is tape five, side one with Wayne White.

WHITE: Yes, there was a session on the Hill in which I think was the Senate intelligence committee asked for not only the section chiefs or whatever to show up on Iraq/WMD to examine why the call was wrong and to what degree pressure from the Administration played a role in that.

Q: Weapons of mass destruction.

WHITE: Weapons of mass destruction, and they wanted hear from the individual analysts. A number of people were there, including supervisors. I wasn't involved in WMD, but I heard this directly from Christian Westerman, a fellow who was our WMD maven and was the one Bolton, you know, threatened in an attempt to get Christian to manipulate intelligence. Anyway Christian was at the session, and the Congressmen and Congresswomen were so distrustful of the supervisors that when they asked the question, "Were any of you pressured to change your intelligence analysis?" and the managers began reassuringly, the members apparently said something like: "No. We want to hear responses from the analysts, and we want to hear each analyst say yes or no one by one by one." From what I've heard, the must have been some pressure in CIA concerning this. Hell, the Vice President went over there to hound them. Whether the analysts buckled in the face of it I don't know, but Christian Westerman was the only person to say yes. They cleared the room, and there was Christian, and he told his story about Bolton and how he stood up to Bolton. But it was classic INR. When we are in one of these meetings, we are more frank than the other agencies, and it is much appreciated, which is why it was so frustrating for all of those years not to have INR's daily analysis going up to the hill.

Q: One question before we close this thing. I am sure it wasn't on your watch and all, but it must have come up because it was an intelligence matter. This is about Jonathan Pollard who was a convicted spy and still in jail, but the Israelis keep raising this. The question I would like to ask is in INR were we looking at this because I remember hearing a report from an investigative reporter, Seymour Hersch of the New York Times who was saying that Pollard was under instructions from his Israeli handlers to get up to date reports on the location of out nuclear missile submarines. I mean according to Hersch, there is only one reason for this. The Israelis, obviously there is no admiral sitting over in the Israeli ministry of defense plotting where our missile launch submarines are. So this had to be information that was being passed on to the Soviets for maybe as a way to get more Jews out of the Soviet Union. Did this come up. I mean was this ever an issue. We are looking at this because the facts of the case are a bit foggy today.

WHITE: Not to my knowledge, but possibly at the Front Office level. I have a different take on this, although I'm not discounting Sy's reasoning. I thought they were trying to get that kind of information because they may have been trying to track where our fleet is in order to know in advance what our plans are regarding actions related to the Middle East. You know, if we were going to make a move militarily that they wouldn't appreciate (even if only shifting a portion of our military presence elsewhere), they would get advance warning in this manner. I always thought that was one of their interests, but you may be right. Their relationship with the Soviets was not very good, and the former head of the Israeli foreign ministry research department became the first Israeli chargï¿½ d'affairs in the Soviet Union in the last days of Gorbachev, when there was a thaw which would continue into the Yeltsin and Putin periods. Something very interesting that might support what Sy is alleging is that the Israelis did have a number of very strange liaisons going on. Everyone now knows the Israelis were involved, albeit in a relatively small way, in the arms trade to Iran during the Iraq-Iran War.

But I talked with that very person who had become their first chargï¿½ to Moscow. I also spoke with Israel's Iran czar, Yuri Lubrani. They talked very frankly with me about other types of secret aid, protection money for Jews that the Israelis were providing the Iranians, for example. I asked Lubrani: "Why are you doing this? Is this to keep Iraq weak? You know our policy isn't to strengthen Iran." He said: "No, absolutely not. The whole thrust of the policy is the protection of the Jewish community in Iran," which was huge. There were perhaps 100,000 Jews still in Iran during the Khomeini period. It was larger under the Shah, but many left. They even served in the army - drafted, everything. All this was a buy off, so the new, radical regime would generally leave the Jewish community alone. The same thing could have been true of the Soviet Union and the Russia that replaced it. It would have been aimed at getting Jews out of Russia. Not so much how they are treated in Russia, but just to get them out and keep that flow moving. So that is something worth talking about. But I certainly hope that the submarine information was part of that.

Q: What information because if it was the location of our missile launching subs, that had nothing to do with fleet action because these were all off by themselves.

WHITE: That was a strategic piece of information, but, not knowing which subs they are tracking, many submarines, as you've implied, are attached to carrier battle groups, and their movements would indicate where major surface combatants are located-or bound.

Q: Yes but that would have been of interest to the Soviets but not to the Israelis. Where our fleets were is a different matter, but these are tow, I don't know because I don't know what the record is.

WHITE: Yes, same here.

Q: It is an interesting, it would be interesting to find out.

WHITE: Yes, as we know now, they (the Soviets) didn't have to worry so much about a huge amount of information bearing on our naval operations for almost two decades. That was being provided by Walker and other Soviet-paid agents in our own navy.

Q: OK, well maybe this is a good place to stop, Wayne. We will pick this up the next time. Is there anything else we should talk about during the time we are covering. We can put here.

WHITE: I don't think so, and I think this is a good place to stop and then to move on to my becoming a division chief. Within six months of that happening, the '90-'91 Iraq crisis, "Gulf War I" (for us, at least) began, and there is a lot to say about that.

Q: Well that is what we will do then. Great.

Q: Today is 1 June 2005. Wayne, you were dealing with the Iraq war, what do we call it, the Suez, not the Suez but the Kuwait war or the Gulf War/ What is it called?

WHITE: Yes we call it Gulf War I and the invasion of Iraq in 2003 Gulf War II, but those are misnomers because there was the long Iran-Iraq War in the Gulf before that, ending only 2 years before the so-called Gulf War I. It is the 1990-1991 Desert Shield, Desert Storm campaign, that was utterly exhausting in INR, but I covered a lot more than that. The division I headed beginning in April 1990 was the North African, Arabian Peninsula, Iraq and Iran Division. We had analysts covering those different accounts, plus a Middle East Regional Analyst. When I took over the division I wanted to concentrate on the North African front because this is the one area I hadn't covered as an analyst or spent much time in doing official business. Within about four months of trying to do that, between April and July of 1990, I was sucked right back into the vortex of Iraq once again by the blooming crisis on the Kuwaiti border.

Q: When you got there, I mean you had been dealing with Iraq. How were we reading the situation? This is debatable I guess, 1990. How were we reading Saddam Hussein's control over Iraq, what his outlook was, our concerns or lack thereof?

WHITE: There is a now-famous (or infamous) National Intelligence Estimate from late 1989 which said that in the wake of the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam was bankrupt, the population war weary, he was licking his wounds, turning inward, and would largely behave himself for awhile. Fortunately, I had nothing to do with the NIE, but that was the dangerous conventional wisdom some of us were concerned about. Within a very short time, as I mentioned before, he sent armor to the Christians in Lebanon. I noted that as a major warning that those predictions were not solid. There was a small analytic divide, you know, in our own office, on this issue. The Iraq analyst who I inherited in taking over my new division maintained that the Lebanon-related activity was just an anomaly. Meanwhile, the division covering the Levant (Lebanon, Israel and such, which I had been a part of) had a different, darker view because he had arrived on our doorstep. So there was a misreading of where he was going. I wasn't surprised, however, that people could judge that Saddam would lick his wounds for awhile, but I couldn't understand sticking with to that viewpoint after the Lebanon arms shipments.

Q: Well then what sort of take when you got there, what sort of stuff were you getting on Iraq?

WHITE: You mean the quality of the information?

Q: Yeah the quality and what kind of information?

WHITE: Well, we had gradually grown closer to the Iraqis during the Iran-Iraq War (something that gets flogged regularly now), but everyone in the entire world who cared about oil, the region, the Arabian Peninsula or Iraq not being overrun got close to Saddam because of the threat that Iran represented-and considerably closer than us, I might add (e.g. France and Italy). Iran constantly throughout the 80's kept reminding everyone about how much of a threat it was by attacking tankers in the Gulf (in retaliation for Iraq's similar attacks), by backing suicide bombings in Lebanon against our embassy, and things like that. The Rumsfeld meeting has been cited, but everyone was meeting in those days and seeing Iraqi officials. I was once ordered to brief Tariq Aziz (doubtless a low point in my career). But anyway the intelligence was deficient in one critical area, as we have discussed before: leadership intentions. Constantly there is a dearth, almost an absence of information on leadership intentions. You often can get just about everything else: how big its army is, what it is doing internally, and the inner workings of much of its foreign policy. But you never get into that tiny little room with the leader and his cronies, or you never get inside of his head, which is why you need analysts who can do some of that. I could go further ahead with this and explain why no one caught the move into Kuwait until only hours before it occurred. What analysts generally have to do, at their peril at times, is assume that the actor that they are watching, given his milieu, given the factors impacting on him and his country, and the overall mix of other factors affecting him more broadly will act rationally. And 90% of the time, perhaps even 95% of the time, they do act rationally within the constraints and the context of their own and their country's situation. Then there are the other times. The invasion of Kuwait was one of these unfortunate anomalies-and a whopper.

Q: Yeah for anyone looking at it would think for god sakes he has just come out of this horrendous war, I mean why would you do this, which could start all sorts of things going.

WHITE: But that's the danger sometimes: the tantalizing logic of conventional wisdom. Conventional wisdom would lead you down a certain, seemingly rational path of analysis. The other problem we have with conventional wisdom is once it becomes deeply rooted as sort of the intelligence thesis, people tend to start batting away indications to the contrary, which is why you had the Iraq people dismissing the significance of Iraq's aiding of the Christians in Lebanon as evidence that he was going to be more precocious and more of a problem.

Q: Well in a way I could look at that and say this is a win-win. I mean they were armored cars weren't they.

WHITE: He was sending them U.S. equipment of which he had virtually none in his inventory. So he was giving them captured Iranian vehicles of U.S. manufacture that had been purchased by the Shah. At the end of the war, Saddam's forces were able to penetrate deeply into Iran and scarf up a lot of artillery, self propelled artillery, APC's, tanks, etc. He sent the Lebanese Christians mainly M-113 armored personnel carriers, as I recall.

Q: Well in a way that wouldn't necessarily show anything because it was practically costless to him. You know he could stir up trouble over there while he went about his thing. It wouldn't necessarily be an indicator.

WHITE: It indicated was that he was watching the region closely for opportunities to raise his profile on the broader Middle East stage (and secure some payback). Iraq was not a big enough stage for him. He viewed his Iraq as a regional superpower, especially after his victory over Iran - something that greatly fed his political ego. With the military he had at the end of that war, and with Iran prostrate from its recent defeat, he clearly was, in fact, the Persian Gulf regional superpower at the time. He wanted to flex his muscles and show people that it meant something.

Q: Well how were we reading, and did we get much of a feel for Kuwait? Did we feel they were really under threat? How did we feel the Kuwaitis were dealing with this?

WHITE: Nobody was looking in that direction. I told you in previous tapes how in the course of my meetings with foreign ministers, defense ministers, etc., up and down the Gulf during the 1980's talking about the Iran-Iraq war, I would hear occasional expressions of concern about Iraq's burgeoning military strength from some of these senior officials because they knew that their militaries were tiny and untested compared to Iraq's. In many cases, with respect to the militaries in the Gulf, key cadres were foreign, such as Pakistanis recruited in sizeable numbers. This sometimes involved effectively buying mercenaries to flesh out the tiny and untried ranks of these small militaries. Oddly, none of those few expressions of concern came from Kuwaiti officials.

Q: How about the Saudis? How were we looking at the Saudis at the time?

WHITE: Aside from Iraq and Iran, the Saudis were concerned, as were we, over the economic situation in the kingdom. The oil price was extremely low at the time. The Saudis were continuing to really run deep deficits after running nothing but gigantic oil-fed budgets all the way up through 1981. Since '82 they had been running deficits that were yawning ever wider. That was the main concern about Saudi Arabia at the time: how long can the government continue to run these deficits and maintain the vast social support system critical to its survival?

Q: How did you find relations, your role prior to when the balloon went up, that was August I think.

WHITE: Yes.

Q: Relations between INR and the secretary, Jim Baker? Were they good? Were they using you?

WHITE: He was relatively new at the time. I wasn't so much into that loop. We got the impression that Baker was reading our stuff, but, as with so many secretaries of state, when addressing their relations with INR, it was a relatively remote, reading relationship, save for the INR director, who attended the usual round of 7th Floor meetings. They basically read product. Sometimes you would get I suppose what one could call graffiti on the product that indicated that not only did the 7th Floor read it, ranging from a small circular stamp with the Secretary's initials indicating that the item was read, period, all the way to questions or reactions, things like that. Doug Mulholland, our INR Director at the time, was brought over from the Treasury Department where he headed a small intelligence shop for Baker. Doug was a very nice man to work for - diligent and professional, but not pushy or hard-edged in any way. INR's 7th Floor profile was relatively low, although that would change greatly when what people are calling "Gulf War I" started.

Q: Well also did you have a feeling, I don't know but in any bureau where INR was supposed to go, did you have a feeling that the slow dissolution of the Soviet Empire, this is where the main, particularly after the Iran-Iraq war was over, that all of a sudden the spotlight had switched away and you were a secondary or tertiary theater.

WHITE: I suppose that there's a little truth to that, although the Middle East was always hot. In fact, one of the most interesting things about Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, with respect to the USSR, is that Saddam didn't get it. He overlooked the fact that the Soviet Union was in the midst of warming up to the West, breaking up, and he didn't grasp that if you went in and gobbled up Kuwait in a bold move like that, there was likely to be no Soviet Union that had previously viewed Iraq as a market, an ally, a fellow socialist state, etc. to veto UN Security Council Chapter VII military action against him.

Q: Did you have any significant contact with the NSC in your office?

WHITE: Very little. You know there is a system that automatically and electronically sends out our product to organizations like the NSC, the two intelligence committees on the hill, the Secretaries of Defense, Treasury, Justice, etc., all intelligence agencies, all major military commands, and key embassies abroad. But very little concrete feedback is received. It's funny in a way because people have to get used to a situation in which they function as analysts without a lot of feedback. In other words, it is not like being a reporter who writes a story and then, particularly in this day and age when there are blogs back to the newspaper that can provide the reporter (and his editor) with pretty quick reactions. Instead, the meat and potatoes of the job is to do one's level best to send out what INR's rank and file and leadership believes is both relevant to the foreign policy flow and of the highest possible quality, presuming that if you meet those standards it will be read and appreciated.

Q: Well how did the, when did warning bells, how did the Kuwait invasion creep up on you?

WHITE: Well, starting in July there was this huge build up of Iraqi forces on the border as Saddam made demands on the Kuwaitis who had the biggest purse in the Gulf, for loans or grants because he was in the hole financially. The Kuwaitis and Saudis were quite outraged because he accused them of not supporting him sufficiently during the war when they had given him, along with the UAE, something like 21 to 23 billion dollars in loans which had no payment deadline and which they had effectively written off. But that wasn't enough. Kuwait also, at some risk, became one of his two premier ports for the receipt of heavy weaponry and munitions throughout the war. As mentioned before, we were insufficiently alert to his revived regional designs, especially on the part of those working Iraq. He was not about to drop his vainglorious regional agenda because of financial problems (about $70-80 billion in debts), and he felt that the Gulf states owed him for defeating Iran.

Q: Well was our system, satellites and all this, giving a pretty good picture of military force and where it was and all that?

WHITE: We, like every other advanced intelligence operations around the world, had just about everything you could want, with the exception of the most elusive piece of the puzzle - intelligence on Saddam Hussein's personal intentions and emotional state. By the time it was a week before the invasion, practically the whole newspaper-reading world knew there was a huge build-up because of leaks related to the situation on the Kuwaiti border. And it WAS huge - about150,000 men. And that is why I mentioned before that while an analyst has to judge that the actor is going to act sanely, rationally, (albeit within a certain unique context) there are going to be risks in certain situations following that approach. The best bets were that this was merely to pressure the Kuwaitis and that he was not foolish enough to cross the border and seize an entire Arab country. Even the Arab League would find that outrageous and beyond the pale. So everyone interpreted it as a negotiating tactic on the part of a notorious bully.

Now I will say something that I have said repeatedly elsewhere in a variety of fora. Even if we had secured intelligence on his interaction with his smallest inner circle, we might not have heard invasion of Kuwait as the purpose of that build up. I believe that it really was aimed at menacing the Kuwaitis and, by extension, the GCC states more generally, into coughing up lots of money. It was bare-knuckled blackmail. Talks started in Riyadh. He sent down one of his senior officials to Riyadh. In the first round of the talks, the Iraqis made outrageous financial demands, and the Kuwaitis said, "No." Instead of staying to dicker, which the Kuwaitis doubtless expected, the Iraqis picked up their marbles and went home. Saddam clearly was enraged. In Arab bargaining you always start that way. If, in the end, you are prepared to give the guy ten billion dollars, you start by saying no or, perhaps, one or two billion. Then at the next meeting, it is maybe three or four billion, and what are you going to do for me. But Saddam abruptly called his people back after that first session, and the invasion occurred something like 48 hours later. I have always said that we have a shortage of analytic focus on leadership analysis. And I think what we had here a Saddam Hussein temper tantrum, that he really did not intend to go in, but anger drove him over the top. We were told that Iraqi troops ordered into Kuwait, even senior officers, had no plans, no orders for such an invasion. They were just told to drive south. Here is the road map and just drive down and into Kuwait city. Many of them were as stunned as everyone else. I think that he just exploded, ordered them in as an all-powerful dictator can do, and the rest is history.

Q: Sometimes, I am familiar with sort of to some extent with the Korean temperament. A leader will send subordinates out to do something, and he expects them to come back ??? So they are very much under the gun because they can't come back and say well we started the negotiating process or something like that. But this doesn't sound like the Arab way at all.

WHITE: Well, it is similar. It is just that usually things are done just as they are done here in the West. We like to talk about souk bargaining as if it was unique to the Middle East, but when we are having talks over an issue - how about buying a car, for example - everyone is looking for a compromise. You start with a position that is on the edges of the continuum and then you start moving inward, so it is not all that different, only a bit less frequent in everyday life.

Q: Well what was during this time, were you all in INR was there a point where we were saying wait a minute?

WHITE: Yes. But it was too late to be of any value to the policymaker. Quite literally our office concluded, even finally our Iraq analyst, that he was going to something, and I will discuss an interesting exchange we had at midnight on the night of that invasion, which is revealing.

Our Iraq Analyst and I had a disagreement the day before the invasion. She said, essentially: "It is all economic, and he has complained angrily about the Kuwaitis drilling an oil field that Iraq and Kuwait shared-using that lateral drilling technique to allegedly 'steal oil' from the Iraqi side of the border. He is going to seize the Ramallah oil field," which was the name of the field concerned. I said, "No, it is both territorial and economic. He's always wanted a narrow piece of territory to flesh out his one small port on the Gulf. He is going to go for both." The fact is that if he had done that, he probably would have gotten away with it. Who would have gone into this huge coalition-based war effort over a sliver of Kuwaiti territory and half of one oil field for a county that had scads of oil fields of which Rumaila was just one of in its veritable oil empire? The Kuwaitis would have just taken it on the chin.

One thing people forget is that the Kuwaitis were somewhat disliked in the Arab world at that time. The Kuwaitis were looked upon as misers. This is another reason why he would have gotten away with this kind of thing. They had the biggest purse in the Arab world, and were perhaps the best investors. They had reached a point before that war, with so much invested, that if they had stopped all oil production they could have run the national budget for a number of years just off of interest. So there were many who were angry because Kuwait wasn't a lot more generous. Iraq was almost the exception, ironically; it had given away large amounts of money to poorer Arab and Muslim states before it ran into the difficulties of funding a major war, in large measure, of course, only to capture the presidency of the Non-Aligned Movement. Anyhow, the Kuwaitis, by contrast, had a tarnished reputation. People in the region used to tell me that before Gulf War I in my travels, with me arguing that I rather liked the Kuwaitis I encountered during those trips. Saddam overreached. He probably could have gotten away with a few pieces of Kuwait had he been more level-headed and clever.

Q: Well then what did you do? OK at a certain point you say he was going in. This was within hours of his going in or?

WHITE: I would say it was pretty much a missed call because all we were talking about the day before was nudging across the border, grabbing the other half of a geographically small oil field, maybe taking a sliver of territory either because you wanted to keep that stuff or because you wanted to hold the Kuwaitis hostage saying we won't withdraw until you do cough up the loans or grants. Anyway, a full-blown invasion took place instead. Our Iraq analyst was called at home at around midnight, which shows how news gets around the Intelligence Community.

Q: She was the...

WHITE: Iraq Analyst, the Iraq Analyst in my division. She was called in the middle of the night. That shows a certain lag because by midnight Eastern Daylight Time, it is already 8:00 or 9:00 A.M. in the Persian Gulf, and the Iraqis were already driving around in Kuwait City. They had been there for hours. Anyway, she then called me, and said: "You were right. He went for that sliver of territory on the border, in addition to the oil field because they have moved across the border well east of Rumaila." The first reports coming into official Washington apparently only showed a movement of a few miles into Kuwait. So I went to sleep thinking yeah, I guess I called that one right. I woke up a little after 4:30 AM, turned on CNN, and there are Iraqi armored vehicles near the Hilton Hotel with which I am very familiar in downtown Kuwait City. I said to myself, "Dear God. We sure have a helluva mess now."

Q: How about was our embassy in Kuwait, did they have any feel for this situation?

WHITE: No, this was an Iraqi call. They performed admirably. It was one of the best embassy teams we ever had. Nat Howell was the ambassador. Barbara Bodine was the DCM. They stuck it out in the embassy eating tins of tuna fish for much of the pre-Desert Storm period when Iraq was occupying Kuwait. Actually, Nat may now have had a lot of experience in Iraqi affairs. He did a lot of his service in the Levant, and wasn't necessarily a Gulf specialist. That might have been one of his first postings down there, but I'm not sure. He is an interesting guy by the way to interview.

Q: He is in Charlottsville. I have tried to get a hold of him, but haven't succeeded. What about, so what happened to INR when they went in. Did you talk about what was levied on you? I mean what were you doing?

WHITE: I am glad you asked about that because I wanted to go into some of this since it just shows how you can mismanage an organization in a crisis. We were tasked to produce twice a day, a huge situation report that was referred to as the "Iraqi Spot Report." It was quite detailed, intelligence mixed with some analysis, about three to four pages long. It required 24/7 coverage on the part of people who knew something about the Middle East, not just a guy from the INR Watch. It was we found out after the war that Norman Schwarzkopf used it as his basic briefing document, first thing in the morning.

Q: Commander of central command who was sent over there. He was in Florida at the time.

WHITE: Right, he would move his headquarters to the Middle East as the crisis deepened, but even when he did that, moved his headquarters to a bunker in Riyadh, he was still apparently using the INR spot report as his premier early morning document because he felt it was concise and comprehensive.

Q: Would you talk about the spot report. What was it and how did you get the information?

WHITE: It contained a rich blend of material. It came from NSA, CIA, State cables, FBIS reporting, press reports, etc. But one of the problems we had with this crisis, I think I might have alluded to before briefly, was sheer volume of information. It was our first experience with the new information age in which there was just too much for us to sort through and digest properly. I formed a team, our Iraq analyst, our Iran analyst, Arabian Peninsula Analyst, and our Middle East Regional Analyst. That team of four did not do night shifts because most of the big taskings, briefings etc. occurred during the day. So between 6:00 A.M. and about 7:00 P.M., I had coverage comprising some combination of myself and some of those four analysts. Then, overnight, the rest of the office was used for 24/7 coverage - you know, the India analyst, Pakistan analyst, Israel analyst, etc.

This is where the mismanagement comes in. I argued myself blue in the face since the late 1980's that INR is too small and therefore must view its analytic staff as a sort of floating reserve. You put qualified people where the crisis of the moment happens to be, and enough of them. Basically you keep a database of the past experience, college degrees, language skills, and service at overseas postings for every analyst and analytic manager. Let's say there is a crisis like I had then, and there were six or seven others, either covering Latin America, Eastern Europe or whatever who have Middle East or relevant political-military experience. They would be pulled into a broader team to allow the 24/7 coverage to go better and not just completely burn everyone out in our small Middle East shop, which is exactly what happened. The front office showed little interest in this concept. Mary Ann Casey, who was our Deputy Assistant Secretary for analysis in INR at the time, and I had a couple of sessions over this with me arguing that we were just burning out a very small clutch of people.

The other equally foolish mistake that was made by the bureau in the 1990-1991 Gulf Crisis was that there was a State task force, of course, a large State Department Iraq-Kuwait crisis task force, and the INR Front Office said INR had to have somebody there 24/7. It was a serious waste of manpower. The amount of effort required in an eight hour shift would be a total of about 45 minutes of real work. I discovered this interviewing a number of people who had pulled this duty before I went to see Mary Ann to protest this waste. In addition, that 45 minutes of work would generally involve briefing materials. The INR task force representative would go down to INR's 24/7 Global Watch and print out intelligence materials, which the INR watch could easily have done themselves, and brief them to the small handful of relevant people in the building at night. I argued myself blue in the face, and the task force, by the second month of the crisis, consisted of the task force chief and our INR person with everyone from other bureaus merely on call. So we didn't even need to be there, but our Front Office (with Mary Ann leading the charge) insisted on this coverage, month after grinding month. It just stripped out the reserves that I needed to man our own office's Iraq-Kuwait 27/7 operation without burning out the few people in our own Middle East/South Asia office, which could have been reinforced with even just a half-dozen analysts drawn from other INR offices with relatively little to do. At the end of all this, when Desert Storm got underway, and, following it, I was sucked into becoming a specialist on the Shia and Kurdish resistance inside Iraq that exploded after the war (which we need to talk about), I worked, because of the shortage of people in INR and my military expertise, 137 consecutive days. You know Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, etc. I think it is an INR record.

Q: Well now, what sort of things were you, in the first place I imagine one of the major things we would want to know again, this goes back to intentions. Is this grab of Kuwait it? Is this something they are going to do and pull out? Are they going all the way because you have got all those Saudi Gulf oil fields right down the Abqaiq, down that whole area down there.

WHITE: Yes, this is an important question because of the difficulty involved in assembling the force necessary to roll the Iraqis back. The international community, led by us, needed to convince the Saudis, who had tremendous religious issues with respect to deploying foreign, non-Muslim forces on its soil, which later would become the source of considerable angst in the kingdom and eventually played a major role in producing the Osama Bin Laden challenge. To convince the Saudis that there was a sufficient threat that they needed to allow hundreds of thousands of foreign troops to be assembled on their territory, since they were the main launching point for the re-taking of Kuwait, Jim Baker went on the road taking along with him our senior military analyst, Charlie Jefferson, who just passed away in the last year. Charlie would give the briefing at the beginning of the sessions. He briefed the Turks, the Jordanians, the Saudis, some of the other Gulf states we needed like Qatar in a whirlwind tour. Charlie would start off the meeting scaring the Hell out of them because the briefing starts with look at the massive capabilities that Saddam had positioned in Kuwait. Once in Kuwait, he placed about 150,000 troops, with large armored forces on the Saudi border. We misread his intentions towards Kuwait, and with such forces, he could have been in the Saudi oil terminal in Ras Tanura and overrun eastern Saudi Arabia in 48 to 72 hours. Do you want to take yet another chance regarding what might be his intent? We just didn't know, and that scared the Saudis tremendously - and us. They immediately let multi-national forces pour into the country in order to first form a defense line, a shield blocking a move against the eastern Saudi oil fields that the world needed access to so badly. Only then did we begin the build-up for an offensive.

Q: Where were we getting our, where were you all getting any insight into Iraqi intentions after this. I mean you say it probably was an impulsive thing. But what were we seeing? I mean again is this strictly Saddam Hussein's how he got out of bed in the morning or what?

WHITE: Not much on the leadership level except I will say that there were indications during the Desert Shield portion of the build-up, when we were in the pre-war phase, that toward the end of that period Saddam was getting cold feet. Even though he had an exaggerated notion of what his military capabilities were (he had seen his army take on the Iranians and fight ferociously), and thought his army would do the same thing in the face of us, he became increasingly concerned as the massive Coalition force took shape. He initially thought he could scare us into thinking we would take massive casualties and go away, another miscalculation. But the fact of the matter is that we were getting very little information on the morale of the Iraqi army which would have everyone miscalculate how many casualties there would be. Getting back to your question, (I wandered a little bit here), there were indications just before the war that Saddam wanted a deal, and thought when Tariq Aziz was summoned to Geneva to meet Baker that a deal was in the making. Instead, Baker read the riot act to Aziz. UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar met with Saddam in the very last days before "Desert Storm," announcing that there was no flexibility in the Iraqi position, but there were indications that there was some flexibility (a willingness to withdrawal from a large portion of Kuwait), although probably not enough. When the lack of flexibility was announced, Tariq Aziz went nuts, and called a news conference and said that's not true. It is probably was one of the few times Tariq Aziz was telling the truth.

Q: Tariq Aziz was the foreign minister or deputy prime minister?

WHITE: Both.

Q: Both. Were we getting any feel for the military command? Was it a, were they showing us the control of say they had towards the end of the Iran war? I mean troops were a lot of looting which is not the greatest thing for any army to deal with. How were things going army wise?

WHITE: Well actually I think the looting was partly the result of conditions in Iraq. Iraq was economically depressed at the end of the war. I think a lot of these people were called up for duty or had these lowly jobs as enlisted men in an Iraqi infantry division, underpaid, and saw just how well-appointed Kuwait was. They were astonished at the goods that were available. We have to remember the average Iraqi never traveled, and had never seen the lavish wealth of the other Arab Gulf states. When they came into Kuwait City it was "Wow!" And many of the troops just got out of hand. The other problem was you had very abusive and corrupt commanders involved as well, particularly Republican Guard and Ba'th Party types who were making money off of looted materials. This is where you get into the looting of the Kuwaiti national museum. Even Saddam's family went down and engaged in considerable plundering.

Q: OK, we are talking about the looting. Again we are talking still about the early part before we were coming up. What was our concept? Did you feel when this happened, OK we are going to do something or was this very problematic. You know, I mean what was sort of the world's response going to be?

WHITE: I was a bit surprised at the way the world responded, but shouldn't have been because once one state just gobbles up another sovereign state, you have crossed so many red lines, with respect to the UN, the Arab League, etc. practically everyone fell into line behind the liberation of Kuwait. Turkey, a NATO member, the alliance system, the international system based on rule of law all kicked in against the Iraqis in a firm manner, where you even had the Syrians, who had absolutely no love lost for us, sending a division to participate in the march into Kuwait. Saddam was very isolated. He had almost no friends in all of this. In fact, one irony once the war started, was the desperate flight of 130-odd air force planes into Iran for safe haven, despite the fact that Iraq and Iran had only ended their 8-year war less than 3 years before. The Iraqis have never gotten those planes back. There was a resolution that ended the Iran-Iraq war in which the Iranians were due a certain amount of reparations which they never got. So they just chalked the planes up to a down payment on the reparations. Actually it is an amusing saga in one respect. After all the fighting was over, the Iraqis asked for the return of the planes, but they were so embarrassed that they had sent planes over to Iran, that during the war they only admitted publicly to sending 30 planes over there. So when the Iraqis said to the Iranians we want our planes back, the ever-clever Iranians said: "You mean those 30 planes you sent over here?" and used Iraq's public statement to neuter the ability of Baghdad to ever get back 100 of them right from the start.

Q: Well how were we reading Iran because although Iran had been defeated, Iran still hadn't been over run and still had a substantial army. What were we looking at Iran at that time?

WHITE: Iran was keeping a low profile during the crisis. It was realpolitik from beginning to the end. The Iranians had the rare privilege after suffering a humiliating defeat of seeing their tormentor hammered by the international community, crushed militarily. So the Iranians were very tolerant of massive shipping operations in the Gulf that encroached sometimes accidentally on their waters. Some planes flying strikes in Iraq would occasionally clip over Iranian territory - not intentionally, just trying to get back to their carriers as quickly as possible. The Iranians just stood down, not wanting to cross us, but also in effect saying: "Fine, just give it to them!" Their only fear was that we would stay in the region, and that bothered them, but as things proceeded during the war, they sat by and sort of chortled.

Q: Was there any thought at that time, that you saw where we were pointing out this might be a good time to reopen attempts to have good relations or some kind of relations with the Iranians?

WHITE: That happened a few years after the war.

Q: We were too busy I guess.

WHITE: Yes, we were VERY busy - practically everyone. Considering the Iranian leadership's hard line and continuing support for groups like Hezbollah by Iran, the times were not right. This was just an exercise in Realpolitik on their part relating to just one issue, and it didn't really affect the overall relations between Washington and TehraThe era of the reformists in Iran was still 6 or 7 years away.

Q: OK, now we have decided to, we have put in what the 82nd Airborne and we drew up a line for desert Shield getting ready to go to war. What was INR doing? How was your relationship? Was it almost taken over by the defense intelligence organization? What happened?

WHITE: Not really because we had that spot report, which became the focus of our effort and a major flagship product. We were consistently in the center of the Iraq issue within the Intelligence Community and at State. The problem was we sometimes didn't know what the policy adjustments were. People think back and say, "What are you talking about? The policy was to build up to invade Iraq." Well, actually there were shifts in policy because the operation kept getting bigger and bigger, which is why it lasted so long, the buildup, that is, not the war. We thought we needed a certain number of troops which was approximately half of the number that eventually would participate, but then in the October-November time frame, Saddam substantially re-enforced his people in the Kuwaiti theater of operations, we called it the KTO, which extended up into Iraq's flank as well. He had a quarter of a million men where initially he had only 125-150,000 so we had to go into a second round of re-enforcement.

To give you an idea of how outside the core policy flow we were sometimes, and how closely certain things were held, we were completely surprised by the opening of "Desert Storm." Once the clock clicked down on the UN's ultimatum for him to get out, we thought Coalition forces would wait several days in order to grind them down, make them nervous before launching the war, keeping their troops awake at night waiting for the attack, and then, after three or four days of this, they would be pretty exhausted and more vulnerable. Then we would hit them. Instead, we hit them only hours after that clock stopped ticking. We were very surprised. I remember standing with Charlie Jefferson, who I have already mentioned, in what we called the INR crisis room up in his military shop (INR/PMA), which was filled with battle maps and such, and where we would frequently have short meetings. Somebody from the INR Watch ran in with something that had just come in. It said that a U.S. guided missile cruiser had just launched several cruise missiles on an axis which was estimated to be aimed at Baghdad or the Baghdad area. Charlie and I looked at each other in front of this watch officer and said in unison, stupidly: "Somebody could start a war that way!" Well, it was the beginning of the war, as we learned about ten minutes later. We were caught completely by surprise because we thought the opening would be delayed. So we were not in the central policy flow on certain issues, and rightly so with the leakage that regularly occurs in Washington.

Q: On the spot report, what sort of things were you getting, and where were you getting that was so valuable?

WHITE: The spot report, which was divided into military side, a portion of the report largely done by Charlie Jefferson's office, and a political, diplomatic and economic side that was done by my office. It covered things like the military disposition the Iraqis were taking up, what kinds of defenses they were preparing, their desperate diplomatic games at the UN and in the region, etc.

WHITE: On the political and diplomatic side, a lot related to coalition building information because we were trying to broaden those involved in order to render more legitimate this operation. We did a lot of reporting on such developments, all the way from Morocco to Iran on attitudes, limitations, etc. It was very dicey because there were a lot of problems in the Arab world. You know in Tunis, a million people turned out to oppose any effort against Iraq. Saddam gained almost heroic status among the masses of the Arab world as a champion who would stand up to the United States - even Israel, though they would not be involved until later. There was often a ripping effect in a lot of Arab countries that sent contingents to fight the Iraqis between trying to support international law and major allies like the United States, Britain and France and mollifying their pro-Iraqi populations. Populations often objected bitterly to any support on the part of their governments against what they viewed as the champion of Arab rights and defiance of the West. So that is the kind of thing we were reporting on. The King of Morocco, for example, sent a battalion over and made a big deal about it. Then he was hounded by large demonstrations, and quietly passed the word that although we had been sent a Moroccan unit, don't let it get anywhere near the actual battle field.

Q: Well actually we probably didn't want it getting in the way anyway.

WHITE: Well, some of the Arab contingents actually turned out to be solid units that were involved in liberating Kuwait City. That is where we put all the Arab forces. And they got in there a lot faster than many people thought they would. There was sort of a Kuwaiti legion made up of Kuwaitis that had gotten out and reconstructed portions of their armed forces. The Egyptians, the Syrians and the Kuwaitis made the move on Kuwait City along with U.S. Marines, and cut through pretty quickly. That is another story that bears heavily on Iraqi military morale. We had gotten precious little information of much worth on whether the Iraqis would fight hard or not, which had forced everyone to prepare for as many as 3,000 Coalition killed, 10,000 total casualties, so hospital facilities were built to absorb that kind of a casualty flow.

Q: Was there any way of getting information about morale?

WHITE: It was limited and anecdotal, so we didn't quite know how to evaluate it in the context of the bigger picture. The Kuwaiti underground got some stuff out to us. In fact, it was a really exciting thing to see Kuwaitis, those people dismissed as lazy and not really having a sense of real nationality or patriotism, actually starting an underground movement against the Iraqis which, unfortunately, brought brutal retribution. One incident which was heartwarming related to our remaining embassy people being holed up there eating tuna fish out of the commissary. Small rocks were being thrown at a thin sheet of tin that had been put over the window to the old marine guard section leading to the street one night. It became annoying, so somebody finally pushed aside the sheet and there was a Kuwaiti teenager holding up a platter of cheeseburgers for the Americans. How that kid got through the Iraqi guard posts was amazing.

I remember a Kuwaiti pilot, once "Desert Storm" had started, bombing Iraqi frontline positions in a Skyhawk. He was ordered not to go down on the deck and strafe because there was a lot of flak. Well this guy was a real fanatic, and he went down, strafed, and was shot down. He bailed out over the desert behind Iraqi lines. Within a short time he was rescued by the Kuwaiti resistance who wanted to take him to a hideout in Kuwait City. He didn't want any part of it. He wanted to just walk out through the Iraqi lines and get back into another aircraft and start going after the Iraqis again. Another example of Kuwaiti chutzpah was when the Iraqis invaded. The Iraqis took a little bit of time to get to the major Kuwaiti air base. There was a guard at a major air base, an enlisted man, just your ordinary Kuwaiti soldier who never dealt with anything all that important. He was given the order to hold up the Iraqis as long as possible so the planes could fly off to Saudi Arabia - one man. An Iraqi armored brigade arrived at the gate. The planes were about ready to get off. They are frantically trying to fuel them and get them out. He managed to stall the Iraqis at the gate for a half-hour or more by saying the Iraqis didn't have proper identification to enter the base. The Iraqis, being very bureaucratic, actually reacted to this silliness, arguing: "We have Iraqi identification." The guard: "I am sorry that won't work. I will have to call security and see." And they are actually sitting there with an entire armored brigade being stopped by this one soldier. Meanwhile, by the latter part of this prolonged pause, the Iraqis must have seen the Skyhawks taking off, heading for Saudi Arabia. About 90% of the entire Skyhawk inventory got out.

But getting back to the morale issue, we only got bits of it anecdotally. One of them was an account by Nat Howe. When we finally evacuated the embassy in Kuwait just before Desert Storm, the Iraqis knew war was getting closer. Our embassy people had to be evacuated through Iraq and then to Jordan, not across battle lines which had formed elsewhere around Kuwait. Nat was speaking to one of the Iraqis manning the border checkpoint. The Kuwaiti-Iraqi border had been declared non-existent and Kuwait annexed to greater Iraq. Nonetheless, at that point, they were stopped and asked for their passports, visas and all that stuff. So Nat is sitting in the rear of his limo with the window rolled down, and an Iraqi sergeant supervising the checkpoint walked up to Nat and said in English very quietly, "We have a secret weapon that you should know about. It will make it possible for many Iraqis to survive any war. So Nat said: "What weapon?" The Iraqi pulled up his uniform tunic and showed his white undershirt. That is the kind of occasional indicator we were getting.

Q: White flag or surrender.

WHITE: Yes, and there was another report we got in where a bold Kuwaiti who was rather wealthy, had a desert palace, and wanted to see what had been done to it. It was way out in the desert within, maybe with 20 kilometers of the front line. He was concerned about his property and snuck back into Kuwait through the lines and went to his palace to see whether the Iraqis had looted it. He found his palace in near perfect condition. He was given a tour of the palace by the Iraqi company commander, a young lieutenant who seemed very gracious, and who hadn't allowed his men to do anything, which shows the variation in Iraq among people who would loot and others who would maintain Arab courtesy. As they walked around, the Iraqi said: "I have to apologize for one thing. We destroyed some of your bedding." The Kuwaiti didn't quite understand. Then the lieutenant lifted the corner of a beautiful oriental carpet. Underneath the carpet were very neat surrender flags made out of white sheets. So these are the kinds of things we were getting. Quite frankly, such reports were so infrequent that, aside from those two reports, I can't recall a another one at present.

Q: Well then did INR get involved at all in someone saying, OK if we attack we are going, I mean we have a huge military machine with all talk of whatever happens, I mean there is no way that the Iraqi army is going to stop us from expelling it from Kuwait. Were we talking about after, you know what will happen after, what will happen to Saddam, what should our peace plan be, or anything like that?

WHITE: Well the peace plans were pretty much set out in the UN resolution when that was dictated, so we didn't really get into that. But the questions of the morning after are really quite relevant. There were two scenarios. The Iraqis were going to lose all right, so both were defeat scenarios. One was Iraq suffering an especially humiliating drubbing in the face of overwhelming force. In that scenario, yes, we said there could be political developments in Baghdad that might ultimately unseat Saddam. But the best money everywhere, again a misreading the situation and not picking up enough of that information on morale, was that Iraqis would stand and fight - and fight hard, drawing out the war with rising protests in the Arab world beyond. One concern was that our infantry, not people in tanks, Bradleys, etc. the guys who actually had to fight in the open, might actually be the ones to freak out, not the Iraqis. Because, unlike the Iraqis with 8 years of war with Iran under their belt, the vast majority of our people hadn't seen any combat. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis had seen combat. So if Iraq fought a respectable fighting withdrawal and inflicted a lot of casualties on the coalition, which everyone up to Schwarzkopf and others felt might well happen, that might be actually an honorable scenario in which Saddam would have a good chance of surviving politically, as, for example, Sadat had survived the '73 war in which the Egyptians put in an impressive showing. In other words, although he wouldn't keep Kuwait, he might beat the crap out of Kuwait, with many Arabs thinking they got what they deserved, and Iraq had stood up to the Americans and the entire world and inflicted heavy casualties on Coalition Forces. That scenario was actually guiding much of the analysis.

Q: Well OK the morning after. That part of the war was over. Did we take a look and say why did the Iraqi army fall apart?

WHITE: Not really because, after the fact, it became pretty clear with our ability to get information from thousands of POW's. The reason why is that they stood and faced Iran because it regarded Iran as a serious threat to Iraq's whole way of life. Iraqis also thought they had a good chance of winning. By contrast, against the Coalition, one, it was hopeless: how could one fight the world. Two, most Iraqis didn't, at that point, view Americans, Brits, etc., as a dangerous opponents who would wreck havoc across their country and change their way of life. The Americans always come in and occupy places and hand out chocolates, financial assistance and things like that. That attitude would change during the long years of sanctions (viewed as US-driven), our occupation beginning in 2003 (humiliating and destructive), and the many errors and tragedies associated with it.

Q: Well then let's go to the end of the war. What were we doing. Obviously your organization is trying to look ahead weren't you?

WHITE: Yes. And I tell you we were very upset that the war was not finished according to its original plan. It was foolish to cut off the war at 100 hours because by that time of course we knew that scenario one, a hard-fighting Iraqi withdrawal which might not affect Saddam's survivability very much was not the correct scenario, and there was the prospect of Saddam falling or having on his hands a substantial rebellion. So we very much wanted the war finished, and for a very specific reason. In other words we wanted Schwarzkopf to complete that maneuver that was intended to bring our forces from the desert in the west to the coast, encircling and trapping much of the Iraqi forces in the south including a lot of elite Republican guard units and their heavy weapons. That wasn't done, and so much of the Republican Guard was allowed to move north and participate in the brutal campaigns all over southern Iraq and then against the Kurds in order to save Saddam's regime. We thought that was a terrible mistake.

Now, a lot of people in the wake of this whole thing, and particularly now, have argued that we should have gone all the way to Baghdad. However, the UN mandate was limited to the Kuwaiti Theater of Operations, and moving north was just not in the cards. It was essentially a promise to the world community that we wouldn't exploit the campaign to completely overrun Iraq. Also, Bush had been briefed, and had been given information even from INR, saying that you don't want to go north anyway because you will become ensnarled in a much more complex campaign in urban centers, which would be interesting foresight relating to what happened in the 2003 Gulf War and its aftermath.

But something very ugly happened after the war. I talked about part of it, letting the Republican Guard go. The other angle was a massive Shiite rebellion in the south followed a couple of weeks later by a Kurdish rebellion in the north. The U.S. government, through several statements (I think Brent Scowcroft made one and the President himself made another), encouraged an uprising against Saddam. Then it happened, but we did nothing to support it.

Worse than that, the terms of the cease fire forged in that tent in the desert between Schwarzkopf and the Iraqis disallowed any Iraqi aerial activity. Initially, all of Iraq's helicopter and fixed wing air fleet was to be grounded, and only in response to desperate pleas from Iraqi commanders did the ceasefire agreement permit helicopter and a few fixed wing flights in order to implement the cease fire because we had knocked down the bridges, wrecked communications, etc. They had a legitimate argument that they needed to move around the country and do things quickly that they couldn't do through any kind of phone or other communication. So they were allowed to have unarmed helicopter and other flights. Within days that turned into helicopter gunship strikes against the insurgents, even fixed wing flights on the part oPucaras the Iraqis had gotten from the Argentina (slow, fixed-wing propeller planes that can carry rockets and machine guns, perfectly suited for spotting and then going after insurgents and guerrilla-type targets). Letting much the Republican Guard out of the noose with its heavy equipment, combined with our not doing anything to enforce the terms of the ceasefire by flaming a couple of these planes or helicopters - basically signaling you had better all go back to your bases and stand down - were very important in allowing Saddam to crush an insurgency which might have actually caught on. It was a very sad spectacle.

Q: Well was there a concern I mean were INR turning out saying what would happen if the Kurds win and if the Shiites win, you know dismemberment of Iraq.

WHITE: You know, believe it or not, there wasn't a lot of focus on issues such as the possible breakup of Iraq at the time. Everyone was virtually obsessed about whether Saddam would stay or go. All intelligence services that would later make a mistake on the WMD call in the Weapons of Mass Destruction in the second Gulf War and many of us who had missed the call on him going into Kuwait all the way, did not grasp just how much things had changed in Iraq to make survival even under those trying circumstances quite possible for Saddam. And, as late as six months after the war, people were still talking about his imminent demise. We were all wrong. We were hedging a little because of course the Republican Guard had escaped from Kuwait and put down the rebellions. But still people thought he couldn't survive such a humiliating defeat, again forgetting in his many years of power Saddam had created vast overlapping intelligence services and a few elite military units that could root out and destroy challenges to him personally and the regime. Those people took matters in hand and got things back under control. He was probably out of danger within two months after the war.

Q: Was there an attitude of INR and State Department whatever you want to call it, that no matter what we don't want to see Iraq break up into a Shiite area, a Kurdish area and a Sunni area. In other words the dismemberment of Iraq because that means a resurgence of Iran and Shias fundamentalism and all of that. I mean was that behind a lot of our thinking?

WHITE: This is a key question, Stu. But it wasn't a major part of our thinking at the time. Everyone, including all our major allies - inside and outside the Middle East - were primarily focused on whether Saddam would fall. In a sense, we were driven by the interest of our policy consumers: they posed the question again and again. We were somewhat less worried about the Shia question you raised because they had fought so well against Iran that we knew they wouldn't just become a supine Islamic republic or whatever under Iran's domination - Iranian influence, yes, domination, no-should Iraq break up. But the Saudis and other Sunni Arab regimes were concerned over this possibility. This issue of our not going all the way to Baghdad in 1991, even though we weren't supposed to, led to very vibrant Arab conspiracy theories (and those of others) that the objective of the Bush administration was to keep a weak Saddam in charge of Iraq in order to forestall the development of a Shia Islamic republic in the south. That was not true. Everyone wanted Saddam out. Bush I wanted Saddam out, but this conspiracy theory persists today.

Q: Well we are talking about the middle east.

WHITE: Yes, I know. It is near impossible to beat down this conspiracy theory, but I saw not one piece of evidence in any of my dealings in the government during that period or even well into the 1990's that supports that notion.

Q: Was there much interest in the Kurdish and Shiite insurgency?

WHITE: Well actually as I just said, there was a tremendous amount of interest in the Shia insurgency. In fact I was dragooned into an exercise that went on almost three months following the end of the war preparing for Richard Boucher press releases on what we could say on the status of the fighting inside Iraq because it persisted. Beyond about the third week, however, it was pretty apparent that resistance was diminishing. It wasn't going anywhere, it wasn't catching on. Talk about the bureaucratics of the State Department. Every day I drew up what I thought was a cautious, decent-sized release for the noon press briefing which balanced the need to protect intelligence sources and methods against the need to get something out. I would take it up to Doug Mulholland, and he would scratch lines through half of everything I had written. Then I would take it over to Rich Boucher.

Q: Boucher being at that time...

WHITE: A spokesman for the State Department - actually the Deputy Press Spokesman, with Margaret Tutwiler being his boss.

Q: As he is today.

WHITE: Yes, but now actually Spokesman. Margaret was generally not the one assembling the noon press talking points on the Iraqi fighting. She often was traveling with Baker and working with him very closely. So Boucher was the guy I dealt with mostly. I can only remember dealing with Margaret maybe two or three times out of 40 or 50. In any case, I would take this draft over to Rich and showed it to him with all the deletions, and he would hit back, saying: "What! We can't go to the press with this. Come on! Get me some more." Then I would walk back to Doug and say: "Rich Boucher is really upset, Doug. This is just isn't going to wash." Then Doug would restore most of the deleted language, and I would get virtually the entire original text back. It was sort of like souk bargaining in the Middle East.

Q: What was the problem do you think?

WHITE: Doug was just trying to be very protective about the use of intelligence, as he should have been, although I was careful myself. In the end, perhaps one should ask why people need SITREP's or statements on the status of a forlorn insurgency in southern Iraq, especially if providing them in any way jeopardized our collection of intelligence in Iraq on what might have been more important matters.

Q: Were we looking at the Kurdish situation in a different light?

WHITE: A much different light. It didn't have much to do with whether Kurdistan would break off eventually and maintain some kind of special autonomy, which did eventually happen. At the time, we were coping with issues related to the refugee crisis. We were into crisis management, with over a million Kurds sitting on hillsides all over northwestern Iran and southeastern Turkey. Iraqi forces overran a large portion of Iraqi Kurdistan. Later they would fall back because they had insufficient forces to hold it, and the Kurds would return and set up their unofficial mini-state under the cover of a sort of a cordon sanitaire around Kurdistan reinforced by the UN and U.S./U.K, so the refugee crisis would not repeat itself. That is how the Kurds got their first real start toward the formation of their autonomous region, by creating such a horrendous refugee crisis in Turkey and Iran that the international community said to Baghdad, essentially: "You are not going to do that again, or we are going to slap you down hard." So the Kurds got their ticket to form an autonomous region with their own local government.

Q: Did you get much intelligence say from Turkey on the Kurds or not?

WHITE: No. I have to admit that in all my 25 years in INR, 25 years plus, the amount of useful information gotten from Middle East intelligence services was relatively small. Only one, Israel provided a fairly steady flow of really useful intelligence. I dealt with several of these intelligence services, although not Turkey's, and I was taken aback at how unsophisticated they were. I guess I shouldn't have been surprised. Many were too small and never really had resources or time to develop such a capability with much continuity (disruptive coups and favoritism were problems, just for starters). The Israelis had much the same problems we had. They had bad sources, good sources, great access in some areas, little in others - a real mixed bag, in addition to being selective in what they passed along.

Q: Were we picking up anything about you know that later came back to haunt us about the fundamentalist Islamic organizations that had gotten a start in the Afghan war and then in opposition to our going after Iraq and all. Was this something of any concern to us?

WHITE: Are you Clairvoyant, Stu? I was just literally sitting here thinking maybe we ought to get off Iraq and drift westward toward Algeria, which was the premier 1990's poster child for the impact in a country in the Middle East of Islamic militancy. Yes, this despite the fact that Iraq sanctions and other Iraqi issues which, of course, remained front burner throughout the 90's. In the early 90's, '91, '92, '93, I shifted away a bit from Iraqi matters, leaving same to our veteran analyst, who was quite capable of taking care of that, to focus on issues like Algeria, which was galvanizing the attention of the policy and intelligence communities throughout Western Europe and over here because of the Algerian civil war. The incredibly bloody Algerian civil war, which I was reminded of this morning when there was a clash just overnight or this morning in Algeria between residual elements from that Algerian civil war, generated a lot of concern. During this period, in the wake of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, we were seeing a period in which, with the Taliban largely in power there, the first dribs and drabs - even hundreds in some cases - of trained and hardened Islamic militant fighters were returning to their home countries - Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Algeria, etc., and becoming a source of instability there.

Algeria presented us with a very serious dilemma which was argued very bitterly within the U.S. government in the context of rising militant Islam in various quarters. Particularly after the 1991-1992 Algerian election process was aborted, which was the flash point that started the civil war and a jolting intervention in which major gains on the part of Islamists had been literally stolen by an unpopular military junta, this debate intensified. Hell, if I had been a moderate Islamist, and I had this military junta of bullies terminated an election we are about to win, I mean I tell you, Stu, I might have gone into the mountains with an AK-47 myself. So a lot of this resistance in the early years was considered quite legitimate by many of us. Some Islamist militant elements would become bestial later with the emergence of groups like the GIA and other offshoots which engaged wholesale murder, rape, etc. against segments of the civilian population instead of attacking government troops and security forces, more legitimate targets for an insurgency. But debate raged over what stance we should take toward democracy or democratization in the region. On the one hand, although a hot button issue, it was a no brainer. The United States is for democracy. On the other side, we found out that the only groups that were (and are) sufficiently organized (and savvy) to take advantage of democracy are Islamist groups (some of them militant) which did tremendous charity work, social services, grass roots political work, etc. The largely secular elites in the region were seemingly incapable of doing this. They just never got it. They would justake a beating in elections because their idea of an election campaign, because they had been brought up in the context of top down authoritarian systems, was basically, OK, you will do up 1,000 posters and post them around the country in the various places and make some phone calls to important allies. No door to door work, nothing like that - no real EFFORT. Anyway, debate raged back and forth and never fully resolved itself within the U.S. government.

I can, however, remember an interesting meeting called by Ed Djerejian, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs in the early 1990's, of all NEA's office directors and relevant people from the human rights bureau, me representing INR because of my focus on this particular issue, etc. A number of office directors (Ed held back to hear everyone out) said: "No we shouldn't support Islamists, and we should be very cautious on the issue of democratization." Although very much torn, Ed cautioned in that meeting for the first time that Islamists might well support democratization, but only up to a certain point: "One vote, one man, one time." Then they take over, shut down the system, and we would have Islamic republics. Anyhow, I sat heard various office directors saying we have to have a very guarded policy on all this. Because of the danger of militant Islam and their electoral effectiveness, we can't come out strongly for democratization across the board. Then Ron Newman, who at that time was the head of NEA's North Africa Office, which covered Algeria, said, almost shouting: "Wait a minute. What do we stand for? What are we saying here? Don't we stand for anything?" He shamed the whole room. Despite the dangers, this was very much needed. Ron has just been appointed ambassador to Afghanistan. He had consistently been a fantastic star, you know, who was often the guy who goes out and reads the tea leaves, really "gets it," and stands up for principle as much as possible. Within 20 minutes the group had approved a more forthright American position on democratization in the region than was emerging from the discussion earlier in the meeting.

Q: Were we looking beyond what the concept was, one man, one vote, one time.

WHITE: Or the danger of that concept. One election, then no more and merely a different sort of tyranny....

Q: The danger of that concept, in other words Islamists take over and say all right we are an Islamic republic. We don't need, I mean whatever votes we have we are going to set up instead of a military dictatorship, a theological dictatorship. Were we looking at anything to see some give in this type of thing, you know something we could live with. What, you have your religion but live and let live and all that?

WHITE: We did, and it is interesting how little anyone really had to worry abouwidespread militant Islamist takeovers. Algeria had so scared the nearby, largely secular Arab regimes in Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt - even as far away as Bahrain, that they just cracked down on their domestic Islamists. They were not going in the direction of democracy; they are going in the reverse direction and viewing the Islamists in their midst as a potential threat that could start massive civil wars elsewhere. So we saw an emergence of sort of a dictatorship in Tunisia, for example, under Ben Ali, making illegal the Islamist party there which was very moderate. It really was; we had had contacts with it. I went out there myself, you know, at the time. I went out to Tunis (in addition to Morocco & Algeria), and spent time with various officials in the government. I spent time with the interior ministry, and I could see how they had faked a massive show trial to put in prison hundreds of legitimate Islamic activists and even some people who weren't that active at all, just attended mosque regularly, like one senior army officer known to our defense attache. So there was a wave of oppression. There was no incentive to hold back at all on the part of these fearful regimes. As a result, Islamists from Morocco to Egypt, many of whom weren't nearly as strong as those in Algeria and some even more moderate, were driven out of the political mainstream and radicalized.

Q: How were we reading what was happening in Algeria because I have seen talk about analyses showing there is an awful lot of land grabbing and clan fighting, the throat cutting and all this. This was not just a bunch of mullahs saying have your religion the way I have it or you are dead. I mean this is people going after, you know they had the usual tribal clans and all that sort of thing.

WHITE: Yes. There was ugly in-fighting among insurgents who were militant Islamists versus the relatively moderate Islamists. I guess one analogy that comes to mind is Tito in the early years of the 1941-44 uprising in Yugoslavia. Before he turned on the Germans, he turned on the non-Communist Chetniks, and practically exterminated them.

Q: This is tape 6 side 1 with Wayne White.

WHITE: Continuing on Algeria, there was a lot going on there that didn't just pertain to an Islamist uprising against the government. There was some really nasty stuff going on which related to the government itself not taking sufficient measures to stop the widespread violence in the field. It was one of the stories that INR followed more aggressively than any other intelligence shop in Washington. It was the government sometimes carrying out its own hits under the guise of the rebellion, and more damaging, and this is the story we really moved forward with, was the fact that when towns and villages in many cases were almost being exterminated by Islamists who regarded the village as a sinful village (non-supportive, or supportive of the rival Islamist militant group). There were horrific acts - butchering the men, the older women and children and then taking the young women off into sexual slavery. The government was often not doing a damn thing about such depredations. There were instances where there were government fortifications within 200 meters of an ongoing night massacre with citizens of the town beating on the door of the police station or small nearby army garrison, which was loaded with arms and had maybe 30 or 40 men, and getting absolutely no support. Why? Because more was going on in the sense that we had a corrupt, Francophone, secular, European-oriented elite supporting the military junta versus an Arabized, poorer and more Islamic population in the countryside and in the sprawling slums in major cities. This cynical ruling class was not unhappy to see Islamists fighting each other, villages devastated. Those people weren't their people. They were a bunch of Arabic speakers with Islamic sympathies. They considered themselves quite different. I once said at a conference, and I will stick to it, that if international outcry would not have been a problem, the junta might have stood by and seen tens of thousands massacred out there as long as it wasn't their people.

Q: These people were cynical.

WHITE: Yes, and ruthless. What happened in Algeria was fascinating, albeit tragic, and we did a lot of analysis on it. What happened was, ironically, that the group that won the civil war against France in 1962, mainly again Francophone and educated in French schools, used Islam as one of the themes of resistance against the French. But once the revolution was over, they lapsed back into a distinctly secular, socialist mode and stuck to it, sending most of their kids to French schools. But in the name of the revolution, they instituted the Arabization of the country beyond. Their kids didn't go to the Arabic schools set up around the country, but everybody else did. So about 20-30 years after the revolution, what do you have? You had a largely Arabic-speaking country with a strong Islamic focus, with which the ruling class had very little common ground. That was essentially the nature of the civil war - one lifestyle and vision versus another.

Q: I have an interview with Richard Parker who was ambassador to Algeria early on, and he talked about a time when he was sitting with the head of Algeria, Boumedienne and some of his ministers. Boumedienne was saying, "How come the American ambassador speaks better Arabic than you all do?"

WHITE: I will just tell you one anecdote about this ruling class that will shock you regarding the coming violence. I was in Algiers in 1991 just before the election. One made the rounds, and the DCM was Steve Coffee who was, when I left INR, the head of the Eastern European shop, an excellent foreign service officer. Steve and I went to see the head of the Algerian human rights league in the old Casbah of Algiers. Our interlocutor was an attorney. The conversation turned to the "problem" of the Islamists. This was before the violence, mind you, which makes it even more stunning, and he turned to the whole issue of rising Islamist sentiment and the popularity of the Front Islamique de Salut, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), using the French acronym. He said, "On Droit les exterminï¿½." If you know no French, it means they have to be exterminated. This was the head of the human rights league, for God's sake. He must have seen our eyes widen like saucers in shock. Or else thought that maybe we didn't understand, so he said, "C'est a dire, on doit les tuï¿½ chacan." What I'm saying is that they must be killed, every one. This is the human rights league chief which illustrates the cynicism and brutality of much of the entire ruling class that aided and supported the junta which is still in power today - and prospering.

Q: Well obviously we have real concerns about the rise of fundamentalism. At that point, much of it was focused on Algeria, and our embassy was sort of under siege, a terrible place.

WHITE: With the siege, reporting was difficult to do, but they did a fantastic job under the circumstances, of getting people to come to them and have meetings, among other things, at the embassy. Many Algerians wanted to talk to us. One of those ambassadors was Ron Newman, with his political officer Robert Ford, who did an especially fine job of making the best out of that kind of adversity in the field.

Q: Well what about, this was a French preserve, well it was part of France, French for a long time. What sort of intelligence, what were you getting out of the French?

WHITE: Well it was good stuff when they provided something, but they were not offering us very much in terms of quantity. Sometimes, in fact, the best French information came in the form of inadvertent slips on their part in the course of conversations I had with their political officers in Washington.

Q: Mitterrand.

WHITE: If you mean a diplomat with the same name as the president, that individual wasn't the one dealing with me. Anyway, I met the French embassy counselor probably twice a month-once the ambassador. We had some really frank discussions. We were all very concerned about what was going on there. One of the adverse developments that impeded the regime's ability to dig out were fraudulent elections. The junta had no credible figurehead, so it kept trying to arrange the election of a president or prime minister they could hide behind or who could "front" for them.

he first one who came in was what they call an ancien combatant, an old veteran of the revolutionary war against the French, who had remained outside of Algeria because of differences with various people in the junta, residing in Morocco. They thought: "Oh, this is great. We will bring back one of our own. He is a bit cranky, but not tainted by any of the corruption that we are all thoroughly tainted with." What did this man do to their utter dismay? He started an anti-corruption campaign. It was not surprising to us that a supposedly demented presidential guard captain gunned him down on a stage where he was giving a speech, when he had only been president about seven months. Now this captain, prior to the killing, had no reputation for having been unbalanced. His prosecution never seemed to be completed, and nobody really knows what ever happened to him. But it was almost certainly a government hit against the first president who became a dangerous challenge to their little world. The fraud and corruption was awful. The government was up to its ears in it in various provinces, even to the point where, the Algerians, being very systematic somewhat like Iraqis, actually had their various tobacco concessions, coffee concessions, Pepsi concessions (whole empires) so well divided up that senior officers had specific provinces they were assigned as their personal financial fiefdoms. We were trying to get some of this exposed and in order to pressure the government to open up a little and knock it off, saying: "You are fighting a civil war, for Gods sake, and you're not doing too well. This stuff makes the situation even worse for you" The situation didn't really turn around to their favor until I would say late '95 and early '96.

Q: Did we have any feeling towards the Algerian government at that time. You know back in the 80's about '81 they helped get our hostages out of Iran. I mean was there any residue there or was Algeria the sort of government we didn't care very much for?

WHITE: Up until this period, and including much of this period, it was a government we didn't care much for-and it for us. It was a very socialist, hard-line, pro-Soviet government that supported the PLO's most radical groups. It opposed U.S. interests in the region. In fact, the reason why it was selected for the hostage job is because it had sufficient "revolutionary credentials" to go over and talk to the Iranians with credibility. Just to give you an idea of the state of relations in the mid-1970's, when I was in Niamey, Niger, political officer and his wife were involved in a serious automobile accident, and Algiers refused over-flight clearance for the medical emergency and evacuation aircraft sent from Germany to pick up our injured colleagues. But gradually there was a warm up between the two governments. And what happened when this government became so beleaguered with a serious insurgency (largely of their own making) was a desperate reaching out to Paris, Washington, London and other major Western governments for recognition, help, anything of use in its struggle against the rebels.

Q: The Soviets were gone by this time.

WHITE: The Russians were still there in Algiers in significant numbers but didn't really count for much in all this. They had their own problems. The Algerians were desperate for recognition, help, legitimization (following a de-legitimizing, aborted election), and many Western governments were holding them at arms length. It is ironic that this repressive regime, although it gradually cleaned up its act a bit from the late 1990's through the present day, found opportunity in the global war on terrorism by getting the residual resistance groups in the country branded terrorist groups and cooperating by turning over information on all kinds of Afghan-related terrorists they had picked up among the ranks of the more extreme rebel groups. So relations with Algeria finally became somewhat close following 9/11, and, after several flawed elections, including the one that elected President Bouteflika, who is still there now, they have cleaned up their act to some degree. A few positive things have happened there, but at a terrible price related to earlier blundering, insensitivity and ruthlessness.

Something that we saw there for the first time, and now extends not quite in the same way to what is happening in Iraq, was, for lack of any other term, a bestiality related to extreme elements of the Islamic resistance. Beyond what is more well-known - slitting the throats of many innocent civilians - I will just select one thing. That is taking young girls prisoner for sexual slavery. These poor girls could be anywhere from the age of 13 to 25, and many were used for manual labor during the day and group rape at night over periods of weeks or months. One can hardly imagine the torment. Once the girl got pregnant, they would often slit her throat and throw her down a well or leave her body on a roadside. One courageous Algerian girl about 16 or 17 escaped after going through this ordeal for several weeks and told her story in the Algerian media. It is enough to make you cry. But she came forward, even though she knew it meant, among other things, that she might never marry in that culture. Perhaps it would have been better for her to cover it up somehow. This sick stuff was done under justification by certain twisted minor clerics who distorted a Koranic injunction about the flexibility of marriage to justify such brutal criminality.

Q: It sounds something like where we have the Charlie Manson, the cult type thing. Were we seeing essentially were these sort of cults growing up under the guise of Islam?

WHITE: Partly, but there were also some criminal elements in the resistance as well, as there are in Iraq. The rebels in the early years largely fought fairly clean, hitting army and police targets. Then this kind of stuff was begun, largely affiliated by the breakaway GIA, the French acronym for the armed Islamic group. GIA was vicious. It engaged in the village massacres I mentioned. In the main, the AIS (the military wing of the FIS) was generally not into that sort of thing. Ironically, this bestiality caused the government to get its first traction in turning the population against the insurgents. So the rebels were only shooting themselves in the foot. But one reason I mention all this is that we sometimes are dealing with such bestiality in Iraq. Al-Qaeda in Iraq sympathetic clerics justify car bombings of innocents. Even when a car bomb is targeting police lining up for medical exams, it blows up and it kills the kid across the street and three women who came along with their husbands because they had to get something done afterward. Grabbing and killing groups of soldiers and policemen, most of whom joined up just because they needed the money, is similar to hapless 18-year old draftees in Algeria being pulled off public buses en route unenthusiastically to their first assignment having their throats slit by GIA. We now find them ritually murdered in groups of 20 or 30 and dumped into the Tigris, trash dumps, etc. In Algeria, they would be pulled off in front of the rest of the people on the bus, with the six or seven poor young soldiers having their throats slit on the spot as a warning to the others.

Q: Was ion Iraq, was the United States at all a target or was this pretty much home grown and home concentrate?

WHITE: You mean in Algeria.

Q: Excuse me, in Algeria.

WHITE: That is a very good question because I had something to do with that policy and so did Ron Newman and a few other people I know. Not only is the Algerian government woefully corrupt, stole a few elections, aborted another and therefore was sort of a political untouchable for us (despite French pleas, because the French did not want an Islamic republic across the Mediterranean from them), we did not want to support the government because we would become party to a conflict and put our people at risk. Despite French entreaties and urgings even from people inside the U.S. government who were concerned about Algeria "falling," we tried to stay as clear as possible, refusing military-related requests of the smallest importance, and were critical of the government. Again, this was aimed at making sure that our people in the country were not viewed as having anything to do with supporting that government against the resistance. We lost not a single person during that period, whereas a number of French were killed. In fact there was a dramatic attack on the French embassy that knocked off about 20 people. But some other governments who got too close to the Algerian regime had some of their nationals killed. Now, if the ambassador of the United States of America took a stroll through an insurgent-infested area, I am sure they would have taken advantage of the opportunity for an easy strike and big headline. But they didn't show a lot of aggressiveness in trying to go after us.

Q: Well we may be getting close, I think we better call this off for the time being. I can go longer if you want.

WHITE: I can go a little longer too.

Q: All right, maybe we should turn to Libya during this period, because Libya under Qadhafi had sort of been our great enemy and all that. How was it, we are talking about 1992 or so?

WHITE: We can actually go up to almost the very recent period. You know, the late 1990's through, say, 2003. The whole period of the 1990's essentially was one in which Libya was struggling to normalize itself with the international community while making the least concessions possible, a rather wasted effort. There was only one way under UN resolutions it could normalize its relations with the outside world: turn over the indicted perpetrators of the famous 1988 bombing of Pan Am 103.

Q: Pan Am, Lockerbie.

WHITE: Yes, it goes by a couple of names. The Lockerbie bombing of Pan Am 103 always gave me a few goose bumps because on all my various briefing trips to the Persian Gulf with CENTCOM during 1983-1986, we would go through London and have a session with the Brits, you know, to compare notes. It was a standard stop, a two day overlay in London. It was a very welcome one, too, in order to have time with them, and then we would be off to the United States. My flight home of choice was usually Pan Am 103. I had been on Pan Am 103 probably 5 or 6 times before Lockerbie, so I could literally imagine, as I said to my wife once, because I knew how far out the plane was when it was hit, the first few moments of the disaster. The barometrically-triggered device that was put in the Pan Am 103 luggage compartment prematurely detonated, or else the Libyans probably would have gotten off. They underestimated the rate at which the plane would gain altitude. Their intent was for the plane to blow up out over the Atlantic, and in fairly deep water, so useful forensics or recovery of evidence would be very difficult or near impossible. Instead, the ascent of the plane was steeper, and it blew up over land, which gave everyone the evidence needed to pin it on the Libyans. I think of where I would have been in that plane, from time to time. You know, the announcement: "Now you may get up and move about, and we will begin our drink service....," and the next moment this shattering blast with the aircraft then coming apart all around the passengers and crew.

Libya, by the way, was going through two transformations. One, was the effort to normalize itself with the international community by doing just about anything except turning over the three indictees. Two, because of the events in Algeria I discussed, which had reverberations throughout North Africa, Qadhafi was becoming much more concerned about Islamic militancy and cracking down in ways that made the Libyans cooperate much more with the Tunisians, Egyptians, Moroccans and some other governments they had had iffy relationships with before. So she was being slowly sucked into the mainstream. Qadhafi is a fascinating character. I wish I would have stayed in the government long enough to have visited Libya. The reason he didn't give up those people for so long is that he was terrified that all we wanted was to get hold of those people, use the court proceedings and confessions behind closed doors against him. He believed the intelligence services were going to be given access to them, which was not done, and that he was the real target of all this. He was very scared. Despite how radical he seemed over the years, I can't tell you how many times he sent out feelers to us, you know, desperately wanting some kind of direct relationship. He was obsessed with meeting the American president to secure assurances he wanted concerning his safety that he thought could only come from the very top.

Q: Much of this stemmed from the bombing of Libya after the...

WHITE: Following the Labelle discothï¿½que thing which recently was finally resolved.

Q: But you know, up to then it seemed like he was riding top, absolutely could do what he wanted. It really did change.

WHITE: It did, and you know, if it wasn't for his involvement in international terrorism, people would probably know far less about Qadhafi. Well, I suppose the other factor was his eccentricity, to put it mildly. I was in the Middle East when our 1986 bombing of Libya occurred in response to that bombing. I was briefing senior UAE military officers and the UAE foreign minister that day. It was interesting what I would hear that day and down the Gulf: "Why are you bombing him? He is crazy. Just leave him alone in his little corner. He has no power. He has no influence. We think he is Majnum, crazy. Just let him be." Of course, that was easy to say for them. They didn't have their people killed in the Labelle Discotheque or an airliner blown up. Anyway, he had almost no influence over Arab leaders outside Libya. He was so erratic and unreliable that nobody could have a meaningful relationship with him. When we could see that closure was only a matter of time on Pan Am 103, I had to warn our people about him. In other words, he would get some sort of relationship with the United States, and I had to begin warning saying this will be one of the roughest relationships you will ever have because this man, while not crazy and actually quite intelligent and inquisitive, certainly would be a problem. If he was in the United States and had a normal job, this is someone, although not insane, would probably have required therapy - an individual who, as a head of state, would be damn hard to deal with in a conventional diplomatic way.

I will just give you one illustrative anecdote. I represented the State Department for 12 years, 1990 to 2002, at NATO Middle East Experts Working Groups convened twice per year in Brussels. It was an interesting exercise because I witnessed the transformation of NATO. When I first arrived, it was just a group of 16. Then with the fall of the Soviet Union, all Warsaw Pact countries were invited to attend one of the two annual meetings as "Cooperation Partners." They would fill the room. We went from 16 to 30-plus. Some wouldn't come because they didn't have the money. Then, finally, the beginning of the admissions of the new Eastern European NATO members began: the Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, etc.

Anyway, in the context of those talks we discussed Libya in practically every meeting. One story stood out as illustrating how strange Qadhafi could be. The Turkish representative to one of these meetings went along with his prime minister on the first Turkish state visit to Libya in something like 20 years, which I think happened in 1987. He was relating the story to me in the early 1990's. He said: "You won't believe what happened at the state dinner. Everyone assembled in a huge auditorium in honor of the Turkish prime minister-a state dinner. My prime minister and all the other guests, numbering several hundred, sat without food service, without drinks, without anything, for two hours waiting for Qadhafi." It was incredibly rude." Then, abruptly, a panel opened immediately behind Qadhafi's seat, and he walked in, sat down. Immediately, there was joy in the room because food service started - drinks and everything else. Through that special door, Qadhafi got his own unique food service, presumably because he was afraid he might be poisoned, and had his own food carefully controlled. You're probably thinking, as I did: "Oh this doesn't sound extremely odd quite yet." But Qadhafi said nothing to the Turkish prime minister. He ate his meal looking straight ahead, and then got up and disappeared through the panel behind him. Of course, I asked the same questions you're probably thinking, like: "He said absolutely nothing? He didn't even say 'Hello' or 'Goodbye?' He didn't even turn and nod?" According to the Turk, he said nothing. So he is a very strange man, and having a relationship with him is going to be a trial over the coming years. But, anyway, he did finally come clean, although giving up his WMD was doubtless driven largely by fear in the wake of the 2003 Iraq invasion that he might be next. At present, we are still mainly working with officials close to him who engage in relatively normal diplomacy.

Q: By the time we are talking about oh from '92 on, were we seeing Libya as no longer the source of a problem?

WHITE: Very much so. The threat from Libya was just disregarded. It was how soon would past Libyan matters be sorted out, and, of course, at every one of these NATO meetings, the representative of the former colonial power, Italy, would have to put his hand up and go into a 10 minute Libya apologia, urging engagement, etc. Then, of course, several hands would go up from other predictable parties to counter that. I didn't even have to put my hand up sometimes, leaving the trashing of the Italian position to others. But one funny thing that would happen almost every year is if you were at, I believe, the spring meeting, the Italians would make this proposal. If you were at the fall meeting the Italians would sit there without saying anything. Why? Because Libyan liberation day from Italy fell just before the fall meeting, and virtually every year Qadhafi seemingly cannot resist whipping himself up into an anti-Italian tirade, slamming Italian imperialism, Italy's immorality, Italy's crimes against humanity, etc. Frankly the Italian occupation was pretty rough, especially when Graziani was crushing tribal power in the 1930's. But Qadhafi would not be able to resist hammering the Italians one more time, and at the fall meeting the Italian NATO representative would often just sit there in silent revenge. It would take them a few months to get over each year's tirade.

Q: How about Egypt? What were we seeing in Egypt. Were we concerned about the Islamic Brotherhood or any other. I mean were we looking at North Africa in terms of radical Islam?

WHITE: We were, and Egypt was part of that. In fact, that is perhaps about the only area I got into pertaining to Egypt in any depth during this period. Egypt was the leader of the North African group bolstering itself against rising Islamist strength. They made typical mistakes. You have a Muslim Brotherhood that wants into the mainstream political process, a Muslim Brotherhood that over the years had, in the main, become more moderate. It had a hard line wing, you know, but it was relatively small, and, later, a vicious splinter group that was even smaller still. But, instead of capitalizing on some of these differences, Brotherhood people were arrested and otherwise harassed until the one especially radical element noted above (Gamayat Islamia) became a dangerous terrorist group. It was a self-fulfilling the prophesy, you know, by political mistake and clumsiness: they are treated badly, so some of them become rather bad. My North African Division excluded Egypt. It was an odd sort of thing. Egypt was included in the Arab-Israeli Division because it was so heavily involved in Arab-Israeli peacemaking. In fact, my division, the North African, Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, and Iran Division was sometimes called - even by me - "the everything left over division" (what was left after Israel and its immediate neighbors were carved out of the core Middle East).

Q: Well this probably is a good place to stop. I think where we want to pick up the next time, unless there is something else we should cover, you know events leading up to...

WHITE: Almost current events.

Q: Really current events. I mean you still are very much involved in it although retired. We are talking about the rise of real anti terrorism. It is affecting us all over. And what led up to our attack on Iraq and all that. So we will do that the next time.Today is 21 June 2005. We want to go back to 1998 was it, '96 to Khobar Towers. If you could explain what you were seeing what happened there, and then we will move on.

WHITE: Yes, but well before Khobar Towers a global war on terrorism was actually already raging. We had the twin towers bombing of '93 which, of course, was not in any way nearly as serious as the other one. We had the USS Cole bombing in Yemen in 2000, and, most dramatically and I think, appallingly, the East Africa bombings of the late 1990's which wounded over 5,000 people. There were plenty of warnings that this challenge was upon us - in fact, too many warnings for the Clinton Administration, for one reason or another, to have responded so inadequately.

Q: Did you have any role in this?

WHITE: Well, to the extent that things happen in the Middle East, yes, although you have to keep in mind that INR had a separate terrorism analysis office (Office of Terrorism, Narcotics and Crime-INR/TNC) charged with working that issue most specifically. One incident got a little personal. At the time of the USS Cole bombing in Aden, I had a Presidential Management Fellow, a young woman, who was out in Yemen. I sent her out there for 3 months on arrangement with the ambassador, Barbara Bodine, in order to get acclimated to embassy work in the Middle East. She just happened to be there during the Cole bombing, and became part of the task force, getting clearances for military flights, and the like. What struck me at the time, and there was a lot of frustration in the Intelligence Community over this, was the lack of a strong reaction on the part of the Clinton Administration. When people are talking about the lack of warning before the 9/11 bombings, in a way it is unfair to largely dump all over the current administration. Whatever you feel about it positively or negatively otherwise, the Bush Administration had very little time to focus on terrorism in a major way in the less than 8 months between the inauguration and 9/11. Everyone knows what a president does during the first 6-9 months of his administration. He is appointing people, getting set up, sorting out his domestic and foreign priorities, etc. It is a hectic time, and it is not a time during which one can easily zero in decisively on problems like this. So I have some sympathy for this administration on that score. I really blame the Clinton Administration for not really getting things on track and hitting back much harder against key terrorist nodes like Afghanistan-and Bin Ladin in Sudan-well before 9/11.

Q: Where as you saw it looking back. Where did sort of the war on terrorism or the focus on terrorism, where should it have been and what happened that it didn't happen?

WHITE: We should have gone after Bin Laden earlier, and with much more intensity. We should have perhaps even conducted the Afghanistan operation earlier. The East Africa bombings of 1998 would have been the ideal pretext for getting started because, with 5,000 wounded and something like 250 killed (Africans, Americans, other nationals), a major response would have looked far less like the Americans lashing out at an enemy and more like a collective reaction on the part of a lot of injured parties around the world. As a matter of fact, because of a well-placed contact, I believe I know who probably worked to avoid some effective counteraction in at least relating to one major act of terrorism: Sandy Berger.

This is where we get into the Khobar Towers discussion. There was pretty good evidence that although the Iranians might not have been directly behind Khobar Towers back in 1996, Iranian-backed Hezbollah elements on the Arabian Peninsula were. So there apparently was some sort of Iranian connection to the bombing. Our failure to act doubtless related to political developments inside Iran. It was around the time of the reform movement gaining strength and the election of reformist President Khatamin 1997, the year following Khobar Towers, when some of the best evidence was coming in on the bombing. The Clinton Administration did not appear to want to pick a fight with the Iranians because of hope in Washington (and Riyadh) that an opening with Iran was possible. Much evidence linking Khobar Towers with the Iranians was suppressed within the intelligence community and U.S. government. For quite some time, specific action was taken to deny line analysts, their superiors access to raw intelligence relating to this issue. Incoming evidence on Khobar Towers became so controversial at the time that we heard that the only person who could see some of the Khobar Towers traffic that was being denied us in the State Department after a certain point was Secretary Albright. I heard she did something very interesting in reaction to this. She reportedly said: "If my experts cannot see this raw intelligence reporting in order to evaluate it properly for me, I don't want to see it either because I don't know what it means." She basically threw it back in their face, challenging them to do what they should: make it much more broadly available so we could do our jobs.

Q: Who is "Their face?"

WHITE: Senior people in the Clinton Administration who ordered this unusual step, among which I believe probably was Sandy Berger. There was collateral damage because some of the information that was held back from normal distribution was material that contained other information of use to us in evaluating other developments that we needed for the analysis of other issues pertaining to Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf. We heard that if one small portion of an intelligence report related to Khobar Towers, the entire intelligence report was put on restricted distribution. We've dealt with things like this before, but it was generally restricted to, say, the INR Front Office. In this instance, the restriction initially went all the way to the top in the Department. It seemed aimed at avoiding pressure from building within the government (and the potential for a related leaks) for action against Iran at a time when it was felt at the highest levels that our foreign policy interests concerning Iran might be moving in different direction. I don't think that is the way to run things. We know about some of this because people in one intelligence agency ordered to severely restrict distribution of reports they were receiving relating to the Khobar Towers bombing along the lines I have described were horrified, and tipped us off under the table about just how upset they were and just how large the body of material not being properly distributed happened to be.

And who knows, strong action might not have been a mistaken path. We might have gotten a reaction from the Iranians which was different than the one anticipated. In other words the Iranians, the reformists, might not have simply waved off the evidence as lies and demanded an explanation from their own government. Anyhow, what was done by us turned out to be a losing gamble. What did we get in the end? We got the defeat of the reformists in Iran, no improved relations with Iran, and no payback for the victims of the Khobar Towers bombing.

Q: I want to come back to the Khobar Towers. Let's talk a bit what were you picking up about Iran before this? Was there two different forces at work? One we call a reform movement and the other the darker force trying to make things as difficult for America?

WHITE: Even at the height of the reform movement (which would be roughly 1997-99) when reformists had the presidency, parliament, and local councils, and it would otherwise seem to be in a position to exercise some measure of restraint, two Iranian intelligence organizations functioned, both relatively independent of presidential oversight and control, existed (and still exist). The first is the Ministry of Intelligence and Security or MOIS. A cabinet ministry, but answerable to the Supreme Leader first, not the president, is one side of the intelligence bureaucracy, although it might not be quite so active as it once was. The Supreme Leader and more shadowy and hard line elements in his inner circle such as some of those on the Council of Guardians and the leadership of the Revolutionary Guard Corps also have at their disposal another, perhaps now more robust and dangerous, intelligence operation run out of the Revolutionary Guard Corps. Particularly infamous is this Revolutionary Guard "Qud's Force," or Jerusalem force. These people appear to be running the really nasty covert ops, whether in Lebanon, Iraq, or elsewhere. These are the real bad guys. The reformist president almost certainly had virtually no say over the activities of the Qod's Force.

Q: You were telling off mike. Will you talk about Al Khobar?

WHITE: Yes. This is very interesting. Rarely in the world of terrorism, because these matters are so covert and carefully planned, do you get specific information that something is going to happen and when. You rarely get enough before the fact and in time to do something about it. I was working away in my office back in 1996 a couple of weeks before the Khobar Towers bombing, and my Arabian Peninsula analyst came in to see me carrying some reports. He was a Foreign Service Officer doing only a one-year tour in our office, and with little or no prior experience in intelligence, but very, very diligent. He said: "I think there is going to be a bombing. Someone is probably going to hit Khobar Towers. The indicators are pretty clear. I think we need to write something on it in the SMS," which, as I said before, gets distributed around the intelligence community, to the Secretary, other cabinet departments, the NSC, military commands, etc.

Disbelieving that we would ever get such clear indicators, I said, "Are you kidding? We never get this kind of warning." I asked to read the sheaf of reports he was carrying. Most all of them were DIA or military-related reports. I scanned them, and in ten minutes I was right back in his office saying, "Write, for God Sake, write!" So the next morning, 13 days, I believe, before the Khobar Towers bombing, INR issued a warning that it was probably going to happen. DIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency, picked up on our analysis very quickly. They ran their own warning, perhaps 10 days prior to the bombing. Some measures were taken by the people on the scene, but not nearly enough to deal with a bombing of that magnitude. That truck may have been the largest bomb that anyone had ever produced for such a mission up to that time. Virtually none of the bombings in Iraq have matched the sheer power of that truck bomb.

Q: They are mostly car.

WHITE: There have been both, with a truck bomb having taken out the UN headquarters in Baghdad back in August 2003, but this was an entire fuel truck with detonating explosives. The massive load of fuel comprised its main explosive power. It was just devastating. But we called it. It was an incredible call. Regrettably, however, we thought we would make more of a difference. I would like to place the credit where credit is due and name FSO Joe Fishbein as the man who put the pieces together and made that call, a man new to the job and not a terrorism analyst. He's one of those heroes in government that most of those critical of, say, the State Department never get a chance to hear about otherwise.

Q: Obviously there was some ability, but how the hell can you call it? I mean what was coming out, and why wasn't somebody else picking this up?

WHITE: Well, that's where it gets interesting. You get into situations where there is just so much intelligence that people have to sift through that you can easily sift through it, see the reports one by one, arriving during a span of days or weeks, and not put them together in one package. In addition, much intelligence can be insufficiently specific or from sources not highly regarded. Joe noticed in his careful scanning of the traffic that there was a disturbing pattern emerging. He picked out about five or six reports, most from the people on the scene, that all pointed in the same direction - people involved in too many suspicious activities in the vicinity of the Khobar facility, a rather systematic pattern of casing the facility on the part of the terrorists.

Q: By surveillance.

WHITE: Right, things like that. In fact I think the other report that was really stunning to us was somebody supposedly accidentally losing control of his car and actually ramming into one of the security barriers there. Someone else might have chalked it up as an accident, but with the other reports in hand, it appeared to us as an attempt to test the strength of the security barriers for possible penetration by a car or truck bomber. Even the Khobar Towers people, their own security people, reported that they weren't entirely buying the story that this guy just lost control of his car. I think he might have had some other connections that were a little suspicious. So, anyhow, all this came together, and very quickly, meaning that it seemed imminent, that they were close to attempting an actual attack of some sort, and we had pulled together what is called actionable intelligence in advance of the attack.

Q: Were the Saudis alerted?WHITE: Yes, the Saudis were also alerted. The Saudis actually made some revisions in their protection of the facility, but nobody was ready for this monster of a bomb. They could have done more, and the commander came under criticism for not doing more, particularly in view of the warnings. But, anyway every once in awhile you actually can use intelligence, add some real ingenuity, and predict pretty specifically something that is going to happen. And even though the precautions-widening the perimeter somewhat, for example, did not prevent significant damage and loss of life, the results of the bombing would have been even worse without the warnings.

Q: Where did the, I mean was it, were you picking up that this is essentially an Iranian operation early on?

WHITE: No, all we knew was the place was being cased, and that the casing was fairly intense. The intelligence that made it fairly clear to me that it was done by people with connections to Iran came many months later, before we started being denied a lot of the intelligence that might have made that nature of that connection still clearer.

Q: Were the Saudis in a way complicit in this in that they didn't want to raise...

WHITE: Well, months after the fact, they, as with, apparently, some senior Clinton Administration officials, did not want any new trouble with Iran. They saw it as an opportunity, this period of reform in Iran that appeared to be succeeding with the election of Khatami in 1997. They wanted to make their peace with the Iranians - see the reformers keep gaining. They knew that accusations and retaliation risked strengthening the Iranian hardliners once again. They probably were putting heat on people like Berger to back off. In fact Berger had a number of one on one meetings - I know this from that same source of mine - with Bandar Bin Sultan, the Saudi ambassador. Those two huddled over this issue repeatedly, seemingly gambling that the reformists, without interference related to Khobar, would prevail continue to make steady gains against the conservatives. And, during 1997-1999, that appeared to be the case.

Q: This of course is always a dangerous thing. Bandar figures in a lot of things. He has got far too much influence I think in our government. And he is working for somebody else. I mean i.e. the king of Saudi Arabia.

WHITE: That is right. He had a lot of easy access. He was probably the only ambassador who could call up the White House, say I need to see the President for 15 minutes, and get into the oval office in an hour or two. For awhile, he was ailing and appeared to be falling out of sight, but more recently he has bounced right back into the fray. The Khobar saga played out in his heyday.

Q: This is '96. The USS Cole, an American destroyer was bombed off the Yemeni coast by a...

WHITE: Speed boat full of explosives.

Q: When did that happen?

WHITE: 2000.

Q: Now how did we see that?

WHITE: As an Al Qaeda strike. In fact, one that prompted the launching of that rather ineffectual cruise missile strike into Afghanistan in an attempt to catch Bin Laden at a large meeting involving him and a number of other al-Qaeda leaders at one of their training camps.

Q: I heard, not a horror story but somebody saying if you are going to do this, you should do it at a certain time because you will catch everybody at prayers. It was decided no we will do it at night because something operational would work better at night. Well of course by that time, the people had dispersed.

WHITE: I had not heard that much detail, only about a meeting - a meeting of Al Qaeda leadership types-and the fact that we had waited too long for some operational reason, perhaps the one you cite. At that time the USG tended to be more cautious than it has been since 9/11. Now we are much more aggressive, but in those days there were always time-consuming approvals that had to be gotten. So you intelligence telling you that the high value target (or person) is there NOW, and that you have to strike NOW. Meanwhile, up the chain of command, this guy needs approval (or clearance) from that guy and he or she, in turn, needs approval from someone else. By the time you launch the missiles, it could be hours after the target was originally identified. This is why they have developed this new rig for one of our major reconnaissance platforms, the Predator. The Predator used to be a purely reconnaissance drone, but in an effort to act without delay, they have now uploaded a Hellfire missile on the predator so you can have a Predator can identify a target and launch ordnance itself rather than waiting for an air strike that might be an hour or two away.

Q: Well what were we picking up? I mean let's go back. I don't think we have talked about Al Qaeda and how it appeared on the scene and how we became aware of it and what we were doing about it.

WHITE: Well I think in the early days, it was unclear about how...

Q: You are talking about early days, when is that?

WHITE: Let's say early to mid 1990's. It was unclear just how powerful this organization was, how well organized, how bold, and how far and how effectively its organization could project power, both inside and beyond the Muslim world. During that period, and even into the late 1990's, some Al Qaeda operatives, big fish, were in Sudan. In fact, Bin Laden himself was there for awhile. There were major opportunities to have grabbed or killed Bin Laden in Sudan that really galled many of us-and then, not after the fact. And that would have been important because he had lots of money, so his death or capture could have neutralized a considerable amount of al-Qaeda's early funding. I've heard people comment on those lost opportunities in an effort to defend themselves by saying: "Oh, well, you see we didn't appreciate his importance at that time, so any criticism is just 20-20 hindsight." No, there were a lot of analysts arguing at the time that our appreciation of what was happening was significant enough and that he represented a serious enough threat that he should be taken out or arrested. People in our own office were saying that. In fact, he and some of his kingpins had been there long enough to invest in businesses.

This is where you get into the foolish and unfortunate bombing of that pharmaceutical plant. Sure it had some links to Bin Laden through financing, but it was making pharmaceuticals for poor Sudanese, not WMD or whatever. It was a bad hit. But there was lots of intelligence on their presence in Sudan, which they were using because of its sympathetic Islamist leadership, before they went off to Afghanistan - it was sort of a way station between Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan. Even though the Sudanese government was under the domination of Hassan Turabi, we had the capability to act. Once they moved to the more remote Afghanistan, it was far more difficult to get at them without doing what we did in 2001-2002-mount an invasion.

Q: Well now one of the figures that keeps coming up is Richard Clark. Where does he fit into this at this time?

WHITE: I knew Dick very well, but only some years prior to this period-a very interesting guy. He was my Deputy Assistant Secretary for Analysis in INR for several years. In fact, he wanted me to move over to Political Military Affairs with him when he became Secretary over there. I did a couple JPMG briefing trips for Dick when he was over in PM. Anyway, Dick was an activist.. The stuff that he says on TV now, and he wrote his book in which I gather he says there were important missed opportunities, is not far from the truth. There is a little bit of 20-20 hindsight in what just everyone says. Dick, however, was characteristically activist - pushing for some of the measures that should have been taken by the Clinton Administration. Something sad is that it is my understanding that the mistaken strike against the Sudanese pharmaceutical plant I just discussed was primarily Dick's idea. Somebody I know from INR was asked to come over, who formerly worked for the NSC and had returned to State, to work on the Sudanese task force the night of the pharmaceutical factory strike as a favor, hadn't been involved in the planning at all, but looked at all the evidence supporting ittargeting while at the task force in the Old Executive Office Building. The first thing he said was something like: "This evidence is not nearly as conclusive as what you need in order to bomb this facility." He was told by people in the task force: "Too late. The decision already has been made to do this. It is happening in a matter of hours, and nobody is going to turn things around at this point." Dick probably has some regrets over that affair, although I didn't read what he might have had to say about that in his book.

Q: Did you get the feeling that the Clinton administration I mean there really was a more than usual reluctance to get involved. I mean going back to essentially Somalia and all that. I mean we already were in the Balkans but elsewhere we didn't want.

WHITE: Quite possibly, and they frankly sort of edged their way into the Balkans involvement, unfortunately. They didn't seem to want any part of the Balkans for the longest time. And I have to admit that on that particular front, I agreed. For awhile we were standing on the sidelines with the Muslim countries yelling at the Europeans: "This is in your traditional back yard; you ought to do something about Yugoslavia." Hell, it was a vengeful France that oversaw the creation of this polyglot state after WWI in the first place. Then Germans and Italians occupied it - quite brutally - and helped screw it up even further during WWII. And the Austrians owned it and didn't exactly manage affairs down there with any great brilliance either before or during WWI-quite the contrary. It was always my view that Powell's rule, you break it you own it, should hold for the Europeans historically when it comes to the Balkans, and so send in the French, the Austrians, the Germans, and the Italians to help to fix it up, not the Americans. We already had quite enough on our global plate elsewhere, thank you.There were finally signs that this was actually going to happen, and just about when that apparent change came, the Clinton Administration decided to go in. The moment that happened, the Europeans said: "Oh, good, the Americans are in, too. Let them take the lead."

Q: The Europeans said at one point this is a European matter, but they screwed it up.

WHITE: Yes.

Q: Unfortunately they left the faction which I don't know, for a lot of people, myself included, the Europeans can't get it together.

WHITE: Returning to the original question, at a time when there was the intense engagement with an Arab-Israeli peace process actually progressing with Arafat and Rabin, at a time when Russian engagement was a tremendous priority with Yeltsin, etc., this administration didn't need to take on that mess as well. We also have to remember the timing of the Monica Lewinski business. During part of the period in question, they also were turning inward, trying to work through a major domestic crisis. So I think a lot of distractions made this kind of forward leaning action in the former Yugoslavia unwelcome. And it was also after they had foolishly downsized the military tremendously after the Gulf War I, which made going in there quite burdensome - again, something that should have been a burden for Europeans in the first place, not us.

Q: Were you following events in Iraq? I mean after Gulf War I we essentially established Kurdistan in the north.

WHITE: And No-Fly zones in the north and south.

Q: What were you, I mean you still had oversight of this didn't you?

WHITE: Absolutely, all the way from 1991 to 2002, I was head of the division containing the Iraq portfolio, among other things, and we were on it constantly.

Q: Could you talk about what you were picking up?

WHITE: Well, we were utterly crestfallen along with the rest of the international community that in the year following Saddam's defeat in Gulf War I he didn't fall. Then we were into the constant process of sustaining sanctions and WMD oversight in the face of increasing Iraqi resistance. This is where we get into WMD...

Q: Weapons of mass destruction.

WHITE: Right. Sometimes people include under that missiles as well. I do. Some other people say WMD and missiles with nuclear chemical and biological warfare falling under WMD. But anyway, there was so much stalling, so much cheat and retreat, a stream of mini-crises all the way through the 1990's. A number of times the regime was caught red- handed lying. There was a major turnover of hidden material by the regime after the defection of Saddam's sons in 1995, when Saddam thought they had squealed on a lot of what he still had. He turned over reams of materials that he said he didn't have before. So there was this constant suspicion, tension, bickering among us and the other members of the Security Council in terms of measures needed in order to get Saddam to comply and rid himself completely of his weapons of mass destruction and related materials. There were, of course, air strikes. There were cruise missile strikes at certain points to try and pressure and punish him, culminating actually in an operation that had the inspectors evicted after the attacks in 1998 - UNSCOM being thrown out of the country. There was a tremendous climate of suspicion, a reluctance to believe anything the regime said because of its past lies. There was even a missile strike in 1993 after Saddam's people tried to arrange the assassination of the first President Bush.

This led to that long interlude preceding the 2002- 2003 period during which there were no inspectors on the ground, which hampered the collection of on the ground of first hand information on these largely residual programs. Admittedly, they were being denied access to a lot, but they did sometimes find some things. So here we are, with suspicions running high, information from inspectors gone, and over-reliance on Humint, human intelligence which can be, quite frankly, the weakest and least reliable of all types of intelligence. Over my years in INR, there were times when I saw a conversation with a senior foreign official, our ambassador or a visiting senior foreign official. And then, for some odd reason, the CIA received a version of the meeting as well from a contact in that foreign government. The CIA version usually turned out to be flawed and significantly different from the version that we got through normal diplomatic channels. In the case of Humint, what you are often getting is Ahmad told Jamal, and then Jamal re-told it to you know, Hamad, and Hamad told it to the CIA officer. It becomes like that old childern's game of let's sit in a circle and retell around the circle a story, always amused by what it sounds like when re-told by the last kid in the circle to hear it.

Q: IN the first place, a group that gained at the end you might say inordinate influence was the exile group, particularly fairly wealthy Iraqi in London and elsewhere?

WHITE: Mainly Ahmad Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress...

Q: His cohorts. What was our analysis of this group?

WHITE: We in INR were very leery of it, and Ahmad. The Iraqi National Council in London, or INC, just seemed to contain too many political dilettantes. Now it did have some robust membership. The two dominant Kurdish groups inside Iraq, the Kurdish Democratic Party and the Popular Union of Kurdistan, were members of it. Now they actually had a real presence on the ground, and held territory in Northern Iraq effectively under the protection of the United Nations and us. So that part was significant, and we knew that; also, for quite some time, there was the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iran known as SCIRI (or Scary, depending on your pronunciation and perspective), which had lots of assets just across the border in Iran and a network of sorts inside southern Iraq. Chalabi's domineering manipulation ways generated resentment on the part of many INC participants. The INC's fortunes went up and down sort of like watching the stock market, often depending on how seriously it was taken by those in official Washington at any particular time. Its claims as to what it could do inside Iraq (aside from the groups I singled out) and its iffy, but much ballyhooed, contacts within the Iraqi military that Chalabi claimed could turn the situation in our favor and against Saddam continued all the way to the starting of the war. Most all of it apparently turned out to be dreams, false promises and self-promotion on his part.

Q: I hate to say this, but was there sort of a feeling that you were dealing with a bunch of love merchants? I mean the middle east tends to exaggerate everything anyway. I mean with a bunch of Americans analyzing with humint I would think there would be a certain amount o f "Oh my God it is the middle east talking again."

WHITE: Well, there is something that bothers me to this day. Chalabi has been described as having this incredible charm enabling him to pretty much put it over on almost anyone. Back in the late 1990's, I spent an entire evening (about five hours altogether), just me, Chalabi, the Director of the State Department's Office of Northern Gulf Affairs, and the other State Department official's wife (Sonia was out of town). There I had 5 long hours to take my measure of this fascinating personality up close and personal. We talked about just about everything under the sun. The impression he made on me was that of a used car salesman-someone very slippery and unimpressive. I talked to my host the next day. I said: "So what was your take on Chalabi?" He said, "Same as yours - used car salesman." So I don't know what kind of charm he possessed that enabled him to put it over so well on people like Don Rumsfeld and those other people over in DOD who became his main patrons.

Q: Well were you sensing, this is before things started, I mean 9/11 and all that. But were you picking up a different take. Really you go back to the Clinton administration, of the Defense Department. Let's take Clinton first and then Bush II. Of how to deal with this almost a feeling of we goofed the last time. We didn't knock out the Revolutionary guard or something, Republican guard. Did you get, was there a feeling of that or not or did you pick up any of that?

WHITE: There was some feeling among people who had not really worked Gulf War I that we should have gone to Baghdad back then, but it was 20X400 hindsight. I never agreed with that, and most real experts on the matter didn't either. We stayed within the UN mandate; going beyond it simply wasn't the plan, and quite possibly unwise in any case. For better or worse, virtually the entire intelligence community repeatedly warned the first President Bush back in 1990-1991 that he should not move north and get entangled in something much bigger than what was already scripted. We were effectively warning about the quagmire potential of moving north into heavily settled and areas with more foliage, different ethno-sectarian realities, etc.. In retrospect, we effectively warned about what would happen in and beyond 2003. He took that advice. Then, it seemed like he took it to an extreme. He didn't finish the war. He didn't finish cutting off the Republican Guard. It seemed like that analysis, plus the mounting, bloody rout, might have actually caused him to stop too soon and become too...

Q: The general feeling is if he had completed the sweep, encircled the whole thing and sort of take away all their equipment.

WHITE: Unfortunately, he allowed quite a lot of that equipment to get back to Iraq as well. I believe he might have felt that continuing what had become very nasty rout, with perhaps another 10,000 Iraqis to die the next day, would have cast the U.S. in a brutal light, and maybe in a way he was right.

Q: Well what were you picking up about Saddam and his control of the military but also, you know every time I saw these pictures of all these guys looking alike, wearing their military uniforms sitting around a table, I kept thinking God what a ??? this must be a lousy military because they all look too much alike and they are probably chosen politically. But were we picking up stuff about one his control, and two, what the control was doing to the effectiveness of the Iraqi military?

WHITE: Yes, we did, Stu, and it is interesting. I am sort of a WWI, WWII buff. Maybe a decent comparison for the Iraqi military is probably the German military in 1944. There you had elite Waffen SS divisions which had a high state of readiness, good equipment, and considerable fanaticism, and then you had the far larger mass of regular Wermacht (or regular army) divisions starved of the latest equipment, often under-strength, and with morale considerably less than that of the Waffen SS divisions. Closer to the Waffen SS in fighting power, in the German analogy, you also had Luftwaffe parachute divisions, largely fighting as infantry by late 1941. Similarly, the Iraqi regular army people were pretty demoralized. Under sanctions their conditions got worse and worse. Not even new uniforms were issued regularly, and rations deteriorated. Then you had the Republican Guard divisions. These were well equipped, had nice uniforms, decent morale, and considerable loyalty to the regime because all of their commanders down to, say, the battalion level were picked carefully in order to be as loyal to Saddam as possible. The core of this force was clustered near Baghdad for regime protection and in an area about 50-75 miles south of it to move against the Shia, if necessary, and at least one in the north to function as the fire brigade against the Kurds. Inside this ring of two levels of the military was the special Republican Guard. These guys were the loyalist elite within the Revolutionary Guard elite. These people were equipped as a top notch mechanized infantry division. These people were also the ones entrusted with moving around and hiding assets related to WMD. They took direct orders from Saddam where to cache this, where to hide that etc, because they were very trusted.

Q: Let's say as this developed looking at Iraq. What were we, what was the INR and European thing about Weapons of Mass Destruction? What were we talking about?

WHITE: I was just writing something on that. People keep saying INR got it right and the rest got it wrong. Well, it is an exaggeration like so many things are. Yes, we got it right on the nuclear issue, which was a MAJOR driver for war-the mushroom cloud scare. There was no meaningful nuclear program in the country, and we and the Energy Department had a strong case for that. In an area outside the WMD box, we also got it right in maintaining, along with most of the rest of the Intelligence Community, that there was no meaningful connection between Saddam and al-Qaeda.

Q: Am I correct in saying you can't have in whatever you are flying over the thing, a nuclear program in that type of environment?

WHITE: Some of the issues have side-tracked everyone. In other words, for example, I was involved in a heavy email discussion with the Gulf 2000 people yesterday on the alleged purchase or should I say non-purchase of so-called yellow cake uranium from Niger by Saddam on which the Italians gave us a whole bunch of documentation which turned out to be phony. Before this was known, Joe Wilson, former ambassador to Niger (and my successor in my first Foreign Service assignment there) was sent out to Niger to try to sort all this out. But to this day I don't know why there was such a big snit about it because Saddam already had a huge quantity of yellow cake from Niger that he bought in the early 1980's. It is the lowest level of uranium product you can possibly obtain. It is pretty much uranium ore. You need a large industry, which would easily be spotted from the air, to refine yellow cake into something that could be used to build a bomb. So you are quite right, it was easy to make the nuclear call. Distractions like the aluminum tubes didn't wash with us, nor with Energy. So we made a correct call, and the rest of the community, defying explanation (aside from political pressure, perhaps) went in the opposite direction. The other thing we called correctly, as I noted before, wasn't a WMD call, but was equally important. In that case, it was that he had virtually no connection with 9/11, and that he had no relationship with Al Qaeda. Of course, despite these findings, George W. Bush continues to harp on the theme that the Iraq was directly related to the war on terrorism.

But on CW and BW, we were as wrong as anyone else. Therefore, it was good that there was a review of the evidence on that because, honestly, I have never seen more Humint on something that apparently no longer existed - Humint in one instance which was not generated by the CIA or State or any U.S. government source, which was utterly convincing to me and incredibly specific. We are not talking about three or four reports, but rather 20 or 30, as I recall. There have been developments that were true and actually had been happening on various Middle East issues for which I only saw two or three reports and deemed them to be correct. It was amazing how much disinformation was thrown at us. A lot of it came from Ahmad Chalabi and his INC, who of course wanted to get back into Iraq. He knew the only way to do that was to get the U.S. to do it militarily.

One more thing should be made crystal clear: the BW, CW and missiles Saddam was judged to have had according to the now infamous 2002 Iraq WMD NIE were largely RESIDUAL. They in no way posed a threat to U.S. interests, or probably those of anyone else for that matter. Only the nuclear language was strong, but that was the portion of the NIE challenged by a robust INR and Energy Dept. dissent. The case for war was built on this NIE, but contained considerable spin.

Q: You had almost a double thing going on. Saddam Hussein trying in a way bluff to make things look that he was more powerful than he was, and then his opponents were also looking at all of this from the same side of the street in order to get particularly the U.S. to....

WHITE: Absolutely, and that further confused the issue of whether he still had a residual WMD capability. These source reports were sometimes tantalizingly detailed, as has been coming out more recently. If they came from Chalabi, the Iraqi side as disinformation, or whatever, some seemed to be very well-prepared. When we were receiving these reports back in 2001, 2002, etc. we weren't given much information on the sourcing. In order to protect clandestine sources, there is just a little line that says something like: information from a source who in the past is believed to have reported reliably. Bingo, it's a good source. This provided very little in the way of information that would have allowed analysts to make a call on the source's reliability. I can guarantee that if many of those reports had said something like "an INC source associated with Ahmad Chalabi," most analysts would have thrown them straight into the classified burn bag.

Q: During this time, we are talking about really the lead up, up to post 9/11 and all that, but what about the French intelligence service and the British and the Soviet. I mean Russia I guess even. I mean how were you all consulting, talking, what was your impression? How was this worked?

WHITE: The closest we were talking with were the "Allies." In INR there is a practice that has been going on for at least the past two decades. Every Thursday, the "Allied" intelligence liaison officers would come to the INR Front Office and be hosted by one of the Deputy Assistant Secretaries, having chosen in advance which of 2 or 3 topics were to be discussed. They would generally have 90 minutes. We would dedicate a half hour to any subject of interest. We were up there on Iraq constantly. They would say they want a half our on Iraq WMD and Saddam's intentions or Iraq political intentions. I would be doing the political and diplomatic issues myself or with our analyst, or sitting in on a session between the Allied representatives and one of the people from our WMD shop. Beyond that, we also had close contacts with the French and, individually, I had fairly frequent meetings with others, such as the Japanese, Germans, Allied intelligence or political diplomatic personnel who wanted to speak to us one on one, and, of course the Israelis - even the Russians from time to time.

And everyone is on the same page in that he had WMD. The difference was what to do about it. In fact, when we go back to the WMD estimate that I brought up before in which INR had dissented on one key portion, I think it was important because a lot of hype was attached to the nuclear danger. That really gets peoples attention. And when we look at the bigger picture, the NIE never really said, to emphasize this again, that Saddam was a direct threat to the United States, save for the contested nuclear portion of the estimate. It just simply said, yes, he had some residual capabilities, and he has dangerous intentions. At the time it did not say what the Administration said which was, that Iraq clearly posed a direct threat to us. On the terrorism side of the house, analysts in INR did not say that he was part of the global war on terrorism. Neither did anyone else, it seems, except Doug Feith's shop in the Pentagon. This is all like somebody baked a rather unremarkable cake, but somebody else added some fabulous icing. So the political spin was the thing that took that evidence and raised it up to a level where you could gean entire nation interested enough or fearful enough to go to war.

Q: We are talking about threats to the United States at one point, and talking about when the question came, how would they get it there. I gather there were a bunch of equivalent to Piper Cubs that somehow, I mean there somehow didn't seem to be any real delivery system.

WHITE: No, all the delivery systems that he had that we assessed could still be in existence were medium-range artillery, 130mm shells fired form the basic Russian M-46 long-range artillery, 122's from the Russian D-30's, battlefield rockets, a heavy 120mm mortar, and then aerial bombs, which could be delivered by his inventory of MIG-23 Floggers, etc. Even the missiles he was allowed to retain had a range limit of, say, 100 or so miles, and, in the weeks just prior to the war (when Saddam became sufficiently frightened that he was really going to be attacked), UNMOVIC began the destruction of even those short-range missiles. Then, finally, what we are talking about was an inventory that he was trying to fool around with of essentially some crop dusting-type planes or a rather iffy experimental drone. But these were all mainly things that he would deliver agent against either somebody invading his own country or someone relatively close to his borders. Now, I don't want to oversimplify it and say therefore he was no threat to the United States whatsoever because we had some people in these nearby areas such as Kuwait, where we had an entire brigade based. So he could have posed a threat to America there - but not to the continental United States-not even much farther down the Persian Gulf. North Korea posed a far more serious all-round threat. Even Libya, with its SCUD inventory still intact at the time, could still do what it did in the 1980's and fire a SCUD at an Italian island in the Mediterranean, and therefore count coup on a NATO ally.

Q: Well was any, I mean in a way INR would only be a consumer, but was anybody looking at the effectiveness of the Iraqi military? I mean you are talking about OK they have got new equipment for the time, but I mean the new equipment was 1972 technology or the equivalent thereof. I mean it proved absolutely ineffective.

WHITE: For most tanks, armored vehicles and artillery, it wasn't even 1972 in most cases - more like 1962. They had the best equipment left over from the Iran-Iraq War and the 1991 Gulf War. The only new things they were getting and smuggling in using oil for food money and associated rake off money were tires for vehicles, treads for armored vehicles, replacement gun barrels for artillery and tanks, spare parts for engines, etc.. Nothing was really coming in that gave him any new conventional capability.

Q: Actually the equipment proved to be completely outgunned.

WHITE: Oh God yes.

Q: I mean there was no, I saw these tanks of theirs with the turret blown off.

WHITE: It might have been a lot better, Stu, if they had had a lot more modern equipment that required military attention because then the force going in would have been somewhat larger. The mistake we made was correctly assessing the rather minimal capabilities of the Iraqi conventional military and then assuming we didn't need much of a force to go in, and then scaling it down. But that reduced force was not adequate tthe task of safely occupying and securing the country once it was defeated. That, of course, leads to the chapter of chaos, looting and the things we talk about so much today.

Q: Were you picking up was Afghanistan a completely different area, or were you picking up some about what was happening there?

WHITE: It is a completely different area as far as Iraq is concerned. But as Deputy Director of INR/NESA, Near East AND South Asia, I also had some responsibilities related to the Indian subcontinent and Afghanistan. In fact, in the funky way things can happen at INR because of the small numbers of people we have, I got into the business of being the expert on the complex Diaspora from Afghanistan of al-Qaeda fighters that happened as we progressively took over the country. They all spewed out into Pakistan, and to the Gulf through Iran, etc. It was very important to follow that Diaspora because hundreds and hundreds were escaping. Not a good job was done in interdicting this outflow. I will just give you one example. How did most of them get away? Once they were well away from Afghanistan and had reached the coast of the Gulf, they would go on to Somalia, Yemen, or back to their own countries. How? On dhows, these little, maybe 40 to 50-foot wooden ships that probably have been used for the last 1,000 years in the Gulf. They are both sail and engine-powered. There are thousands of them. The U.S. Navy conducted search operations along with other allied navies, Australians, Brits, Italians - even the Japanese got in on this. But what would they search? Only major commercial vessels such as oil takers, freighters and container ships. No one was doing dhows. We told them you have got to go after the dhows. Even if, you know, you are only going to search one out of every three or four because of the number of them sailing around, there would have been a chance to grab some of these fleeing fighters. They absolutely didn't want to get their hands dirty. They did not want to search dhows. I know if they had gone and searched the dhows, they would have lost some sailors. I can just see them a destroyer trying to board a dhow. The guy on the dhow has an AK and he wastes two or three of the first sailors to board, but inside are 12 al-Qaeda fighters who are killed or captured. Anyway, that was the problem. The navy wouldn't deal with anything smaller than major commercial vessels, and hundreds and hundreds got away. In fact the most efficient job of picking up some of these people was done by the Omani navy. This was because that navy consists of relatively small boats, and they would search the dhows.

Q: This is tape seven, side one with Wayne White.

WHITE: Yes, the Omani navy was actually very professional. Either their small patrol vessels were captained by seconded British naval officers or they had just recently departed and the crews were really up to snuff. They caught some of these dhows and also some of the al-Qaeda cadres dumped on their shores. The very efficient Omani security service picked them up and netted them on the coast in little batches here and there. But other than that, most of them got away.

Q: Did we have any reading of all that was leading up to Al Qaeda and Al Qaeda recruitment and all that?

WHITE: Oh yes. There was plenty of information on that-what was going on in Afghanistan, and, even before that, what was going on in Sudan.

Q: Were you picking up any information on Al Qaeda in Europe and the United States?

WHITE: I didn't see much of that. In Europe I saw more, but in the United States, a lot of the information probably was in hand, but as with the Patriot Act and these other things, before post-9/11 measures were taken, it would be squirreled away by the FBI and considered information not to be shared with the rest of the Intelligence Community because it might relate to a future trial and couldn't be used more generally, meaning that far less analytic brainpower was focused on it that might connect it with key overseas developments, and patterns were less likely to be seen. All that stuff that created so-called fire-walls which blocked one agency from seeing information from another was very harmful and was still continuing, albeit to a lesser degree, when I left government. Some of the really good information on the al-Qaeda Diaspora, for example, came from other countries from which a lot of these people originally came. These countries were terrified of people coming back and inciting violence or committing acts of terrorism on their territory, so they had agents in snooping around in interesting places.

Q: We were down to the basic question. What was our analysis at the time, what was Al Qaeda all about? Was it just to be mean to the United States or was the United States sort of in a way an easy target, or were they really after a change in the whole middle east?

WHITE: Boy, you ask good questions. I wish you had been the moderator with a certain TV station recently who asked some good questions before we went on the air and then flubbed one after we got on the air. Anyway, early on, particularly when Osama Bin Laden was based in Sudan, in early to mid-1990's, it seemed more tightly focused, in the main, on overthrowing the Saudi regime, but us as well. This is why you have so many Saudis in al-Qaeda. Its leader and mentor was a Saudi, from a prominent Saudi business family in the Hejaz.

Q: ??? Bin Laden the house.

WHITE: There you go, a huge construction company, but he was the one bad apple in the barrel, and the rest of the Bin Laden family has been traumatized ever since. In fact they actually tried to buy him back into the kingdom - an offer of total amnesty, backed by the Saudi government, plus more money. This is while he was still in the Sudan. One wonders what would have happened had he returned. But anyway, he wasn't interested in the least; his driving obsession was overthrowing what he viewed to be a hopelessly corrupt and un-Islamic regime in Saudi Arabia. Then other countries with good relations with the Saudis became legitimate targets and equally alarmed about his activities. He must have gone through a gradual process of re-thinking his overall mission and realized, hey, what about all the countries friendly with and supporting Saudi Arabia, most importantly the United States. Then, as the years went by - the 1990's - we possibly became an even a bigger target than the Saudi regime, his original obsession.

Q: How about the Taliban? How were we seeing the Taliban as a regime?

WHITE: Oh, just an awful regime which was suffocating Afghanistan in so many ways, even blowing up, you'll recall, those valuable examples of ancient Hindu architecture. It was a regime with a very serious record of human rights violations. It was a regime that had no saving graces whatsoever. It was just one more sad chapter in the history of Afghanistan that started when the Soviets moved in back in 1980. But, on occasion, that same regime tried its best to project a moderate image to the West, and would trot out its foreign minister to say all kinds of reasonable things and deny most anything else. We could even get people in. I sent our Iran analyst, who was helping out in backing up on Pakistan-related issues, around 1999-2000 into Afghanistan, actually meeting with a number of Taliban officials in southern Afghanistan - Kandahar - effectively, the Taliban capital.

Q: I talked to a man who was our ambassador there about that time in Pakistan. He said, "You know, they try to be nice and everything, but it is the 14th century there."

WHITE: The 14th century and the worst of the 14th century, because actually there were some enlightened 14th century Islamic states like the one in Spain at the time in Cordoba or perhaps even the Mamluks in Egypt. But anyway, yes, that was true, and they also most notoriously were supporting themselves in a rather major way by engaging in massive opium exporting. This drug trade was so robust that in order to evade more effective Pakistani authorities much of it was going through eastern Iran down to the Persian Gulf. The Iranians were fighting a huge anti-narcotics war in eastern Iran which is little known to most people, in which during a one year period, the Iranians lost almost 1000 soldiers, security forces and police killed in action against the heavily-armed drug convoys. A drug convoy would consist of maybe 100 vehicles. Many of the vehicles were pickup trucks with heavy machine guns in the rear and trucks full of heavily-armed fighters ready to dump out the back. This drug trafficking didn't affect the United States very much, but I believe it counted for, at one point, something like 70% of all the opium flowing into Europe.

Q: Was there a feeling in INR , maybe I have asked this before, but I will ask it again, that the question of what the hell is wrong with Islam that almost every state just you know it seems to be a couple of centuries behind unless they have got a lot of oil, and even oil doesn't seem to do more than make for a little better life? You know, one time Islam was one of the major engines of society. Was this a question you all would ask yourselves?

WHITE: Oh God, yes. I was discussing this major issue - whither Islam - as far back as the late 1970's, with the Iranian revolution really being the warning of sorts along these lines. Connected with the rise of Islamic militancy, what people variously called political Islam, Islamic fundamentalism, etc. (umpteen conference panels, papers, intelligence studies, etc. have mulled over just what to call this phenomenon), you had Middle East governments that were modernizing, but beneath them, Saudi Arabia being the archetypical example, a seething mass of people being more heavily influenced by a more militant brand of Islam as they groped for ways to solve myriad personal, social, economic and political problems. You also had forward looking regimes that wanted to be more like western Europe or more modern Islamic states like Turkey - not only modernized in terms of machinery, plants, and infrastructure, but modernized in all the other sense of the word, with more modern laws, accountability in government, separation of Islam from government lawmaking - being badgered and threatened by large numbers of people who didn't really want to be taken away from that side of what you called the 14th century.

And much of it probably boils down to one thing: humiliation and a sense of powerlessness. Islam has been in retreat since the late 17th century. Once the Ottoman, Safavid Persian and Mogul Empires, sometimes called them the three great Middle East gunpowder empires - all with their main origins in the 15th century - fell into steep decline. They were once cutting edge in military technology, with the early matchlock muskets and things like this, far ahead of Western Europe, the Ottoman Empire was able to holds lands as deep into Europe as Hungary, burn Moscow and lay siege to Vienna. But then they just drifted, ossified, and fell behind. That gave rise to a long saga of European encroachment, European colonization, the chipping away at the holdings of these empires - and world of Islam more generally. And so there was this feeling among many of the people among the affected populations of helplessness, and questions of how can they revive the "good old days," for lack of a better term. What happened was the first effort at revival - Muslim revivals - but that failed and gave way to nationalist and socialist experimentation. They were going to pull themselves up by the bootstraps in the way the Soviet Union had, and be able to stand up to the Christian West. Well, that failed too. And then there was another problem: success often wasn't measured necessarily by how well they did in modernizing their countries, but how well they did militarily against Israel, a theater of great disappointment and further humiliation.

So, with the failure of all these nationalist and socialist regimes which were inspired by more secular Western or Communist models came the next logical thing - once again trying to go back to the basics of Islam. In other words, many thought things had gone sour because they had abandoned their heritage-even Allah. People have examined this phenomenon constantly over the past 20 years - in Europe, in the United States, in INR, in Intelligence Community conferences, academic fora, etc. But there is a problem with all this largely Western chit chat, and we are still fighting this problem: Islam has to reform itself. We can't do it. Constantly you hear U.S. government figures talking about what has to be done, Islam has to moderate, etc. Many Muslims resent this. How dare you tell us Muslims how to conduct our reform or worship? They have to reform themselves, but basically they are not doing it. There are few voices out there favoring secular reform in the Muslim world or Muslim communities elsewhere, but far too few. The more dominant trend is to reject this "interference" from the West and to reject the few voices of reason in their midst. They are seething with resentment over a seeming powerlessness to determine their own future. They very much want to topple many of the regimes we work with, who are quite undemocratic. That is why Condi Rice is out there right now slamming away at the Egyptian and Saudi governments, but that doesn't do much for our relations with those states. She is not going to be able to reform them. They will push back; albeit unlikely, they have to get their own act together, if they don't collapse first. I have a feeling it is going to take decades - if not longer, maybe generations. It is not going to happen tomorrow.

Q: Well we even have a touch of this fundamentalism in the States. I know you have in Europe where you have a nearly Christian fundamentalism a turning back on evolution, turning your back on certain types of research and all that. It probably wont, at a certain point I think there is probably too much within the soul of the west that they won't stand for too much like that.

WHITE: I was raised as a Protestant fundamentalist in the most strict and orthodox of Presbyterian denominations. But it was apolitical. It did not go in the direction of some of the rather disturbing Evangelical activities I am seeing today. I am quite appalled by it all. Just to pass along an amusing anecdote, connecting this with the issue of Islam, there were, as I said, a few different names going around for militant Islam, one of them being Islamic fundamentalism. When James Baker was Secretary of State (that is how far back this debate goes), I was told that he said at one point up on the 7th Floor to participants in a meeting, whether joshing or serious, that he didn't want people in the Department using the term Islamic fundamentalist, preferring political Islam, because his wife was a Protestant fundamentalist.

Q: Could we talk about, I thought we might finish this session, but could you talk about Africa and east Africa and what happened there. What were we getting and why did you have this tremendous attack on our embassies and all, from the intelligence point of view.

WHITE: I didn't really get in deeply into what was happening in East Africa at the time, but you are asking a very good question. Some African governments were very much focused on the issue of political Islam and its spread south of the Sahara. They were quite alarmed. Appropriate portions of the intelligence community also were aware of this and were similarly concerned. Some in the policy community were as well. There were meetings on this. I attended perhaps one or two because we were supposed to be the experts on Islam; they were the experts on sub-Saharan Africa. Only very belatedly in that process did people become aware of the fact that they had a problem regarding the spread of more militant Islam. And here we had the Saudi regime threatened by militant Islam, partly because of its own ideology which Saudi ruling circles didn't particularly believe in any more, funding its spread south of the Sahara through Saudi NGO's (although some well-meaning Saudi NGO's have, I believe, taken too many hits on this issue). Anyway, in retrospect, I suppose there was a bit of a disconnect between the terrorism people, the Middle East analysts, and the sub-Saharan African regional people. There were three different slices of activity going on, and I don't think it was knitted together as well as it could have been. On the other hand, I don't want to blame us completely because it was terribly easy for terrorists to embed themselves in a place like Dar es Salaam or Nairobi because the security services there were pretty weak. We had problems with often relatively substandard intelligence services in the Middle East and North Africa, but those intelligence services looked absolutely robust compared with most of their sub-Saharan African counterparts. So, to me it was just a juicy target of opportunity for al-Qaeda and those inspired by it.

Q: Did you get the feeling, who were these people who blow themselves up? I mean were we asking this question because today a person blowing themselves up is sort of the weapon of choice being used against us which is almost intolerable we think western.

WHITE: It is funny you should ask, because last weekend in reaction to a number of questions along the same lines, I wrote something on this in the form of a blog. People assume that people who do this are crazy or somehow beyond the pale. And they probably aren't "normal" as we would define that term in the context of our society and time. But on the other hand, it is the same way in which we often dismiss Japanese so-called Kamikaze pilots as crazy. However, at the time, in fact, many of these people were just looking at the odds and to some degree acting rationally. A Japanese pilot taking off in A6M5 Zero-Sen fighter in late 1944 or early 1945 was going into battle with an obsolete aircraft without effective self-sealing fuel tanks, virtually no pilot armor, with one quarter the training of his American counterpart, flying on degraded fuel (which further diminished the performance of the already inferior aircraft), and had a survival rate of about two or three combat missions if he made contact with the enemy. All he was likely to become was a little Japanese flag under the cockpit of some well-trained American pilot with a superb aircraft to fly.

So, it was a small leap from this equation to putting a bomb underneath your plane and crashing it into the side of an American warship, because since he is going to die anyway, he might as well die in a way that was going to make a difference. Japanese pilots even rammed B-29's. That was another kind of Kamikaze campaign going on. People dismissed that as sort of part of the same phenomenon. Many of those guys survived, however, and there were actually ramming aces. It was simply obvious that their weaponry was not going to bring down this huge, superbly modern, well-defended aircraft, so ramming wasn't such an unreasonable alternative to risky, futile conventional attacks, only to be shot down by superior escorting fighters.. The ramming tactic also was undertaken by a number of Soviet pilots in the summer of 1941 who were flying aircraft hopelessly outclassed by their Luftwaffe counterparts. They would ram German bombers. And there were Soviet ramming aces. They hoped to survive, but were quite prepared to die. But all these tactics are the weapon of the weak - the weapon of the outclassed, the overmatched. The weapon of people who can't do what we can do militarily.

Today's terrorists don't have an M-1 Abrahams tank to operate out of. So terrorism on a grand scale is a weapon of desperation. In many ways, I suppose they see the odds. They want to fight the Americans. They want to get at us, and they want to resist the occupation, but they can't do it conventionally. They can't even do it in a straight up fight in many cases in an alleyway because we have overhead predators and such spotting guys running down alleyways with weapons. So you see these lopsided figures from current operations that are taking place in Iraq right now like "Operation Matador," in which we lose two marines killed, 20 wounded, and we kill 143 insurgents (well, probably some counted are innocent civilians, but that's another story). So even in alleyways, they don't have much of a real chance. So methods like car-bombings or IED's are not so crazy as they might otherwise look. Then, the risk of death, combined with a somewhat perverse interpretation of Islamic ideology or theology which says that the martyr fighting the infidel goes to paradise directly, generates many recruits for missions in which they will likely be killed.

Q: A little bit like you pass the old man of the mountain.

WHITE: Exactly, very much like that. So you take the logic of the outclassed but who are determined to make a difference, even if it means death, and meld that to extreme Islamic theology, and you are there. And, also aware of the fear these tactics instill among those from a different culture, you are going to have an endless stream of these people. There is no way to stop that, at least in the short-term.

Q: Well this is probably a good place to stop. Well we are at the point that we should talk, unless there is something else we should cover next time, we should start at 9/11 and what started happening after that.

WHITE: Particularly the lead up to the war, the Iraq war.

Q: The lead up to the war, OK, great.Today is 28 June 2005. Wayne you heard where we are. So should we start right before 9/11. What was your job at that time?

WHITE: Actually it is probably best to start at 9/11 because everything changed so dramatically after that, much of what I was doing. I had, if you are going to relate it to 9/11, relatively limited duties related directly to that event, terrorism in general, etc. I was simply the INR/NESA Unit Security Officer, a position I had held since the late 1980's. Of course, I had the responsibility for getting my whole office evacuated on that day. I actually saw the 2nd tower get hit (I just happened wander by a TV and see it take place).

Q: Where were you located ? In the State Department?

WHITE: Main State. As with people everywhere, many of our people were watching the events surrounding the twin towers that day. I guess everyone has a story. I watched a little bit of it. In fact, as I said, I saw the aircraft come in on the second hit, watching live. I had a lot of work to do that day, so I went next door into my office following the first impact, assuming it was an accident to catch up on the business of the day. Our director had the TV in the adjoining office; in fact, I had it moved out of my office because I didn't want the distraction. Then I heard from the next room, "My God, they have hit the Pentagon." I said immediately, "Everyone out! Everyone out of this building, right now! We are going because this building also is a perfect target." State is located on a nice rise up from the mall - right into that lobby. About two minutes after I said that and we were closing up everything, with me sealing the door (we had a huge SCIF door because it is a highly secure area) behind everyone after one last check that our materials had been secured, the building alarm went off saying everyone out. When I finally left the building, most people outside were about 10 yards away from the building in a huge mass standing around on the sidewalks as if it was a fire drill. So me and about three or four others spontaneously said, "Get away from here. Go up town." I even had people say, "Where?" I said, "I don't care, Starbucks, Tower Records - anything. Just get out of here because if a plane does hit here, you are going to be showered with burning aviation fuel. This is not a fire drill. You want to be hundreds of yards from this building." So we got most everyone up town. Now after 9/11, with regard to what I did, and this just happened spontaneously, because I was interested in it and nobody else in INR really seemed to want to take it on, I took it upon myself during the Afghan campaign and its aftermath, as I said earlier, to zero in on the diaspora of escaping al-Qaeda personnel from Afghanistan.

Q: Well a little, but let's go back. In the first place, had we, had your office been looking at this cadre of non-Afghan Al Qaeda types in Afghanistan and what did we know about them?

WHITE: The South Asian part of our office was working there area, but most of the work along these lines, such as it was, had been done by INR's terrorism shop, so we probably only had one-third of the action. I was interested enough in what was going on in Afghanistan, as noted earlier, to get our Iran analyst, who was also beginning to take on duties related to Pakistan, into Afghanistan only a few months before 9/11. You could go into Kandahar, which was the real Taliban center of gravity and sit down and talk with them. Of course, they were lying about not harboring certain people and this and that, but you could sit down and take the measure of those people. He had a fascinating trip and gave us some interesting insight only months before we would be going to war against that Taliban regime.

Q: What was the immediate reaction of people like yourself in the intelligence community, about where this attack was coming from and also the Iraqi connection if any?

WHITE: There was no doubt in our minds for even five minutes that this was al-Qaeda and was in some way related to Afghanistan. In fact, it just made us even more frustrated than we had been during the mid to late 1990's over the inactivity of the Clinton Administration. I am not trying to be partisan. It was the Clinton Administration's hesitation to take strong measures against al-Qaeda when it was quite vulnerable and in Sudan, where it was more accessible, that allowed al-Qaeda much freedom of action. We had some decent intelligence as to who was in Sudan, what they were doing, and they should have been taken out. Would that have prevented 9/11? I don't know, but it certainly would have disrupted what they were up to generally. As far as I remember, there was almost no intelligence on use of aircraft in this manner. I know there was something out there on that, but there was a lot of stuff floating around on plots. It is typical Monday morning quarterbacking to say such an attack was obvious. You have got a thousand pieces of intelligence on them and maybe two or three speak of this. You have tons of other intelligence, and maybe 60 or 70 pieces talk about blowing up buildings in a more conventional mode or car bombings. My impression is that It was buried in the weeds.

Q: In the intelligence world, there was concern about using aircraft. Way back the Israelis shot down an Egyptian airliner which strayed off course. It was obviously an airliner but there was concern it might be used as a bomb.

WHITE: A Libyan airliner was shot down too in a little-known incident over Sinai. It was way back I think, in 1969. That was a tragedy because there was nothing going on. They just killed 40 or 50 passengers in a Libyan airliner - just as we destroyed an Iranian airliner in the Gulf. That was a tragic incident where we, to use an air force term, pickled an Iranian air liner that was completely innocent. There was a little bit of an internal skirmish in INR over the Iranian incident. We had a naval analyst who was a good buddy of mine. Anyway, the moment that happened, I said, "This is a disaster and a bad shoot," as the navy would call it. He said, "No it wasn't. The plane wouldn't listen. It was coming in." I said to him, I said, "OK, if it was an F-14 coming in, exactly what was an F-14 supposed to do to a guided missile cruiser - go down to the deck and hose it with some light cannon fire?" It had no known capabilities for anti-ship attack. So it was a totally bad shoot. You could have easily given the plane the benefit of the doubt and let the plane come practically all the way in. There was almost nothing that an F-14, which is an air superiority fighter meant for air-to-air combat, could do to that ship. It is interesting that after a few days, my friend came back and said, "You are absolutely right. That was totally wrong. It was a bad shoot."

Q: Going back to right after 9/11. What were you getting, I mean did you get tasked anything to do?

WHITE: Well, remember I was deputy office director at that time, and so was watching the flow of paper, even though I was not a South Asian expert, nor on Afghanistan. We had some really good people working that. But our job was mainly to look over the internal situation in Afghanistan, vulnerabilities, weaknesses, and tribal and factional splits - in other words, who would become our allies when we got in, like the northern alliance. Their reliability and such issues were the ones we worked. As far as the military issues, planning and such, INR didn't have much to do with that. As far as the terrorist activity there, we were essentially feeding off of the INR terrorist shop's analysis and conclusions.

Q: Well were you getting an indicator that from the terrorist thing, the terror side of our analyses, were we looking at an Iraqi, I mean was Iraq sort of talked up as being a potential and therefore we are always looking for its hand. In the old days we used to look to the Soviet Union.

WHITE: I know. It is a good question because this is very hot and will remain so. But no, Iraq had nothing to do with it. It was not viewed as a terrorist threat. More interestingly, people, including me, were also looking at Iran close aboard, right next door. But even with that, you have the problem of Al Qaeda being Shiite hating Sunni extremists who had little in common with Iran except the United States as an enemy. Yet, Iran would provide both passive and active support for escaping Al Qaeda types, swallowing hard and doing that in its effort to inflict pain on us. As for the Iraqis, there were a couple of reports indicating that the Iraqis had met with al-Qaeda types, of which people are aware, but even these reports have been debunked. And even if the Iraqis had met with these Al Qaeda people at their request, the Iraqis expressed no interest in becoming involved because they didn't need that kind of baggage considering how bad off they were already with the international community. There wasn't one scrap of reliable evidence that the Iraqis had any meaningful connection with Al Qaeda. Now I will take a minor footnote to that and say when the Diaspora occurred, there were some Al Qaeda types went through Iraq escaping, but actually much fewer than through Iran, and even significantly fewer than through Turkey (a NATO ally). So, yes, somebody could take out that little piece of evidence and say: "Oh yes, they helped," but they didn't actually. These people escaped through Iraqi territory, but they would be far down on the hit list of those countries through which people had moved. So that was pure hype.

Q: You might explain what the Diaspora was.

WHITE: Yes. Once we had pretty much beaten up and taken down the Taliban regime and began taking control over parts of the country along with the northern alliance, there was a need for the Al Qaeda people to basically skedaddle. In other words, we failed to capture or kill, I would say, maybe 50 or 60 maybe even 70% of them. The biggest failure, and I was screaming about it at the time (along with our South Asian experts), was Tora Bora. We had a large number of them up in the Tora Bora hills, moved against them, and let the Pakistanis guard the back door, which was a joke. We had enough troops that we could have at least sprinkled that back door with companies of Special Forces (or whatever) and blocked significant portions of the escape routet. But almost all of the ones in Tora Bora escaped into Pakistan, which was the favored route of escape. Immediately across the border in the northwest provinces there were sympathetic tribes that helped them in various ways. This is now where many think Osama Bin Laden might be living.

Q: You know, from accounts that have come out, it seems that the President and Condoleezza Rice, the national security advisor were saying within a day or two that there was an Iraq connection and to make the Iraq connection. Did that translate down to your office anywhere, because you had, Iraq was on your desk.

WHITE: Not nearly that quickly, but there was no Iraq connection worth mentioning, in any case.

Q: Well no, but I mean was somebody saying, Dammit find it, or something?

WHITE: No. There was no pressure on our shop that I was aware of. The Christian Westerman outrage about pressure on him over WMD from Bolton seemed rather unique. For one thing, I don't think Colin Powell or Rich Armitage believed it either - or Marc Grossman, the Undersecretary for Political Affairs. No, I don't think most people believed that. Bolton was largely an anomaly on the CW front at State in the pressure department, and there was no pressure on us - INR/NESA - that I knew about. I will have to add another footnote to this story. There was a small pocket nudged up against the Iranian border in Iraqi Kurdistan that a virulent group of militantly Islamic Kurds gained control of-a tiny little pocket. The pocket was under the Ansar al Islam - very nasty. Into that pocket came some of the fleeing Al Qaeda types. That was cited at the time by our government at times, and the funny thing was that Iraqi Kurdistan was essentially under our protection. Baghdad had absolutely no control over that area. It wasn't their fault. It was the fault of Kurds who were completely unable to drive them out despite several attacks because those guys were so tough. It was also the fault of the Iranians for allowing these people to filter in there and not doing anything about it like sealing the border on their side.

Q: What were we seeing, because you have the Iran watch. What was Iran doing during this, post 9/11 period?

WHITE: During what period?

Q: Post 9/11.

WHITE: Oh post 9/11. First of all, they were desperate to convince people they had nothing to do with 9/11, which they didn't. So nobody really pressed that very far. It was the Diaspora, the fleeing Al Qaeda cadres from Afghanistan, which involved Tehran. The Iranians allowed hundreds to pass through their territory. I would say that at one point i2002, there were may have been as many as a couple hundred present in Iranian territorIn fact, I believe the Saudis may have been complaining especially sharply because so many of the Al Qaeda types were Saudi nationals; they wanted major figures handed over, and, I believe, some might have been handed over to the Saudi government at some point. I think the other problem we had with Iran that should be noted here is that sometimes you have the Iranian president denying that there were people being allowed to move through or stay in Iran because he didn't know that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps was doing. He probably had no control over that. They answered directly to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khameini. So you had this split within the Iranian government. The hard-line clerics were only too happy to let him remain largely unaware of what was actually going on. Meanwhile, the Revolutionary Guard apparently continued some covert activity.

Q: You mentioned John Bolton. I might add that as we do this interview as of today, John Bolton has been nominated to be ambassador to the United Nations. Very controversial and has been unable until today to get confirmation. But it is a continuing process, and many of his judgments and his style of operation are very much under question. Did he play any role, or did you run across him or anything during this period?

WHITE: I never ran across him. He dealt primarily with our special weapons office or INR Assistant. Secretary Carl Ford. I heard about what had happened with John Bolton and the whole issue of pressure after the fact. I am proud to say that our bureau completely resisted that pressure. I am also proud to say that in that hearing about pressure on Capitol Hilin which they wanted all the analysts to come to discuss the issue of pressure, INR once again did its duty. The members apparently said something like: "We want to ask every individual analyst whether they were pressured." And they went around the room. "Yes or no, were you pressured?" It didn't mean you responded to it and diluted your intelligence. They went around the room, and the responses were no, no, no, no, no. Then they came to Christian Westerman form INR. He said, "Yes." That was the beginning of the Bolton affair because the person who had done it was Bolton. Christian walked through the entire Bolton affair. Based on some past experience in hearings on the Hill, I think it may be part of the CIA's institutional culture to deny such things; they might even have been called together before they went up there by their supervisors, who said, "Yeah, I know there has been pressure, but you are not going to admit that." But in INR it is free speech, period. There has been no hiding of the truth that I have ever observed, even if it meant potentially career-damaging defiance.

Q: Did they call INR?

WHITE: Yes, it was an inter-agency group, according the Christian, who briefed me on this hearing in some detail some weeks after it occurred.

Q: Well the thing I find very difficult to understand as a former bureaucrat myself. Here you are in INR, the President and the National Security Advisor are both talking about connections between Al Qaeda and Iraq almost from day one. When the President speaks, any president speaks of this, you have a tendency to say that is the word of God. Yet, and here you are sitting on the same intelligence supposedly that everybody else is, and you have you have Iraq as part of your parish. I find it hard to say that either you weren't told to look harder for it or forge ahead and say lets make a big point that we don't see it, I mean a great percent. Somehow or other how did this work?

WHITE: First and foremost, INR works for the Secretary of State. Did the Secretary and Rich ask such questions? Sure. INR produced written product, such as by nuclear analyst Simon Dodge that said no regarding Iraqi involvement in a revived nuclear program. There is no reason to believe that there is a connection there, or with al-Qaeda on the part of State/INR. On Iraq and terrorism, there also was a lack of evidence of anything going on. So I think the administration was shamelessly telling half of a story, that Iraq may have been approached, but not telling the other half (even if the validity of the report on the meeting could be confirmed), that Iraq had rejected cooperation. This was pure spin. That is just one reason why this war issue has gotten so ugly. It is going to be uglier than Vietnam because in Vietnam, during the height of the cold war, there was a genuine belief on the part of the Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon Administrations that there was a threat that South Vietnam was going to fall to the Communists, and Communism was the global enemy. There was a difference of opinion about what to do about it, but the debate, although flawed, was conducted in a more rational manner. Were there shady aspects of all that, as in the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution? Of course. However, I've seen the classified documents on Johnson's 1965 decision to go into Vietnam on a much greater scale, and one can see why he was dragged in that direction, pressured from all sides in his Administration, from the military to domestic political advisors.

Q: Well the domino theory which has been sort of rejected. But quite frankly I felt that at a certain point there was a validity to the domino theory.

WHITE: Yeah and people would say after South Vietnam falls, Cambodia and Laowould also fall, and they did, but partly because of our interference there.

Q: Indonesia could have gone very much the way we had done.

WHITE: There were fears about Thailand. But, anyway, in this case we have a clear indication, clear indications across the board that the hard intelligence was lacking to make these connections. Even the WMD estimate, the NIE in the fall of 2002 said Iraq had certainly has WMD capabilities. But, aside from the much-hyped (and footnoted) nuclear judgment, they weren't major capabilities. The spin that Iraq posed a direct threat to the United States was purely political. Historians in the future and others are going to look at his with amazement, that basically a scam was undertaken in order to build Iraq up into a threat that it really wasn't. Was Saddam a bastard? Yes. In fact I recall that briefing with the Israelis at which Ellie Rubenstein, talking about Saddam's placement of missile launchers in the western panhandle of Iraq, aimed at Israel. I was briefing and saying he was not going to use them for a preemptive strike. All they were was something Saddam put out there to show he was willing to stand up to the Israelis, but it was a bluff. Everyone knew where they were. Now, in the first Gulf War he launched missiles against Israel, but that was not exactly in an unprovoked first strike mode. He was in the midst of a crushing Coalition aerial assault and flailing about for Arab support. But when I said that he wouldn't simply fire off missiles out of the blue, Ellie, as you will recall, said: "He is a bastard. How can you say this." I said, "He is a bastard, but that doesn't mean he is going to launch a missile first strike." The same thing went for this war. He was a bastard; he was a monster, but that didn't mean he posed a direct and imminent threat to the United States. If the world community wanted to go to war and it was somehow justifiable to eliminate a heinous human rights violator, then that would have been something different. But the justification for war was not built up along those lines. Now we are using Saddam's crimes in order to try and justify what we couldn't justify otherwise because we never found any WMD or a credible connect to al-Qaeda. Now we are saying it was the need to take down this terrible ruler which could apply just as well to other rulers around the world.

Q: Were you picking up, I mean did you have connections with British intelligence, and with Israeli intelligence at this time? In other words were we looking for indicators of Al Qaeda connections or was it so understood that there wasn't any connection that you didn't bother looking for it.

WHITE: Looking back, I can't really remember a specific thing along those lines. We were very close to the Brits, but at the working level no-one bought this argument. By the way, the Intelligence Community assumed a rather enlightened attitude toward our interaction with them as of the late 1990's. John McLaughlin, who was the acting CIA director before Porter Goss was appointed and who ran the National Intelligence Council at one point, was interested in reforming the production process for intelligence estimates. In a rather bold innovation to which I believe John was a main driver, had the Brits in on at least a couple NIE's (in my area, one on Iran) to rope in even more expertise. They wouldn't be able to sit through all of the working sessions. But you kick off an estimate with a major discussion which usually lasts half a day, about where we stand on the various issues so that drafters get an idea of where everyone is and where they should be taking off from.. In the case of the NIE kick-off the Brits attended on Iran, they sent four or five people. So that is how close the Brits have been. I saw the Israelis constantly. I saw the Brits a lot, the Australians and Canadians even more. The entire Allied grouping (US, UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand) were almost family. There was a lot of cross fertilization going on. Nobody up to rather senior levels among intelligence professionals really thought there was an Iraqi terrorism angle.

Q: What about your contacts with the CIA? Were you picking up any indicators or rolling of eyes on this because we are talking about very soon, I want to go back and look at the record, but very soon our leadership was talking about the Al Qaeda Iraq connection. Were you picking up anything from the CIA about what they were going through?

WHITE: No I didn't. And much of that was a job for our INR terrorism people in liaison with their counterparts over at CIA instead of INR/NESA. But the problem we have in assessing what the CIA was telling the White House relates directly to the issue of the President's Daily Brief, to which we were denied access in more recent years. So we saw what they were saying in their products distributed to the entire intelligence community, which contained perhaps 60-70% of the PDB, but we didn't see the PDB itself.

Q: PDB being...

WHITE: The President's Daily Brief. In any case, another problem was even outside the PDB itself, where there were always specific requests being made. There were requests being made to the PDB briefer, a very prestigious job at CIA at that time, for which the incumbent had a staff of like 40 or 50 to work with on the product. But there also were memoranda written in specific response to presidential questions, vice presidential questions, perhaps even questions at the NSC. We were not allowed to see any of those save two that the Secretary apparently told George Tenet he wanted his people to look at. These were really closely held.

Q: Was this a fairly new phenomenon or had this been going on?

WHITE: What the PDB?

Q: Well I mean the fencing off of certain off of certain elements of the PDB from INR.

WHITE: Well I think the PDB always was considered "close-hold," but became more so in recent years, with only a few exceptions. It was very frustrating. The CIA's non-PDB daily flagship product was the SEIB. It used to be called the NID, National Intelligence Daily, then it changed to SEIB, and don't ask me what that stands for, about five or six years ago. Frankly, I didn't become aware of the flow of CIA PDB-related special memoranda until about five years before I left government. But there was an increasing push back to the extent where we almost decided to deny the Agency access to NODIS messages (the most restricted channel of State Department cables) in order to retaliate and break free some of this other stuff they were preparing that we weren't seeing. There also were separate questions, like I mentioned related to the Khobar Towers bombing, when the White House or NSC didn't want people to become aware of raw reporting that could drive policy in a different direction than what they wanted. With respect to Khobar, I already noted the bold decision made by Madeline Albright in that context. That must have gotten them a bit concerned.

Q: Well I am told, one of the people I interviewed was Phyllis Oakley, who was the head of INR at one point. She said that she was excluded from briefing Madeline Albright because she was told by one of Madeline Albright's staff assistants that Albright was already getting a briefing from the CIA and it wasn't necessary. I may have mentioned this before. But it goes to show you know, the reach and unfortunately the policy reach of CIA.

WHITE: Absolutely. In fact Toby Gati, who also was an INR Assistant Secretary during the 1990's, was given a certain amount of access. To get it, however, Toby had to go upstairs every morning at a beastly early hour before which we would have to come in and brief her at an even more ungodly hour so she would go up "smart" (well-briefed). I was driving into the office at 5:30 in the morning to do this for her, along with other INR Office Directors and Division Chiefs. But this enabled Toby to sit there with the Secretary and the Deputy Secretary (there were a lot of Strobe Talbot issues at that time involving Russia) with the PDB briefer sitting in one chair and Toby in another. She heard everything, and then she could comment and offer INR perspectives, including sometimes INR follow-up in the form of memos, but the only way she could participate was by going in with the PDB briefer.

Q: Well what was the feeling within INR as the drumbeat went for war against Iraq? You know, I mean was there an attitude or what?

WHITE: Most everyone in INR/NESA was appalled-appalled by the whole drift toward war, and the screwball justifications behind the drive for war. In our meetings with the intelligence community in various contexts related to the march to war, and even after it began, there was considerable concern all round. There was a deep feeling of unease, almost a surreal unease. I don't think Rich Armitage and the Secretary were comfortable with this either, regardless of what the Secretary said in his UN presentation. It wasn't just a case of the Secretary simply wanting UN cover for a military campaign. I think the Secretary generally didn't believe that the war was a prudent and, more importantly, a necessary war, but that's for him to say some day in his memoirs.

Q: Well You come against what had been known as the Powell doctrine when he was the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff. This is when the timing went. Did you get into the planning for a war, because there was a period of time when the war plans went through. ??? you might say the civilian analysis of what might happen, and that is one looks at the war fighting capabilities, but then there is no doubt that we could beat the Iraqi army. But what about the aftermath, putting it together and all. Did you get involved in that at all?

WHITE: Not very much at all. As noted before, I was dragooned into covering Iraq and leading an Iraq team just about as the war started. The only meaningful involvement I had in this process were occasional appearances I had to make at meetings and SVTS's that our office director or Iraq analyst were unable to cover toward the end of 2002. SVTS's are secure teleconferences that our Iraq analyst couldn't attend because she was overburdened. Since I had a lot of Iraq expertise, I was inserted into that stream after initially being asked to cover everything but Iraq (as Deputy Office Director), so the Director and Iraq Analyst could better concentrate on Iraq. Sitting in and participating these meetings definitely gave me a picture of lack of preparedness - especially on the part of the military - for the morning after. Especially shocking in my view, again, was this lack of familiarity with the Geneva Convention and responsibilities under same.At one point, they planned to rely on NGO's to treat enemy wounded. I told them there were no NGO's wandering around on an active battlefield and that under the conventions it was THEIR responsibility to do this in any case. Why were they trying to foist off responsibilities onto other entities? I think they knew their superiors were being forced to conduct the Iraq campaign without sufficient manpower. They wanted that force cut down as far as possible. That was part of their problem when they went in.

Q: Well now you are getting ready for a war. I am not sure exactly at what point. I think in the minds of our leadership, a day or two after the 9/11 that Iraq was the final enemy. Was there any tasking anywhere in INR about OK we are going to have a war with Iraq. What about after we defeat the enemy. What will happen? You know, look at constitutions, the tribal stuff. The whole thing, you know, the normal thing that one plans. You turn to civilian expertise which would be the State Department for how this thing would be put together afterwards.

WHITE: I forgot to answer something you raised before, and I will deal with it real quick. You asked about war planning. We were kept at arms length. Core war planning is quite secretive. So no we never had much of the benefit seeing what they were up to in terms of specifics. And, on day after planning, INR had very little to do with it. There are two reasons. We had limited numbers of people we could get into that even given the relatively limited number of meetings we were invited to. There were so many other requests coming in about the Iraqi internal situation, Saddam's intentions in those last months that, as usual, we had to focus on intelligence analysis, not operational planning. Much of our expertise was locked up in coping with that.

We didn't feel as bad as you might think about all that before the war because we knew that the "Future of Iraq Project" run out of NEA was supposedly working that street, and quite aggressively so. We presumed that its advice would be heeded. Occasionally, we would attend meetings related to that project. Some very good Middle East hands worked on that project, and a large body of relevant planning was produced. We had no idea (nor did all those people), that it would simply be dumped by the Administration. The NSC, the military, etc. wasn't taking it seriously. They all just threw it in the filing cabinet, you know, and didn't really heed a lot of the material in that valuable study, going issue by issue, ministry by ministry. Some of the reasons for the so-called failure of the Garner Team that was that it originally was supposed to benefit from that planning, take over a country not gutted by looting, and deploy to Baghdad much earlier.

Q: General Jay Gardner.

WHITE: Right, and it was supposed to go in early, but because the military effectively ignored the planning on which the Garner team based its entire line of approach (undervaluing the significance of post-war stabilization, once again), the team not only went in late, but when they finally did arrive the city had been gutted by uncontrolled looting - including all but one of the ministries they were supposed to work from. And the Garner Team itself was only belatedly assembled because of still more fumbling within the Administration over the need for a major civilian effort following the war to put Humpty Dumpty back together again.

Q: Well were you given, well, you know an intelligence analyst can't help but apply one's intelligence to the internal workings of one's own government. Was anybody saying yow, there was a terrible disconnect here.

WHITE: People were saying it constantly, especially those like our Iraq Analyst, who were closer to the Future of Iraq Project people than I was in the months before the war. But the fact is in those hectic days before the war, INR was so burdened by taskings of varying nature related to its usual mission, often in the weeds type stuff, that you didn't have an ability to engage you know, on the broad-based issues that now seem ever so clear to outsiders when viewed with 20-20 hindsight. The dominant factor is that INR, by the very definition of its mission, had no right to engage in policy prescription. It was not our job, and only because we stuck to our job, avoiding politics, did we get so much right before the war. There is supposed to be a separation between policy and intelligence analysis, and it is correct. It would be wrong to send a message up to the Secretary such as a memorandum prescribing policy. It was something NEA absolutely would have jumped down our throat about. S/P, Policy Planning, would have been similarly angry. I will admit, things got pretty hairy during all the failures in 2003 and 2004, and at my own peril, I sent up and around, using a different email channel the entire State Department is on, not INR's own system (the FAIS system or Classnet), to transmit, on various developments, to the 7th floor, to a number of addressees, even in CENTCOM. commentary that often bordered on policy prescription. I did it four or five times, warnings about the consequences of what was happening because I didn't think they were being recognized. Each time I did it, I was holding my breath a little, saying to myself: are they going to come down on me about this one? Anyway, I got away with all of that, but my concern shows the extent to which we are supposed to stay away from policy-and how seriously policy was stumbling from where I was sitting to cause me to nudge a bit over the policy-intelligence dividing line.

Q: Do you think you got away with it because nobody was reading it?

WHITE: No, actually I got away with it because it was making sense. Some people were actually responding, so I know they were reading the messages, even taking some action - or at least indicating they would-related to the messages, which were going to both 6th and 7th Floor principals. The disappointing thing was that while some of these warnings were being heeded by NEA and the 7th floor, they were not ideas that made any meaningful impression outside the Department. Some of my more formal Intelligence Community efforts had far more effect outside the building.

Q: Was there a point where the State Department, you are thinking about NEA and the Iraq future project.

WHITE: Future of Iraq, but it is so close.

Q: Future of Iraq. Were looking at this, INR which is looking at this, and obviously the Secretary of State and all. Was there a feeling of almost them saying my God the military, not really the military but the civilian leadership of the military and the White House and the NSC I mean you can come up with the names, Bush, Cheney, Rice, and Wolfowitz seemed to be the prime instigators.

WHITE: And Feith's little office?

Q: And Feith, the instigators of this. They have got the bit in their mouth and whatever, we are not even a player heading over the cliff.

WHITE: Yes, much of the planning (or lack thereof) was just kept so secretive that we had no idea as to just how bad it was. We just weren't privy to much of the planning, often reading U.S. domestic tea leaves in order to sense its direction as much as those outside government entirely. We were aware of bits and pieces through little leaks that occurred from planners, CIA people, etc., but this was very late in the process. We were aware in the last weeks leading up to the war of unrealistic dreams that Iraqis inside would rise up against Saddam. We actually weren't without hope about that either because those in the army should have seen the hopelessness of resisting. But we were also aware of Saddam's ruthless oversight of his military, having picked its leaders, the political officers hovering over them, and the danger that any army commander giving an order to turn on Baghdad of being shot on the spot. We feared that it was really not a likely scenario when all was said and done. We knew certain things they were working on related to the war on the operational side, but always through a glass darkly. We were shut out of virtually all of it, just as in Gulf War I in 1991. We didn't know about Norman Schwarzkopf's great left hook plan back in 1991. We didn't know the date when Gulf War I was going to start. We didn't know how long the air campaign would continue before ground forces struck, etc.

Q: So how did this all play out for you. I mean in the first place you said you sent out some what amounted to policy suggestions. How was this done; what were they, and what was your role and sort of your boss' role?

WHITE: Again, for much of the period before the war, it was my boss working with the Iraq analyst. I was trying to handle everything else in the office. So I was only getting little snippets. But I will tell you one thing, an anecdote that will tell you a little bit about why I think the military did not do very well in the occupation of Iraq. I was at a conference, a government conference, not scholars and whatever-one of those things I did attend before the war because our Iraq analyst and my director were too bogged down to do so. A Marine colonel grabbed me during a break in a conference (in fact we missed much of the next session because of our chat), and sat me down, saying, with great intensity: "Please, I need information. I need information on the situation in Iraq." He started just exploding with incredibly specific questions related to southern Iraq. Then, sensing he had very little feel for the country, I told him to back up, and I started explaining to him certain things about the overall situation. He said: "No, no, I don't need that. I am with an important Marine unit (I know the unit, but I don't want to reveal it here), and we are supposed to take only these areas. All I need to know is everything connected with where I am going. I don't want any talk about Baghdad. I don't want to talk about Basra. Basra is for the Brits. I want to talk about these specific areas." He wanted to know about Al Kut, because, as you know, the Marines went up the eastern side of Iraq on the way to Baghdad. All he wanted to know was what was on his narrow route of advance, and he had blinders on relating to most everything else. He turned out to be the senior intelligence officer for that Marine division. This was probably typical of much of the military. My mission is this. It is not to the right or the left or anywhere else. So a lot of military commanders and their senior staffs were not seeing the big picture in Iraq, probably just did not think they had the time in many cases. They were just focused on their assigned mission as part of a greater plan, as ordered. Some of that tunnel visiodoubtless hurt the overall mission. And, by the way, this conversation occurred in August 2002, giving you an idea about the detailed nature of military planning for war against Iraq that far advanced that early in the game and the seeming certainty on the part of this individual that this wasn't just another contingency plan.

Q: Well then the war gets going. Did this change your work in INR at all?

WHITE: It exploded exponentially. It just absolutely exploded - mainly because of the sudden departure of our Iraq analyst.

Q: Who was that?

WHITE: Suzanne McCormick.

Q: Where did she go?

WHITE: Condi Rice cherry-picked her from INR maybe a week before the war. So there we are without an Iraq analyst. I suppose our management was not able to resist a request coming from such a significant quarter. Perhaps the Secretary himself leaned on Tom Finger and Carl Ford to get them to agree to that.

Q: She was taken to the NSC.

WHITE: Yes, to work for Blackwill, Ambassador Blackwill at the NSC who was in charge of the Iraq portfolio over there.

By the way, she left the NSC earlier than I thought she would. I really don't know why, but perhaps she might have been a bit unhappy with the policy over there, and her inability to really have as much impact as desired, but, again, that's just a supposition on my part. I have questioned several people that I have met since I have retired, and just before my retirement, one who had cited interesting meetings over at the NSC. I asked: "Was our former Iraq analyst there?" These were working-level meetings, but she wasn't there. Now, this was just one glimpse. For all I know she could have been crashing on another equally important project at the time. And, again, this is pure speculation because I wasn't in that loop at all, but perhaps they weren't properly taking advantage of her vast expertise.

But anyway, getting back to this whole issue of what happened during the war and how burdened we were, it was me on the political side of the Iraq intelligence action (and a few other things Iraqi) in INR. I wrote a number of assessments that were virtually all warnings. I could see things going bad from the first two days of the campaign. I was alarmed at the sort of irregular resistance to the Brits in one relatively modest port town right on the Kuwaiti border. I was alarmed that the Brits had to keep retaking this small port city in the south, which contained a significant Sunni Arab population, from people fighting guerrilla-style. I was not only producing product for the Secretary, but I also was using my FAIS channel to be a little policy prescriptive like when the looting started. It was a disaster. I knew that it must be stopped. The museum looting was just one part of the catastrophe, but a highly symbolic part.

That is when I actually volunteered to go out and sit in the museum and use my own money to buy back antiquities and actually ran into somebody else who wanted to put up money too. The Garner Team said it was a great idea and that even Tommy Franks had approved the idea, but they would take care of it. I thought it would have been great to have sat in the lobby with the curators (to confirm the authenticity of returning items), have an amnesty, have people bring stuff in before so much of it could get out on the international black market. I could have bought a lot back in with $35,000 of my own money, plus $20,000 from our DIA liaison, perhaps millions of dollars of priceless items by striking fast. I would have been in there within 72 hours. But the Garner team that said they would do it and waved me off, couldn't get into Baghdad for awhile and then the idea largely drifted astern. Thank heavens a Marine officer, on his own initiative, got in there, just as outraged as I was, and did considerable work to get things back in order. However, that officer, might have achieved even more if I had been able to get out there to supplement his efforts. While he did much of his very painstaking investigatory work, I could have been out front, striking while the iron was hot, in bringing some of the lost materials back.

Q: You retired when?

WHITE: March 3, 2005.

Q: OK but the war, what role did you and INR play? The war is you might almost take it from the point where President Bush appears on the deck of the Abraham Lincoln carrier with "Mission Accomplished." How did you see things developing after military resistance ceased?

WHITE: I saw the situation as calamitous, and some others did too. I mentioned the reasons why. The looting took center stage. The museum caught my attention on a Sunday when I came in to do a lot of extra work. Jim Larocco, the PDAS in NEA also was in that Sunday morning, and he also was outraged. He said he had been yelling at home the day before - venting. His wife said something like: "What are you yelling at around here for? Go to the office and do that." Anyway, we could see the situation was disastrously out of control and deeply embarrassing to our country. On various fronts, the looting had brought Iraq to its knees. It should never have been permitted. Later would come the dismissal of the army and the Ba'th Party, but we saw a country in utter chaos, with an insufficient amount of troops there to deal with the chaos, and with insufficient instructions on how to deal with maintaining the civil order. In fact, in light of the Administration's belief that there was WMD and nuclear capabilities there, it was astonishing to see the vast Tuwaitha nuclear complex south of Baghdad go unguarded for quite a stretch some time after its capture. It is only a 20 minute drive down there from Baghdad. So it was looted, too.

It just boggled the mind. It said two things to us. It said, first, that the military just can't get anything properly in order out there. Actually, they put a platoon at Tuwaitha for a few days or a week, and then the platoon was ordered to go to some other trouble spot, leaving the site completely unguarded, and then it was looted. But anyway, the fact that they didn't bother to secure Tuwaitha when their supposed nuclear concerns should have made it a top priority, said not only something about the disastrous situation on the ground, but perhaps also that their principal interest in the nuclear issue was more related to using it as a pretext for war than real concern over the nuclear threat. In any case, immediate post-war events regarding Tuwaitha made me very suspicious. That all the ministries were pretty much looted, burned and destroyed, which devastated the potential of the "Future of Iraq Project" and the Garner Team's ability to gain traction. That team had based its planning on inheriting a country that was relatively intact, and it had every reason to expect that this would be the case. Unlike the others, the oil ministry was carefully guarded, feeding all kinds of Iraqi conspiracy theories that all we wanted was the oil. You can call it a conspiracy theory, and I'm not convinced that it was a deliberate happenstance, but it is not just a little suspicious that the only ministry that was very well guarded was oil.

Q: Well did you sense that while you stayed there??? Still the same year that you retired. What was happening? What were you doing after things started falling apart?

WHITE: I was writing all sorts of things about what the implications of what all this would be, warning them that matters they tended to brush aside were serious, and Iraqis had very high expectations. Iraqis had expectations sort of like European populations in 1945 when the GI's showed up, there would be candy bars and eventually even a Marshall Plan. Some of that was mythical. As you know, the post war situation in Europe was pretty damn grim in many areas. The American military did not have the capability of fixing everything instantly. It didn't happen. Reconstruction took a decade, two decades in some cases. The Iraqis had taken aboard this mythology about instant gratification. Saddam was gone, and the all-powerful USA will fix everything - now. They really were delighted in many cases at first that he was gone and we were there. But we didn't deliver: we allowed the country to be looted, dismissed the army, fired all Ba'thists, and so most jobs went away. Their services disappeared-even their safety, as we've seen since shortly after we took Baghdad. We were warning, urgently warning that this disappointment and other factors were going to set the situation up for anger, instability, violence, etc. So we were in there early with such warnings - the earliest, I think. INR was the first to warn in no uncertain terms about the grim facts of life in post -war Iraq, including the fact that there would be a rising insurgency.

Q: Was there a general disillusionment or what have you with the people who were looking at this. I mean this thing was being handled I think you could say without being overly political, just terribly. That this was an administration either that hadn't really thought this out or was on the wrong course or anything? In other words, was the Bush administration getting much support would you say, from the experts who had a view of the problem?

WHITE: No. There was a considerable disconnect in that respect. I remember, for example, one sort of snooty remark that came over from, I believe, someone in NEA, clearly a bit to heady with visions of a clear-cut military victory, during the first week of the war when I was writing a warning about the irregular guerilla-style fighting that had cropped up in the British rear in particular and what it might portend for dealing with Sunni Arab areas that could make that problem worse when we arrived farther north. I forget who was supposed to have said this, but it was something like: "Can somebody please go tell Wayne that we are winning the war?" But, on the 7th Floor, the funny thing was that Rich Armitage, with more military experience, was getting a little nervous about such developments (and the failure to quickly find evidence of WMD) and started a daily meeting with me and a small group of INR people working the war as a sort of reality check. We had some very brief exchanges with Rich over our concerns. But I found him not really wanting to believe that there were any serious difficulties. He wanted to believe that things were still going fairly well, and also appeared more interested in the tactical question of the day more than long-range considerations. I found that too many senior officials across the USG - even the media - were focusing on things which were irrelevant to some of the fundamental challenges we would face, such as capturing people on the list of 55, the deck of cards-almost obsessed with this. One day, Rich asked, "OK, I want to ask you each, yes or no, how soon will we get Saddam? In a week? In a month?" In another session, one big question was whether we thought Saddam and his sons were alive or dead.

Q: What were we seeing from an analysis point of view of just specific why it took the British so long to secure Basra. As you say it is a rinky-dink little port.

WHITE: I was talking about Um Qasr, a bit further south than Basra. But that said, the Brits allowed the huge city of Basra to be looted. In fact, the Brits in many cases from what I could determine, were thinking it was even more funny than some of the fools up in Baghdad and back in Washington thought it was. You know, what did Rumsfeld call it, an expression of freedom or something along those lines. A persistent theme in the first two years after the fall of Baghdad was how the Brits knew how to handle people, and that is why there wasn't so much trouble down south. The Americans just didn't know how to deal with Iraqis. Well, it is true that the Americans didn't know how to deal with the Iraqi situation in the center and north because it was a situation in many cases where the Sunni Arabs couldn't be persuaded to accept that, effectively, the country they ruled had been taken from them, along with their status, jobs, etc. The interesting thing is that when some Brits were moved up north into what is called north Babil (or north Babylon, the area just south of Baghdad) in 2004 because of our shortage of people to conduct major military operations in al-Anbar province at one point, they quickly began losing people just as we had. In North Babil, there is a collection of some of the most aggressively hostile Sunni Arab towns and villages in one area in particular. That is where a lot of raiding against our convoys was taking place. This strongly suggested that the Brits had no silver bullet for the problems affecting the core of the country. The Brits just happened to have been sitting on predominantly Shia areas in which people were - for a time - behaving themselves while awaiting an election that would give them majority power.

Q: Well what was happening to you and some of your fellow officers feeling about this whole business? I mean did you feel it was time to get out or what?

WHITE: No, that is the trouble with the entire Iraq situation. To be quite brief, if you stay you lose people and it remains a mess. If you leave, it explodes into a civil war, with portions of it perhaps harboring al-Qaeda types and the mess sucking in some neighboring states. You are sort of trapped between the devil and the deep blue sea.

Q: This is tape eight, side one with Wayne White.

WHITE: Yes, our job, literally mandated in the intelligence community, was to analyze and, where necessary, warn of danger and highlight opportunity. I was warning about various aspects of the situation that was ongoing. We were the first to warn about the danger of an insurgency. In fact the community was asked to get to the bottom of the issue of violence in Iraq in the summer of 2003 by CENTCOM. That is where, as I said, INR stood alone and said the insurgency was going to greatly intensify and become a serious problem, and that key factors related to the insurgency were jobs, the economy, lack of electricity, the importance of Sunni Arab alienation and various other problems that went well beyond the military realm. We were utterly alone at the first meeting, even within the intelligence community. Until I started arguing forcefully at the coordination table, we had no support from NSA, DIA, or CIA. We continued to fight that battle, albeit in the face of rapidly diminishing resistance, all the way from July 2003 when, just before she left for the NSC, Suzanne told them to throw away the first draft because INR could not work with it, until the final clearances in late October, and the National Foreign Intelligence Board's approval. By that last draft, levels of violence were spiking up, exactly as we said they would, and even the most resistant elements of the community had got religion. About a month or so before final approval, the draft and had gone way over to our side.

We created a really good baseline estimate revealing the causes of violence and resistance, where would it come from, who was behind it, the identification and motivation of those involved in the violence, the former regime elements, the Zarqawi types, and most importantly perhaps, a substantial, neglected area for which a term I coined at the time, POI's, pissed off Iraqis, was aimed at framing - you know, the individual who lost a brother in the war and is going to get us for that, the ones opposed to occupation, the jobless, the ones whose houses were searched (or even bombed) and damaged, etc. And, as the fighting goes on, there will be those who were only sympathetic toward the insurgents, weren't actually fighting, but for one grievance or another become more enraged and join in. But anyway, we warned, and INR had not held firm in the face of the rest of the Intelligence Community, that timely warning would not have gone out. As amazing as it seems now, a lot of the things that I am outlining and talking to you about are so very basic. Everyone knows this sort of thing now, but this was rocket science in the summer and fall of 2003 to a lot of the intelligence community and beyond. In INR, we warned about various things, such as the danger of ignoring, as Jerry Bremer was doing, Grand Ayatollah Sistani's statement in June 2003 that there had to be elections. Personally, I think many of those who played significant roles on the policy side in getting us into the war remained in denial for quite some time-just didn't want to take aboard the bad news.

Q: Was there too much the feeling of true believers do you think? All of a sudden we were moving to bringing democracy to the middle east and all that.

WHITE: In the intelligence community, and I am going to say something hardly unknown, the higher echelons in other intelligence agencies, not State/INR, there was - and always has been - a reluctance to hand the leadership bad news. NSA also may well be an exception, but I just don't have quite enough data to go by, although they were in INR's corner on a number of tough calls over the past 10 years (but not in the early stages of the insurgency NIE). When we completed the third draft of this thing I have been discussing, which would go to five drafts, and I had browbeaten the group (literally, by yelling and being a wise ass at times; it was a very ugly day, perhaps the worst ever in any NIE coordination spanning 26 years, at least for me) into accepting 70-80% of my changes into this document, the National Intelligence Officer (NIO) who dealt with military issues over in CIA, Gen. John Landry (the NIC is not part of the CIA, it just resides over there as a neutral coordinator for the intelligence community analyses), was visibly unhappy. He had presided over the failed 2002 WMD NIE, not that the analysis in it was necessarily his fault. You must remember that the NIO functions mainly as a broker, trying to build consensus while trying to make sure every key angle is explored. At one point during the process of putting out an extensive (and also somewhat controversial) update in late Spring 2004 to the Fall 2003 NIE on the insurgency, when that second document appeared like it wouldn't go as far as it should, I couldn't help quipping: "Do we want another embarrassing product like the WMD NIE?" (I know, not all that polite, but we were arguing a point at the time, and it just popped out). Working on the Fall 2003 NIE, we seemed to be at opposite poles over several points in that first session, and after many of my changes were made, which made the draft look pretty grim, he said something, albeit rhetorically: "How I am supposed to take this upstairs?" (but he did, of course). So, clearly there was some feeling of reluctance to pass along bad news, or what a former deputy director in my office used to humorously refer to as a steaming turd, up to the boss. I do want to say one more thing about General Landry. He's a good man, an honorable man, a man who does really want to get to the truth (although that can painful at times, but some NIE sessions can be pretty argumentative), and once we got past that first meeting in August 2003, we were pretty much on the same page, and worked closely together virtually all the way through March 2005, when I retired.

Q: Were you seeing dissention within the ranks of INR over this? Not necessarily what we but I mean talking or dissention because of here we are on a lousy policy. I mean did you have to as a leader, sort of chin up the troops and tell them get with it even though maybe this is a poor policy. I mean we are all working for the same people and all.

WHITE: Actually, it was easy, at least in that respect, because during this time, and led by Carl Ford who, despite being a Republican political appointee, was quite dedicated to getting to the bottom of things as we saw it, politics be damned. And the caliber of the people on my team, two coming from other agencies, was extremely high in all respects. I don't want to say almost. People were all on the same page. Our economists, human rights people, military analysts, my political shop, everyone was on the same wavelength. I know that can be dangerous, and we had considerable debate at times, sort of red teaming our assumptions, but we consistently seemed to be on the right page. We held a lengthy meeting once a week on Iraq. I mean we met constantly on a number of things that came up otherwise, but there was one formal meeting per week in which we were all gathered every Thursday in the afternoon with Carl Ford in the main INR conference room. And Carl, Tom Fingar and Carol Rodley asked tought questions, testing our thinking. Other people could attend. It could be a full house, at times. Sometimes there were 30 or 40 people who weren't even working the Iraq issue, but just wanted to see what was going on, and they were invited. It became a joke, you know, that if you wanted to come into this meeting, you better take valium or something because you are going to hear a lot of discouraging news. I mean the entire front office team would attend with Carl, and we warned about various things, before, during and after the war. We periodically reviewed - and in great depth - factors that INR had inserted into the insurgency NIE about socio-economic, tribal, Sunni Arab disenfranchisement and other issues that determined what was going on; that document became about 1/3 to 50% political and economic, largely because of INR's interventions.

I mentioned the update to that NIE (actually called a "Memorandum to Holders," or MTH). In some ways, the spring update was even more depressing than the original document. Then there was even yet another June 2004 inter-agency product, an NIE done on governance in Iraq under Paul Pillar's chairmanship. Paul was very fair and professional in his pursuit of the bottom line. Through all of these two succeeding products, and some other meetings that were not specifically related to products, General Landry, Paul and I worked very well together. After we warned correctly, and, honestly I am not trying to brag here, Stu, but pick out, say, a half-dozen major judgments in that first NIE, and INR's score was like 6 to nothing, correct on everything. So Gen. Landry probably said to himself, even if Wayne can be a pain at times: "These guys certainly know what they are talking about." And there were several times at the table during the update when a major point was being agreed upon, and he turned to me and said, "Do you think that's that OK, Wayne?" Essentially, we won a powerful vote of sorts on most key points relating to the 2004 "Memorandum to Holders" because we were sort of regarded as the truth squad who were most likely to be right, and so I got the impression that Gen. Landry was sort of putting some of his money on us on close calls.

Q: What in your analysis was the problem with CIA at this point?

WHITE: First off, I think the overall caliber of the people I worked with in CIA over a 26-year period in INR was pretty darn good. In response to your question, and related to the Iraq issue since 2002, I think there probably was more pressure on CIA than we ever had to deal with (not across the board, in our case, because we did have the Bolton problem on one front), but that is an impression, not something I can say because I have any solid proof, leaving aside, of course, the issue of pre-war analysis relating to WMD where there are rather strong suggestions that such pressure (and significant pressure) was applied, perhaps even by the Vice President. In addition, CIA did seem a tad more reluctant on a few occasions to pass bad news up the line, and even when bad news was obvious, some people didn't want to pass along an especially horrific version of the bad news.

There seemed to be a more general tendency, and not just with CIA but the policy side of government well beyond it, of trying to make the news a little less negative in tone. And then there is something else we run into constantly in the context of the intelligence-policy divide: I can remember people across the table on the policy side or in the military saying: "Well if that is the situation, where in Hell do we go from here?" When this came up, albeit infrequently, on the intelligence side, I would say: "That is not our business. We are not the policy makers. We are just trying to tell your (or them) what we believe the situation to be, what the trends are. We are not supposed to become involved in what will be done." We viewed our job as to provide the bottom line-give it them straight. That said, there were other policymakers across the table saying you're absolutely right, thank you very much, and we agree 100%. I should add that I as I've indicated already, that we were, of course, concerned about what our analysis meant and what should be done, but we had to stay clear of that in our conclusions as much as possible.

Q: Did you get involved on the special committee that was set up to look at the intelligence operation?

WHITE: No.

Q: Why not?

WHITE: I don't know. Probably because I was part of it. In other words, I was part of what they were reviewing; therefore, it would be a conflict of interest if I was, in effect, reviewing myself.

Q: I mean I would assume they would be talking to people who were a part.

WHITE: They did talk to me. Oh, yes. They came and talked to me as with many others.

Q: What was your impressions of the conclusions they came to?

WHITE: Pretty good. Especially in the area I was heavily involved with. INR came out of it looking great. We were very frank about the sessions. I could tell by the heavy note taking at certain junctures that other people probably hadn't been fully straight with them about how bad things were, how early and how loudly we said how bad things were going to get. Obviously they had gone to some other people outside INR who had not indicated they had really been warned.

Q: What was your impression of the Defense Intelligence Agency's work?

WHITE: I think they did a very good job. In fact, I am reminded I almost mentioned when we were talking about the grueling battles at the table, that despite DOD's policy driven agenda, it seemed that DIA working-level analysts were honest brokers, and have always been. In fact, I suspect that DIA analysts probably had warned them in channels that we weren't aware of, and that they were very much in line with us in their thinking. There were occasional problems with the military itself. CENTCOM could be uncomfortable at times with these harsh calls on how bad the situation was and would become, which I always think is ironic. People actually out there taking the hits on the ground, and has been typical of our mission in Baghdad as well in the Green Zone, were generally resistant to analysis that things were so bad, were going to remain so, or even get worse, probably because they felt it reflected adversely, and this is my assumption, on their own efforts and performance. In many cases, what we were saying was not critical; we were just noting the prevailing circumstances and the unfortunate rules of the game on the ground. But they probably got wrapped up into the blame game, needlessly on many occasions because it wasn't their fault.

At one point in our deliberations on the 2004 update to the Fall 2003 insurgency NIE, I can recall once instance in which Gen. Landry, responding to carping from a military officer from, I believe Army Intelligence, about the pessimism in our analysis, actually turned to him and said something like: "Listen. DIA speaks for the Pentagon. You have to bring your complaints to DIA, and then DIA decides what is going to be the overall DOD position, at least regarding intelligence matters." Then he turned to a DIA representative and said, essentially: "What is the DIA position?" The DIA representative said something like, "Not that." And we were back on course again. This was, again, in late Spring 2004.

In mid-January 2005, when all of us were well into the Iraq venture and I was within two months of retirement, there was another interesting gathering on Iraq. Because the situation was so bad (particularly right before the elections), the White House called for a major meeting of all heads of intelligence at the CIA. Tenet didn't attend, but I believe the CIA's number three was there, and Tom Finger, now our assistant secretary, was there, NSA, DIA, etc. were there with their principals. Each principal had one briefer, their senior Iraq person under them to give a read-out on where the situation was headed, in Tenet's conference room. After this was over, the heads of agencies were going to go into another room and prepare something like a short paper for the White House as to how bad this is really getting.

I prepared perhaps the most hard hitting and pessimistic briefing you could imagine. I figured a few parts of this might never be driven home quite so hard, you know, because of the bad news syndrome. Anyhow, I sent it up to Tom Finger, but expecting Tom might say: "You know, while I agree, I don't know whether this has to be caste quite so starkly." But INR had these long Iraq sessions each week, and it was an educational process for our people. And Tom has integrity and guts. Tom sent it back without a change. He said: "Deliver it as it is." So off we went to the meeting. The Brits were included. They sent a three star over, which is pretty significant, I believe the head of their military intelligence, as well as, I believe, a senior JIC official from the Joint Intelligence Committee that functions under their prime minister and oversees their equivalent of NIE's. It is somewhat like our NIC, National Intelligence Council over there.

I led off. I don't know why I was asked to start the ball rolling, but anyway I led off and really let them have it. Our embassy in Baghdad was participating, via secure teleconference link. With that in mind, remember what I said about who dissents - quite often the people on the ground who cannot see the big picture or seem resistant perhaps because they feel in some way responsible for any mess. I gave my briefing. The first reaction came, I believe, from either General Hayden, who then was the head of NSA, or the Brits. Whoever of those two parties reacted first, said, essentially: "We agree and see no need to deliver our own briefing. We just heard it." Whoever spoke up next said that they agreed with it as well. We went around the room. It was pretty much: "Agreed, agreed..." Then from out in Baghdad, they said something like, "Whoa, we don't think things are quite that bad." Here we have once again the people out there much close to the fire dissenting from isolation of the Green Zone. They did not, however, make much of an impression on the others, and, as events would prove, the more pessimistic read-out was, unfortunately, accurate.

Another interesting thing happened related to that briefing. It occurred within days of Colin Powell's departure as Secretary. Powell heard about the INR briefing and asked Tom Finger if he could get a copy of our three or four page presentation. It was run up to him. Then a few hours later, he called Tom and said something like: "I want to give you back the copy of that briefing." Tom said something like: "Well we can print out other copies. You don't have to give it back." Powell then said: "Just come up." Upstairs, Powell told Tom that he had just had his last meeting with the President, and he had used some of the INR briefing. So the President in January of this year heard at least portions of a pretty grim assessment about how bad things were in Iraq. So any protestations of not hearing the grim facts of life on Iraq are false, because he heard them, according to Secretary Powell at least, in mid-January 2005.

Q: Did you get any feel during this whole thing of the role of Condoleezza Rice?

WHITE: I have only impressions because, as you know, I simply wasn't an insider with respect to what was going on over at the NSC. In fact, I have had to read books written by people who worked within the NSC or gained access to individuals who did to try to fill that gap. Phillips is one of them. He records some of the interplay within the White House on the policy side, how much they were ignoring. But anyway, my impression was that the NSC was not really playing much of a leading role. Most of the Iraq action was being driven by the Pentagon or Cheney.

In something related, I participated two mornings every week at 6:45 A.M. in secure teleconferences on Iraq including Baghdad, the Embassy Baghdad, the military including CENTCOM, including all the leading intelligence agencies, and we would sort various things out. It was technically related to the collection of intelligence, not so much analysis. Charlie Allen was the CIA's intelligence collection tsar. It is a very important job, and Charlie is a curmudgeonly guy who could really lean hard on people sometimes to get things done, but I saw instances in which they thoroughly deserved it. Charlie was appalled by the damage caused by the looting, looting still continuing in some rural areas into 2004, and the failure to repair the damage to vital sectors like the power grid and state industries. Charlie's heart was in the right place, I worked together on some things relating to this effort (intelligence collection), he always treated me with respect, and I liked and respected him as well. In the course of those collection meetings I picked up something interesting, but privately, from Charlie. My INR contributions were usually downbeat - but accurate. I wrote a paper, a memo, unsolicited, to Secretary Powell in April, 2004. We've now been in Iraq for a year. I said something like: "Here is why some people are saying the Sunni Arab heartland is irretrievably lost." I used as a foil people who were saying it, so I could then list ten or eleven reasons why these people had a really good point on this. Rumsfeld got a copy of it when Powell faxed it around.

The reason we knew Rumsfeld got a copy was that I gave it to Tom Finger who said, jokingly: "I don't know about this; do you want to mess up my confirmation? You are saying it is over in the Sunni Arab heartland." I said, "Uh-huh." Tom, never afraid tpass along what he thought was accurate, walked right up and gave it to Powell. I was acting office director at the time, and we had an office director's meeting about 30 minutes later. Back from seeing Powell, Tom said, once again jokingly: "Well I guess my confirmation is really in trouble now." I said: "Now what?" He said: "Look," and Powell had taken the thing and secure faxed it to Cheney, Card, Tenet, Rumsfeld and the head of NSA. Going back to your original question, isn't it interesting that Rice wasn't listed? Powell wrote on the fax sheet something like "Interesting reading," He just faxed it out to pretty much the entire Iraq-related leadership.

Anyhow, returning to Charlie Allen, he was with Secretary Rumsfeld about a week later to discuss collection issues just one on one. He said at the end of the meeting Rumsfeld picked up from a stack of paper on his desk this same memorandum and handed it to Charlie, who he doubtless respected, as did I. Charlie told me later: "The drafting page was missing, but I recognized the handiwork." Rumsfeld said: "What do you think of this?" Charlie read it and then said something like: "Well, I am not quite this pessimistic, but I'm getting there." Then he told me: "Rumsfeld sort of shook his head and put it back in his desk." So Rumsfeld read that one. So some rather hard-hitting analysis was getting through. These people were reading some of that stuff. But it didn't seem to have much of an effect.

Q: Well I mean they have launched themselves.

WHITE: Right.

Q: Turning to basically a different thing. Were you covering Iran during this time?

WHITE: Not much. Believe me, Iraq was so consuming I could hardly look sideways. I covered Iran most heavily in the 1990-2002 period when I headed the INR/NESA division containing Iran, and then in 2002 for some months when we were tracking, as I said, the al-Qaeda cadres that were moving out of Afghanistan, including how Iran waddressing that specific issue, to what degree the Iranian government might be complicit, etc.

Q: Well I guess we are coming up to your retirement aren't we? Do you have anything else you want to add here?

WHITE: That is a big question. I guess one thing we can say about both Iraq and Iran that was interesting was that in May of 2004 we had a simulation at the War College. Some people call them war games. Simulation is a better name for it because a lot of these things are political, not military, or a mix. We had one there in 1999 on Iran I might have mentioned. Anyway, we had a simulation of Iraqi governance, how stage by stage Iraqi governments all the way from that point through the elections and a couple of months beyond the elections in 2005. It was really interesting because what happened after the elections in our simulation was that the political process crashed and burned. It validated something I have been very afraid of. The administration has been going on the assumption that the farther we get down the road on Iraqi governance, turning over sovereignty to them, holding these elections, things would get better. Momentum would build. That simulation validated my opposite theory that, no, the further you got down the road, if things pretty much remained the same otherwise with respect to the insurgency and getting Iraq back to normal, the process would get harder and harder - in part because issues have to be hammered out more and more permanently. Because the only reason we got past some of the first hurdles was by kicking the really difficult political compromises down the road.

Sure enough, we did a simulation, and it was detailed. We brought in a lot of experts. I was on the Iraq team. You had to role play. I was Jalal Talabani. Anyway, we had a really good Iraq team run by an Iraqi scholar, not just somebody who covers Iraq, but an Iraqi himself. We had about 15 people on the Iraq team representing different Iraqi constituencies. It just totally crashed. People couldn't come to agreement on these different issues after the election, even finalizing the exact form of government in a way that would resolve key issues. Then the game was terminated. I remember the Iraqi who chaired our team, a very interesting professor saying, "You people have been more Iraqi than Iraqis." That was quite a compliment when you trying to simulate Iraqi reality.

Anyway, look what we have seen. The election process did crash and burn. People can say, "No it didn't; we have a government." Yes, we have a government that is non-representative. We had an election. Yes, there was an election, but it wasn't held in any of the Sunni Arab areas because it was too dangerous. So if you sort of break those things out, yes, it would, effectively, crash and burn, one way or another. We are still in that mode right now, desperately trying to stand up and hold together a government that still isn't fully representative or credible. In fact, a government that is having trouble with the fact that now we are talking to the insurgents, the Americans. But anyway that game was considered so revealing that I wrote it up as an INR assessment and sent it up to Powell with a text box, what we call a little box, alongside the main text. The box said, "If you think this is just a game and that nothing ever happens up at the War College in these simulations that means anything, the last time we ran an especially important game, back in 1999, it was on Iran - whither the reformists, the reformists after the student riots of summer 1999.

I played Rafsanjani in that game, or, to be more specific, because he was considered so important there was a Rafsanjani team. There were three of us. The game's conclusion was that the reformist movement in Iran would be crushed, at least for awhile. And, guess what? That's where we are right now, where we are this week with the conservatives taking over the last institution the reformists had. So I put this box in there saying to the secretary that if you think the Iraq simulation is worthless play-acting, look at what the last major simulation predicted. I thought that was very revealing. A lot of people think these simulations aren't worth very much, and that was my own attitude back in 1999. But if you get the right people and the right mix of scholars, think tankers, experts already in government, etc., you can sometimes do some really incredible work. Some of that is being done over here at FSI where Fred Hill has run some fascinating games. I participated in a Libyan simulation over here not so long ago, which was pretty useful as well. Anyhow, I suppose that's it, Stu.

Q: OK, Wayne could you just briefly give a feel for what you have been doing since you have gotten out? I mean did you retire because it was time to retire or because you had to retire, you couldn't take it any more? In other words why did you retire, and what have you been doing since?

WHITE: Well, There were several reasons why I retired. One was that we have family reasons to have to return to our native Pennsylvania. You know we really had to get, I don't want to go into all of those, but something under control. This was the time in family terms to retire and help out back home.

In addition, I developed in the course of this Iraqi coverage a rare medical disorder. It is called hypnic headache. I am glad you asked because I am going to say a few more things about this. Hypnic headache is going to sleep and then, rhythmically, within three or four hours of going to sleep you wake up with the worst throbbing neck ache you have ever had in your life combined with the worst throbbing frontal headache you have ever had. This affects only seven percent of one percent of the population (I feel so privileged), and only if they reach a certain triggering stress level. There is no known cure. It was only discovered in 1988. The only thing they know that helps is if you take a gigantic mug of caffeinated coffee before you go to bed. It reduces its likelihood to occur and its intensity by about 50%. Of course then you can't sleep after the coffee, so it is sort of catch 22. Anyway, I got slammed with that in 2003. All through late 2003 and all of 2004, I was getting hammered by this thing. The amount of sleep I got during those important years was greatly reduced. The only solution is get away from the stress.

The neurologist who diagnosed this, because I went through two because it was so rare, said that it was only the second example he has seen. In diagnosing it, he had thrown a tremendous amount of questions at me, many related to my work - atmosphere, stresses, intensity, etc. He said, onset in August, 2003 was classic - when you took over single handedly for the second time the beastly Iraq account because our Iraq analyst came back to us after the war, but you now knew, when Condi Rice cherry picked her for two years, that there would be no relief this time around. So he said the stress that was building all along because I was involved with Iraq, but didn't explode during the war because it was only going to be a short term thing, finally crossed a red line. Then, when you know you are going to be doing this for a long period of time (without much help in the form of subordinate staff for almost a year), then there was that brutal confluence of having to fight that awful NIE battle for three months beginning at the exact same time. I didn't tell him the substance of the NIE struggle, of course; I just passed along some of the atmospherics. He said "Bingo, there it is." In a medical classic, he then said that the only thing he could say was to get away from the stress. Well, knowing how dire the Iraqi situation was and that other people weren't "getting it" all too often, I just gritted my teeth and steamed forward. I knew I couldn't just say I am sorry; I am going to drop the Iraq account. Our contribution was just too critical. I was the one of the few people that General Landry, Charlie Allen and Paul Pillar were confiding in at the time with respect to the bad news that was Iraq, and I had the stature in INR on the issue to gain the ear of the senior policymaker, so I just had to keep at it, but it was murder.

Then, when I got help beginning in June, 2004, in the form of DIA's best Iraq analyst, Bob Kitrinos, and then a really terrific junior analyst from NSA to be a third member of the team, I could see that the nocturnal attacks were going down in frequency and intensity. They never were every night - even at their worst - or I wouldn't have been able to keep functioning normally (well, sort of normally). They were always like every other night. But anyway, the stress levels went down. By the time I retired, and when you retire and as you are retiring in your last six weeks I was gradually handing off duties to other people, it was going down even further. By the time I retired it was down to about 20-25% of what it originally was. But anyway I had a medical reason to get out. In addition, by March of 2005, I realized I had probably done everything I possibly could on the Iraq issue - at least on the inside. I had fought the battles, put the analysis and warnings in place, and I had left behind a team that was qualified to continue the good work. So that is why I retired. Why I think it is good to mention that health problem is INR is a very small organization with a huge mission. Most people don't have any back up. Unlike CIA, for example, when at one point back in the mid 90's I had to do a survey, INR had one full time analyst working Iran, CIA had around 40. Those people weren't terribly stressed. Our guy was stressed. Everyone on major accounts, particularly Middle East-related are stressed.

Young Simon Dodge - well, young compared to me - had a stroke around age 40. Simon, who made the call on the aluminum tubes and fought that battle bitterly within the community saying Iraq has no nuclear capability anymore and stuck to it through all that, had a very severe stroke. There are various types of strokes. I didn't know this, but they can actually diagnose cause based on what kind of a stroke it was, but it was definitely related to stress, his doctors had told him. Another INR standout was Stan Shaloff, a division chief, who was sort of the analytical fireman for a good chunk of Africa. Stan did all kinds of tough work on the Horn, on Somalia, and other hot-button issues. In the early 90's at, say, around 6:30 in the morning preparing briefings because even though he was division chief, there weren't enough people around to have briefers and separate division chiefs, had a serious heart attack and was evacuated to GW. What I am saying is that INR does good work, but it is just too small, and the work is taking a terrible toll on the people doing it. I am just one victim of that, within a bureau containing some real heroes, including a seeming endless line of courageous INR Directors and Assistant Secretaries and their Front Office Deputy Assistant Secretaries, from Hugh Montgomery to Tom Fingar. And, sweeping back over my broader Foreign Service career, I have had the privilege of working alongside a few real heroes there too.

What I have been doing since I retired? I am what is called an "Adjunct Scholar" with the Middle East Institute, where you will find many a veteran Foreign Service Officer, including a real stand-out, David Mack, MEI's Vice-President, who asked me to join up. That job associated with MEI entails just about everything you can imagine. Writing op-eds is one line of work - one just ran in the Baltimore Sun. Op-eds are requested by various organizations and newspapers or self-generated pieces are pulled from Middle East Institute website perspectives.

Yesterday was an example of what can happen. MEI has what it calls its Communications Center or media liaison. The media can draw on that if they have an urgent need for someone. They have come at me a lot because there is almost nobody who came out of the intelligence world, is Iraq-literate, and also is interested in region wide issues like Islam, democratization, Lebanon, etc. So, anyway, like yesterday, I met with an Australian Office of National Assessments - ONA is sort of THEIR national intelligence council - senior advisor. That was going to be the only thing I had booked that day at MEI. Then the veteran Communications Director came running in saying, "Can you finish up because Le Figaro wants an interview over the phone - their correspondent in New York." So I did the Le Figaro thing. As I am doing that, Laurie Kassman, this terrific Communications Director at MEI, comes running in again and says, "When are you going to finish up because CNN International wants you to come over and do a bit on Iran for their live noon show." So the limo rushes over, and I got into CNN only five minutes before the program. But I have done CNN International before, BBC world, BBC world service, VOA TV, and have been a resource for various newspaper articles in everything from the New York Times to the LA Times, and done public speaking at places like Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School, Columbia, and Penn State. So that is roughly what I am doing these days, then it's off to Skytop in northeastern Pennsylvania-still working with MEI and others-to live alongside my biggest hero, my wife Sonia of over 30 years.

Q: All right, well I want to thank you very much.

End of interview