Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR JOSEPH C. WILSON IV

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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[Note: This transcript was not edited by Ambassador Wilson]

Q: Today is the 8th of January 2001. This is an interview with Joseph C. Wilson. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Can you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family?

WILSON: I am from a California family. I was born, almost by accident, in Connecticut. I lived there for about four months and then went to California. I make that point because whenever I give a speech people will inevitably, when they see I was born in Connecticut, come up and ask me if I am from the same town they were from. I have no recollection whatsoever of Connecticut. On the other hand, my family roots go back to California for over 200 years. We are an old California family.

Q: When were you born?

WILSON: I was born in November of 1949 and spent the first six or seven years of my existence in the Bay area, which is the family home. We lived in southern California after that and then moved to Europe for four years in the 1960s where I went to high school.

Q: Let's go back and get a little feel for your family. To have a family for 200 years in California is pretty unusual. Where did your mother and father come from?

WILSON: My mother's family is the California side of the family; they had moved to Californivarious wings of the family moved to Californias I said, between 150 and 200 years ago. They were shepherds and ran sheep and cattle ranches from the Oregon border down to Los Angeles. At one time their fattening ranch was the bottom land along both sides of the Napa River between Napa and Calistoga.

Q: Where did the shepherding come from?

WILSON: Most of the came from the UK. There is some French or Basque in there but I think most of the French and Basque were hired help. There is a large population of Basque shepherds in that area.

Q: I know. I did business with them back in the 1950s.

WILSON: They go back far longer than that. If you look at the demographics, there is are awful lot of them in Nevada and in the shepherding range area of the United States. In more recent times, my family were the Rolphs and the Moores; they were big players in northern California politics and then later California politics from about the time of the earthquake until the Great Depressio1906 to about 1930 or 1932. My great uncle was Mayor of San Francisco from 1913 to 1928 and then he was Governor of California from 1928 until he died in office in 1931/32. The Moore side of the familthey were the Moore Dry Dock Companbuilt many ships for the Pacific fleet and the bridges and the infrastructure that was built in northern California during the first half of the 20th century.

Q: Tell me something about your mother's education and interests and all, and then we'll turn to your father.

WILSON: She was raised in San Francisco and Napa, and she went to the usual parochial schools, I guess.

Q: It was a Catholic family?

WILSON: No, it was an Episcopal family, but she went to a Catholic school. She went to the University of California at Berkeley and graduated. She went into war. She was an aide de camp to a Marine commandant here in Washington and then went back and finished her education at Cal Berkeley.

Q: Was she in the Marine Corps actually?

WILSON: She was in the Marine Corps. She was whatever they called them in the Marines at that time during the course of the war.

Q: There weren't too many women...

WILSON: No, she was one of the very few who was actually enlisted in the Marine Corps. Her father was a captain in the Navy in the Second World War and was, I think, in the Army in the First World War. He was a pilot in the First World War.

Q: And what were your father's grandparents?

WILSON: My father moved out to California when he was about 10 or 11 from Pennsylvania. He grew up in Pasadena, went to Pasadena High, and then he too went to the University of California at Berkeley. He was the son of an Army Air colonel. My grandfather was always referred to as "the Colonel." He been a pilot in the First World War and had been shot down four times; he crashed his airplane each time, but walked away from three of the four crashes and was dragged away from the fourth one with a couple broken legs. He won both the Victorian Cross and the French Legion d'honneur for his activities in the First World War. He came from an old Pittsburgh family. The first Joseph C. Wilsol am the fourth with the same namwas an architect and a builder in Pittsburgh who was quite well know, I guess, at the turn of the century.

Q: What did your father do during World War Two?

WILSON: At the time of the Second War he too went into the Marine Corps. Actually he went into pilot training in the Navy, and at that time the top graduates of flight training school had their choice of going into the Navy or Marine Corps. He went into the Marine Corps, and flew off the carrier "The Franklin" during the Second War.

Q: Was he on it when it took its major hit?

WILSON: He was the last pilot off.

Q: The Franklin didn't sink, but it was certainly badly damaged.

WILSON: I believe the single largest number of casualties of any ship which was attacked in Second War. He was the last pilot off. He got off because the fellow who was in line ahead of him couldn't get his plane to turn over; so they pushed his plane out of the way and put my dad's plane on the track; he got off just as the Japanese plane was coming in.

Q: It was a kamikaze attack.

WILSON: It wasn't a kamikaze attack. The Japanese dropped a bomb. He was coming in, and apparently he and my father just sort of crossed. One was coming in and one was going off. My father used to tell the story that he then had the Japanese plane in his sights and was prepared to take it down when his wing commander waved him off and took the shot himself. I think there were about 1200 casualties. Most of the people who were on the flight deck were killed or very badly injured; so he was lucky to get off. He used to like to tell the story when he was alive, that his personal loss was just his $600 in poker earnings.

Q: We have some horrendous pictures of the...

WILSON: You know, in those days people didn't talk about things like that. All my life, my dad never talked to me about the trauma of losing a lot of his mates in that attack, although you're absolutely right, it must have been terrible. There was a lot of fuel on deck, and it was very, very bad.

Q: You say you were born in Connecticut in 1949. This was, of course, after the war. What was your family doing?

WILSON: My father graduated from Berkeley and got married in 1946. They lived in California, and he got a job with one of the Pittsburgh steel companiel forget which one it wawhich sent him to New York. They were there for a couple of years, I guess, during which time they lived in Connecticut, where they conceived me. Then he had about enough of the East Coast, so they went back out west.

Q: Where were you as a kid? You said that for the first few years you were in the Bay area?

WILSON: Right. For the first memorable years I was in Lafayette which is right outside of San Francisco. It's just across the Bay. At that time it was not really the suburbs; it was still pretty country and you could drive into the city.

Q: Did you go to school there?

WILSON: I went to elementary school there and spent from 1950 until about 1957 there. My extended family was so very, very close and very big in San Franciscvery active. So all of my memories are of San Francisco society and going with my parents to the St. Francis Yacht Club, where my mom had grown up.

Q: How was the school system there? The California school system was considered both quite modern and quite good at the time.

WILSON: Absolutely. I think the California education system in those days was one of the best in the country. As a kid going to elementary school, we didn't have much to compare it too; so I don't know how good the education was relative to elsewhere, but it was generally regarded to be very good, and in fact it was. School classes were not very large. The attention that kids got was extensive. We were not living in the city, but we were close enough to the city that you could go in anytime you wanteanytime my parents would go into the city. We had pond on our property where we would fish out the tadpoles and do the sort of stuff that kids did in those days.

Q: How about school there? We're still talking about elementary school. Were you getting into reading and activities like that?

WILSON: Sure; just like every other kid. I don't have any real conscious memories of sitting down and being a great leader at age six or seven. My memories of growing up in that area were largely of being outside and climbing hills that were unoccupied and fishing, as I said, tadpoles out of ponds and riding my bike all around the neighborhoods.

Q: What about at home? Did you have brothers and sisters?

WILSON: I have a younger brother who is two years younger than me. He was born in San Francisco. He was my only sibling.

At home we had a piano. My parents futilely tried to teach me to play and read music. Unfortunately that was not anything that I picked up at all. Neither did my brother, for that matter. We had a swimming pool, we lived up on a hill, and we did a lot of outdoors type stuff.

Q: How about at the dinner table? Some families sit around and talk about events of the day. Were you picking up book lore or politics or anything else at the table?

WILSON: Yes, in my family politics were a daily staple, particularly California politics because of the role that my family had played in California politics. Up until the 1980s there was always a member of the family on the Board of Regents at the University of California, for example. Even though the peak of the family's participation in politics was in 1932 when my great uncle was Governor, the family still remained very active in state politics thereafter and by extension in national politics. It was an old Republican family. During the election periodI remember the elections of 1952 when I was very, very young and 1956...

Q: That was Eisenhower versus Stevenson both times.

WILSON: That's right. In the debate that went on in our house during that period, Adlai Stevenson was quite a candidate, and yet, of course, in the Wilson household we were all for Ike. I remember we had a very small black and white TV. One of my earliest memories was watching the election returns and Stevenson's concession speech.

Q: Did Senator Knowland play any part in your conversations. He was on the international scene, particularly as it concerned with Chiang Kai shek and the Taiwan independence. He was a major player. He was from the Berkeley area.

WILSON: He was not a friend of my immediate family that I recall. He may have been a friend of other parts of the family, but I don't recall ever seeing him our house or he being in anything that involved me. We, of course, knew who he was, and I think maybe other parts of the family probably were closer to him. At that time, he would have been a senator and we would have been very young; there may have been instances when my parents went to events that were being hosted by my grandfather that might have involved Knowland. I wouldn't be surprised at that at all. In fact, I'm quite sure the family would have known him.

Q: Earl Warrehe was Governor during part of that time.

WILSON: He was Governor and then he was on the Supreme Court during that time. He was appointed by Eisenhower. Eisenhower, I guess, afterwards was heard to have said that it was his most disappointing appointment, because the Earl Warren family turned out to be far more liberal than Eisenhower had wanted or expected, and far more activist. Those of us in my generation, we applaud that.

Q: Earl Warren represents, particularly on civil rights and other matters, a major positive figure.

WILSON: I know Warren might have really thought that 'one man, one vote' was an important concept to the adjudication of a Presidential election.

Q: When did you move down to southern California?

WILSON: In 1956 or 1957 we moved to Scottsdale, Arizona, which at that time was a brand new, just being developed suburb of Phoenix. We moved there because my dad had arthritic knees and so he wanted to get some dry heat. He thought that that might be better to move there for a couple of years. One of my grandfather's brothers lived in the area. So we lived there for a couple of years.

Q: Were you in high school by that time or not?

WILSON: No, I was still in elementary school. I would have been in fifth or sixth grade. I was nine years old.

Q: How did you find Arizona schools? Was there a noticeable difference?

WILSON: Not that I particularly noticed. Again, my recollection of schooling was all small classroom. This was not the era of the one room schoolhouse anymore, and we didn't have to walk seven miles through the snow barefoot to get there and back as our parents used to tell us that they had to do. I suspect that if people go back and look at the history of American education, it was probably a very good period. School classes were no more than about 25 to a class. Teachers were generally young and dedicated and motivated and were not overwhelmed by the bureaucracy. So Arizona was a good, positive experience as well. I did pretty well in school there.

We were there for a couple years, and then my parents decided that they would go to Europe for six months in 1959. We left for Europe in January of 1959. We came back six months later, and we actually came back through Washington. I have a picture of my brother and me standing in front of the White House in 195a little over 40 years ago. We sailed to Europe. Those were the days when you could still take these sailing vessels to Europe. In fact, we flew across the country, stopping in Chicago, on the old turbo props. It was just right before the jet age.

Q: The Lockheed Electras, I think, were one of them.

WILSON: There was the Electra, the Trident, the Viscounsomething like that. We took the "SS Augustus," which was an Italian ship, to Europe; it was a bit of a cruise. We stopped in Bermuda, we stopped in the Azores, and then we stopped in Casablanca, Gibraltar, Barcelona, and then we got off in Cannes, I guess it was. We bought a car. We bought an old 1950s Citroen, which was the old gangster shaped car.

Q: Oh, yes, wonderful carlong, low slung, black.

WILSON: Black, yes. This was an old taxi and so it had jump seats. It was a long. We drove that around Europe for six months. We spent almost all of our time in southern Europe. We went as far south as Italy and then the southern part of France. Actually we dipped up into Sweden for a couple days, but we spent most of our time between Italy, southern France and southern Spain. It was six months during the school year; so we didn't do much schooling, but we did spend a couple of months in Spain where we went to a Berlitz schoosomething along those linean elementary school, for a couple of months in a little town called Portemarinos, which is right outside of Malaga, which at that timfrom the pictures we have in the old scrapboowas still just a fishing village. It's now just wall to wall apartments.

Q: Yes, it's one of those English colonies.

WILSON: We lived quite literally 100 yards from the Mediterranean. I suppose that for my parents this was a real epiphany. They decided that this was their last town. They really enjoyed it. We followed the opening of the bullfight season; we went to Sippia for the Easter fiesta, and then we followed the bullfighters all around southern Spain. In 1959 in southern Spain you could still see people living in caves. The country was very much in the grips of the Franco regime. Yet it was still quintessentially Spanisthe Spain of the Hemingway novels in the sense that if you were a foreigner, an expatriate, you were living life at a certain level, but if you were Spanish, you lived at a different levethe Spain of old ladies wearing black for many, many years; people traveling as much on burros and burro drawn carts as they were in automobiles; and dirt roads going to the little towns in the interior.

Q: Some thirty years later or so, Spain really became part of Western Europe.

WILSON: That's right. This was still when the Pyrenees were a big border between the Iberian Peninsula and the rest of Europe. I think the Franco government was part of the reason obviously. As the rest of Europe was moving toward some form of democratization, Spain was still very much in a dictatorship.

Q: You were still quite young, of course, but were you picking up any vibrations about the government at that time therthat this was not a government that really Americans cottoned up to or not?

WILSON: In 1959 we were still in the aftermath of the McCarthy hearings and everything that had happened during the "Commie" scare. Western European politics were defined in different terms. So I don't think that the Franco regime was an anathema to the American government. They certainly didn't appear to be. What was much more of concern to them were the Communities Parties of Italy and France. So if you were anti Communist, which, of course, Franco was, then you stood to have...

Q: I think that's when we started putting our bases in there, too.

WILSON: I don't know when the bases went in, but certainly we had bases in Rota then as I recall. My parents used to go to Gibraltar a lot, to get their cigarettes and whatever sort of contraband you could get more cheaply there. We used to go to the villages and do the Hemingway routine following the bullfights and bullfighters.

Q: Than after this six month interlude, what...

WILSON: We came back to southern California in July, 1959, where my other grandparents, my dad's side of the family, lived outside of Los Angeles. They lived in a place called Altadena, which was just north of Pasadena.

Q: My grandfather is buried there. What were your grandparents doing there?

WILSON: They were retired there, having lived in the area since the 1930s. My grandfather at that time had already passed away, and my grandmother was pretty close to dying. She had lung canceshe was part of that great smoking generatioand so she didn't last too long. That was where my father had grown up; so that's where we ended up after we left Europe. We lived there from 1959 to 1963 in a place called San Marino, which was just south of Pasadena.

Q: Did you go to school there?

WILSON: Went to San Marino junior high there.

Q: I went to Henry Hunington Elementary, and then I also went to South Pas Junior High. Did you go there?

WILSON: I did it the other way. We moved back and we lived in an apartment in South Pasadena, so I went to South Pas junior high.

Q: I'm talking about the '30s; things were different.

WILSON: We were in South Pasadena just very briefly, just long enough to find a place in San Marino. We moved to San Marino to a house right along the San Marino/San Gabriel border. We were still the San Marino school district. Then I too went to Henry E. Huntington Junior High.

Q: Oh, yes. Not too many alumni here in Washington.

WILSON: That's right. So which part of San Marino did you live in?

Q: We lived on a street called El Molino. We were on the northern side of the railroad tracks.

WILSON: We were pretty much neighbors then. We lived on Robin Road, which was literally a half a block long; we would have been just a couple blocks toward San Gabriel from you.

Q: It was one block oveLorraine was half a block down, and then there was Robin Road, right by a reservoir. Know it well.

WILSON: So we grew up close to each other.

Q: It was a different era; were you there for how long?

WILSON: I was there then from 1959 to 1963 and I did sixth, seventh and eighth grade there.

Q: By that time San Marino had its own junior high?

WILSON: Yes; it was actually Henry Huntington, which went up to eighth grade.

Q: Where did you go to high school?

WILSON: We went back to Europe in 1963. We also had a summer place in San Clemente where we used to surf. My dad had grown up doing that, surfing in Pasadena and San Clemente and so we did that. We moved back to Europe in August of 1963, thinking we were going to be living in Paris, but we found that the weather in Paris was just too wet for any reasonable person from southern California. In the 31 days of August in 1963, it rained 28 days. So my parents decided we were going to do down to the Riviera. We lived in Nice for a year, 1963/64, but decided that Nice was too cold in the winter, so we moved to Mallorca, Spain, for two year1964/66. During each of those summers we went over to Biarritz and surfed. That was our summer vacation. My brother and I were the first resident California surfers to become members of the Surf Club de France, which included members of the French national surfing team. From 1966 to 1967, which was my last year in high school, my parents thought that the best thing for me would be to go to school. We moved to Montreaux, Switzerland for the year. I did my senior year there.

Q: During this time in Europe, where were you going to high school?

WILSON: For the first year I went to a Catholic school in Nice. For the next two years I went to Belver International School, which was a British run school in Mallorca. We went to that British school and did "O" levels and prepared for the" A" levels which was part of the British secondary school system. Then in Switzerland in Montreaux I went to a school called Montarosa, which was really on the eastern end of Montreaux towards the end of the lake. That school offered both the U.S. exams and the British exams. I did both of those there, both the A levels and the advanced placement and the SATs and everything else you had to do to get into an American university.

Q: You had this eclectic education. You were getting the French Catholic system, you were getting the British system, and you were trying to keep up with your American system. Were you picking up languages at the time?

WILSON: Sure. In the French system, the classes were all in French. I found that it took me about three months to really begin to understand French, about six months to begin to read it, and at the nine month point I met a young lady in France; then it became imperative that I learned how to speak. So at nine months and two weeks, I was suddenly able to speak French as well.

It was interesting. I never really saw my high school education in terms of how it was going to prepare me for American university. It was just something that one did as one was growing up. You had to go to school, and these were the things that you had to do. The subject matters that we dealt with in France, we dealt with them as the French kids did. The same thing in Majorca; we dealt with them as any kid who is preparing for an English university. As I said, the school we attended also offered the PSATs and the American examinations, so we could take that. Mathematics and verbal skills are not that much different whether the education if French or British or American style except in the way that you express them in examinations. So we did both the English exams and the American exams. I never really made a decision as to where I was going to go college until I was a senior in Switzerland. I think if I had to assess the relative educational systems based upon my experience, I would say that I had a lot easier time of it at university having been schooled in the European system, for two reasons: one, the British system requires you to write; so you have to write essays (i.e. being able to do much more than just answer multiple choice questions); two, having a knowledge of both French and Spanish, I could always take a couple of courses at an American university pretty much guaranteed of getting good grades without having to study too hard. Knowledge of one or two foreign languages was always a boost to the grade point average at university.

Q: Were events in Europe at all like the de Gaulle period in France and the pull out of NATO and other things like this impacting at all on you?

WILSON: You know, when we lived in Nice, we found that the locals were not very pro American. My parents particularly felt this; that there was a bit of anti Americanism there. We also had a Volkswagen camper, which generated profoundly anti German expressions. One time we had our tires slashed, which my parents attributed to the basic French dislike of Americans and things German.

Q: It was also a time de Gaulle was really pushing the nationalistic very hard.

WILSON: Sure. At the same time we used to have travelers come into Cannes all the time; we used to always go and take trips on the visiting ships. There was a group of Mormon missionaries in town who were trying to teach the French how to drink wine and how to believe in Mormonism. They used to come by our house because they wanted to speak American every now and again. I don't think they were really seriously trying to proselyte us. There were real mixed feelings about their effortIt was also the erin France in particulaof the Beatles and the Rolling Stones whose music started coming to the continent. That started a phenomenon in French music which was a direct copy of what was going on in the States at the time; even there Johnny Holiday was getting support and he was basically doing all covers of Elvis Presley songs at that time. As there is today, this was a love/hate relationship with things American. This was before Vietnam; so you didn't have that tremendous focal point of the Vietnamese War to get people to being anti American. De Gaulle was making French nationalism the coin of the realm, making the United States the external enemy. We didn't have the same sense at that time as one would get from reading the history books on that period. The decolonization of Africa and the Algerian War were the key to the French psyche in those days as well. I must say I found the experience living in southern France being very agreeable. I suspect my best memories, however, are those years we spent in Mallorca. The weather was better.

Q: I would think Mallorca would be sort owell, to live in a real tourist area is, this often can bkind of a never never land or something.

WILSON: Mallorca was the land of the lotus blossom; it already was a never never land. In February of every year you had the almond blossoms, which turned the entire island pink. We had racing bicycles and we would spend our weekends riding around the island. Many of your natives shunned the tourists; that allowed us as observers, to become the fount of all wisdom when young people come to the island. When I lived there, two of the Rolling Stones bought a nightclub there. The Animals bought a nightclub right across from our school. So there was some glamor there. Even though Mallorca was a tourist destination at the time relative to other parts of Europe it wasn't as nearly as touristy as it is now. It was still new.

Q: Was Switzerland a little bit like somebody opened the window and they ran outside and it was cold, or something like that?

WILSON: There are a couple of sort of common threads in the four years that we spent in Europe. One was doing things athletic. We had bicycles; we were living by the ocean, and so we had rowboats and went swimming. Every time that there were waves, we'd go body surfing even if in February; we spent a lot of our summers surfing. The flip side of surfing is skiing. When we went to Switzerland, it was not so much that it was cold but it was an opportunity to do something that was like surfing but do it in the winter and on land.

The other common thread is that everywhere we lived, we had a viewhen we lived in Nice we had a view of the Mediterranean. When we lived in Mallorca, we lived right on the sea. When we lived in Montreaux we lived with a view of the lake and of the valley. I don't know what that particularly means in my life except ever since, I've always looked for houses with a view.

Q: I know what you mean. My last post abroad was as Consul General in Naples, and we'd sit there and look at Vesuvius and Capri and the Bay of Naples. It's still hard to live in Annandale, Virginia.

WILSON: That's right. Even when living in Washington, I have always looked for houses on the Potomac and I actually have a house that has a view noSo that was a common thread.

Q: We're getting into 1967.

WILSON: In 1966 and 1967 we lived in Switzerland. This was the final year. My parents came back to the U.S. about six months before we did.

Q: By the way, your parents, were they essentially living off income or did they have a job?

WILSON: Both my parents were writing for a syndicate and other publications. They wrote articles which chronicled matters that were different in Europe from the United States. It is hard now to see where there would be an audience for that, but then there were not that many Americans traveling and the Western worlWestern Europe and the United Statehad not become so homogenized. So each continent had its own idiosyncracies and unique attributee.g. the village parties in the summer with the band and everybody gathering; things like that. We have scrapbooks of their newspaper articles at that time. So they wrote really for four years.

Q: During the early 1970s...

WILSON: We left Europe before drugs were really introduced in Europe. By the time we got back to California, there was already a flourishing drug culture thermarijuana and some of the psychedelics. You didn't have the hard cocaine and heroin consumption that you did later. But in Europe there wasn't much of that at all. The Americans, and other foreigners, that we would run into, on a regular basis, were either middle class tourists or surfers.

Q: Whither to college?

WILSON: While I was sitting in Switzerland and thinking about my future, I was filling out applications to Oxford and Cambridge and the Sorbonne; I was considering staying in Europe. By this time I saw myself pretty much as an international citizen. I started thumbing through some of my old surfer magazines and I came across one whose cover said, "It takes a B average to slide a campus point." I thumbed through it and there were 14 pages of perfect waves at the University of California at Santa Barbara. So I threw all the other applications away and filled out the form for the University of California at Santa Barbara. As you can see, one of the themes through my early life was surfing and sports in general, but surfing was an anchor. Surfing was the one thing that brought us back every year to the same group of friends and kept us in contact with our buddies in California.

Q: Today one has the feeling that this was a very specific culture which is really not connected with almost anything else. I may be wrong, because I'm just observing it. But people get jobs in order to surf.

WILSON: Absolutely.

Q: This gets a lot of surfing but doesn't lead anywhere.

WILSON: It leads to a lifestyle that they enjoy. But that's exactly right. It's always been much more of a lifestyle than a sport. But I suppose it's not any more of a lifestyle than that led by people who get into golf early and decide that their life is going to revolve around golf, or horses or skiing for that matter.

Q: You went to the University of California at Santa Barbara from when to when?

WILSON: 1967 to 1971.

Q: Let's call it Santa Barbara. Is that what they call it?

WILSON: Yes, UCSB.

Q: UCSwhat was it like? I think there are UC campuses at Berkeley, Santa Cruz, and Davis which was more agricultural.

WILSON: Davis is agricultural. Santa Cruz was always thought to be sort of philosophical. Berkeley was always the political one. Irvine was a campus for southern California, and nobody quite knew what Santa Barbara was. UCLA was the big southern California campus before it went to Berkeley. UCSB had started out as a teachers' school, but when I was there it was known for its emphasis on oceanography; it was also good in engineering.

Q: 1967 to 1971 was sort of the height, certainly at Berkeley, of agitation. I guess the free speech movement was over by that time.

WILSON: In Berkeley the free speech movement and related efforts started about 1963/64. It remained a strong voice, and although not a really large movement, it morphed into the anti Vietnam movement in about 1967 and 1968. My entering class was probably the first class that from the time we started as freshmen was bombarded by the anti war sentiment. The sophomores, and certainly the seniors, were a lot different in terms of their outlook on life. Between 1967 and 1971, we had various demonstrations in Santa Barbara itself. We had the burning of the American flag in Buena Vista; we had a kid who was shot and killed; we had the National Guard called out twice. We were part of that cohort that was in college during the transition from the old draft system to a lottery system. We used to say that the difference between Berkeley and Santa Barbara was that Berkeley was a commuter school which being a highly politicized school knew the value of getting their riots in during the day so that they could be on the evening news; we in Santa Barbara had other things to do during the day like surfing and smoking dope and drinking red wine; we could never get together to go rioting until after the sun had gone down. But our riots were every bit as intense.

Q: What was your involvement in these campus activities?

WILSON: As I said, I had come back from Switzerland, knowing that in Europe in the 1960s, the students were already much more anti U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War than we were in the States and much more hostile to it. I found myself in a school in Switzerland with a bunch of British professors who were essentially opposed to the Vietnam policy of our government, and I objected to their views as any patriot would do when confronting a bunch of foreigners. I came back to California and found that maybe defending our continued participation in the Vietnam War was not what I wanted to do. I was as influenced as everybody else was by events at the university and by the anti war movement. We had activities on our campus which ignited the first of the riots in Santa Barbara with the burning of...

Q: There was a lawyer for the...

WILSON: There was a lawyer for these rebels. Like everybody else, I was influenced by that. I never played any role in the anti war movement. We used to go to the marches, and we walked through the campus and the town. A couple of my roommates and I walked through the Bank of America as it was burning, but we didn't actually light any matches. We didn't throw any rocks, although I had a friend, a fraternity brother, who was a member of the golf team, who would sit out behind the house and hit pitching wedges into the police roadblocks 120 yards away. But we never really were major players in those riots.

Q: Did this cause any problem with your father being a Marine aviator?

WILSON: He was out of the Marines by that time.

Q: But still had the background.

WILSON: Remember, of course, that this was the Nixon Administration. He had brought to Washington a bunch of Californians including neighbors of ours such as an Assistant Attorney General who was indicted and convictealthough his conviction was overturned in the Watergate trials. He was also known as the one who decided that they would use RFK Stadium as the place to house all the anti war protestors they arrested here in the 1968 riots in Washington. These guys were pretty radical Republican. John Mitchell used to come by the house fairly frequently when the White House moved to San Clemente every summer. That was where my parents lived at the time. So we had all these guys around all the time. There was a fair amount of tension in the relationship, although to my father's great credit, he was not nearly as far out there as was Bob Halderman and some of the other Nixon Republicans on this issue. I don't know if that's because my father finally began to listen to me or if for other reasons he finally concluded that this was not a war that was winnable in the way that was being fought. I just don't know. We never really discussed the issue.

Q: Were you also picking up sort of the real time when there was a real generational gap, when everybody over the age of 30 was beyond it. Being beyond 30 at that time myself, I sort of have the feeling that your generation was the first one that grew up with the feeling that original sin did not include them.

WILSON: I suppose people looked at the 65 to 70 crowd, in that way; if you read the Electric Kool Aid Acid Test, Tom Wolf's story of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, you might have concluded that, although it does seem to me that we were pretty tame relative to those who came after us. We might have opened the door. I think the use of marijuana and the soft drugs was obviously much more prevalent in our crowd than it had been in those that went before us. Woodstock was kind of at the very end of the 1960s.

Certainly the music was a lot different. My father would listen to Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra, and I would listen to the Grateful Dead and the Jefferson Airplane. There was a real disconnect. I remember that very clearly, because my own son is now 21 and I do try and listen to his music just to have some sense of what he's listening to. It is as difficult for me to understand his music as my music must have been for my father.

Q: Somehow I think during this whole period there was one aspect that I found on which there was just no meeting of the mind and that was music. On almost everything else, I can see their point of view, but music really was not. This was a new phenomenon. I think it started about that time. Before then, everybody listened to the Hit Parade and that music sort of covered the whole spectrum.

WILSON: That's right.

Q: In the late 1960s it sort of chopped up into various groups.

WILSON: That's right. It became very difficult for adults to understand what the kids were listening to.

Q: Obviously the most important thing was the war thing and surfing, but you were taking courses, I take it.

WILSON: Sure. During one of the semesters the university basically suspended school because of the riots. I majored in history. I suppose I was pretty much of an indifferent student. I had my gentleman's Bs. I had a B to B+ average, but I never worked too hard.

Q: What sort of history were you taking?

WILSON: Whatever was easy.

Q: Was there any feel for what was going on in the world?

WILSON: We were very interested in what was happening, because we were potentially going to be dragged into it either willingly or against our will because of the military draft system; so we were keenly interested in the politics of the time. Even if we were not leaders of the anti war movement, we were certainly sympathetic to it and we certainly did participate in a lot of the marches. During the election of 1968, Bobby Kennedy came to Santa Barbara the day before he got shot in Los Angeles, and we saw him. We were all sort of pro Bobby Kennedy and anti Ronnie Reagan and anti Nixon and anti Johnson. I'm not sure that our politics was terribly well defined other than by a general sense that being in Vietnam was not a good thing for us.

Q: Eventually you're going to end up as a Foreign Service Officer. You'd gone to school abroad. Had a career in the Foreign Service entered your thoughts?

WILSON: I had thought of the Foreign Service as something that might be of interest from the time I was about nine years old, when we had first met the American consul general in Barcelona, Spain. When I was in Majorca, my great aunt, who lived in Majorca, was the curator of the Fra [Father] Junipero Serra Foundation.

Q: I went through the California public school system, and you learned a hell of a lot about Fra Junipero Serra.

WILSON: My great uncle, when he was Governor of California, was known for two things: one, he wore cowboy boots all the time; and two, he was the one who was responsible for putting the Fra Junipero Serra statue in Statuary Hall of the Capitol. His cousin had married a British author and they had moved to Mallorca, where she had taken on this task in the Father Junipero Serra Foundation in Mallorca. Every year to celebrate his birth or something, they would have a celebration and the American ambassador would come ovethat was Angier Biddle Duke at the time. I remember meeting Duke for the first time when I was 13 or 14 years old. I was really struck by the fact that this guy was wearing patent leather shoes with bows on them. I couldn't quite figure that out, but it was a nice pair of shoes. Meeting the American ambassador also had an influencl was at a very impressionable age and I met him a couple times. I also have friends who remind me that even in college I talked about an international career. An old girlfriend who got in touch with me couple of years agl hadn't seen her in 30 yearsaid, "You always used to talk about becoming an international lawyer." So I suppose that I had talked about a career in international affairs and that that had always been an option, although at university, I suppose, we were united in our distrust of the government and in our opposition to the Vietnam War. The slogans of the period included "Don't trust anybody over 30," "Tune in, turn on, and drop out," and "Hope I die before I get old"that sort of sentiment. At the time that I was at the University of California at Santa Barbara, working for the sort of fascist government of the United States of America that was in power at the time, was something that I would not have considered.

When I took my semi obligatory hitchhiking trip through Europe in 1970, that feeling about the government was just reinforced, as every bridge you would go under in France would have graffiti on it: "Down the USA," "Out of Vietnam," "U.S. Equals CIA," and that sort of stuff. There was a lot of anti Americanism, anti U.S. government hostility. I remember going to a social political function. We were hitchhiking through France and got picked up by these kids who were going to an occasion being put on by the French Communist Party, which was a legitimate political party in France. Like all the political parties, they hosted these soirees. This was a party in the main square of some village in France. The French kids said, "You have to come with us;" we said "yes" and went to the party. I got up my nerve to go and asked this little French girl to dance. We were dancing and having a good time, and she detected a bit of an accent and she asked me where I was from. I said I was from the United StateCaliforniat which point she stopped dancing with me immediately and turned and walked away and wouldn't have anything more to do with me. So the anti Americanism was evident. At that time my vision of the future did not include working for a US government which might be headed by a Ronald Reagan or a Richard Nixon. Ronald Reagan was the Governor of California and he was the one who called out the National Guard when we were rioting, which we felt was a bit much. It stopped the riots and it was probably in that respect a very successful maneuver.

Q: There had been the Kent State event.

WILSON: Kent State was in the Spring of 1970. That was when we were having big riots in Santa Barbara as well. We had riots in 1968, 1969 and 1970.

Q: You didn't feel the Guard might fire on you?

WILSON: No. Actually, a lot of us had friends who were in the Guard, but its presence really did stop the rioting for me. In the late spring, after Kent State, when they had the riots and they called the Guard out, the imposed a curfew from 6:30 on. Where we were in Santa Barbara, the campus town was right next to the campusort of one square mile, and it was pretty easy to secure. When the Guard came in, it came in overwhelming force, and made it clear that if you weren't off the streets by 6:30, you were going to hell. I had friends who were coming back from the beach at about 6:30 in their wetsuits with the surfboards and they were hauled off. One of my friends was walking from next door to an apartment roommate after 6:30, and he got hauled off.

Q: After you graduated in 1971, whither?

WILSON: My last class was in 1971. I actually had to write a paper, which took me a lot longer to write than I had anticipated. I then decided that I was going to do something that was completely different from a university life; so I signed up for the carpenters union's apprenticeship program. I had odd jobs during the summer, and I got into the union program in September. I spent the next three and a half to four years as a carpenter. I built houses in Santa Barbara, and then when I got enough money, I moved up to Lake Tahoe and was a ski bum for a couple of years. I built houses and condominiums in Lake Tahoe during that time. I broke me leg skiing, moved back down to Santa Barbara and started building again in Santa Barbara. Got married and moved up to Washington state and lived up in Washington state, building houses.

Q: One, how did sort of moving into the blue collar class as a carpenter sit with the family? And, two, was this done as something you really wanted to do, or was this a rebellion or what?

WILSON: First of all, I think the family at that time was probably just glad that I was out earning my own living, although I actually paid my own way through college. They had not contributed from my freshman year on.

Q: What were you doing?

WILSON: Anything, anything and everything. I was a school bus driver for a private school in Santa Barbara for three years and that paid pretty well. I tended bar. I was a gardener. I cut grass and kept people's yards in shape. During the Halloween season we had a bunch of pumpkin patches and we would lay pumpkins, load trucks to earn moneanything and everything. I worked delivering and selling refrigerators. I worked at a nursery, produced mums for an estate. Whatever was available. So the family was just glad that I seemed to be doing something that was steady, and I think that at that time they just assumed that life goes othey had done their bit. My father always said that, "All I can leave you with really is a good education. That's the best I can do for you."

In terms of whether I liked carpentry or whether it was more of a rebellion, I enjoyed it very much. It was good work, steady every day. In Santa Barbara and Lake Tahoe, it was a good way to make a lot of money and to ski. During the winter we would work indoors a couple days a week and weekends, and we would ski during the week when all the tourists had gone home. So it was a nice lifestyle. I certainly was not the only college graduate at the time who was doing that. I made pretty good money.

Q: Did you have the feeling that this was fun but there was going to be something else later on?

WILSON: I think everybody, certainly the guys I worked with, became contractors if they stayed in the trade. In my last year I became a contractor. It was pretty clear that once you mastered the trade that you were going to do other things with it other than just working for some one else. In fact, during my time in Santa Barbara and Lake Tahoe and later in Washington state, I worked on projects that were not factory, assembly line projects. I worked on high end houses which required a small group of people to work from beginning to end. We would do the laying out; we would do the pouring of the concrete; we would do the foundations; we would do the framing; we would do the finish work on the house, so that we experienced the breadth of work from beginning to end. The difference being that in Santa Barbara it was always warm, so it was great weather all the time; at Lake Tahoe if it was not warm, you were skiing, so it didn't make any difference. Once I got to Washington state it was cold and it was wet and it was miserable and there wasn't anything to do if it was cold and wet and miserable except to woryou didn't the alternative of skiing or surfing or whatever.

Q: You say you got married toward the end of this...

WILSON: Got married in 1974.

Q: Where did you meet your wife, and her background?

WILSON: I met her just as I was graduating from the University. When I would return to Santa Barbara, she was still in school. We would go out. When I broke my leg, I was hitchhiking around California and I would go to Santa Barbara a lot and see her. We were just sort of hanging out. She was from the Los Angeles area. When we decided to get married, we agreed that we would just basically pack up my pickup truck and drive north until we found a place we liked and just there settle for awhile to see what it felt like. We went up and we ended up in Sequim, Washington, which is on the Olympic Peninsula. We had some friends who had moved up there a few years before, so we knew we were going to go up there, but we didn't know we would stay there. We settled there for a couple years. We lived in a house on the Dungeness Plain and worked. We decided in 1974 that maybe there was something else to do besides build houses all the time. We looked at the University of Washington graduate schoothe University of Washington School of Public Affairs. It offered a Master's of Public Administration degree with a good International Relations option, which was of interest to me. I thought this was something where I could use my foreign languages and my international experience. To get into the School of Public Affairs you had to demonstrate a commitment to public service. I had no public service experience other than collecting unemployment insurance when I was a ski bum. So I took the Foreign Service exam, and I got into the program at the University of Washington. I also got a fellowship to a university wide program at Eastern Washington State. I ended up going to Spokane for a semester; I also passed the Foreign Service exam.

Q: Was the Foreign Service exam something you sort of kept in the back of your mind anyway?

WILSON: I hadn't really thought about the Foreign Service exam for a number of years, although the idea of diplomatic service was something that still appealed to me, I didn't quite know how to get there from here. When we had the luxury of some spare time in Washington, we looked at everything from Peace Corps to the Foreign Service exam and then decided that I would just go ahead and take it just to see how I would do. I did a little research on it and found that you're not penalized if you don't pass it and that a lot of people took it more than two or three times before passing it. Also I found that there wasn't very much you could do to really prepare for it. You couldn't read all the books needed to pass a graduate school exam. I did take about two months off and I spent all day in the library in Sequim, Port Angeles. I got books on American history and world history and economics and just studied up trying to bring myself up to speed. At the same time I got hold of all the copies of the books to help me prepare for the graduate entrance exam. I took all the sample tests; I really just spent a couple months studying. I took both of those examgraduate school and Foreign Servicin December of 1974.

Q: Then what happened?

WILSON: When I came out of the Foreign Service exam I told my wife that in my exataking history, this was the only time that I had ever finished a test not having a clue as to whether I'd done well, indifferent or very poorly. A couple weeks later I got the exam results and I passed, which surprised me. I had also done very well on the graduate school entrance exam. So we started focusing on a potential new lifestyle. At that time I was in the throes of building a small contracting business. I had a contract to build a house for a guy; I did that, made some money doing it.

We moved over to Spokane, Washington, and I started graduate school while waiting for the Foreign Service exam process to work itself out. I had taken the oral exam in, I guess, April or May of 1975. That was interesting. As a matter of fact, I was just looking at some pictures the other day out in California, the day before I took the exam and the day of the exam, wearing a tie and hair closely cropped. I went over to the Federal Building in Seattle and walked in. When my turn came, they opened the door, and this lady steps oualready I was pretty surpriseand stuck her hand out. When you're in the trades, you didn't see very many women on the work site. You certainly didn't shake hands with anybody, much less some woman in a business suit. She said, "How do you do? My name is Sarah Nathwess." I was so taken aback, but I managed to say, "How do you do, Miss Nathwess?" It took me about three time to get her name right. The exam went downhill from there. But for some reason they decided that I had done okay in the examination. There were three examiners. There was the woman who met me at the door and two men.

When the exam was finished, I left the room; they came out a few minutes later and said, "Congratulations. You've passed." That left me trying to figure out what to do next; while I was getting my papers, the secretary said, "Congratulations. They've been here for two weeks, and you're only the third or fourth person that they've accepted." I said, "I'm surprised. I didn't think I'd done that well." This was the year of the publication of Alistair Cook's book on America; one of the first questions they asked me was, "If you were a consular officer in Hungary and some guy came to you and said, 'I want to travel to the United States,' what books would you give him to read?" I said, "How about Pastures of Heaven?" which is a collection of short stories by John Steinbeck which take place in the Salinas Valley; it is a book that nobody has ever heard of, before or since. It is the one John Steinbeck book that nobody knows; it is a collection of wonderful short stories which I just happened to have read. Then I came up with some book that I had remembered from Sociology 101 on the plight of the urban black in American cities and American societTalley's Corner I guess it was calleand then another book on the United Farm Workers, and then finally some book by Kurt Vonnegut which was a satire on middle Americl can't remember the name of that book. The one book I just never even thought of was Alistair Cook's America even though it was being reviewed on every TV program and every newspaper at the time. All these books that I had come up with were kind of left wing treatises on how bad American society was, and that was what I suggested giving to these guys to promote America. Anyway, I passed the test.

Q: Did woman examiner ask you questions on the opera? I know because at this particular time I was on the part of the Board of Examiners and I was the head of the counselor cone and I think the woman was my deputy, she was a big opera buff in Europe.

WILSON: I don't recall them asking any questions about the opera, which is probably just as well. I never would have been able to answer them at that time. But I never saw her again, unfortunately. It's a story that I've often used in talking about joining the Foreign Service. I was sorry when I saw that she had passed away, because I always wanted to run into her and tell her that...

Q: She smokelung cancer.

WILSON: I went off to graduate school at Eastern Washington University in Cheney. This was a program that was affiliated with the University of Washington School of Public Affairs. They were just getting it started in Cheney and they wanted some people to go there. They offered me some money to go theri.e. a fellowship in economics. The idea was that I would go to Eastern Washington University for a year, do the basic course work in the economics and the political science and then do the second year in Seattle, where I would concentrate on international relations at the master's level. So I went to Cheney, which was a wonderful little place right outside of Spokanin Tom Foley's district at the time, which is another story. I was now five years out of college, so I was closer in age to the professors than I would have been had gone just after graduating from college.

I established a little basement remodeling business, because some builder had put up a bunch of housea tract development projecand they had left all the basements unfinished. I had my fellowship, and life was good. We lived in a farmhouse. I hobnobbed with the professors. Most of my courses were at night, so I could work during the day. Then the call came. Toward the end of the first semester, the Department called and said, "You number has come up on the roster. Do you want to join the Foreign Service?" I said, "Look, I want to talk to my professors." The professors said, "Look, we'd really like you to stay. Why don't you call the Department back and see if you can't negotiate a deal so that you can finish your master's program and then enter the Foreign Service after you finish your master's degree." I called the Department and I talked to some officious bureaucrat in BEprobably just a secretary or receptionist as far as I knew, because I had no idea how the bureaucracy worked at all. I just said, "Look, I'll be more valuable to you if I have my master's degree. What do you think?" The person on the other end said, "Once your name's come up, if you don't accept the offer, we put you on the bottom of the list, so we can't guarantee that we'll ever call you again." Knowing how difficult it was to pass the test the first time, I wasn't sure that I wanted to take the chance of having to pass it again a second time, so I said, "Okay, I'll take it your offer."

Q: You probably talked to the wrong person.

WILSON: Probably did.

Q: These entrances are negotiable, but it depends. Somebody down the line, you know, using a little power.

WILSON: Yes, probably, but it didn't make any difference to me.

Q: You came in then in what?

WILSON: I entered the Foreign Service in January of 1976.

Q: What did you sort of feel that the Foreign Service did, and what was the role of the United States abroad at that time?

WILSON: I suppose what really got me thinking about government service was Watergate. The televising of the Watergate hearings was absolutely fascinating as an exercise in civic education. It occurred at a time when there was not much happening in my life; so I had a fair amount of time to watch and follow it. The hearings were all over the television; so if I wasn't working, then it was easy to turn them on. If I was working, they were always in the newspaper or in the nightly news or whatever. They were absolutely fascinating to watch. If I recall correctly, I probably had my broken leg part of the time, so I was laid up anyway. I broke my leg in January of 1973. I had taken a considerable amount of pride in that in 197we couldn't vote until we were 21, and I turned 21 in 197was the first Presidential election I could vote in,. I had registered Republican so I could go vote against the SOB Nixon twiconce in the primaries and once in the general election, which I did. I broke my leg and the hearings took place. I was watching the hearings and thought, "Gee, this is really fascinating to watch all these guys, including guys that I used to see come by our house." That got me thinking that perhaps there were some real interesting things to be do. I still didn't know much about Washington. But it also seemed to me that maybe everybody who was doing this stuff in Washington, that maybe they weren't perfect in their assessments and their analysis, and that maybe there were other points of view that could be brought to bear on policy making. I started thinking about how working in the government might be an interesting thing to do, but again it took me awhile to figure out how to get from here to therfrom Lake Tahoe and Santa Barbara, to Washington, DC.

When I moved to Washington in January of 1976, we lived right over here across the street from the State DepartmenColumbia Plaza apartments. At that time I had no idea what an "in box" or an "out box" was. I had never been in a bureaucracy; I didn't know much about file cabinets. At home, I had a little box with all my files in it. Suddenly the world became a much more complicated place than getting up and driving a few nails and going off to take a few courses and hanging around with a few professors. The A 100 class was a real eye opener in terms of how complicated and different the bureaucracy works.

Q: How did the A 100 course strike you at that time?

WILSON: I think the first few days I felt very inadequate, but I suppose most of the other people did too in that many seemed to have all these great degrees and interesting experiences. Then after the first few days, most of my colleagues seemed either normal or jerks, one or the other. One moves into the stream that one has to swim in and figures out how to do it. I think the A 100 course is really good for getting a bunch of people from disparate backgrounds together and giving everybody both a sense of inadequacy and a sense of sort of common bonds. It was useful in that sense. Our class, I think, was particularly delinquent. We were always late; people wrote letters to the coordinator and said, "These guys will need to shape up if they're going to make it," and that sort of stuff. We went to the Department of Commerce; most of us spent our time in the aquarium rather than in the meetings. Most of us didn't show up at the Department of Labor's briefings and so on. Occasionally we asked questions that were embarrassing to those who had to answer. The coordinator may have changed the course requirements a little bit, but we seemed to have a pretty good time, and our class did reasonably welas well as other classes.

Q: Looking ahealater you were going to spend most of your career in Africdid Africa cross your radar at all?

WILSON: I didn't know anything about Africa. Coming from California, I didn't know very much about African Americans. I had had an African American roommate when I was a senior in high school in Switzerland, and I had some African American friends at UCSB, but I had no particular understanding of Africa. Like most kids my age, geography and history was limited to Europe and occasionally Latin American and maybe, if you're lucky, the Nile and Egypt. During the course of the A 100 class, I had a meeting with my career development officer, who came across as being the guy who was going to look out for my interests in the Foreign Service. I later found out that really he was just the guy making sure that you got round pegs put into round holes. Jesse Clear was his nama labor officer. I went to see him and Jesse said, "Well, what do you want to do?" and I said, "Well, look, I speak French and I've studied French history at university and studied French literature at university, studied French at university, lived in France. It seems to me that it's in the interests of our country that you send me to Paris or Bordeaux or Nice or Marseilles." He nodded and he said, "Well, son"when he called me 'son,' I knew that I had perhaps made a little bit of a faux pas by talking in terms of the interest of my natiohe said, "Well, son, we've got a place for you. It's a little bit to the south of France, but I think you'll like it. You'll be able to use not just your French but you'll be able to use your carpentry skills there as well. We want to make you the GSO in Niamey, Niger." I said, "Well, thank you very much. That's very interesting. May I think about it and get back to you?" and he said, "Sure."

I left his office and I went around the corner to the State Department Library and got out the post report on Niger. First of all, I got out an atlas to figure out where the hell Niger was. Then I got out the post report and took it back to my wife, who looked at it and saw nothing but pictures of camels and mud brick houses and sand. We looked at it; we talked about it; and we decided that this would be our chance to have a National Geographic experience; so we said yes. That is how I got to be an Africanist. I will say that the only thing that I regret about it was Jesse had been less than truthful when he said I could use my carpentry skills, because after you've been in the Sahara Desert, you realize that there's hardly a goddamn tree in the place much less a piece of lumber that you could drive a nail into. I went to Niger as the GSO in May of 1976.

Q: When most people come into the Foreign Service, they're told there are counselor, political, economic, administrative specialties. They usually don't know anything about these things, but the pecking order will usually tell, "Well, unless you're an economist, you want to be a political officer. Avoid the other two." Were you getting that from your A 100?

WILSON: At that time, you had to choose one of the cones. You had take a specialty test. I took the administrative cone part because I had read and learned enough to figure out that it was the easiest cone to get into. I never expected to do this for a lifetime. I just expected to go in and do it for awhile and see the world and have fun and then move on to something else. I figured that, once I got into it, I could then decide where I was going to go. I didn't realize that it was going to be hard to change cones. In my case I never was able to change cones because I never got into a position where I could. I went directly from administration to management. Once you get into management, you couldn't change cones. You had to have an out of cone experience to get that. I never went back to administration; I went the management cone, as DCM or ambassador from 1982 on. So I took the admin cone because I figured that was the easiest way to get an assignment in the Foreign Service, and that was right.

Once we were in the A 100 course, there were enough bright people who were going to be in different cones that it would have difficult for those who were in the political cone to make a "cone" distinction right thei.e. one cone being better than the others. In fact, those who tried to come across as being better than the rest of us were really quickly cut down to size. We were geographically diverse; we were sufficiently experienced in whatever we had done before that and sufficiently old not to be impressed by somebody who said he was a political officer. Furthermore I am sure we all thought that we could probably change cones much more easily than turned out to be the case.

Q: So in 1970 you went to Niger?

WILSON: I went to Niger in May of 1976.

Q: So you were there from 1976 till when?

WILSON: 1976 to 1978.

Q: Joe, what was Niger like? What were our interests in Niger in 1976?

WILSON: As I think I mentioned earlier, when we took a look at the post report, we saw pictures of a lot of camels and lot of sand and a lot of sort of adobe type buildings. For us, it was really the National Geographic experience. I remember flying off to Africa. In those times the Bureau of African Affairs was relatively financially well off; they allowed me, a junior officer, to stop in Dakar and Abidjan on the way to Niger. I had helped in the Bureau with Kissinger's trip to, among other places, Zaire. So I had gotten to know all the people in AF/EX, and they gave me this little travel bonus. I flew into Senegal in one of the old PanAm flights that would start in New York and end in Nairobi, hopscotching across the continent, arriving in Senegal at sun up. In those days the airport was really quite a ways outside the citmaybe 10 miles outside the city. Since then, the city has grown up around the airport. But we arrived in Dakar as the sun was coming up, and I will never forget driving into the city from the airport and watching the Senegalese in their flowing robes, either doing their prayers or walking majestically across the Sahel into town. They were very strikintall, very elegant, very dignified looking people.

That was my first step on African soil, and I fell magically in love with the continent at that moment. We got to Niger in the middle of May, which is really the very hottest time of the year. I remember stepping out of the airplane and feeling like I'd stepped into a furnace; it was very, very warm. Niger at that time was in the throes of the terrible drought of the 1970s. The drought had been going on for several years, and as a consequence, many of the nomadic tribethe Tuareghad moved into Niamey. You found nomads all over Niamey. The Tuaregs are a much lighter skinned African in their typically either white or blue native wear. They also a different lifestyle from the natives of Niamey.

I must say Niamey lived up to everything we expected. Our expectations were to have a National Geographic experience, and we certainly had that. There was a wonderful game park about two and a half hours south of Niamey called Park W, where we had some Peace Corps volunteers. We had about 150 Peace Corps volunteers throughout the country. So we could go to the game park. We were able to fly into a desert outpost called Bilma. There was a military base where we later helped rehabilitate the landing strip. I flew here one time with the ambassador and when we disembarked, the provincial administrator was there with a bunch of Land Rovers. We got into our Land Rovers and went charging across the desert to Bilma itself, which is an oasis about 45 minutes away. The rules of the game were that you drove as fast as you could across the sand, ï¿½ la "The Rat Patrol"old television program of that timbut you could never pass the provincial administrator's car in which he and the ambassador were riding. They were driving very fast, so it didn't matter. We would come over the top of the sand dunes and sort of launch off down the other side. We got to the oasis. Bilma in addition to being an oasis with enough water to permit some truck gardening, was the site of a number of salt mines. The people who lived there mined the salt in these big, open pits; they would take the salt out and then they would mold it these molds that looked like a missilsome sort of a big shell. Those salt licks would be loaded onto camels, and taken across the desert in caravans down to Nigeria.

Niger at that time was governed by a military colonel. His name was Seyni Kountche. Our ambassador, the first ambassador in my career, was Doug Heck, who later went on to head up the Counterterrorism Office and then ended his career in Kathmandu, Nepal. I arrived in May. On the Fourth of July Bicentennial we held a celebration. I was the lowest man on the totem poll was the junior General Services Officer. Because we were having the bicentennial celebration and because it was going to be the first time that the president of the country would attend a national day celebration, all embassy activities were focused on making this a great celebration, including fireworks display. We had to coordinate the fireworks with the local authoritiemilitary authorities. We had an AID officer who was a graduate of the Julliard School in New York and his specialty was music. He was assigned to train the Niger military band on how to play John Philip Sousa marches. I was working with the ambassador to make sure that we the fireworks display went off smoothly and that everything else went fine. I was with the ambassador every day for a couple of hours. We would roam the ambassador's residence and make sure that we had everything in place.

Q: Did you work with Ernie Heck, Ernestine Heck. I've interviewed Ernie. She was a young political officer in Saigon when I was there.

WILSON: Yes, Ernie was there. She was the ambassador's wife. She was on leave without pay doing the ambassadorial duties, and of course we worked very closely with her, as one does with an ambassador's spouse when one is General Services Officer. The residence itself was fairly new at the time. It sat on a hill overlooking the Niger River, and across the river you had these mesas and buttes; the view looked like that of the American Southwest with the river sort of winding through this stark countryside. So we had the Fourth of July and it was a huge success, and that pretty much made my stay in Niamey. I wouldn't have had to work another day as long as the Hecks were there. The fireworks went off without a hitch. We had designed the launching systems for the fireworks and they all worked just fine. Since you couldn't test the systems we had designed, we put three different types of launchers on each instrument that we built. As I say, it was the first time anybody had ever seen fireworks in Niger; they were launched over the river. The president came. He had a good time. The band played its John Philip Sousa, and it was a big event.

During the time I was in Niamey, because of the drought and because of the aftermath of the collapse of Vietnam, USAID was shifting all of its resources out of Southeast Asia and into Africa which became the new development focus. So during the two years that I was there, we doubled the embassy American staff in size each year, which, for a small capital city like Niamey, was a real explosion in expatriate population. Of course, AID came with everything that is required by projectvehicles and these big Chevy Suburbans for these little Niger streets. We made a deal with International Harvester which was trying to make inroads into the African market. AID agreed to buy a lot of their Jeep equivalents and they agreed that they would then maintain them. They ended up with all the Jeeps which they didn't maintain and after a couple of years you had these International Harvester carcasses all over the countryside because they didn't last very long in that climate.

We ran a number of very interesting projects. I mentioned earlier we had about 150 Peace Corps volunteers throughout the country doing everything from national park management to maternal/child health care, school, teaching and building. We had projects designed to improve the production of the national crops, which were millet and sorghum, throughout most of the country. We had projects designed to improve the purchasing of the crops, the storage of the crops, the transport of the cropeverything designed to try and eradicate or try and come to grips with what was perceived at the time, and still is, as a sort of chronic underproduction of food. We had projects designed to stop desertification by planting of trees that grew very quickly and anchored the soil in a number of different places. We had well drilling projects. It was a very interesting time. We dealt with issues that were fundamental to society. At the time I went there, the general conventional wisdom was that the Sahel would not be able to sustain the population that it had, much less the expected population growth. As a couple of people have pointed out, in actual fact in the last 25 or 30 years, it has done reasonably well, perhaps aided by our assistance programs, perhaps aided by the weather, but it has managed to cope by and large with the population growth.

Q: One of the things that I've heard was that by drilling wells, we were changing the migration. Cattle were considered wealth, and rather than keep moving, they tended to sort of congregate around well points. Was that a problem?

WILSON: Yes, it was a problem. It was a lesson learned from the well production in the 1960s and early 1970s. The cattle would come, hang around where the wells were, and then they would overgraze the surrounding area. That was a problem. I don't know how they ended up dealing with it in the 1980s or the 1990s, but in my time, it was indeed a problem.

Q: What was the American interest there?

WILSON: At hat time we had an interest in containing Muammar Qadhafi. We had a humanitarian interests in a population that was underproducing food stocks and which was being ravaged by the effects of the drought. We had an interest in working with the political leaders to improve governance. The war against Qadhafi was really played out more in Chad than it was in Niger. Qadhafi tried to destabilize the Niger government periodically while I was there, including shipping guns in diplomatic bags to be used in Niamey. Those were our political interests. We later, as part of our military assistance program, gave the Nigerians a couple of C130s and, as I said, we rebuilt their airstrip up in the north, up close to the Niger/Libyan border. By and large our policy was driven by foreign assistance and humanitarian assistance.

Q: What about the French? The French have always been very sensitive in Francophone countries about American involvement? It sounds like we really were involved there. Was this a problem?

WILSON: It only became a problem when we would be seen to be intruding in areas that the French felt that they had the lead on. For example, when we were trying to engage in political reform, the French would say, "Well, we will take care of that. We'll do it our way." In Africa that is a problem that crops up everywhere, particularly in countries where there are valuable resources to be exported and where there are real commercial opportunities. Fundamentalland this goes back even to this timthe French have a view on democratization which maintains that the pace of democratization is keyed much more directly to maintaining public security and should not proceed any faster than that it can be achieved without threatening public security. For us, perhaps because we have fewer interests directly engaged in these countries, we work for democracy now and assume that public security will follow. The one activity where our paths do cross in either competitive or surveillance ways is in the production of uranium, which was just ramping up in Niger when I was there. Of course, uranium implies enrichment, which implies nuclear programs. The French and the Japanese were big clients of the uranium that was being produced in Niger.

Q: How were they getting the uranium out?

WILSON: They were trucking it either across the desert or down through Niamey to the coast. But when we were there, it was just getting started, so there wasn't a whole lot of production. It was the time for discovery of the mines and the building of the infrastructure in the north to take care of it.

Q: Was there much of a French military presence there?

WILSON: There was some, but not as much as in other countries. I don't remember if they had their own base or if they were just basically integrated as advisors in the Nigerien armed forces.

Q: They tended to keep a few bases around and move them in when there was trouble. Essentially you didn't have trouble while you were there?

WILSON: Not when I was there. Kountche was known to be very austere and very much in control. He had come to power in 1974, just before Doug Heck got there. In fact, Doug was en route to post, I think, when the coup took place that brought Kountche to power. When I was there, there was maybe one attempt at changing power, and I think that happened just before I got there in 1986. Kountche was very much the disciplinarian; he was idolized by the armed forces, and the memory of him is very positive and very strong in Niamey.

Q: Often the GSO is the main person having to deal with the government on contracting for labor and services. How did you find dealing with both the government and the work force of Niger?

WILSON: You make a good point. I've always thought that ambassadors and political officers ignore GSOs at their own peril, because, particularly in the Third World, the landlord class is also the political class. When you only have 10 percent of an economy that's monetized, the same people who do politics do leasing of palaces, provision of services, etc. We did in fact have a number of interesting relationships with the chief of protocol of the country, with the senior commercial class and with senior politicians. It was always interesting, at the time that we were there, because due to the rapidity of our build up, our demand outstripped the supply of houses, so would end up essentially entering into short term leases while building our own structures. We would advance all the money; we would have houses built to our specifications; we would be there to supervise the constructiowe would bring people in to make sure that things were done properly. We had a work force there. Because we were doing a lot of construction of houses ourselves, we had a huge work force. A cast of literally hundreds would show up every morning. We'd have to figure out who they all were and send them on their way to do things. Then, of course, at the end of the construction the landlord would come back and say, "Well, now I've got this house; we need to renegotiate the lease." That made for constant battles with landlords to make sure that we got the best deal possible. We also dealt a lot with various protocol issues related to importing goods. Because Niger was a landlocked country, most of our requisitioned supplies went to Lagos first and then were flown to Niamey by an airline that I think we used to own at one point and later just chartered. It was a classical DC 6 that would fly up once a month. It was a DC 6 that was at the end of its useful life.

Q: It was a four engine plane which won its real fame during the Berlin Airlift in 1948.

WILSON: That's right. Up until the 1970s and even to the mid 1980s it was still flying around Africa routinely. They had pretty much come to the enthe motors anywaof their useful lives. They used to spew out more oil than one could even imagine their consuming during the course of a flight. The plane would fly up once a month, and we used to work with the customs officials to make sure that they would allow all those goods into the country. So there was always a lot of work with airport customs officials, the in town customs and protocol officials, and immigration officials to get people in and out. That part of it worked pretty well. I think I had a bit of an advantage in that I spoke French and I got along pretty well with the local population.

One of the major issues that we had was theft. Because we were growing so quickly, we didn't have the systems in place to manage the property very well; so accountability was an always an issue. Getting houses ready for people was always an issue, keeping inventories up to date.

Q: You were saying that going to Niger with your carpentry background, there was no particular wood to deal with, I guess it was mostly cement.

WILSON: A lot of it was stucccement, cinder blocks, a lot of sand and cement; it was basically cinder block construction. Most people were housed in an area called "The Plateau," which was the old colonial area. Then they built up a new area called "The Nouveau Plateau." We were the first ones to start building in that area, which was basically across one of the main road. My own house was across on the other side of the city. We had our recreation association there which had a tennis court and swimming pool and a snack bar.

Q: I guess your experience helped a lot in this construction program.

WILSON: In a lot of ways it was wonderful, because being the hands on supervisor, I had a chance to work with Africans on a daily basis. I had some people who were very close to me, my senior nationals, and we would work through all the various issues that one had to work through, whether it was customs clearance or contracting or property accountability or the motor pool. We hired a lot of people. I had to go back to Niger about four years later as part of a post inspection to check on compliance with the post inspection of two years earlier. I went back up there and realized that a lot of the things that the inspectors had earmarked for correction were things that I had put into place or people I had hired when I had been there. Obviously we were not infallible in what we did; in fact we were pretty much as a staff overwhelmed by the rate of growth.

The General Services section then, as now, was very much understaffed. It was hard to get people, particularly American supervisors. We didn't have nearly as much American supervision as we needed. Because of the growth of USAID, we put into place what was called a Joint Administrative Office which provided combined administrative support to all elements of the embassy. We had to harmonize our management style and the regulations to take into consideration different agencies, different budgets, different procedures, trying to insure that we had the same standards, and then different accountability procedures. It was pretty complicated. At one time, for the last six or seven months of my tour, there was no administrative officer and I was the only GSO and also acting administrative officer. It was a challenge.

Q: With this influx coming in of AID people, this can often have sort of an upsetting effect on a small city, a small country. Was this a problem?

WILSON: Initially it was a problem for USAID. A lot of the people who came out there were people who had come out of Southeast Asia. They had a vision of what their lifestyle as an AID employee ought to be which was based on their experiences in Southeast Asia where they had six or seven servants and had lived in Shangri la type housethey lived in a very tropical setting and everybody was beautiful and everything was relatively clean. They arrived in the Sahel and found out that it wasn't like that at all, and that life was pretty tough and not terribly sanitary, and that the medical facilities were not very good, etc. A lot of these people had to make a real adjustment problem.

Now, in all fairness, one of the things that they did to complement the career people in the project development process was to hire a lot of former Peace Corps volunteers to do some of the key mid level jobs. That made for a nice mix. They did have some people who were absolutely dedicated to development in the African context; they were not jaded and were not disillusioned by having to move from a relatively plush setting like Southeast Asia to the edge of the Sahara Desert. The frustrations created by the climate were difficult. The Niger government was just as overwhelmed as we were. I think that it is safe to say that for a number of years, just by virtue of the number of Americans who were there and the size and number of our automobiles, we overwhelmed the city of Niamey itself. The General Services operation was located downtown right in the middle of the city; the embassy was just on the outside of town. When I say 'city,' there were really two stoplights in the city; that's how small it was. It was maybe a couple hundred thousand people maximum. We would run shuttles back and forth, putting Chevy Suburbans on the road all day every day. They were very visible. We were not inconspicuous.

Q: This was your first post. What would a political officer do in Niger?

WILSON: The one political officer we had, did political and consular work. While I was in Niger, three Americans dieall within about a 24 hour period. A kid, a tourist passing through, died of malaria. Then we had an airplane go dowa cargo flight bringing in cigarettes. It had an American crew of four, and two of them died. The consular officer and I, as backup consul, had responsibility for taking care of dead American citizens, so that occupied us at that time. The consular officer was a bit squeamish. There were no embalming facilities in Niger. We tried to get the Peace Corps doctor to help us embalm the bodies, but he would have nothing to do with that. We looked up in the regulations, to see whether we could figured how one ships an unembalmed body back to the United States in a way that is both safe and consistent with U.S. rules and regulations. It was a very complicated procedure. One of the things that the regulations suggest that you do if you don't have embalming facilities or can't get the embalming done, is to wrap the body in a formaldehyde soaked shroud. So we went down to the morgue which had only six places, six iceboxes, and we used three of them during this fairly extended period. It was almost eight or nine days before we put our procedure together. Finally, we went to deal with these bodies, got them out, put them on the slab, and the poor consular officer said, "I'll go do the paperwork. You handle this." He just couldn't do it. I had a Nigerien come in to help me. He smelled the formaldehyde, took one look at me, and said, "You crazy mazungu," which is 'white man,' and left. So I was left with these bodies; I manhandled them as best as I could and tried to wrap them up in these formaldehyde soaked shrouds; that took a couple of hours. All the while, we had a guy outside the morgue building the coffins on a couple of sawhorses. We had to have zinc lined, lead sealed coffins with a filtration system because in the heat you've got the expanding gases which needs a way to be released. Otherwise the casket could explode. In fact, one did in Chaone of the legends is that the embassy tried to ship the body back to the States in a luggage compartment and the casket blew up. We didn't want that to happen to us. The builder of the coffins was a Belgian, about five six and rotund, who wore a beret. He had a classic one piece of hair that went from one side of his head all the way over to the other side. He always had a cigarette hanging out of his mouth; he was a very strange looking fellow, not the sort of fellow that one would in any walk of life want to spend a lot of time with, which is maybe why he was the local coffin maker. We managed to wrap up the bodies and put them in coffins for shipment to the U.S.

Other than that, the political officehe was the political/economic/consular officewould write economic reports. We would do our annual foreign economic trends report. At that time you would chart how much foreign assistance was coming in, what the status of the uranium projects were, etc. We would do our general political reporting on what was going on in town, who was in, who was out, who was doing what to whom. Then he would handle the consular work and he would travel around the country to sponsor self help projects, using the ambassador's little fund money to bestow on worthwhile activities, small activities, throughout the country.

The political/economic/counselor was the job I wanted. I thought that he was up in a second floor office, right across from the ambassador's; he was not getting sweaty and dirty every day; that looked pretty good to me. The embassy was going to reassign me. The deputy and the ambassador said, "We want you to come up and do this for the second tour. It would mean something like an excursion tour that you get as a first tour officer now." But then the Bureau's executive director said, "You can't do that, because we won't be able to fill the GSO job. It's much easier to fill a political job than it is to fill the GSO job, and so long as we've got this sucker down here, we've got to keep him there." So they did.

Q: You were there during the first part of the Carter Administration. Did human rights play any role, or were you away from that?

WILSON: Human rights played a role, but we were still trying to figure out how a country goes from a one party systems that were all over Africa to a multi party system. So the lag time between the commitment to human rights and the real changing of human rights policies in a number of African countries was considerable. There has been a lot of progress on the human rights front in Africa, for all of its problems, but at that time you didn't really see it, other than maybe just some increased sensitivity to it at some levels. It gave us some ammunition to talk to the government about things like the imprisonment of the journalists who were writing against the government, but we were not yet geared up to talk about free press in the context of having more than one government newspaper, or things like that.

Q: Then, of course, you were coming up against the French too.

WILSON: We were coming up against the French. The French attitude, as I said earlier, was, 'Yes, we believe democracy is a good thing, but we need to go at a pace that they can live with and which won't cause instability. Besides, Kountche is our friend and our national interests are much more geared toward stability in Niger than they are for one man/one vote.'

Q: How did you and your wife find the social life beyond sort of the intra American community with the Nigerians.

WILSON: The Nigerians don't invite people out very much, especially to their homes. Part of it, I think, is the difference in lifestyles. They could never really entertain you in the way that you could entertain them. They live much more modestly obviously. But in terms of just a social life generally, we were very active. We were active through the recreation association, of which I was president for two years. We revitalized it; we opened up the membership to others than just American citizens, so that we had an international membership. It became the place for the international community to go on a Friday night. We started a bunch of interesting activities.

As I indicated, we spent a lot of time traveling. We would meet the missionary community and Peace Corps volunteers throughout the country. We had a number of Nigerien friends and contacts through my GSO activitiee.g. the landlord claswe would entertain them. That was a challenge because oftentimes if they would come they would not necessarily bring their wives, but rather their girlfriends; they would come late; there would be no shows. We could quite never figure out why they behaved this way. But certainly in terms of entertaining, we did quite a bit; we had a lot of activities including the Nigerians. Towards the end of our tenure, we started getting invitations from people who liked us and wanted to invite us before we left. That was very nice. When it happened, it was always a real privilege to be invited into somebody's home to break bread with them.

Q: You left there in 1978. Whither?

WILSON: I left in 1978. We had traveled to Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, Benin and Upper Volta. I had a Toyota Land Cruiser. We had enjoyed all of West Africa, but we did not include it when we submitted our wish list for places to be assigned. We basically wanted to go to Indiat the time I still thought of the Foreign Service as a way to see the worlso we put down Madras and Bombay and Delhi. We listed five posts; everybody had said that since we had served in a hardship post in Niger, we would really have a priority in getting what we wanted the next time around. India was still considered a hardship post, so we didn't think we would have to fight to get there. I got a cable in December before anybody had had a chance to review my wish list, offering me the job as administrative officer in Lome, Togo. I had joined the Foreign Service to see the world, and my first two tours were going to be within about 800 miles of each. I said "Yes." The way that the cable was phrased, you couldn't say no. It was, "We want to offer you a job that is both professionally challenging and career enhancing."

Q: I was in Personnel. You learn these phrases. And it probably made sense too.

WILSON: It would be challenging; it would be career enhancing. We had very much liked Lome. We had been there and we had been entertained by the administrative officer. He had a nice house a block from the ocean with a rooftop terrace. The Togolese are very nice people, and it was a pretty country. So we thought about it for the requisite 30 seconds and went back and said, "Professionally challenging and career enhancing, sounds like my kind of job."

Q: Then you went to Togo from 1978 to when?

WILSON: I left in 1979; I was there about a year and a half. My wife got very sick; so we had to curtail our tour and go back to Washington for a while. But Togo was wonderful. It was much more manageable. The AID mission was stable; it wasn't growing. President Gnassingbe Eyadema was a very interesting character. He's still there.

Q: What's his name?

WILSON: Gnassingbe Eyadema. At that time Eyadema liked to style himself as one of America's chief friends in an otherwise Soviet leaning Africa. He tried to make the case that Togo was a bastion of pro Western thought and action in an otherwise leftist world. At that time the Togolese practiced a rather liberal economy philosophy relative to its neighbors.

Ghana was a complete disaster. The Ghanian currency was worthless. Benin was not far behind. Both countries were in the clutches of socialist dictatorships. Eyadema was a right wing dictatohe was our kind of dictator. All the transport for the landlocked countries came through TogLome, which had great port facilities. So Togo had an abundance of supplies, and low import taxes, making everything relatively inexpensive. Togo, as a former German colony, also had great beer, had the best beer in west Africa. So it was great. Our house was a block from the ocean; we had the ocean breezes to cool ul used to get up every morning and go to the ocean to body surf for an hour and then run back up the beach. There always was a great current going east. I would body surf and then run home every morning about six o'clock; it was always a good way to wake up.

Q: Who was our ambassador while you were there?

WILSON: When I first got there, it was Ron Palmer, who was about Eyadema's size and very gregarious. He and Eyadema used to fly to a town north of Lome together to watch traditional wrestling. They got along very well. My second ambassador was just the complete opposite. Her name was Marilyn Johnson. She had been a USIA officevery petite, a lady of a certain age, very refined. Ron was also a very bright guy and very well read, but he was a little bit coarser and little bit more gregarious. Marilyn was almost the exact opposite. She was about as opposite from Ron as you could possibly get and still be a human being. They were both very talented in their own ways.

It was an interesting period in Togo. The Togolese economy was flourishing relative to its neighbors' economies. It was a peaceful place. We had a big Peace Corps program. The Peace Corps loved it. There was a lot of interaction. The Togolese from the coast spent a lot of time in the States. A lot of Americans had come and stayed in Togo. Right as I was leaving and thereafter, a number of American companies were looking to invest in Togo. The Togolese, in order to enhance their image and open up to the West, dropped their visa requirements and opened up an office in Washington to promote tourism and investment. It was really a good time. There was a lot of building going on in Lome. So it was a good time to be there.

Q: This was at a time sort of going back to one's roots for many of the American blacks. Did you see many American blacks going to Togo to take a look at...

WILSON: Not very much. Most of them would go to Ghana. I don't remember when Roots came out.

Q: It was a little earlier but close to that, 1975 or something like that.

WILSON: Most of the African Americans were going to The Gambia, some to Senegal, and a lot to Sierra Leone and to Ghana. The trouble with going to Togo was that you pretty much had to speak French; that reduced potential visitors a lot. We, however, were one of the first operations of Leon Sullivan's international NGO, and therefore had a lot of its staff there. They were doing an agricultural project in the interior of the country.

Q: Was Togo sort of one of these countries that was cut with tribes on both sides of the area, spillover tribes, or is there pretty much tribal unity there?

WILSON: The tribal structure in West Africa goes north to south. So you get a lot of the same tribes along the coast. The coastal tribes, the Ewe and the Mina, have ties to their tribal members in Ghana and Benin. The further north you get, you run into a different group; in Togo they call them Kabre; they were the ones who were in power. They have stayed in power, and I think that the longer they've been in power, the more they have come to dominate the south; they have created a lot of antipathy on the part of the southerners and created a lot of the problems which still exist. So the country is stratified with coastal tribes and the interior tribes. The further north you go, the more different ethnic groups can be found. So Togo was not an ethnically homogenous country. In fact, with the exception of maybe Botswana or Equatorial Guinea, there are very few actually homogenous countries in West Africa.

After World War I the French became the colonial power. Franz Josef Strauss, the old Bavarian German politician, used to come down to Toghe and Eyadema got along real welto go hunting and partying and what not. But by and large it was the French who were running everythinthe port facility and commerce and all the trading relationships went up through Paris.

Q: Was the embassy and our American activities running at cross purposes with the French, or was it working pretty well?

WILSON: At that time, it was working pretty well. We saw much more commonality in our interests than we saw potential conflict. The French would bridle a bit at our cultural center and some of our cultural programs. They never liked the Peace Corps very much. They were leery oAmericans throughout the country and they watched what they were doing. They didn't like the idea that Americans might be teaching English to Francophone natives because of their belief in the superiority of Francophony French. But by and large we got along pretty well with them. There were not any real issues there.

Q: Were there any particular issues that absorbed us in Togo other than maintaining good relations?

WILSON: No; we just wanted to maintain good relations. We thought Togo was a paragon of democracy in an otherwise socialist part of Africif not democracy, at least economic growth and stability. Togo was pretty much a success story.

Q: Were the Soviets messing around there?

WILSON: No, the Soviets were in Benin and in Ghana. There must have been an embassy, but I don't recall it. We didn't really run into the Soviets very much until we got to Burundi a few years later.

Q: Did any of the neighbors like Benin or Ghana try to mess around in Togo?

WILSON: There were always tensions between Ghana and Togo, but at that time they were pretty much under control. There would be occasion when we had border incidents; everybody would try and say that country was destabilizing the other. But it never got beyond that. As far as Benin goes, Kerekou was in power as the dictatonot as the elected president. Benin Togo relations were not real good but they weren't bad. Togo basically benefitted from the chaos in the other two countries.

Q: How did you find being administrative officer? Was this professionally challenging and career enhancing as it had been touted to be?

WILSON: It was career enhancing! I got two promotions while in Niger, and then I got another promotion right after I left Togo. That made three promotions in three and a half years; so in terms of enhancing, I think it worked out just fine. I enjoyed being an administrative officer. I had more control over the budget function. That was the big thing. As GSO, I basically executed; as administrative officer I planned and controlled funds.

We had an American school in Togo. I was on the board of that school which was a lot of fun. I had the best office in the embassy. Mine was the only office that had a view of the ocean; as a Californian I appreciated that. I had good staff. The Togolese were talented people. The size of the mission was stable; we didn't have this great burst of staff growth when I was there. It was all very civilized. The country was stable and at peace.

The AID mission was very small under good leadership. We used to meet all the time and sort out our differences. The USIS operation was right across the street; it also was small so everything manageable. I think the U.S. government had very good little operation in Togo and I enjoyed it. I think most of all I enjoyed the Togolese. The people who worked at the embassy had been there for a long time and knew what they were doing. We had State specialists coming through on a regular basis who worked with them, particularly on the budget and fiscal matters. It was a good, professionally run, efficient operation and didn't suffer from the chaos of bursting at the seams as we had in Niamey.

Q: Did Washington intrude much on what you were doing there?

WILSON: Washington was pretty good to me. I basically learned early on that if you enjoyed their confidence, then you could do pretty much what you wanted. The same people who were in Washington when I first went out to Niamey were still there; they were very supportive. They wanted the mission to succeed. The AF/EX people in particular were particularly concerned that the mission succeed; they always gave me a full hearing.

Q: At that time was there sort of an administrative center for western Africa?

WILSON: We had a number of different support operations. The budget and fiscal operations went through a regional center. We had a regional budget fiscal officer in Ghana who used to visit and we had a regional personnel officer somewhere else who used to come to see us periodically. Periodically people would come out from Washingtothe post management officer and otherbut we had no regional administrative office to whom we reported. The administrative operation was run by me, and I reported to the ambassador and the DCM.

Q: I would think that people in Ghana, for example, because of the lousy rule they had there all the time, would sort of enjoy coming down to Togo and enjoy a certain amount of stability in an R&R place.

WILSON: They used to come down a lot. We had two or three really good hoteltwo were right on the beach. We would have people from Ghana all the time. During the time that I was in Togo, the Ghanaians engaged a major U.S. accounting firm/investment bank to come to restructure their Ministry of Finance. These guys, including Theodore Roosevelt IV, were in Togo for the weekend when the Ghanaians closed their border and stole their money. They took all their currency and exchanged it for new CDs. This investment bank/accounting firm that was supposed to be restructuring the Ministry of Finance didn't have a clue that this was going to happen. The Ghanaians kept it a closely guarded secret. So these guys ended up having to stay in Togo for 10 days while the Ghanaians did their thing. They were probably our best known guys who were stuck outside of Ghana during that time.

Q: Did you have any crises like people dying or things like that?

WILSON: Actually we did. We had a Peace Corps volunteer who had a motorcycle accident upcountry. She had her wound, which was a knee wound, wrapped by a Polish doctor; she was then brought down to Lome. Her injury got infected with gangrene, and we were fighting to get a medevac plane. While we were doing that, the meds were basically having to go in every day or so and cut off another part of her leg as the gangrene spread. She finally died, which was real tough on all of us and especially the Peace Corps people. When my wife gave birth in the States to my first set of twins in May of 197just a couple months after the Peace Corps volunteer had dieshe also caught gas gangrene in an American hospital in California. It was a very strange coincidence having seen a gangrene infection happen in Togo and then suddenly being faced with it again in California.

Q: You had to leave then for medical...

WILSON: Togo is part of that corner of West Africa that has the highest rate of twin births in the world. All my twins were conceived in Togo, as I like to remind my African friendit is the waters of West Africa that brought me first one set in 1979 and then 21 years later a second set of twins. We didn't know we were having twins. My wife would go in to the doctor in Lome every couple of months, and he would look at her and say, "Gee, you're awfully big. Are you about seven months pregnant?" She said, "No, I'm only four months pregnant." He said, "Well, you're awfully big." He was a German doctor, but they didn't do sonograms or anything like that in Togo in 1979. We flew her back when she was seven months pregnant. She called me up and said, "You're not going to believe this. We are having twins." So I literally did not know for the first seven months. When I heard this news, I changed my plans and went back to the States; my wife gave birth literally the day I got back. I got off the airplane in LA; we went to see a movie, and she went into labor that night. So I ended up being up for about four days in a row, traveling, across continents and oceans and then sitting through a movie and delivery. She gave birth to the twins and got very sick. She almost died. She was in the hospital for about six weeks. They thought she was going to die. They gave her about a one in 10 chance of survival. They flew her by helicopter to various hospitals. At that time they didn't have a lot of hyperbaric chambers around. Finally they got her into one in Long Beach; she survived to my great relief. As a consequence of emergency, we had to curtail our tour in Togo, which was too bad. I liked Togo, and I liked the job and the people.

Q: Then in 1979 where did you go?

WILSON: In 1979, we came back to Washington and I became the administrative officer for the Bureau of African Affairs. The job was responsible for insuring that there were sufficient interagency resources put at the disposal of the Bureau of African Affairs, both money and positions. We were fighting for positions for the joint administrative offices to support State and other agency activities. We were hammering out all these agreements with the other agencies to make sure we got adequate funds transferred to our account and that people to work in these joint offices were transferred to our payroll. I worked on the assignment of all officers in the Bureau; so I was the liaison with the Office of Personnel for the assignments of people to African posts, everything from the DCMs down to the junior officers.

Q: You did that from 1979 to when?

WILSON: 1981.

Q: How did the African Bureau rate in those days in its ability to get money, people, and all that?

WILSON: The Bureau did very well. We always managed to get everything we needed and then some. Africa was looked upon with favor because it was understood to be more difficult than any other region. At that time, we were being squeezed a little bit by the principle of universality, which required that we keep an embassy open in every country just because it was independent. But the squeeze was not very great. We were able to defend it basically on Kennedy principle dating back to the 1960s when the U.S. made the decision that any country that was sovereign would be treated as a sovereign country and would have an American embassy and an ambassador; by and large we did that.

We did very well in the money game. We always had a lot of money. We did very well on staffing. We had a lot of people who earned their stripes in Africa; they started there, served two or three tours there, and then moved on. At that time you were rewarded for taking initiatives in Africnot punished. I remember one time in Niamey we built a tennis court, and even though it cost more than $25,000, it seemed like the thing to do at the time. The inspectors came through and said, "Gee, this was a great idea." Had they come through 10 years later, they would have put the administrative officer and everybody in jail, I'm quite sure. We used the wrong kind of funding source for this project; we usethis is very arcanFAS operating funds for an FBO property, for example. You just don't do that.

Q: You didn't call it a helicopter landing...

WILSON: No; I think we were very straight up about it. We just said that we had to do this. Niamey was a difficult post, and people deserved to have a tennis court. The guy that masterminded it, was a guy by the name of Wayne Swedenburg, who was a very senior administrative officer, and we just made it happen. The field had that autonomy and freedom in those days, and we had the luxury of having enough money to operate with. We could get things done very quickly and with a minimum of bureaucracy. I think those were the golden days are now gone.

Q: How were relations with AID? Sometimes AID is able to get more money or have a different set of procedures which seem to enable their people to live a little better than those in Department's Foreign Service. Was that a problem?

WILSON: It was always a problem. It was always horrible. AID was so much bigger than State in a lot of these posts; so you always had sort of competition between the AID director and the ambassador. I remember in Niger a couple of years after I left; Jim Bishop went out our ambassador; Jay Johnson was the AID director. Jay picked him up at the airport. Jay had already been there for about five or six years, and quite literally as they were driving into town, Jay said to the new ambassador, "I just want you to know that that tennis court at the residence was bought with FAS funds and so it's open to everybody." I'm not sure I would have put it quite that way had I been the director, but that's the way he put it. That became the stuff of legend, as Jim Bishop fumed at being told this on the way in from the airport. AID had different rules and regulations on allocation of vehicles, for example; so you would have mid level AID employees riding around in official vehicles, while the State employees couldn't do that. The centralization of administration services was designed to get at the disparities in services; the idea was that if you had one administrative structure and if operated by one set of rules, you would not have then the disparities in services. It didn't always work perfectly well. It probably worked better than if you had had three or four different sets of rules and regulations, but it wasn't perfect by any means. AID employees were different then from what they might be now. They had served in a different part of the world where the lifestyle was considerably different and probably considerably more luxurious that it was in West Africa. They came to West Africa thinking that they could replicate the lifestyle that they had had in Southeast Asia, only to find that they couldn't. They really would complain a lot to try to see if they could. We in the administrative section were put in a position having to tell them "no;" that was always interesting.

Q: Any particular posts that stick out in your mind while you were serving in Washington, or any particular problems?

WILSON: The one thing that I have always been struck by is the extent to which you see the same problems in the same posts decade after decade after decade. So in Niamey it was always the property accountability. In Togo it might have been something else; in Brazzaville it might have been something else, but we would always end up sort of seeing the same problems time and time again. When I was in Togo, I had been sent to reopen Brazzaville in 1978; I spent about two and a half or three weeks there doing that. That was a great opportunity. We had done everything. We had been able to spend several hundred thousand dollars in a couple week period doing thingeverything from making curtains for the chancery to building a swimming pool at what we then turned into the recreation center. When I went there six years later as Deputy Chief of Mission, I found that not only were many of the same personalities there, but many of the same issues that we had tried to deal with then were still there. While in Washington, we spent a lot of time on redoing Lancaster House in Harare...

Q: Dealing with thwhat are they called?

WILSON: It was sort of the independence of Zimbabwe.

Q: Independence of Zimbabwe and Ian Smith had to bring the white regime into democratic...

WILSON: That's right. It was trying to effect the transition from a white regime to a black regime essentially. That was an ongoing issue. We had the Liberian coup that brought Sammy Doe to power. That was very difficult because there were a lot of deaths that took place. At that time, there was a large vocal Liberian American community that made their concerns known to us. We spent a lot of time worrying about the evacuation of American citizens, worried about things going bad, going from bad to worst.

I was in Washington at the end of the Carter administration; so a lot of what was going on in Africa was overshadowed by the hostage crisis in Iran. As is so often the case, you operate in Africa somewhat below the political radar screen here in WashingtoLiberia and Lancaster House being the two exceptions to that rule. Lancaster HousZimbabwe independenchappened just before the Carter Administration went out. It happened in 1980. That was a high moment for everybody. We were able to get Vice President Mondale to go to Africa in July, June or July. I advanced that trip in Senegal, and I worked on the visit to Niamey, and then I went to Lagos, Nigeria, and worked the last part of the trip. That was a lot of fun. It was very interesting.

Q: How did you find Mondale work out? Did he follow his brief?

WILSON: Yes, he was pretty good. The only time I really saw him was in Niamey. I saw the delegation in Nigeria, but I didn't see much of Mondale. In Niamey I was one of the lead people out of Washington and I spent some time seeing Mondale and the delegation. He was pretty good. There was the meshwe where they roast goats and lambs. They serve the meat on a spit; you would go to tear the meat from the carcass itself, or in Mondale's case, somebody did that for him. There was the ceremonial grabbing of the first piece. You would get a bucket of water and you would put your hand to clean it; then you take the goat off the spit and eat it, and then you put your hand in back in the bucket for another cleaning. They brought the bucket over to Mondale, and he rolled up both sleeves and put both hands in the bucket and scrubbed himself like a surgeon up to about the elbow and then went at it. He was in good spirit.

Unfortunately they insisted on putting him in the presidential guest house, which had a horrible double bed which was only really about a bed and a half. It was not built for somebody of Mondale's size; it sagged in the middle very badly. I'm sure he didn't sleep very well. As Air Force II was landing we got a phone call to the effect that the plumbing, the pipes, right above the bed had burst. There wasn't anybody in Niamey who was going to do anything about it. They were all out at the airport to see the Vice President of the United States arrive. We had to send our embassy team to the guest house to repair the pipes and change the bedding and clean up. I didn't inspect the work myself, but it got done.

I was involved with the other guest house that housed the congressional delegation as well and the people Mondale had with him. I remember going around and noting that there were no toilet seats on any of the toilets. This was going to be a problem for our delegation which was accustomed to having toilet seats. So we had to go around and pull toilet seats out of every American house's guest bathroom, move them into this guest house so that these people had toilet seats to sit on. Unfortunately the screws for the toilet seats we had in the American houses didn't match up very well with the holes in the toilets that were at the guest house; that required considerable improvisation so that the Americans who were on this trip would have toilet seats to sit on when they went to the bathroom. It was all fun.

When I got to Niamey, I commandeered a mobilette. I went and talked to Jim Bishop and said, "What do you want me to do? " I said, "I need some transportation. The motor pool is stretched thin and taxis are next to impossible to get." I said I would like to take the mobiletta little motor bike. So I wheeled around Niger for five or six days on this mobilette buying all the food for the congressional delegation and all that sort of stuff. I was supervising, honchoing a lot. It was like being GSO agaihad a great time.

Q: In 1981, a new administration came in. Were you there during the transition between the Carter and Reagan Administrations?

: As the Carter administration was drawing to a close, we had a rover team in South Africa which had uncovered what they thought was some fraud on the part of the GSO there. What he had done was to set up double accounts for all local providers in town; he had given them purchase orders for furniture, refrigerators, appliances, etc. and had made out the purchase orders for too much money. The suppliers would then bill the embassy for the amount shown on the purchase order and then give him kickbackthe difference between the phony and the real costs. In this way, he was able to get several sets of furniture put in the own barn next to his house. He had purchased a house in South Africa because he was planning to retire there. He then he had leased the house to the US government even though he had been told he couldn't do that. Anyway, it was a real mess. I was asked to go to South Africa to serve as administrative counselor, supervising the administrative functions of the embassy and the three consulates. I went in 1981 which was just at the time of the transition in Washington; I was basically transitioning out myself. I arrived in South Africa on January 4th, I guess it was. I had left Washington on January 1st or something like that. Right about that time, President Reagan was giving an interview and somebody asked him a South African question which was, "What are you going to do about South Africa and the apartheid regime?" President Reagan said, "Well, gee, South Africa is an important country. It's been an ally of ours in every war we've ever fought. It's got a lot of mineral resources, and we'll just have to deal with it." The South Africans, of course, interpreted that to mean four more years for apartheid. So when we got there, the South Africans were euphoric. They thought Reagan was the best thing since sliced bread. In terms of dealing with the transition in Washington, we were responsible for preparing all the papers on budget, staffing, procurement sources, and for compiling all the issues' briefs for the incoming administration. But I left before Chet Crocker had been named as assistant secretary. Dick Moose was still the assistant secretary when I left.

Q: How did you find Dick Moose? He had been in charge of management in the Department and there are people who are critical of his management style and all that. I was wondering how you found him from your perspective as administrative man under Dick Moose.

WILSON: Dick Moose had a good AF/EX director who later, I think, had to plead guilty to some misdemeanor, maybe some felony, dealing with some irregularities in the Bureau, but he was a buffer between me and the assistant secretary. Moose would call me when he wanted to talk about people being assigned to African posts on other issues that I handled. I traveled with Dick on one trip down and I spent a lot of time with him. I made Dick and Tony latthe two guys on whom I actually spent a lot of time making sure that they were squared away while on this trip. Moose has always been an interesting guy. He's very bright. I don't think that he had a management style that was suitable to the job, but he was surrounded by people who were very good managers and who understood how the bureau really functioneprincipally Bill Harrop, who was his senior deputy and who made the bureau run. Bill was one of the finest people that I've every know.

Q: A very fine man, yes.

WILSON: Absolutely. It helped a lot to have Bill as the senior deputy.

Q: You were in South Africa from 1981 to when?

WILSON: I arrived there in January of 1981 and I left in July of 1982.

Q: What was the situation in South Africa when you got there?

WILSON: When I got there, in terms of politics, the apartheid regime was firmly ensconced. The regime thought that it had free rein from the American administration and that there was not going to be much pressure brought to bear by the Americans. At the embassy the ambassador and the DCM had been sorely embarrassed by this scandal on their watch.

Q: This was the GSO?

WILSON: This was the GSO who had been accused, and was later indicted.

Q: Did anything happen? There's not a very good history of following through and putting people in jail.

WILSON: In his case, he was indicted, and there is still an outstanding warrant for his arrest. But there is no extradition treaty with South Africa that covers his crime. He retired, and my understanding is that because he was never been convicted, the Department never bothered to stop his pension. He retired in South Africa and has collected his pension ever since; I understand he's still alive. It is now 20 years later; he was 63 then, so he must 83 or 84 now. But the Justice Department and the State Department are still trying to get him. I think he's actually taken on South African nationality or he has got a long term residence permit and the South Africans are leaving him alone.

Q: Did you find that he was an embarrassment? Were you untangling things?

WILSON: I spent most of my time untangling things and just putting the operation back in some sort of order. We rationalized the way we did management there. We put procurement under control and put everything back in the right warehouse. We had installed some accountability and we basically tried to insure that there was some integrity in the operation.

Q: Who was our ambassador while you were there?

WILSON: Bill Edmonson was the ambassador when I first got there; he was there for about my first year; Herman Nickel arrived just before he left. The deputy was Howard Walker, who went on to be ambassador to Togo and then Madagascar. Our embassin Pretoriat that time was on two floors of the same building that housed the South Africa police. We were basically in hostile territory in a building that was occupied by some offshoot of the South African security apparatus, right downtown. It was an interesting time.

Q: As far as our embassy is concerned, I would think there would be considerable discomfort by being cheek by jowl with the police.

WILSON: At that time the South Africans had a great way of basically seducing Americans. They are fundamentally nice folks so long as you don't start talking about their "caffer" problem. They like to have barbecues; they like to entertain; they're very jovial and they're very friendly, and so to a certain extent they're very seductive for Americans. We didn't have a lot of African Americans there; we lived pretty much in white communities, so to a certain extent we didn't have the feeling that we were in hostile territory unless you had, as I did, a lot of employees who were Africans who lived in segregated townships. Then you saw the situation somewhat differently. This was the time when we were just at the beginning of constructive engagement. Up until that time been focused principally on Lancaster House.

Our ambassador and our DCM were concerned about the politics of South Africa, but it hadn't yet translated into the same sort of hostility as we got later when we moved to imposing sanctions on the apartheid regime.g. disinvestment, etc. In terms of working in the same building as the South African police, you didn't really have any sense of their presence. You didn't see a lot of uniformed South African police. It was basically where the bureaucracy was housed. Later on, there was a bomb that went off next to the building. Then we finally got FBO to agree to provide the money necessary to move the embassy to a more secure place. Interestingly, if you talk to people who had been in South Africa in the 1950s and come back in the 1960s or in the 1970s, they would tell you about the demonstrable progress the blacks had made in the intervening years. They had gone from having to step off the sidewalks when a white was on the sidewalk, to actually manning the cash registers in stores and actually being allowed to shop in some stores as well. So there had been an evolution in South African society, not nearly enough and not nearly fast enough obviously. Pretoria was probably the most conservative of all the cities in which we had representation; Cape Town probably the most liberal.

Q: You were stationed in Pretoria?

WILSON: I was in Pretoria, but we also had responsibility for three consulates, Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. The embassy moved down to Cape Town for six months every year, because that was where the legislature was. So when the legislature was in session, the embassy would move there. The ambassador and the DCM and political officer as well as a few others would move to Cape Town.

Q: As administrative officer, you were dealing with an essentially black work force.

WILSON: I had a black work force. I had a white landlord class.

Q: I would have thought that you would have been a very good source for telling it the way it was as opposed to political officers who are pretty well trapped with the political class. Did you find yourself sort of a source of 'well, here's the way it really is?'

WILSON: The political counselor at the time was Dennis Kehoe, who was later killed in Namibia, and the political officer was Reid Hendrick, who is now deputy chief of mission, I think, in The Hague; he is a very good friend of mine. In fact, both of them were very good friends of mine. Dennis was also a father of twins, so we had that in common. Dennis and I used to work pretty close together. Dennis and Reid and I would talk all the time. When we started working on "constructive engagement," which was in April of 1971, when Chet had been appointed but not yet confirmed and when Eliot Abrams had been appointed but not yet confirmed. Bill Clark, Judge Clark, had been confirmed as Deputy Secretary and he came out to South Africa. Dennis and I worked together on that trip. I handled the logistics and Dennis provided the substance in the briefing papers. Interestingly, the South Africans tried to get Judge Clark to go to Namibia. They commandeered the motorcade that he was in. Instead of taking him to where we thought he was going, they took him to the airport and tried to bundle him on an airplane. Dennis had gotten split from the motorcade, so that he was not at the airport as the South Africans were telling the Judge that he was going to get on. The Judge, to his great credit, said, "No, I'm not getting on the airplane; I'm not going to one of the bases in Namibia." The foreign minister or some other high official turned to him and said, "But you have to. We've already flown the band out there." But the Judge, to his great credit, didn't get on the airplane. He did not succumb to that. The South Africans were running operations in Angola out of Namibia which meant that in addition to keeping Namibia occupied, they were also running operations in support of Jonas Savimbi and his UNITA. The trip did not take place.

Dennis, Reid and I worked very closely together. They were very interested in knowing my staff better. They wanted to know about the townships that they'd been in. My staff basically reported to them on what the Africans would think about various issues. At that time, we didn't have that much structured contact with the black community. We really couldn't go into Soweto and we couldn't go into the townships out of Pretoria, even just talk to people. Our consul general had contacts with leaders, but as often these were with the white liberal class as it was the African.

Q: Were there problems of with having Americanthe professional Foreign Service peoplnot being seduced too much by the white society or/and also not being appalled by apartheid. I would think this would cause quite a morale problem.

WILSON: We had a lot of morale problems in Pretoria, but I think they had much to do with having an absentee ambassador by virtue of the fact that he would have to move to Cape Town for half a year. The political section of the embassy was so focused on the politics of South Africa that there was not the same camaraderie or the same leadership given to the embassy community as a whole. The person who was left in charge of the embassy, while the ambassador was in cape Town, was not a person who felt that taking care of the community was part of his job requirements. Typically, it was the economic counselor who would be forced into this job.

There was always the question of "is South Africa a hardship post?" "should we get differential?" "should we get this or that," "should we get R&R because, after all, we are in this apartheid system, even though living is pretty good down here." There was always that dichotomy as well. Curiously, given the relative living comforts, morale was not very good, but I don't think that it had as much to do with living in the apartheid regime for most people as it did just not having a real sense of strong community. We were spread out all over Pretoria. A lot of the people who were assigned to the embassy were people who had spent time in small African posts and were used to a closely knit embassy community. Pretoria did not have a closely knit embassy community; we didn't have the same social demands or social opportunities as you might find in other African posts. I think, that said, when you left South Africa, either on R&R or just to get out of the country, people would come back and say, "I've got to tell you, I had no idea of how oppressive this society was until I got out for a couple days." So to a certain extent people adapted to the circumstances. For those of us who had spent a lot of time in black Africa, it was pretty appalling when my neighbors would come up to me and tell mand this is a direct quotafter knowing me for five minutes, "You need to understand our situation: our "caffers"black workerare not like yours. You can't teach ours."

We had an African nanny working for us. Joyce was her name, and she was just wonderful. She was big and strong. One time, a neighbor came by and complained to us that she had pushed their kid off his bicycle. I asked Joyce about it. She said, "Yes, he came up and started harassing me." I told the neighbor to get her child under control. We never saw those neighbors again. But it was that sort of indignity that Africans would suffer almost routinelalthough I think the situation in the early 1980s was better than it had been in the 1970s, but obviously not as good as it needed to be. Johannesburg was a melting pot. Tensions were higher in some instances. At the same time there was more opportunity to mix. I played fast pitch softbalthey played softball and basebaland I played on a team. South Africa has traditionally sent a softball team to the world series of softball which is played in the United States every couple of years.

I played for the Northern District team champion, and we ended up playing in the national championship. We were, I think, second or third in the national championship. Softball was one of the few sports in South Africa that was fully integrated, and even though it was fully integrated, the Northern District team had nobody of color on it. The only teams that had people of color on it were the Durban and the Cape Town teams.

Q: You left there in 1982?

WILSON: I left there in 1982. Again, my tour was curtailed. Our ambassador to Burundi had received a death threat, and she came to South Africa. A Libyan threat had been made on her life, a threat that was attributed to...

Q: Who was that?

WILSON: Frances Cook. She came to South Africa ostensibly to get medical treatment but it was really to get out of Burundi while the police tracked down this threat. She asked me if I wanted to come to be her deputy. That seemed like an opportunity to break out of the administrative officer mold and go on and do something else. So I said, "Yes." It was a stretch assignment; it took awhile to work through the system to make it happen. But Frances, for all her faults, was a strong enough character to make it happen, and she brought me up to Burundi as her DCM.

Q: Were you beginning to feel a little bit like an African hand by this point?

WILSON: By that point I was very comfortable in Africa. While in Washington, I had made a couple trips out to a number of different posts looking at their operations. I liked Africans, and I liked the challenges. It was apparent to me from having talked to my colleagues who had worked in other parts of the world that you got much more responsibility in Africa much earlier in your career. I was able to put in a whole new information management system in South Africa while I was there. I was able to spend a lot of money doing things. In Brazzaville, when we reopened the post, I was master of my own destiny. Some of my colleagues were still clipping newspapers in European capitals where nothing much really happened. So I liked it, and so long as it kept offering me challenging jobs, I went along for the ride.

Q: You were in Burundi from what?

WILSON: 1982 to 1985. As I said, Frances Cook was the ambassador. She had been the office director for the Office of Public Affairs when I was in the Bureau of African Affairs before going to Pretoria. Frances and I had known each since 1979 when I came back to Washington.

Q: What was the situation when you arrived in 1982 in Burundi?

WILSON: The political situation was okay. These were the good years. Tutsi regimes in Burundi had historically come to power in a military coup, either bloody or bloodless. The regimes have traditionally been nominated by the southern Tutsis, who in their caste system are low on the ethnic hierarchy and, as such, had been the recruitment source for the military historically. As they got guns, they got power and became all powerful. When they come to power, they did so on a platform of reconciliation, but because of the fact that 85 percent of the population is Hutu and only 15 percent of the population is Tutsi, eventually they become paranoid. As they become paranoid, they become more authoritarian, and then the cycle of repression began again. When I got there, we were on the good side of that cycle; there was still a lot of talk about reconciliation. They were in the process of setting up a national assembly. They had local and legislative elections which returned to the national assembly a certain percentage of Hutu. Clearly it was not indicative of the 85 percent strength they had in the population, the demographics, but it at least gave them a voice in the national assembly. So things were fine. It was a good time.

Q: Can you describe the composition of our embassy there?

WILSON: We had an ambassador and DCM, a consular officer and a political economic officer. We had a defense attachï¿½ that came from the CongZaire then. We had a USIS operation, and we had a large AID mission with a number of projects that we were on goinAnd then we had a couple of other agencies, including the Peace Corps.

Q: What was AID doing there?

WILSON: AID was doing a health project; their big project was the peat project. Burundi has peat bogs, and in the interest of forest conservation, AID was working on a joint venture with the Irish peat bog to exploit the peat in Burundi which could be used as an alternative fuel source to timber. They were harvesting peat, converting it into fuel, developing ovens and pots and pans that would work with peat, because peat gives off a higher heat than charcoal or wood. Then they were subsidizing the sale of it in the open market. The project was never economically viable, but it was interesting. The nature of the peat in Burundi didn't lend itself to being used as a fuel, and the conversion of every kitchen in Burundi from the one that they had been using to another one was just simply out of the question. It never did work, but it was an interesting project.

Q: I've interviewed Frances Cook, but from your perspective how did she run the embassy and how did she work?

WILSON: Frances was a very dominant personality, very outgoing. She knew everybody in the country. She defended and promoted U.S. interests and activities with great enthusiasm, and she didn't mince words. Actually I thought she was a lot of fun. She was everywhere. She cut a large swath through Burundian society. She didn't hesitate to tell the Burundians of all stripes what she thought. At that time, Burundi had one of the radical Marxist Leninist socialist fascist military dictatorships that one saw during the Cold War in Africa. Burundi had been the country that had introduced a resolution in the United Nations equating Zionism with racism, I think is what it was, or Zionism with colonialism or something like that; it had been that resolution that had tied the UN General Assembly up in knots for a number of years and put Burundi definitively on the list of countries we didn't value very highly. They were still radicals within the OAU camp and were...

Q: That's the Organization...

WILSON: Organization of African Unity. They didn't like "constructive engagement," and they didn't think much of the United States. They were much closer to the Soviet Union and becoming closer to France. The moderation during this time of Burundi's foreign policy moved it from being a close confidante and ally of the Soviet Union to being pretty close to the French.

Q: The Belgians by this time were pretty much out of it ?

WILSON: The relationship with Belgium was very similar to the relationship between other African countries and their former colonial powersort of love/hate relationship. The Belgians still maintained an interest, but they were only peripherally involved. The Burundians liked Belgium as a country they could beat up on, but they still felt comfortable sending their kids to Brussels or to Louvain to go to university or other schools. I would say that the Belgians exerted less influence on Burundi than, say, the French had exerted on their former colonies historically. Remember that at the time of Burundian independence, I think there was only one or maybe two university graduates; so the Belgians hadn't done a whole lot. There was no real public school system in Burundi worth mentioning.

Q: That's sort of the pattern that they followed in the Congo.

WILSON: I think that's exactly right.

Q: Just to touch on a few things, how did you find the Peace Corps? How were they working?

WILSON: I've always thoughand this was brought home to me when I was in Burundthat Peace Corps is one of our best operations in Africa. It gets Americans out to the village level. We learn a lot about Africa that way. We should never underestimate the value to our own people of the Peace Corps program and the value of getting our young people some knowledge about how life is in the rest of the world.

Q: There are a significant number who went into government, either in Congress or in the Executive Branch, who brought that Peace Corps experience with them.

WILSON: Yes; more and more. I think Peace Corps volunteers are basically people who are interested in public service generally and find the Peace Corps to their liking, or if they go into Peace Corps, they then find public service to their liking as a calling. We used to have a lot of ex Peace Corps volunteers in AID. There were a number of former Peace Corps volunteers who were moving up in the ranks of the Foreign Service at that time. They did a great job. We had about 110 Peace Corps volunteers throughout Burundi. They were involved in everything from development of maternal/child health care programs to teaching to all sorts of other activities. Raising fish was one that they did in the interior. To a person, they were great; they were very active; it was a good group; they were motivated. They found the people in the interior to be very welcoming once they got over their sort of innate shyness.

Q: Here's a quasi Marxist dictatorial regime. How did you find dealing with the government?

WILSON: For me, it was my first tour as a DCM, and I learned an awful lot from Frances. She was very good about introducing me, about encouraging me to take initiative, about insuring that I was aware of everything that she was doing so that I could fill in when she wasn't there. My range of contacts was pretty much hers and then some. I ran a basketball team when I was there, for example; so I had a somewhat different range of contacts that came through the basketball league. Basketball was kind of the national pastime there, and we managed to get some sponsorship for uniforms and balls and what not.

Q: I would thinone always thinks of the Tutsis as being so talthat this would be a Tutsi dominated sport.

WILSON: Interestingly, in the government of Burundi at the time, the tallest minister was a Hutu and the shortest minister and the most Bantu looking minister was a Tutsi; only they truly knew how the lineage passed. At the time I was there, they estimated conservatively that the rate of intermarriage was about 35 percent. They have clan distinctions and they have anthropological distinctions that put people in one caste or the anther, but in fact there is an awful lot of intermarriage there. It is even more pronounced in Burundi than it is in Rwanda, for example, where when it became independent and had the revolution or genocide that brought the Hutus to power, most of the Tutsis or a good percentage of the Tutsis were driven out into refugee camps. Those who remained in Rwanda afterwards had to carry ID cards. One's identification card designated you as either Hutu or a Tutsi. That was the Rwandan practice. In Burundi it was not like that. They were all Burundians, and you didn't have the minority of the population driven into refugee camps. There were Hutu refugee camps outside of Burundi, but the vast majority of the Burundi population was Hutu. Our basketball team was young and fast. The Minister of Public Works had his basketball team, and they used to beat us pretty regularly, but they were older and savvier. They made up with the experience for what we had in enthusiasm.

Q: What were the issues of most interest to the embassy in Burundi?

WILSON: We were concerned in those days about democratization; in other words the political liberalization of the country. We were concerned that the country not fall back into a genocidal type situation as had occurred in 1976; so we were interested that there be put into place structures that would permit the adjudication of conflicts in other than violent manners. We were concerned that the Burundians be able to climb the ladder economically; so we were always looking with them at ways of increasing their GDP.

They produced a cash crop, which was coffee. They had their entire country planted principally in beans. Legumes were the principal staple in their diet; they had rice and they had some other things, and they harvested fish from Lake Tanganyika and from some of the other interior waters and rivers. They were very productive. For all intents and purposes, they were self sufficient in agriculture. But they have a large population relative to the territory that they live in. So they always had to make the land even more productive; they had to come to grips with population growth; and they to come to grips with the incipient, inherent ethnic conflict. Our AID and Peace Corps projects which were designed to provide some humanitarian relief where necessary in the health sector and/or some development type activities. We built a farm to market road in southern Burundi, for example, to help open up some of the farmers to get their coffee crops down to the markets. So those were the sorts of things we were concerned about.

Q: Did we get involved with the government on human rights and that type of thing?

WILSON: In those days, we were doing a human rights report every year which meant that to the extent to which there were human rights violations in Burundi, we were reporting on them. For my first two years there anyway, the situation was pretty good and improving, I suppose. 'Improving' is probably a better way of describing it rather than 'pretty good.' There were still arbitrary arrests; the justice system was not very good, and you didn't have a free press, but for the first couple years I was there, things were getting better. The National Assembly permitted additional voices from the Burundian society to be heard. There was a sense of liberalization. Now, from the second to the third year, that changed, and the Bagaza regimJean Batiste Bagaza was the presidenbecame increasingly paranoid and as a consequence became increasingly authoritarian. It began to see enemies among the missionaries, in the churches, and then by extension in the larger Hutu population. We started to see arbitrary arrests, priests being thrown in jail, missionaries being thrown out of the country or being thrown in jail.

Q: Were there American missionaries there?

WILSON: There were not very many American missionaries. There must have been one or two. There were some Seventh Day Adventist missionaries there. There were some Catholic, French and Italian Catholic, missionaries and priests there. We may have had some Baptists, I'm sure we must have had some Baptists...

Q: Usually the Seventh Day Adventists get involved in medical.

WILSON: That's right. They had a very interesting health center project. They were putting health centers up in the interior, and they were doing it on a sort of a pay as you go; they were trying to develop some sense of shared responsibility for health care between the patients and the providers of medical services.

Q: Were we going in and protesting, particularly into the third year you were there, about excesses or were we carrying a watching brief?

WILSON: With Frances Cook, there was no such thing as a watching brief. She was very much your activist ambassador, and she was of that generation which approached the job of being ambassador with great zeal and enthusiasm. We had no Washington guidance whatsoever. If there was a hiccup that we took umbrage at, we were all over them like a dirty shirt.

Q: How did they respond to this activist American ambassador, and a woman at that?

WILSON: They loved her. As she pointed out, for the first couple years she was there, she would bang on doors and nobody would answer. Then they got used to her, and they basically began to accept her because she brought things with her. She was good natured; she truly wanted a better future for Burundi, and so she worked very hard to get AID programs in place and to enhance the presence of Peace Corps. Peace Corps got started in Burundi when I got there. I actually brought the document with me which brought the first Peace Corps volunteers there. She had done all the spade work, she had done all the negotiating and she had worked the arrangements to bring this program to Burundi. She did all the negotiating for an IMET prograa military training prograthe authorization for which I also brought with me when I came to the country. So these were all things that she had done. The Burundians saw that she was prepared to work for a better U.S. Burundi relationship. They understood that the cost of bringing these programs was that they would have to listen to her expressing the views of the United States when they did things that didn't match up with our interests or our concerns.

Q: Did you find a growing interest, you might say, in the Western form of democracy, and particularly economics, or was the hand of the Soviet Union and sort of the extreme socialist world pretty heavy there?

WILSON: When I first got there in 1982, it was about the time that the IMF and the World Bank were starting to talk about privatization and the need to develop private sectors as part of a country's economic management strategy. So there was already a lot of interest in seeing how things could be privatized, including the coffee cooperativthe buying system that they had in place. Now, the Burundians, like a lot of other African governments, were always willing to sell off assets that didn't make any money or didn't employ anybodventures that lost money and didn't employ anybody's cousins, but there weren't many of those in Burundi. So the pace of privatization moved very, very slowly.

Politically they were interested in our Constitution. Even if they weren't interested in our Constitution, we made sure that they got copies of it, translated it into French so that they would all read and understand it. I'm sure that Frances must have highlighted a few copies to insure that they would focus on the important parts. They were interested in that. I think that they were looking for a way to practice a more modern system of governance, which would allow them to manage the affairs of state more effectively than they had done in the past. The issue, of course, was how much power were they prepared to give up in doing so. The great fear, which remains to this day in these countries, is who's going to be massacred if they give up that one centimeter or one pound too much of power.

Q: I would imagine that, both in Rwanda and Burundi, every head of family has to figure out when am I going to get the hell out of here, or how am I going to protect my family, or something like thathese massacres occur, particularly since independence apparently; it's more a modern phenomenon.

WILSON: I think any family with some substance does exactly that. They try to have a way out and a place to go. In Burundi there was still this nightmare of the 1976 massacres. At the time that I was there, everybody was very sensitive to that; people sort of tiptoed around all the core issues. There was no such thing as a "Truth and Reconciliation" Commission. There was no such thing as facing up to the events of 1976. You would come at event somewhat obliquely; people would in confidence tell you the stories of their experiences during 1976, whether Hutu or Tutsi, because the massacres took place both ways. There were 60,000 Tutsis who were murdered during the first couple nights, and then maybe 600,000 Hutu that were killed in the aftermath in a systematic fashion by the Micombero government and by the military.

There was still some sense of reconciliation after the 1976 massacres; people seemed to be focused on that. Towards the end of my tenure in Burundi, the Tutsi regime was getting paranoid again, which is a common thread through the politics of the region. When the Tutsis are in power, after a while, they get paranoid and then they get oppressive, and then you have essentially a return to some war as they force people into guerilla activities..

Q: Did the Soviet Union, China, North Korea or North Vietnam play any role there?

WILSON: The Chinese were building buildings. That's what the Chinese did best. The North Koreans built a building. They built what I guess was going to be the new National Assembly. It was completed the year that I left. I actually went to an event there where President Bagaza spoke for about three and a half hours in Kirundi, which I certainly didn't understand and nobody else in the diplomatic corps understood. But I remember distinctly sitting on these uncomfortable seats that had been put in by the North Koreans to fit people of North Korean stature. They were very tight for somebody over 5'6." Your knees literally were up against the seat in front of you. The Burundians were pretty big people, and the seats were obviously too small. For three and a half hours in this seat listening to the speech in Kirundi was not the most pleasant of my experiences.

Q: Let's talk a little about the neighborhood. Libya, were they messing around?

WILSON: A couple of things were happening when I was there. One of our policy requirements was to defend and support "constructive engagement." Burundi was one of the most skeptical countries about that.

Q: You might explain was constructive...

WILSON: "Constructive engagement" was a U.S. effort predicated on the notion that if you were going to solve the southern African racial conundrum, you had to do it by persuasion and by evolution and not by fomenting revolution in South Africa. You had to try and maintain some infrastructure in place so that it all wouldn't be destroyed in the process. "Constructive engagement," as it was practiced, solved the southern African problems one by one, beginning with the resolution of the Angolan civil war and then moved on to the independence of Namibia and ultimately to the change of regime in South Africa. It was a concept that was articulated by Chet Crocker in a Foreign Affairs article before the election of Reagan in 1980. It was despised by Africans because they saw it as racist, and even if it wasn't racist, they thought that it was way too soft on the apartheid regime of South Africa. You can make a lot of sort of rhetorical money by denouncing "constructive engagement," which the Burundians did.

I remember that the first part of our strategy was to deal with the international implications of the Angolan civil war, i.e., first the Cuban troops in Angola and then the South African troops in Angola. I remember about three weeks after I got therI was Chargï¿½ then because Frances had left the countrI was summoned to the foreign ministry by the then foreign minister, a guy by the name of Edward Nzambimana. He was a colonel who had participated in the coup that brought Bagaza to power. He had been a prime minister and he had been the foreign minister. He was a savvy guy and a real radical. He summoned me to discuss an arcane element of our approach towards Angola. We were negotiating with both sides, or all sides, in the Angolan civil war the withdrawal of Cuban and South African troops from Angola. The question was would the withdrawals be linked, or would there be parallel movement, which would have come down to having one South African leave for every Cuban. I spent 45 minutes explaining to the foreign minister what the subtle distinction and differences were between these two approaches and what was on the table. After I left, I went home thinking that I had done a great job in my first meeting as charge' with the foreign minister. I got home and turned on Voice of America. George Bush, who was then Vice President, had just landed in Nairobi, Kenya, and at his airport press conference somebody asked him, "Is there any difference between linkage and parallel movement?" to which he answered" no." So I figured my credibility with this foreign minister was shot after having wasted 45 minutes of his time telling him there was a difference. Fortunately for me, he got fired about three weeks later, and he neglected to tell his successor what a bad diplomat I was.

The Libyans were involved. The Libyans had always had designs on that part of central Africa, and the Libyans had money that they were prepared to spend there. They did things like putting up a library. When I was there, Qadhafi came to visit one time. During the course of his speech he got so vehemently anti American, virulently anti American, that somebody pulled the plug on his microphone, which was gratifying to us. The fellow who did it later came to see me to explain to me what he had done and to tell me why he had done it. We were concerned because the Libyans were making menacing noises at that time. In fact, we had some information that they were supporting terrorist activities in the region, supporting activities against American and, in fact, French interests, and some of the stuff that we were seeing then later got played out in west and central Africa a few years later. So, yes, we were concerned about them, and one of our objectives was to make sure that the Burundians understood our concerns about the Libyans. At that time they were fighting a war in Chad with the French along the Aouzi strip. The French and the Chadians were basically fighting the war; we were supporting it. So that was one of our...

Q: Was the Burundi government concerned about people such as the Libyans getting more involved?

WILSON: The Burundian position was always 'We understand your concerns. We want to be friends with the United States, even as we're attacking you on "constructive engagement." We want to assure you that we're watching the Libyans closely and we're not going to let them do anything that is untoward or out of hand or that undermines our regime.' That region had had some experience with Libyan involvement. The Libyans had invaded Uganda to defend Idi Amin and the Tanzanians had deployed and defeated Libyan troops and had gotten Amin out of there. So there was some history in the region of Libyan troops actually deploying. Burundi is not a Muslim country. I think maybe less than one percent of the country was Muslim, so they didn't see a Qadhafi library as being terribly threatening to them, or that the Libyans were actually going to be able to convert a bunch of Burundian Catholics to Islam.

Q: Did Uganda play any role there?

WILSON: We saw very little of Uganda. Uganda was in a lot of turmoil during the years that I was in Burundi. It was an internal strife. Obote was having troubles; the Obote period was even, if anything, more disastrous than the Amin period. Uganda during these years was pretty much tied up with itself.

Q: What about Tanzania, particularly on the economic side? We watched Nyerere, with all good will and everybody saying how wonderful it was, essentially destroying the Tanzanian relatively rich economy. Were the Burundis looking at that and taking note?

WILSON: The relationship between Tanzania and Burundi has always been tense, principally because Tanzania was the port through which a lot of Burundian goods went as well as imports into Burundi. The Tanzanians, by controlling access, were able to exact their pound of flesh from the Burundians. There was also a certain arrogance in the way the Tanzanians approached the landlocked countries. There were also some Hutu refugee camps on Tanzanian territory, and the Burundians were concerned that there would be destabilization efforts being launched from Tanzania anytime that Nyerere decided he wanted to do something. The people in the Tanzanian government were principally from Brururi, which was the southernmost province, bordering on Tanzania; that generated a sort of cross border understanding and tension. Nyerere was not universally admired in Burundi, to say the least.

Q: He seemed to be most popular in Scandinavia.

WILSON: I think that's right. It'll be interesting to see what the revisionist history of the Nyerere era will say about him. There were some things that he did which were pretty successful. For example, I think he actually was pretty successful, at least on the mainland, of forging a Tanzanian identity, but at great cost. Whether or not the cost through the years of bad economic policies were worth the forging of a national identity, I think, is anybody's guess, but I suspect it will be several hundred years, or at least 100 years, before anybody definitively makes a case one way or the other. From my perspective, it was unfortunate that Nyerere became the mediator of the Burundian dispute, because I think there is merit in having somebody who is truly a disinterested party to be the mediator in these things. Nyerere was never disinterested, and Tanzanian Burundian relations are replete with examples of Tanzanian destabilization efforts of Burundi or at least harassing Burundi over the years. That doesn't make for a good mediator.

Q: What about Rwanda?

WILSON: Relations with Rwanda were always tense because you had a Hutu government in power in Kigali and a Tutsi government in power in Burundi; that made for a little bit of concern. After I left, there were massacres in the north in the late 1980s; even during the time that I was in Burundi, there was always concern that the Rwandans were working with Burundian Hutus. The Hutu population was even larger in the north than it was in the south; so along the Rwandan border, there was always concern about that. The relations were strained. The two countries talked to each other. They were part of the Great Lakes Organization, so they all talked to each other. Every now and again Mobutu would mediate some issue between them. But relations were not real cordial.

Q: You mentioned Mobutu. What about with the Congo, Zaire at that time?

WILSON: Relations with the Congo were interesting because Mobutu played the regional relationship very much as he played his own domestic politics. He would not hesitate to use the carrot if he felt it necessary or to use the stick. At one time, Mobutu decided that he wanted to double his defense budget. He took advantage of a Qadhafi visit to Burundi to visit the United States and say that Qadhafi was planning to invade the Congo from Burundi using Burundian troops. He said that Qadhafi had delivered a bunch of Zodiac boats to southern Burundi to effect an invasion across Lake Tanganyika. Therefore, he, Mobutu, was going to have to double the defense budget, and the United States was going to have to come up with some more money. We went and looked for these Zodiac boats everywhere and looked for any evidence of Libyan training and obviously couldn't find any because there was none to be found. So Mobutu would not hesitate to use such excuses. Mobutu occupied a heavy position in the region. He was "the man." The Congo was and is a huge countrpotentially very wealth47 million people compared to 4 or 5 million in Burundi and 4 or 5 million in Rwanda. They were all Francophones and they could all deal with Belgium. So he was the predominant power obviously.

Q: Did you yourself get into any interventions with the Burundian government and people in jail or anything like that?

WILSON: I don't think we did because I don't recall any. We might have gone and spoken on behalf of a political prisoner, but I don't recall. I just don't think there were that many political prisoners while we were there. My second ambassador, Jim Bullington, had a cook who was a Seventh Day Adventist; he was arrested in late 1984 or early 1985 as part of a round up of the cultisti.e. other religions that were deemed by the government to be subverting its authority. Bullington took this as a personal affront, and it became sort of a cause celebre for our relationship. The Burundians wouldn't release the ambassador's cook. I know that we must have made some demarches as people were being rounded up, bul just don't recall anymore.

Q: You were there during the Reagan Administration, and you were mentioning that population was a real problem. Of course, we had our problems, domestic problems, about various forms of birth control, particularly abortion. Did that mean we weren't a player in the population side?

WILSON: It meant that we didn't run any population control programs and we didn't participate in any programs of the planned parenthood variety that might have either an abortion information component or an abortion component. We did do some maternal child health care type activities which were designed to enhance the health of both the mother and the unborn child and then subsequently the child. As part of that, we would talk about child spacing. This was principally done by Peace Corps. They would be out in the villages talking to the mothers about the utility of maybe waiting two or three years before you have a second or third or fourth child.

Q: Was there any sort of equipment available? I'm thinking of condoms, IUDs or something like this. You can have a space, but you've got to have a means to space.

WILSON: I don't recall. This was before the big AIDS scare, so I don't recall that we were in the business of providing condoms.

Q: What about AIDS?

WILSON: AIDS was becoming an issue towards the end of my tour there. We were just beginning to hear stories about this. In fact, I watched a number of friends in Burundtwo aidepass on in subsequent years. We were already hearing about the route from Mombasa for trucking goods through Uganda, Rwanda and to Burundi. All along that route there were stories about AIDS beginning to affect populationtrucker populations and the prostitute population. Jonathan Mann was in the Congo; he was an American doing research on the AIDS phenomenon and was beginning to write cables about the pandemic that AIDS was going to become.

Q: Were there any great crises while you were there?

WILSON: We had a drought during one of the years that I was in Burundi. It would have been 1983 84, or 1984 85. There was a lot of concern that the harvest would come up short and that they would need some additional food products. We actually got ahead of that. It was at a time when we were doing this air relief into Ethiopia because nobody had seen the consequences of the drought there. We'd seen it a year ahead of time and we'd managed to organize Catholic relief services and some of these groups as well as USAID began to report on this. We were submitting of reports on the weather throughout the country and trying to plot whether or not the harvest was going to come up short. As a consequence we were actually able to stockpile several thousand tons of food products on the east coast ready if needed to be shipped to Burundi and we did. We had enough stockpiled so that we were able to use some of these stocks that we planned for Burundi for other relief requirements. We were pretty pleased with thathat we had actually put into place an early warning system. We were pretty gratified about that. Other than that, we went through the good periods and then we started going through the bad periods. Then my three years were up and I moved on.

Q: Were we looking for a political cycle or was there one almost well established that could be predictable enough for paranoia to set in or was this something that you more or less realized in hindsight?

WILSON: We could see it coming. It was curious. The cycle sort of changed about the time that France gave up sovereignly. Just before she withdrew, we started seeing a reaction to missionary activities and religious activities. If anything, Washington was reading our reporting and was saying, "Gee, Frances, maybe you've got "clientitis," because she was pretty enthusiastic about the changes that were being made. When Jim Bullington came out, he took a cold, steely eyed look at the situation, and he started reporting from his perspective. In fact, the situation was changing. We had gone from a pretense of democratization to authoritarianism, which culminated in the arrest of his cook, as I mentioned. We began to use a different slant on our report, but it was pretty clear that this was a cycle that Burundian regimes went through. In fact, you needed to put in place, I think, as many safeguards as one possibly could as early as possible in the hopes that they would not all be destroyed when the subsequent paranoia set in these regimes. Curiously, after we sort of identified the new trends, we were criticized for being too critical. Go figure.

Q: This was a period during which, I think, we were beginning, particularly in Africa, to look at the non governmental organizations as being a real potential tool of influence rather than being sort of outsiders mucking around with government controls. I'm talking about the NGOs. Did you see this?

WILSON: Yes; we saw it principally when we looked at humanitarian relief. Catholic World Relief Services, Catholic Relief Services, had been a partner with USAID on some of our "Food For Work" and "Food For Peace" programs. Our farm to market road had been financed through "Food For Peace;" it was managed by Catholic Relief Services. They would bring in all the food and distribute it. When we geared up for the potential drought, we used them exclusively. We were still early in Burundi's development so that only the traditional NGOs were there. Catholic Relief Services, Lutheran World Relief, and the Seventh Day Adventist groups were the ones that were most active. There was not yet the explosion of other NGOs. They were viewed with a mixture of appreciation and suspicion by the host governments. What were all these guys doing there? There was also the growth of some of advocacy groups at that time as well. That meant that in addition to our human rights reporting, interested parties were starting to get reports from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, some of which were consistent with what we were reporting and some of which went further than what we were reporting. They had some different information on some subjects than we had. They had different takes on the threats to organized religion by the government. So we had these two groups, which confused the NGO picture somewhat because in some people's minds it was not clear whether they were an NGO development group or an NGO advocacy group.

Q: At that time when you were there, were they working together?

WILSON: You can't generalize. The traditional ones worked very well together. The Seventh Day Adventist project was a great project, and they worked very well with the Ministry of Health. They worked best with those ministries that were underfunded and overburdened. Catholic Relief Services was good in the distribution of food to those who needed it. The Adventists were good in developing the health centers.

Q: We were talking about that there were no college graduates in Burundi. Did you find that there was a pretty sophisticated government structure by this time or not?

WILSON: The government structure was principally a military government, so all the key players were military officers. The military, as is true in so many of these little African countries, was the only organization worthy of the term 'organization.' Burundi had people who had been educated, but not in a liberal arts education; it was a military education. By the time I got there in the 198020 years after independencthere was a generation of educated Burundians, mostly Tutsi, but they were all pretty young. The ministers were in their early 30s, for example. Bagaza himself was only 36 at the time. So it was a pretty young regime. They focused on educatiotrying to get people educatebut they had a long way to go because during the 1976 massacres, one of the principal targets for execution were every educated Hutu. They assumed that a Hutu with glasses was an educated Hutu. Therefore, wearing glasses was a death sentence. After that, you can imagine that in Burundi society the desire for education was not universal, to say the least. There was a sort of paradox. The people that we dealt with mostly were educated. A lot of them had been educated in the East because the Soviets and the East Germans had put a lot of money into bringing these people into their systems. One of my principal interlocutors had been educated in Bulgaria, of all places. That background gave some Burundians an ideological baggage which gave them a Marxist understanding of how economies ought to be structured and managed. They did not always a great education. Increasingly there are people who were going off to Belgium and some that are going off to France, because France was offering some education. There were some that had gone off to the States either on Fulbright scholarships or some AID program that provided them some education. I had always thought that the fall of Berlin Wall presaged basically the cutback in scholarships from Eastern Europe. If there was ever a void to be filled, that was it; we could have filled relatively inexpensively and we would have been able to train literally an entire generation of African elite along Westermore politically and economically liberalines.

Q: I was in Yugoslavia in the 1960s when almost an entire African student group said, "The hell with this." They arrived in Belgrade and said, "Get us out of here. We're being called black monkeys and all this." They weren't getting any real education in the East. We took a lot of them and sent them off to pretty good places.

WILSON: We should have continued to do that. We never should have let that opportunity pass. There were a lot of them going off to China, a lot going off to the Soviet Union. Actually it worked in our favor because many would come back with real ambivalence if not outright hatred of their experience.

Q: Those countries were not able really to absorb foreigners, particularly black foreigners. They used the term 'black monkeys' which was muttered in front of them, and the Africans knew enough Bulgarian to understand. It was not a pleasant experience.

WILSON: That's right.

Q: When you were in Burundi, did you have anything to do with gorillas?

WILSON: G O R I L L A S as opposed to G U E R I L LAS. There were some mountain gorillas in eastern Congthen Zairin the Keva region. There were also gorillas in Diane Fossi's area in Rwanda. There were no gorillas in Burundi, but we used to go over to Bukavu fairly frequently to see the gorillas. A friend of mine was the head of the Peace Corps training program there. All the new Peace Corps volunteers were trained in Bukavu before the Congolese wars; so we used to go over there and talk to the new Peace Corps volunteers and take advantage of such occasions to go see the gorillas, which was a lot of fun. It was one of the more interesting things you could dtrek through the forests and run across a family of gorillas complete with silver backs and the little ones, and learn the etiquette and protocol of approaching a group of gorillas in the forest.

I was in Burundi obviously, as I mentioned earlier, from '82 to '85, which was a good time in Burundi.

Q: In 1985, where were you assigned?

WILSON: I left Burundi in August of 1985 and came back to the States. I had been accepted in the American Political Science Association Congressional Fellowship Program.

Q: And you did that for a year?

WILSON: For a year.

Q: What did this program consist of?

WILSON: It consisted of one quarter at Johns Hopkins University taking one class in American foreign policy and the politics of foreign policy, which also gave us the time to visit and observe Congress and then begin to interview for a Congressional staff position. There were at that time, I think, four State Department officers who were participants in this program our of about 60 students every year. An old friend of mine, Jeff Davidow, had been in a similar program, if not that program, knew that our time would not be fully occupied. Rather than let me spend my days hanging around congressional galleries talking to staffers and interviewing with congressmen, he brought me back into the Department to work on a special project which was block the proposed sanctions against South African congressional attempt to impose economic sanctions on South Africa, which ultimately succeeded. There was a large operation in the State Department trying to thwart the will of Congress on this. It was a fascinating experience. I wasn't sure it was exactly what the State Department should be doing, but like a good soldier, I saluted and did it. I ended up going to work as a Congressional Fellow for the first half of my fellowship. The fellowship was constructed in such a way that we did some class work, including writing a paper. I wrote a paper on our Angolan policy focusing on the congressional activities of the 1970s which curtailed our involvement in Angola. I covered the congressional hearinthe Church Committee hearings and others.

I worked on the Hill for the then junior Senator from Tennessee, Al Gore; I worked for him for half of my term, until about April, as, of all things, his agricultural legislative aide. That was the year of the passage of the Farm Bill and the implementation of one aspect which affected him considerably and that was the dairy buy out provision. The Congress in its wisdom decided that our dairy herds were too large and, therefore, they provided some incentives to farmers to reduce the size of their dairy herds by giving them money to slaughter their herds. A number of dairy farmers wanted to do this because they weren't making any money on milk and cheese, so they went ahead and slaughtered their herds. They got paid by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and they dumped all their meat on the open meat market. The center of independent beef futures commodity traders is in Memphis, Tennessee. When the dumping took place, I got a call from Senator Gore saying, "I'm down here in Memphis, Tennessee, and my constituents are going bananas. The bottom has dropped out of the beef futures commodity markets. You've got to prepare something for me. We got to stop this." So we did. We got hold of the Department of Agriculture and said, "You really need to phase this program in so that you don't disrupt the markets." We gave Al a statement when he got back at noon from Memphis, Tennessee; he went to the floor of the Senate and read his statement decrying the attempt to put commodity futures traders into the tank through the ill advised dumping of beef onto the market.

Q: Where were you getting your information about agriculture? Knowing you background, I can't see how you did it. Were you a quick study or what?

WILSON: I wouldn't say I was a quick study, but when you're working in Congress on legislation, you get the input from the constituents and from all the various staffers and everybody's who is working on the legislation. You look through all of this input and try to figure out what makes sense and what doesn't make sense. Eventually you get everybody actually calling you. Going out and getting the information isn't hard. Sifting fact from fiction from the various people who have a view on the bill is probably more difficult. In the end the drafting is done in committee. Our particular concern was the legislation address the dairy buyout provision; after that, you know, life went on. But I would not say that I was an architect of this particular piece of legislation at all. We were just trying to defend the interests of our constituents.

Q: What was your impression of Al Gore?

WILSON: I think Al Gore is a very fine public servant. I thought he was terrific. I traveled with him to Tennessee. In his town meetings in Tennessee, he was great. I remember going to my first town meeting with him. We flew to Memphis and stayed with his uncle in Jackson, Tennessee. When I got up the next morning, I figured that since I was going to a town meeting with the U.S. Senator, I'd better look good. So I brought out my very best double breasted suit and my best tie and nice white shirt perfectly pressed and shined my shoes up real good and I went to breakfast. Al comes in and he's in this blue suit that's kind of threadbare and he's got kind of a frayed collar on his Arrow button down blue shirt and a burgundy tie with sort of a stain on it. I looked at his shoes and they were whatever Rockports of those ages wersort of scruffy and what not. I thought, "Gee, this is a U.S. Senator. Shouldn't he be looking a little bit better for this appearance?" We got to the first town meetinthis was about 6:30 or seven o'clock in the morninand the guys who were there were the people who had grievances. The people who have grievances that they want to talk to their Senator about are not typically the people who are going to dress up at seven o'clock in the morning in their finest suit, even if they owned a suit. They were basically in coveralls with either John Deere or Jack Daniels ballcaps and sort of lace up hiking boots or tennis shoes or something, and their checked plaid shirts basically, your farmer type thingsort of downtrodden farmers of rural Tennessee. As I got out of the car and looked at Al and looked at these guys, I realized who the odd man out was; it wasn't Al. So I went around to the back of the car, popped the trunk, took off my coat and loosened my tie, and kind of took my collar and bent it up a little bit. Then I found a bit of mud and rubbed it across my shoetops so I looked a little bit more like the constituents. Then we had a good time. We traveled through Tennessee. Gore was very animated with his constituents. He would return to Tennessee three weekends out of four. He would fly down on Friday night after the Senate session ended, spend all day traveling crisscrossing the state and then fly back Sunday morning in time to take his wife and kids to church. I found him very serious on the subjects that he cared about, which happened to be subjects that mattered even if they're not politically sexy. Arms control is not a politically sexy topic, but he was a master of it. He was an absolute master of the science and technology of peace, well before anybody else was ever thinking about it. When he said he invented the Internet, to a large extent it was his support that allowed the development of it to go forward. Even Newt Gingrich has given him credit for that. Al's problem has always been that he doesn't appear very comfortable in front of a camera, and because of that, he lost the election. Everybody talks about Florida, but it wasn't Florida that cost him the election; it was Tennessee.

Q: Tennessethat was a surprise. You're talking about the election of 2000.

WILSON: The election of 2000. If he had spent a little more time a s Vice President worrying about Tennessee, the election might have come out differently. But Gore is not a natural politician. He's a natural policy guy; he is a natural mover of issues governmental; he is a public administrator, but he is not a natural politician. If he had spent a little bit more time in Tennessee, if he had gotten another road built or if he had gotten a bridge built or something like that, then the course of history might have been changed; but it just wasn't in his character to do that. He was Vice President of the United States; he had a larger set of issues to deal with.

Q: After you stint in Gore's office, what did you do?

WILSON: I went over to the House side to work for the then majority whip as his whip assistant; that was Tom Foley of Spokane, Washington. What I did for him was to be basically his staff guy on those issues that he addressed in his capacity as a leader of the Democratic Partthe majority Whip. If he was called upon to meet the National Organization of Nuclear Power Plant Operators, which he did, to speak to them at a luncheon, then I would prepare his talking points and I would do the potential Q's and A's, and then I would travel with him. He was wonderful. He would take me everywhere. He didn't have a desk in his office. He had a sort of a living room type arrangement in the whip's office. Whenever he was in there, I was welcomed. From a Congressional Fellowship perspective it was great because I got a lot of one on one time with him. He would basically spend all his days telling people stories of what it was like in the House of Representatives from 1964 on; I learned a wonderful history of the House from the time of Lyndon Johnson.

At that time Congressmen were constantly running for their leadership positions in the House. Foley went on to be Speaker. He would spend a lot of time with his colleagues; he would be over in their offices a lot talking to them. We would have whip meetings every Tuesday attended by all the assistant whips. Tip O'Neill was the Speaker then. Tip and Wright and Tom Foley would chair these meetings and all the assistant whips would be there. Our offices were right in the Capitol building, putting us right in the Rotunda. It was a great experience, a lot of fun.

Tom and Heather Foley are just about as nice people as one could hope for. From that whole experience, I learned to have tremendous respect for how hard these people work. You can disagree with them philosophically, you can disagree with the interests that they represenand a with a lot of them I disagree passionately about the interest that they represenbut you can't deny that they work really hard for their constituents and for their interests. They're back in their constituencies almost every weekend. For somebody like Tom, that meant flying across country on Friday and flying back on Sunday night on the red eye from Spokane. But those were the things that had to be done. There were always things that you had to do back in the district and there was a lot of legislation that had to be worked on in Congress.

Q: Did you get any feel for the interface between the people you were working for and the Department of State on issues?

WILSON: Every time a Gore constituent had a probleand most of the time they werLatin America type problemcouldn't get a visa or people were arrested therhe or she would call their senator, who call me and I would then call the State Department to try to get the problem resolved. That was most of our interface with the Department. When I was working for the Tom Foley, the House passed a bill that beefed up in a major waaround a billion dollarthe security funding for the State Department, the first time that had happened. The rationale had been provided by a commission that had studied the problem. Our then Assistant Secretary for DiplomatiSecuritI think it was Bob Lamwas quoted afterwards in the Washington Post as saying, "Well, this money is great and good, but at the end of the day it is people who make the difference on security." Foley had been a big supporter of this bill; he was not real happy about that comment. He thought that the State Department ought to be a little bit more grateful for this billion dollar windfall. We called Bob to invite him to the whip's office to have a little chat with him about his views on why this billion dollars wouldn't enhance the security of our diplomatic missions overseas and whether we should really be spending that money. He was appropriately chastened. It was kind of fun to watch. He was an old time administrative officer. He'd been the administrative counselor in Bonn. He was of one of the best of his generation. He was well known. He'd come back from Bonn and had been appointed to be the assistant secretary for administration; he later went on to be assistant secretary for security, and then went to Cyprus as our ambassador. When he came in to Foley's office, he was meek and mild mannered. Tom had a little chat with him about his being "misquoted" in the Washington Post about the importance of the billion dollar security program. That was kind of fun.

Q: I'd like to return to one thing. You were saying that you were part time trying to block efforts of Congress to get nasty with South Africa.

WILSON: If I were to really think through what our mission was, it was to insure that there would no mandate on the executive branch with respect to imposing sanctions on South Africa. It was inimical to what Chet Crocker was trying to accomplish through "constructive engagement." He thought that it would tie his hands and restrict his maneuverability, which was absolutely true. So the administration wanted no part of that; just as a matter of policy it didn't want it. If you recall, before Reagan came into office, he gave a press conference and somebody asked him a question on South Africa, "What do you think about the apartheid regime of South Africa," or something to that effect. He said, "Well, you know, South Africa has been an ally of ours in every war we've been in and it's a country with enormous mineral resources, etc..." The South Africans took that to mean that they would get a free pass on the issue of apartheid, which wasn't in fact the case. In fact the administration, and Crocker in particular, was going to work with the South Africans, encouraging them and pressuring thefirst gentlto come to grips with issue of majority rule within their own country as well as the issue of independence of Namibia and how we and they were going to deal with the Angolan civil war.

Q: What sort of things were you were you working on?

WILSON: We put together talking points as to why the sanctions regime wouldn't work. We devised together approaches to state and local government on why they should not be meddling in foreign affairs by imposing restrictions on their own pension funds and things like that.

Q: Places like Massachusetts...

WILSON: Massachusetts was one. Berkeley was another. We had set up a state and local government office so that we communicate with them about sanctions. We offered to send people out to speak publicly on these subjects. We were trying to come up with ways to explain to Congress why this wasn't a good idea and to take on those who thought it was a good idea.

Q: What was your personal feeling? You had to deal with it in Burundi. What were you getting about the Crocker's approach? Did you feel this was the right course, one that would maybe reach a proper outcome, or was it sort of a compromising with the devil?

WILSON: I had just come from South Africa; I had seen apartheid in operation and had on my staff a number of South Africans. I was not at the timand I say this openlI was not a big supporter of "constructive engagement." I thought we ought to be taking a much harder line. I always thought that backing Jonas Savimbi in Angola was a mistake. I sort of held your nose and defended the policy, but of course that's what you're paid to do. It's like being a lawyer. You defend unpopular cases. Having said that, I have to say that in retrospect you have to give Crocker some credit, because at the end of the day, southern Africa evolved without major civil wars.

Q: Which is really remarkable.

WILSON: Which is very remarkable.

Q: I was in INR working on Africa much earlier. Then it was accepted that there was going to be a night of long knivethe black South Africans going after the white South Africans, and it was going to be nasty.

WILSON: That's right. The consensus in the early 1980s, when I was at a Security Assistance conference in Germany, was that by the year 2000/2003, South Africa would look a lot like Lebanoa lot of different ethnic groups and factions fighting each other. There is a lesson in that for me: even if a policy is unpopular, you have to take a look at the strategy and you have to take a look at what your objectives are and then you have to figure out how best to get there. At the time, the policy was clearly intellectual. It was not difficult to defend, because the idea of evolution versus revolution is a pretty easy idea to defend, but in retrospect I give Chet an awful lot of credit for his steadfastness and for his ability, in the face of irrational opposition, to stay the course and move the process forward.

Q: After you finished this time with Foley, you were back in the State Department system again.

WILSON: I went out to Congo, Brazzaville. as Deputy Chief of Mission.

Q: And you were there from...

WILSON: 1986 to 1988.

Q: You were off in 1986 to the Congo, Brazzaville. Could you describe the type of government. What was the political and economic situation in Brazzaville, and how did you get the job?

WILSON: I got the job because I had already been DCM in Burundi, so I had a track record as DCM. A fellow that I had worked with in South Africa by the name of Alan Lukenhe had been consul general in Cape Town and had been named ambassador to Brazzavillasked me if I'd like to go and be his DCM. I said "Sure;" it sounded like a lot of fun. The Congo, Brazzaville, is a former French colony as opposed to the Congo, Kinshasa, which was a former Belgian colony. The Congo has traditionally been one of the most politicized of all African countries. They have had political movements and violent demonstrations in the streets for virtually their entire modern history. When I was there, there were in the throes of, I guess, the second or third Marxist Leninist socialist fascist military dictatorship, which basically meant that the military was in control. There was a military colonel, Denis Sassou Nguesso, who was in charge of the government. He had overthrown his immediate predecessor, Joachim Yhombi Opango, who had been made president after the assassination of the country's first military leader and second president, Marion Ngouabi, who was a Communist to the core. He had changed the flag so that it was a hammer and sickle on a red background.

The Congo in the mid 1980s still mouthed the Marxism Leninism rhetoric, and in fact their best allies were the Soviets. The Soviets had a very large embassy there. There were a lot of scholarships given to Congolese to study in the Soviet Union. A fair number of them brought Soviet women back with them as wives; so within the Brazzaville population you had a fair amount of Soviet women married to Congolese. The Soviets occupied quarters right down by the port where the ferry went back and forth to Kinshasa; it was a pretty interesting location for them. They could pretty much see everything that was going back and forth between Zaire and Congo, Brazzaville.

Q: They didn't have relations with Zaire?

WILSON: Yes, there were relations. One could get back and forth. The ferries ran every day. The two countries met periodically. Relations were not ever terribly good, but I think that was a function of the various personalities. I think it was a pretty much conscious attempt by Mobutu not to have very good relations with any of his neighbors. The Congo's economy was driven principally by oil. Despite the Marxist Leninist rhetoric, the principal trading partners remained the French who basically ran the oil business to the extent that I think, if anybody were to study it thoroughly, they would find that the French oil company made an absolute fortune over the previous 40 or 60 years. American oil companies, when I was there, were interested in some concessions and actually got some concessions. Amoco and Conoco were present in the Congo, although Conoco later backed out of most of its west African investments. Chevron was down a little further south in Angola. There were some missionary groups who were working in the north; they had been there for many years. That was the extent of our American presence.

I first visited the Congo in late 1978 when we were just reopening our embassy there. Our embassy had been closed at the time of the 1967 Arab Israeli war, and we were just reopening it. We were hoping to have a Peace Corps program in the Congo, but then came the coup that brought Sassou power, and all our efforts stopped. We opened the embassy at a very low level. We had an ambassador and maybe half a dozen people working there. The embassy grew slowly from that time, from the late 1970s, till the time I went back in 1986. It was an interesting time. Sassou was making overtures towards the West and was reducing, I think, his dependence on the Soviets; he was openly interested in closer relations with the United States. When I got there, he had just been named president of the Organization of African Unitthe OAU. Historically the head of the OAU, when he goes to New York for the UN General Assembly, has an opportunity to meet with the American president; he comes on either a private visit or working visit as the head of the OAU representing Africa. There was not a lot of interest in the Reagan administration in meeting this avowedly Marxist Leninist military dictator. We tried to make the case, as did the Bureau of African Affairs, that Sassou was to be met not as the Congolese president but as the head of the OAU. We had been reasonably successful in making this pitch in the first few weeks that I was there in 1986. Then Sassou's foreign minister went to the UN General Assembly. During the course of his remarks to the UN General Assembly, he equated Zionism to racism, which was a whole new way of looking at Zionism. That predictably really gave pause to the Israelis and their American friends in Washington. I got a phone call from the deputy assistant secretary saying, "Look, they have just queered any chance of a meeting with Reagan unless they do something dramatic to basically denounce their foreign minister or otherwise correct the record." The ambassador asked me to go see the president's secretary general to explain to him that something dramatic had to be done. The ambassador suggested that I tell the secretary general that they ought to fire the foreign minister.. In the car on the way to the presidential offices, I thought about it for a while, and concluded that I really couldn't go so far as to tell them to fire their foreign minister. I thought that they might take that rather badly. I tried to finesse the issue by just saying that if they hoped to have a meeting with our president, they were going to have to clarify the minister's statement in a way that made it very, very clear that he had not been speaking on behalf of the government. Then the secretary general asked me precisely what I had in mind in terms of a dramatic way of making amends and I said, "Well, far be it for me to suggest how you deal with issues that are really your own, but it has been suggested in Washington that if the foreign minister were to lose his position, that would be viewed positively by your friends in Washington." Then I left. I thought I had finessed it pretty well, but of course the secretary general went right in to see the president and told him, "Wilson just came by and said 'Fire the foreign minister.'" The secretary general then apparently told Sassou, "The hell with that. We'll just get rid of Wilson. That'll show them." I've been told by a counselor close to the President, that a meeting was held shortly thereafter which decided that I wasn't really a big enough fish to be worthy of declaring persona non grata; so they didn't do anything. But for a brief period of time, my credibility with the higher reaches of government was pretty much compromised. Literally a few weeks later another counselor went to see the president and said to him that "You know this story that Wilson said to fire the foreign minister is just not true. You ought to take a look at the minutes of the meeting, because there was a notetaker in that meeting." So Sassou called for the minutes, and the minutes of the meeting made it very clear what I had said and what I hadn't said. Sassou was satisfied that I had not in fact been interfering in the internal affairs of their country. My relationship with him got better right after that.

As for Sassou's visit to the United States, he went to Washington, but Reagan wouldn't see him. They just wouldn't put him on Reagan's schedule. All we could do was to get Reagan to call him. He was staying at the Willard Hotel. Reagan gave him a call and said, "Welcome to Washington. I hope you're having a good time, etc...," after which Sassou hung up the phone and said, "That was very nice of him to take the time to call me. Given that I'm literally only about 100 yards away, it would have been nice to have been able to go over there and shake his hand." He was quite right on that. It didn't stop the Congolese press, however, from taking a picture of Reagan seated and picture of Sassou seated and putting them together on the front page of their local government run newspaper, suggesting that a meeting had taken place.

Substantively while I was in Brazzaville and during the time when Sassou was president of the OAU, we worked very hard to do two things. One was to increase the level of American investment in the Congo by supporting our petroleum companies' efforts to expand their presence. And, two, in his capacity as president of the OAU, Sassou had defined two Africa wide problems worthy of his attention. One was debt relief, which was a nonstartejust not a major issue in 1986. It is now in 2001, but it wasn't then. The other one was the Angolan civil war. There had been a hiatus in our discussions with the Angolans. There had been no dialogue between the Americans and the Angolans or the Cubans or the South Africans on the Angolan issue for the previous 18 months. Sassou wanted to restart the dialogue. The Congolese were in a very good position to influence the Angolan side because most of the leaders in the MPLA had been in Brazzaville during the time that they were running their war against the Portuguese. Many of them had occupied positions in the Congolese administration. Almost all of the Angolan political leadership was friendly with the Congolese leadership; so there was a good rapport. For 18 months, we worked with the Congolese to put together a series of ideas to transmit to Washington. We found that the most difficult part of putting the negotiating process back on track was convincing our Assistant Secretary Chet Crocker that the Congolese were serious and could deliver. Crocker held out; we finally sent somebody to Washington who was very close to Sassoa very interesting character, a Malian author and politician, a Maoist who had spent seven years in jail in the deserts of Mali in the 1970s under Moussa Traore. This fellow had been a Modibo Keita guy, and when Traore came to power he was thrown in jail. His name was Sadu Banian Penate, a well known west African author and a well known west African Maoist at the time. He left Mali and was in exile in the Congo serving as an adviser to Sassou. He and I became very, very good friends. We sent him to Washington and he was actually able to persuade Chet Crocker, who was not a Maoist, that Sassou was good for his word and that he could deliver. Crocker described Sassou pretty much as I have described him, but he also used terms like "Marxist Leninist lightweight who enjoys his Pierre Cardin suits and reads Afrique Aziz as his weekly reading material." Afrique Aziz is a kind of socialist, left wing, lightweight news magazine. We finally got Crocker to come out to test the waters. This was in the middle or about the end of 1987 or just beginning of 1988. Crocker came to Brazzaville. It was agreed that the Angolan minister of interior, who was effectively the number two in that country would come from Rwanda to meet with him. Crocker got out there, but the president of Angola had gone to India. According to the Angolan rules of governance, the president and the minister of interior could not both be out of the country at the same time. So Sassou sent his airplane down to Rwanda with a very senior personal advisotheir ambassador the UN, or somebody of that rank. They bundled up the Angolan minister of interior and brought him to Brazzaville despite the fact that in leaving the country the minister of interior was in violation of his country's rules of governance. In any case, Sassou and the minister of interior met and that relaunched the process. We went from that to having a quadripartite meeting with the South Africans and the Cubans and the Angolans and ourselves, followed by a series of negotiations that led to what is known as "the Brazzaville protocol to the New York accords." The New York accords effectively de internationalized the civil war in Angola, got the Cuban the South African troops out of Angola. That was a pretty significant piece of diplomacy; it was a lot of fun to work on it and to watch. I think for Chet it was one of the big breakthroughs in the management of the "constructive engagement" policy that he was trying to implement.

Q: What was in it for the Congolese to work on this?

WILSON: I think for Sassou it was a way of legitimizing himself in the eyes both of Africa and of the United States, of the Western world. He was able to crown his OAU presidency with a pretty significant success. I think that was part of it. Also in retrospect the Angolans were coming under a lot of pressure, and this was one way of the regime to ease some of the pressure on imilitary pressure coming from the war against Savimbi by at least taking the South Africans out of the equation and by moving forward on lessening the scope of the conflict. But I think for Sassou it was principally a question of actually accomplishing something during his tenure as president of the OAU. It was in our interest to actually see that the Cubans go home. We didn't like the idea of Cubans hanging around central Africa destabilizing governments or potentially destabilizing governments or being in a position militarily to do that.

Q: You mentioned that the Malian intermediary was a committed Maoist and that Sassou had Maoist tendencies. Where did this come from? Was it sort of a homegrown thing, or where did this...

WILSON: I don't think Sassou was ever really a Maoist. I think Sassou was much more steeped in Marxism and Leninism, principally as a political organizing concept. Fundamentally the part of the concept that appealed to him was that he and his cronies would control the levers of power in the name of "The Party"the ruling party. I'll just talk first about the Conga lot of it came from a vehement rejection by a highly politicized society of the yokes of colonialism at the time of independence. As a consequence, they made a decision to go in another direction from the direction under which they had labored for the 40, 50, 60 years being a colony of France. The people who in the early 1960s reached out to the Congolese in a very successful way as the Cold War was being played out in Africa, were the Soviets and their allies. They offered scholarships; they offered military training; they offered political training. They had their political people there helping to organize the party. The Congolese political leaders, while they were military guys, operated through the party. I think that was more than anything else that drove him. I don't think Sassou who is still president now was motivated by a sense oMarxist Leninist principleall power to the workerbut for him it was a question of providing controlling power to the party, which was organized the same way the communist party was organized. Mali was also a country that at the time of independence which rejected the French pretty strongly and turned to those who would help them as they were being isolated or ostracized by the French. At the same time they were ostracizing the French. Keita was one of those who for some reason or another seemed to become close friends with the Chinese. The Chinese were and are very, very active in Africmajor commercial partners. All those things that the Africans need, whether it is tin pots or silverware or the sorts of stuff you see in the open markets, small trade type items, all are made in Chinnot unlike a lot of what we see. So in both the Congo and Mali, I think it was a matter of turning to those who are willing to extend the hand of friendship at a time that they were looking for alternatives to the way that they had been governed by the colonial powers.

Q: You mentioned scholarships to the Soviet Union. My experience has been that the Sovieand I have more experience with Bulgariascholarships were really a two edged sword. They would invite Africans to go to Moscow, Sophia or wherever, where they would be treated like dirt. The Slavs don't take kindly to Africans. It's extremely apparent. So this often backfired. Did you find any of this?

WILSON: I think that's right in one sense. Most of the guys went to Leningrad. That is where the big university ithe Patrice Lumumba University. They would go there and they wouldn't be treated very well; so they would come back with not fond memories of life in the Soviet Union. On the other hand, it was higher education; whether they liked the Soviet Union or not, their experience with higher education was learning about life, whether it's politics or economics or sociology, as it was taught by Soviet professors. As a consequence, whether you liked the Soviets or not, the students' outlook on the world was going to be somewhat slanted by the education that had gotten, which was considerably different from the education that they would have gotten in Western Europe or the United States. As I have said, I've always thought that the big mistake that we made at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall was not doubling or tripling our scholarship funds to these African countries and to other Third World countries; this was the time when the Soviets and the East Germans and the Cubans and others who had big scholarship funds were reducing theirs. I thought so for two reasons: one, education has got to be the foundation for development and for progress in these societies; and, two, there was just a wonderful opportunity to step in there and bring a lot of people over to the States to learn in our universities and to see our system.

Q: How about the role of the French, not only in intellectual life but economic life and political life, in the Congo?

WILSON: You mentioned that studying in the Soviet Union or in Sophia, Bulgaria, as being sort of a double edged sword. The relationship with the French is very much the same in that there was a certain amount of resentment over the way that the French continued to dominate the political and economic life of their former colony. At the same time, the language in Brazzaville and Paris was the same; there were historic ties; everybody had a relative who lived in France; people went there on vacation. There were a lot of French in the city of Brazzaville; that maintained a certain familiarity which to a certain extent overwhelmed the contempt, not by much perhaps, but to some extent. It was very, very difficult for these African countries to completely break their ties with the former colonial power just because there was so much common history.

Q: Did you find that while the embassy was working on relations with the Congolese, the French were in a way doing the same. Was there a certain rivalry in that?

WILSON: The rivalrwe're talking about 1986 to 1988 nowas on commercial matters. The French government supported French commercial activities very aggressively in their former colonies, and wherever they think they have an edge, they're going to use. The French oil company, Elf Aquitaine, was and to a certain still is a power unto itself. In Africa, Elf Aquitaine was the repository for French intelligence operatives; it was used as a funneand this is now coming out now in the French justice systefor money going to these former colonies and their governments when it came time for elections. Some of the money came back when it became time to fund French political parties at election time.

Q: They're having big scandals going on now.

WILSON: Big scandals now. It'll take a number of people down. It'll be interesting to watch. In a sense, there was always a rivalry. There was one case where the French had developed a cloning process for eucalyptus trees in the Congo. They were trying to produce stock for a paper mill plant, paper mill, but they could never get the paper mill up and running very well. There were literally hectare upon hectare upon hectare of eucalyptus trees, each of which looked like the one next to it because they were all cloned, and each of which, to an American eye, looked like telephone poles or electric poles that you would use to string wires across countries. The French had been working on this project for 20 years. They didn't have any idea as to what to do to commercialize the product. An American came in and said, "Gee, these look like telephone poles to me." He worked a deal with the Congolese to take possession of all these eucalyptus stands and was working hard on turning them into telephone poles, shipping them out to Syria and to the Middle East and places where they didn't have trees, but where there was a need to run a lot of power lines. He was well on the road to commercialization of the tree stands. Then the French stepped in and undercut him in a big way. They did it just as the French can do everywhere, with a little money here or a little threat there and some underhanded deal somewhere down the road. They managed to take that the stands back, putting the American out of business. Those were the sorts of things that we would occasionally come up against. By and large in the 1980s, there was a tendency to allow the French to take the lead in areas that were not of primordial importance to uand the Congo wasn't. "Constructive engagement" was essentially a southern African policy, and that was the African focus at senior levels of the American government at the time. When we had to deal with things like Liberia, or if later on we had to deal with Mengistu in Ethiopia, we did so on an emergency basis; "constructive engagement was where our continuing focus was.

Q: Did you feel very much, while you were in Brazzaville, that the real attention in the immediate area was on Zaire (Congo, Kinshasa)?

WILSON: Very much so. Congo Kinshasa at the time had our largest single embassy in Sub Saharan Africa. It was the largest, or the second largest, in terms of personnel in the world if you include Foreign Service nationals. Everybody was in Kinshasa.

Q: What was the feeling or reflection you were getting from the Congolese government towards Mobutu and what he was doing?

WILSON: The sentiment towards Mobutu was that of all the neighboring countrieit wasn't just in Brazzaville, but it was also in Burundi and to a certain extent, although I wasn't up there very much, in Uganda. The sentiment amongst the neighbors was that Mobutu was going to do everything he could to keep them weak while making himself strong. That included efforts to destabilize his country. The neighbors were always looking askance at Zaire and wondering what Mobutu might be up to. They would go to the meetings in the region that Mobutu would attend. Mobutu's was kind of the "big brother" or the potentially threatening neighbor with whom you had to somehow make your peace with if you hoped to live to fight another day. There was a lot of healthy concern about what Mobutu might be up to and at the same time a recognition that they were relatively much weaker than he and his ilk. This was in the 1980s before Mobutu's decline and fall.

Q: Did we ever get a Peace Corps into the Congo while you were there?

WILSON: We had a Peace Corps staff in the Congo in the late 1970s and then because there was a coup, that office closed. When I was there from 1986 to 1988, we had a lot of discussions about starting a Peace Corps program. We had people coming in to make surveys, and we may have actually had an office open towards the end of my tenure, but it was just getting barely off the ground at that time. It's certainly obviously closed since then, in light of the renewed fighting.

Q: What about the American missionaries? Did they play much of a role?

WILSON: They had been there for a long time. There were not as many there as I've seen elsewhere in Africa, but there were these odd familienot in the sense that they were odd people but there were just a few families scattered here and there in the north, principally working with the pygmy populations. We would see them as they would come through Brazzaville but they pretty much kept to themselves. They were not a real active part of Congolese life.

Q: Did tribalism play much of a role while you were there?

WILSON: Not when I was there. I think the heavy hand of the central administration was such that you didn't see much tribalism. It hadn't really reared its ugly head. That came about principally after I left when they got involved in the liberalization of the political sector. They had their national conference and brought all the political groups out of the woodwork. When they began to develop political parties in the Congo, most of the parties then grew up along tribal lines. That's not to say that there wasn't sort of tribalism; it just wasn't on the surface visible to the untrained Western eye. The marriage between Sassou and Antoinette, his wife, was essentially a marriage between the north and the south. He was an M'bochi from Oyo, and she was a Vili from Pointe Noire; so one was from the coast and one was from the north. The coastal politics were the politics of oil and wealth, because they owned all the oil. The M'bochi ran the military and the Vili had run commerce from the exterior historically, which also happened to be where the oil fields were. So there was a division there. This all got played out in Brazzaville which is Congo territory I guess. Essentially there were the three different ethnic groups and three political groupings that played out their rivalries in Brazzaville. Right before I got there, there had been some problems between the south and the north that had resulted in a couple of tribal leaders being thrown. The leader of the southern grouthe mayor of Pointe Noirhad been convicted of terrorism in a real public trial. It was on television everyday all day long. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison. He was later released and, as far as I know, is back in Pointe Noire. The people in Brazzaville became more active as Sassou opened up the political system.

Q: Did you feel that one of the jobs to get the Congo, Brazzaville off the "bad countries" list maintained by Department of State because it had certainly been there for some time?

WILSON: Yes, absolutely. We had had no relations with the Congo for a period of 10 or 12 yearsomething like that. Then we had had very modest relations with them. They were not bad enough to be hostile because the Congo just wasn't important enough to be hostile, but they were not friendly. We had a very small mission in a country which hosted a very large Soviet mission and where the Soviets really held sway. When I was there, it was at a time when the Congolese were reaching out and trying to improve their relationship with the United States; so one of our roles was to convey that desire to Washington and to convey then to the Congolese what it is that they needed to do if in fact they did want to get off our "bad countries" roster. Their involvement in the Angolan peace process was clearly a way of doing it. Since we had initialed the Brazzaville protocol in the fall shortly after I lefSeptember of 198and then we signed the New York Accords in December of 1988 or January 1989, Sassou returned to the United States and was able to meet with President Bush.. That was, I think, in recognition of their efforts to play a positive role in the solution of a regional problem. So to a certain extent we were successful in our efforts.

Q: Did you notice any diminution of Soviet efforts in that part of Africa but particularly in the Congo? This was the time of the Gorbachev reforms and perestroika and other things, so things were really changing in the Soviet Union. I'm not sure if they're hit yet, but was there any reflection of this?

WILSON: During the time that I was there, the DCM was the one who generally represented the U.S. embassy at Soviet functions; that dates back really to the invasion of Afghanistan. So both in Burundi and in the Congo I was the one who basically went and hung out at the Soviet receptions when they had all their military days or national days. I was the one who got to know the Soviets diplomatically through this. In fact, from 1987 on, it was pretty clear that the Soviet embassy was not getting the same sort of resources and the same sort of support that it had been getting. The number of Soviet personnel was down. Soviet activities in the country were down. Soviet interests in the Congo seemed to be waning. I think towards the end of my tenure therthat would be the 1987 1988 time frame, we began to see some signs that the Soviets were lowering their profile in that part of Africcertainly in the Congo. So, to a certain extent, the answer to your question is "yes," although it was not highly visible or dramatic. It's certainly a far different Russian presence in Africa now than it was when I was there; the change has been dramatic since then.

Q: Did you view the Chinese influence there as benign, hostile or what?

WILSON: The Chinese influence has always been of a different nature. The Chinese have a different way of looking at development assistance. They will offer you development projects but the projects are designed to show what the Chinese can do and generally involves a large Chinese worker presence. We would export expertise. The Chinese would export workers who build roads or build stadiums or build buildinge.g. National Assembly buildings. They were pretty good at that. Then their development people would stay in the country and bid on international projects. So if they had a development project to build a National Assembly, then they would bring 600 or 700 people over to do thaworkers that would build the National Assemblwho then they would stay on and bid on World Bank projects or on other international opportunities. They would establish a worker presence in the country, who pretty much stayed by themselves. They were autonomous. They were self sufficient. You rarely saw them in town except when they came in to sell vegetables or buy things at the store. Their diplomatic presence was significant but not in any way hostile. They didn't fight the Cold War against us the same way that the Soviets did. You could go to a Chinese reception and be treated nicely. You go to a Soviet reception and you would have to fight the "kitchen debate" with the Soviet Third Secretary who happened to be half smashed on vodka just because he thought that he would have a good Congolese audience to listen to him rant and rave. That happened to me several times. The Chinese were more polite. I always thought that the Chinese offered a pretty good "south south" type relationship to these African countries. They made products which were very cheap and the Africans provided a ready market for a lot of them. I've always thought that we ought to really worry more about the Chinese in Africa if we really care to maintain some influence or not to lose some of our influence. Today that might not be terribly important, but if you have a constellation of powers supporting China, including all of Africa, someday that might be important to protecting our interests in the international forum.

Q: Were the Libyans fishing on these waters at all?

WILSON: The Libyans had a very good relationship with the Congolese. There were some Libyan officers operating there under cover of a Libyan timber company. They were the ones who were the principal suspects in the planting of the bombs that went into the UTA airplane that crashed over Niger, along the Niger Chad border.

Q: That's the one that killed Bonnie Pugh?

WILSON: That's right. That bomb was planted in Brazzaville.

Q: Did the Brazzaville people do anything about it?

WILSON: I was gone when that happened. I know that the Libyans reduced their presence, but whether that was forced by the Congolese, I don't know.

Q: Is there anything else we should coveany other developments there? Any problems with the embassy personnel?

WILSON: No; we had a pretty good little embassy. Allen was there for the first year I was there, and theLen Shurtleff was there.

Q: Who?

WILSON: Len Shurtleff was there as ambassador the second year I was there. Actually the Congo was an interesting period for me because I was the one who was responsible for all the activities dealing with Angola; I'd be running back and forth between Bodion, who was working for Sassou, and the ambassador. We would meet two or three times a week, Sassou and Bodion and me. The ambassador and I would get together maybe once a month or once every six weeks to go over things and talk about what was happening on Angola. Then we would get the principalis together a couple times, a couple or three times, to discuss the situation. That was a lot of fun. Towards the end of that, Crocker's special assistant flew out to Brazzaville to see me. He was a guy by the name of Robert Cabelly. We went out to lunch, and he said, "Look, Crocker wants you to know that he thinks you've done a great job on this, and he wants to reward you by giving you any job you want. So what job would you like? I will carry back your wish to Crocker, and we'll make it happen." I said, "Well, the only thing I've every really wanted in the Foreign Service was to be the "Africa watcher" in our embassy in Paris. I've been in Africa now for the better part of 10 years, and I'd really like to follow events here from Paris." So Cabelly said, "All right, you've got it. Not a problem." He got on the airplane, and while he was flying back from Brazzaville to Washington... Remember that even in the 1980s, if you wanted to make a phone call to Washington, it often took three days; if you wanted to call Kinshasa, you would have to call through Paris and Brussels and back down to Kinshasa, which could take days as well.

Sometime before Cabelly returned to Washington, the wife of a good friend of mine, who was serving in New York, got a job in Paris working for USIA. She used to work for me in Pretoria. This friend calls up Crocker and says, "My wife just got a job in Paris. What can you do for me?" Crocker, not knowing that I wanted the job in Paris, said, "Not a problem. You can have the "Africa watch" job." When Cabelly got back to Washington, he told Crocker that I wanted that Paris job. Crocker said, "Damn. I've already given it away." So the booby prize for not having gotten the Paris job was Baghdad as DCM in 1988. That was the next job I had. Curiously, my friend, who was currently Deputy Chief of Mission in The Hague, has never forgiven me for having gotten Baghdad while he got Paris. He was slogging through the trenches in another Foreign Service job, a mid career job, while I'm sitting out in Baghdad on CNN virtually every day.

Q: Okay. Well, let's pick up on Baghdad then. In the first place, how did this hit you when you got told this?

WILSON: I had had on a number of assignments; this was one of those times in my career when I thought it was probably useful to get out of Africa. I'd been in Africa for a long time, and I needed to do something elsput my foot in some other bureau. I bid on Algiers, Kathmandu and maybe a half dozen other DCM jobs, because by this time it was pretty clear that "conal" niche was the DCM world more than the administrative world. I wasn't going to be "reconed" as a political officer. I had good DCM experiences. I'd spent five years as a DCM, so I bid on other DCM jobs. I didn't want to go back to Washington. I got a call, or a message, from my career development officer saying, "Look, you're in the running obviously for all these DCM jobs, but you ought to know that for Kathmandu there's 142 people who want to be the DCM there. For Algiers the ambassador hasn't yet been named, but the ambassador undoubtedly is going to want to take his or her own person. These are not sure things. But would you be interested in going to Baghdad?" Nobody's bidding on Baghdad. It was the middle of the Iran Iraq War. "Would you like us to put your name forward?" I thought about it, and concluded what the heck, why not. It might be very interesting. I said, "Sure. Put my name forward." I talked to the ambassador, and the match up between what she wanted and what I had to offer was pretty good. She wanted somebody with management experience.

Q: The ambassador?

WILSON: The ambassador was April Glaspie. She wanted somebody with management experience, somebody who'd help her take this embassy that had been sort of a backwater operation during the Iran Iraq War and make it, in the aftermath of the war, an embassy in an important Middle Eastern country at an important time. The Faustian deal was that, in exchange, she would teach me all there was to know about our role in the Middle East, in which I had no experience. She was, and is, a real master of Middle East. She knows it very, very well. She knows all the players. She knows all the issues backwards and forwards. So it was a great opportunity. I said "yes," not knowing that the Near East Bureau is an entity unto itself, which even if nobody bids on a DCM job in a place like Baghdad, resents the idea that an outsider would useful, particularly one who was not an Arabist. I went ahead and took the job, and had a hell of a time. It was a great job. But the day I received the official communication saying that I had been approved also was the day that the Herald Tribune headlines boldly stated that the missile war had resumed between Tehran and Baghdad. They were lobbing these scud missiles back and forth between the two capitals. We had with mixed feelings when we read the message assigning us to Baghdad.

Q: You had a wife and family?

WILSON: I had a wife. My kids were living in California, with their mother. They would come out every summer either to France or to the Congwherever we were.

I arrived in Baghdad on Labor Day of 1988 and left on January 12, 1991. I arrived at a time when Iran and Iraq had signed their cease fire as called for by UN Security Council Resolution 598 which was a step forward for negotiating their differences. So the two countries were not at war when I arrived, but the Iraq regime had just gassed its Kurdish population in the north and photos of that were just beginning to seep out into the international media. Saddam was under a fair amount of international criticism for gassing his own populatiocriticism well merited. We arrived at a very, very interesting time in the history of US Iraqi relations.

Q: In the first place, can you describe the embassy? What size was it and how did it operate? What was the state of relations?

WILSON: We had a pretty good presence in Iraq. We had an agricultural attachï¿½, we had a commercial office, we had a defense attachï¿½, we had a USIA office, and then we had the usual State functions. We were pretty well staffed up. We were located right along the river in a nice part of town. Our political focus was basically how do we deal with a very bellicose, thuggish regime in the aftermath of a 10 year war with Iran. Virtually everything that regime did was an affront to our own value system; yet it was an important player in Gulf politics and, as a consequence, in Arab politics, where its enormous wealth and power and military might made it a force to be reckoned with. All of our Arab friends in the region were telling us that Saddam was a changed man as a consequence of the Iran Iraq War and that we should not isolate him, but rather that our policy ought to embrace him and attempt to weave a cocoon of moderation around him, both to reinforce his new maturity after 10 years of war and also to encourage a continued move towards moderate and more expansive behavior. This was the Arab take on the situation, which showed in their relationships with him by and large, with the exception maybe of Kuwait which had a somewhat different slant on the situation. So to the extent to which we could, we tried to develop a relationship with was some substance to it.

With Iraq we had gone from 1967 to 1972 without having any presence in Baghdad whatsoever. From 1972, we'd had an interest section located in the Belgian embassy. We'd had one person staffing the interest section whom we raised to be chargï¿½ when we opened our embassy. Subsequently we elevated that position to the ambassador level through a series of moves throughout the 1980s. By the time April and I got there in 1988, we were looking at ways to actually put some meat on the bones of this relationship. The theory was that if we had something to lose and they had something to lose, there might be more incentives to try to find ways of accommodating our concerns on human rights and other issues. One of the tools in our diplomatic toolbag was agricultural credits, which was one of our major programs with Iraq. At the height of this program, we had extended about a billion dollars of commodity credits to Iraq which came under some criticism for being the second largest program in the world after Mexico. In fact, for one year, our Iraq program was larger than Mexico's.

At the same time that people were becoming critical and concerned about the size of the program, we were just then beginning to realize that we were actually getting more of a return on our investment every year than we were actually investing giving us a net advantage. The agricultural credits was one of the most important programs we had in place.

We also actively supported U.S. business efforts to help rebuild Iraq. Westinghouse, General Electric, everybody was in there trying to build up the infrastructurelectric grids, power plants, and things like that. Our relationship with Iraq was always tough. Shortly after I got there, we had people who wanted to travel around the country. To get permission to do that, they had to give the Iraqis three weeks' advance notice if they wanted to go beyond 25 miles outside of Baghdad; if permission was granted, then you had to be escorted or followed. One's freedom to poke around was inhibited in any way the Iraqis could do it. Iraq itself was probably one of the two most paranoid countries in the world, vying with North Korea for the number one spot. Yet it was a lot of fun.

The Iraqis were very interesting people. They have a finely honed sense of their own history. They have an intellectual class that is the equal of any intellectual class in any other society even at a time they lived under this truly brutal dictatorship. The markets were great to visithe kilims and the rugs and the copper and all the stuff that you could find in these places. Iraq is the heart of the Old Testament, with its ruins of Mesopotamia and Babylonia. It was interesting in that respect.

We were of interest to the Iraqis during this time because of our position on the UN Security Council. When I first got there, the Iraqis were embarked upon a campaign to persuade the Council of their positions on the issues related to the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 598. To persuade us of their position, we would be invited, or convoked, maybe once every couple of months to what amounted to a seminar on Persian hegemonic ambitions and designs over the previous 150 years. The Iraqis would get out their maps and show us how the Persians have been encroaching on the Shatt al Arab over literally the last 150 years; where the border was in 1850; where it was in 1910 and where the Iranians tried to redraw the bordehere, here and there. Much of the relationship between Iran and Iraq was often played out through the Kurds. There were Iranian Kurdish dissident groups supported in the northwest by the Iraqis. Some Iraqi Kurdish dissident groups were in exile in Iran supported by the Iranians and operating out of Iranian territory to try to undermine the Iraqi government. Politics within Iraq were always very interesting. We had the Shia in the south and the so called "Marsh Arabs" in southern Iraq. Of the three significant Shia shrines, one is in Baghdad and the two are in southern Iraq. It was an interesting mix, sort of conflicting alliance, with the Arab Shias, the Iranian Shias, the Kurds in the nortboth Iranian and Iraqi Kurds. All of that got played out in countries that were destabilized.

When I first got there, right after the end of the Iran Iraq War, the Iraqis had brought back to Baghdad war booty that they had captured at the front. In New Baghdad, they had created a fairgrounmiles upon milefor Iranian war booteverything from helmets with bullet holes in them to light weaponry to heavy equipment, tanks and armored personnel carriers, trucks, bulldozers and things like that. You could walk for miles up and down this field and see all this equipment that they had captured. It gave you a real sense of the enormity of the war. If you remember, between 1980 and 1990, we all got pretty numb to this land war that was going on and on and on. But once you got to Iraq and you were living in a country of 17 20 millionot counting the 1 million who had lost their lives in the previous decade on the Iran Iraq front. As Tariq Aziz said in one of the few truthful statements I ever heard him mutter, virtually every Iraqi family had somebody in their family who had been lost in the Iran Iraq War. It had been a terrible, terrible war for the Iraqi population, and you could see that. Saddam attempted to run a guns and butter economy. He wanted to pay a peace dividend to his country in terms of increased imports of products wanted by the population, but at the same time he wanted to maintain a significant military machine including 1 million soldiers at the front and another 1 million who were basically guarding the oil pipelines. That's a very significant military. He had already mortgaged a good part of his future prosecuting the Iran Iraq War, and his post war program required an additional debt burdethe money had to come from somewhere. Hence, as we approached 1990, tensions began to emerge between Iraq and Kuwait. Kuwait had been a major financier of the war effort; it had financed a lot of the war effort through loans rather than just grant funds for development assistance.

Q: What were you getting from your Iraqi contacts about the value of the war? Was anybody able to question it?

WILSON: Nobody would question the Saddam regime; it was not done in Irain polite Iraqi society. Saddam came to the presidency through the security apparatus, and, in his years of running the security apparatus, had created a number of concentric and overlapping circles of intelligence services. Some people estimated that perhaps there were as many as seven, some of which existed just to spy on the other ones. We used to say that, if you wanted to do your Iraqi friends a favor, the best thing you could do for them would be never to be seen with them. I have been told that very senior Iraqi officials would be invited to dinners by other Iraqis. The next day, the host Iraqis would have to go in and explain to the intelligence people what the senior officials had said at the dinneand these people were presumably close to the leadership. There was no open dialogue, real candid dialogue, on what the Iran Iraq War meant other than what the official word which was essentially that Iraq was defending the Arab worlin the broadest sense of the teragainst Persian hegemonic ambitions along the Shatt al Arab. Tariq used to say that, "We defended, with the blood of our sons, Arab independence against the Persian onslaught."

The Iraqis would take the spouses of ambassadors to some of the key battlefields and show them exactly how the battle had played out along the coast, for example. They went there and took pictures of what that battle was all about. That was one of the really big battles in the Iran Iraq War. You'd go down to Basra and see that along the waterfront of the Shatt al Arab there were statues of Iraqi generals who had given their lives in the Iran Iraq War. There were those who said that the Iraqi military pension policy was to give a general a bullet in the head about the same time you gave him his third or fourth star to prevent the development of a cadre of military officers who might form the nucleus of a threat for Saddam autocratic power; that was probably pretty accurate. There were a lot of generals who just disappeared or just died. It was a very brutal regime.

During the time that we were there, there were a number of interesting things that we did. Chevrolet came in and basically displaced Volkswagen as the automobile of choice in Iraq. The Iraqis all made it very clear that, despite the fact that we hadn't had relations with them for so many years, they were interested in having American products as opposed to those of other countries. In the two and a half years that I was there, the vehicle fleet literally turned over so that Chevrolets became the vehicle of choice in Iraqi society. These were Chevrolets made in Canada, although it's hard to, even in Iraqi minds as well as ours, to view a Chevrolet as a Canadian product. I used to say that if you had only one time to be in the Middle East and one place to be, this was the time and Iraq was the place, because it was involved in everything. They had just emerged from the Iran Iraq War. They were asserting themselves as a leader of the Arab League, and they were taking positions on the Arab Israeli conflict, as they always had beepositions that some U.S. Senators initially thought that might serve as a basis for moderation the position of the Arab states on Palestinian issues.

We had an inspection team look over our operation. Senator Larry Pressler came out a couple times to talk to them about various issues. Yasser Arafat would come to town all the time; he took refuge in Baghdad when he wasn't living somewhere else. His relationship with Saddam later almost cost the Palestinians any sort of power and authority in their quest.

One other interesting issue that we worked on during the first year or year and a half of my tour was Lebanon. The Iraqis saw Beirut and Lebanon as an opportunity to get back at Syria for what they viewed as Assad's betrayal of the Arab cause by the position he took on the Iran Iraq War. The Iraqis quite openly were sending these frog surface to surface missiles from Baghdad to Beirut through Aqaba. We actually intercepted a ship to keep it from landing in Beirut; it turned back. As April Glaspie pointed out to Tariq Aziz, the Iraqis found themselves in a very odd position as a tacit ally of Israel by supporting General Aoun in his efforts to keep Beirut free of Syrian interference. For the Iraqis it had nothing to do with Israel; it had much more to do with giving Assad a bloody nose and using Beirut as a way to do it. The road to Damascus from Baghdad went through Beirut.

Q: Were we getting a reading on what Saddam was up to? There was a quite a debate, as I recall it, over what his purpose was. He was going after major weapons systems, long range artillery and everything. Were we looking hard at that to try to figure out what this was all about?

WILSON: Yes, sure; we watched it very carefullas carefully as we could given the sort of meager resources at our disposal. We had an aggressive program to try and find out everything we could about his nuclear, chemical and biological weapons development programs. If he in fact had used chemical weapons, that was something of great concern. So we watched with great interest every time that they would come up with some reverse engineered type program. They came up with a cannon at one point; they had this long gun, which didn't work very well. It was fascinating to watch. We were not the most effective and we were certainly not the most aggressive in subverting what they were doing. I think the Israelis' intelligence services was ahead of us on that score. There were people who developed the big gun working with the Iraqis; they were found dead in odd places around Europe as they got closer to sort of realizing their goals. The Israelis, who had already blown up the Iraqi's nuclear reactor once, were watching developments very closely as well. We did everything we could, given our resources, to try and make sure that we had a handle on those programs. I'm not sure even to this day that we had a perfect understanding of what's going on, but we were certainly concerned about it and we followed it. We ran a lot of stuff at the time to keep tabs on what the Iraqis were doing internationally.

Q: Were there concerns about our relations with Irawe were too close or not. Was that an issue that was being played out in Washington?

WILSON: Clearly, when the Iraqis gassed the Kurds, that was a real problem for a lot of people including people up on the Hill. Claiborne Pell was Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at that time. He had a guy on his staff, Peter Galbraith, who later went on Zagreb as ambassador in the Clinton Administration, who was very concerned about what was happening in Iraq and what Saddam was doing. He and Pell brought a lot of pressure to bear, and they forced us to really think about the sort of relationship we were having with the Iraqis. We shared their concerns. We were under no illusions that this was anything other than a very brutal regime. The question was always which was the better approach. Was it to isolate them like we treated Libya and Cuba, or would it be better to develop a network of relations with them to encouraged moderate behavior because moderate behavior might lead to better relations? The aim was to discourage extremist behavior because those circumstances could potentially lose what we already achieved in terms of improving substantive relations, whether in the commercial or political areas.

We felt that a better approacand it was not just us; all our friends in the Arab world were counseling us the same wato an Iraq that was emerging from a terrible war with Iran, was to encourage moderation by developing a whole network of relationships that would benefit both parties. Those relationships would provide the anchor which would stabilize the relations as the political wind blew back and fortpolitical winds being generated principally by Iraq and Saddam. When he would arrest generals and shoot them, if we had a relationship that basically established constraints on Iraqi temptation to do something more outrageous, we would then be able to moderate their behavior over the long term; that was something that was just generally believed by the Arab world as well. I wouldn't say it was forced upon us, but I would say that to a large extent, the Arab counsel was to do that, and that counsel was accepted at the highest reaches of our government. So, even as we would produce these human rights report which were, I think, accurate in their depiction of Iraq as a brutal totalitarian regime, at the same time were we attempting to put into place policies and programs that would provide some substance to our relationship in the hopes that that would then moderate Iraqi behavior.

Q: When you got to Baghdad, how did April Glaspie use you? Could you all communicate with the government?

WILSON: First and foremost, April used me basically to be the chief operating officer in the embassy, although she was very much a hands on person herself. But I managed the operation in the sense of directly supervising all the elements and serving as the go between her and the staff. We put into place a large scale program designed to turn our embassy, in the aftermath of the Iraq Iran war, into a real embassy rather than an outpost on the front line of a major war. That involved coming up with new staffing patterns, coming up with a new budget, making significant equipment buys. We had the undersecretary for management come out and take a look at the sort of space we needed. We were negotiating a settlement with the Iraqi government on property that they had taken from uour old embassy of 20 years earlier worth about $35 40 million. We were looking to buy new property. We were going through all the classic stuff that one does when one is establishing a significant organization, including spending a fair amount of money to do so. That is what I spent much of my time on.

The other thing I did as DCM was to serve as counselor to the ambassador and to be her alter ego; she was very good about making us about as interchangeable as we could be. So I spent a lot of time with her learning about the Gulthe issues, the players, the position of the United States on issues, where the strength and weaknesses were in various positions, the role of the Arab League in politics, etc. This was material that I had to learn since I was in a region with which I was not been terribly familiar. In that respect it was a great learning experience. As I said earlier, the Iraqis helped on that because they had made it a goal of their policy to try and persuade us of their position on UN Security Council Resolution 590; we had a lot of exchanges with the Iraqis on those issues.

Q: That resolution dealt with what?

WILSON: That was the resolution that dealt with the aftermath of the Iran Iraq War. It provided the framework for the two parties to negotiate a peaceful settlement. So we had a lot of exchanges with the Iraqis literally from day one. I used to see everybody from Tariq Aziz on down.

Q: My understanding is that we had been helpful during the Iran Iraq War by supplying satellite information and things like that. Was there any residue of good will?

WILSON: No. The Iraqis always took the position that we never did anything that wasn't in our national interest and, therefore, we earned no brownie points with them for having done something that was totally in our own interest. On the other hand, we did earn a fair amount of criticism from the Iraqis whenever it was suggested that we had done something to benefit the Iranians. For example, at one point we were accused of having given the Iranians the Iraqi order of battlwhether done deliberately or through some loose talk that got into the newspapers. The Iraqis used to always accuse us of having favored the Iranians because of that. One of the early negotiations that we were involved had to do with a resolution of an Iraqi attack on a US destroyer cruiser, the Stark, during which 34 sailors had been killed or injured and which caused a significant amount of damage to the ship. We actually were able to negotiate the first payment of that. We negotiated with them and received some compensation.

Q: The Shah had had a hell a lot of American equipment, and Iraq had a lot of Soviet equipment. Were there any comparison made and lessons learned?

WILSON: To the extent to which the Iraqis learned any lessons, they learned the wrong ones. If they thought that by having held the Iranian military to a stalemate, they might somehow concluded that their equipment was as good as the Iranian American equipment. They were dead wrong. As we moved into the Gulf War, that was one of the things that we, the embassy in Baghdad, wanted to make sure that they understoothat this was not going to be a military action along the lines of the one that they had just fought against Irathis would be an entirely different war.

Q: You were the new boy on the block; so I guess you were asking a lot of questions. What was your impression of the military tactics of both sides during this war?

WILSON: The Iran Iraq War?

Q: Yes.

WILSON: Having gotten there after the last battle was fought, there wasn't a lot of sort of post mortems to be done. I guess principally the most sort of shocking and surprising result of the was the level of casualties and how a population of 17 million could take as many casualties.

Q: It sounds like the Battle of the Verdun played over.

WILSON: In fact, that's exactly right. I think that we really saw in the Iran Iraq War, a replay oWorld War I complete with mustard gas and rudimentary chemical weapons, and with trench warfare and sort of slogging it out on a front line forever and ever and ever with very little forward movemenno more than five kilometers one way or the other, during the course of the 10 years of the war. One thing became very clear. As we extrapolate the Iran Iraq conflict into the Gulf War, one of the real weaknesses of the Iraqi military tactics and strategy was their ability to have effective logistics. They could move their troops, but they couldn't get the logistic support to them. This became again very clear when they invaded Kuwait. They just couldn't go any further because they had outrun their supply lines. If you look at the Iran Iraq War, you can see that. They could get troops five miles down the road, but then they couldn't support their forward position.

Q: Dealing with the government, you mentioned Tariq Aziz. He had a whole series of positions while you were there. Who was he?

WILSON: Tariq was Foreign Minister at that time. Tariq is a very interesting character. He speaks very good English, although, as far as I know, he has never been educated outside Iraq. All his education was in Iraqi schools. As a Christian, Tariq had no independent political base whatsoever; he owed everything to Saddam; so he was kind of a loyal flunkil used to tell people that Tariq Aziz is somebody who is very bright and very articulatfar brighter and far more articulate than I will ever be - and very powerful through the authority that he got from Saddam. He used articulate the position of his government, his country, with great authority. Yet the bottom line on Tariq is what you say to yourself when you go to a used car locan you trust the salesman? In Tariq's case, you couldn't. I would never trust him particularly when we are talking about the Gulf War. I had some experiences with him that proved that I couldn't trust him.

Q: Was Tariq the person the embassy went through? Was there any direct contact with Saddam Hussein?

WILSON: Saddam almost never met an ambassador. When one presented his or her letters of accreditation, the letters were always taken by Izzat Ibrahim or by Yassin Ramadan, who were Saddam's two chief lieutenants. Saddam would meet ambassadors only when they were escorting distinguished visitors from their own country to a meeting that had been granted with Saddam. So the only times that we met Saddam during the two and a half years that I was there were either when people like Arlen Specter and other Senators came to Baghdad. John Kelly met one time with Saddam when he was assistant secretary of State. There were the two occasions for meetings with Saddam as events were leading up to the Gulf War : April Glaspie saw him on July 26th and then when I saw him 10 or 11 days later on August 6th. Those were the only two times that anybody can remember our meeting with him when we weren't escorting a VIP or a part of a Congressional delegation. Those two were the only one on one meetings. April might have met with him one other time, but I just don't remember.

Q: Where we able to tap into the mafia in the town of Tikrit?

WILSON: Most of our with Iraqis were in very formal channels, and most of our relations with the Iraqi government went through Nezar Hamdun. He was the undersecretary. He had been in Washington as the head of the Iraqi Interests section, then as ambassador, had returned to Baghdad to become the undersecretary. He was basically the guy that handled U.S. relations. So virtually everything that we had to do went through him first. We could then have a series of other relationships within the foreign ministry depending on the nature of the business. Our contacts would be with the protocol office or the desk officer or with Tariq occasionally or with the office director depending on the issue. Relations beyond that with the broader Iraqi community were very rare. We had some of it with Hussein Kamel, who was the minister of industry and military industrialization. He was Saddam's son in law who later fled to Jordan and then decided he could come back because he was told all was forgiven, only to return to be shot. We had some relationship with the minister of commerce and the minister of agriculture because of the specific programs that we were funding. But those relationships were very perfunctory, very formalistic and were not terribly authentic. As I said earlier, we had a saying at the embassy that the best thing that you could do for your Iraqi friends is never be seen with them. Normally, Iraqis could not come to our houses; only on very rare occasions did they show uprimarily those very few who had this permission to circulate in the broader international community. There were really only about a half a dozen of them, and you sort of had to wonder what their role in all of this was. But, by and large, there were really very, very fein fact, virtually nonmeaningful relationships that allowed us to actually sit with an Iraqi and talk about issues and get something other than the party line.

Q: What about the role of other embassies? Was it sort of like Moscow in the bad old days when everybody went to other embassies and asked what's going on and trying to share this information maybe?

WILSON: Because the contacts with Iraqis were so few and far between, the main avenue for gathering of information came by attending all National Day celebrations. There were 110 embassies, so there were 110 National Days. Because the Iraqis were a significant military power and had just fought a significant war, there were military attachï¿½s attached to all embassies. So depending on whether a country had one military day or whether each service had its own day, you would have another 110 odd military days. That meant than on 250 days of the year you were out at one reception or another. That was the way we figured out who was seeing whom and who was saying what to whom; there was a lot of gossip that went on in these receptions. Now we, as I mentioned earlier, because of the nature of our relationship with the Iraqis, were often the ones who were the providers of information on contacts with the Iraqis because we had lots of them. On the other hand, the Soviets had some very experienced hands assigned to Baghdad. As we moved to the Gulf War, this became increasingly the case especially with the emergence of Primakov, who was a close personal friend of Saddam. Their DCM, my counterpart, was a guy by the name of Sasha Kalugin, who was the son of Kalugin, the KGB guy who's written a couple books. Some other embassies that were particularly gooe.g the Egyptian embassy was very good because there were 4 million Egyptians in the country; so they had lots of contact.

Q: What were they doing?

WILSON: They were rebuilding Babylon; they were doing a lot of manual labor that the Iraqis didn't do anymore. They basically filled a void. As all Iraqis men became soldiers, Egyptians came in and did the road work. And the Turks were also active. The Turks had an ambassador there who's currently their ambassador in Paris. He went from Iraq to be the Turkish ambassador to the European Union in Strasbourg, and then he went to be the head of Turkish Central Intelligence organization and then to Paris. He was a very distinguished Turkish diplomat and a very savvy guy; they had a good embassy there. Because of the nature of their relationship with Iraqis, i.e., big trade back and forth across the border, they had lots of good information and lots of good insights into what was happening in Iraq.

Q: This was prior to the build up of the Gulf War. How about the Kurd situation? Were you following that?

WILSON: Yes, we followed it a lot. One of our key employees was a Kurd. His clan had been pretty much coopted by the Iraqi regime, but he was still able to give us a fair amount of insight into what was going on. The head of the Kurdish Democratic Party, KDP, was a good friend of ours. He was based in the mountains outside of Sulaymaniyah in Iraq; he used to come in fairly often and give us some good insight into what was going on up there. So we had pretty good Kurdish contacts. We couldn't get to their area as often as we wanted because of travel restrictions. I actually got up to the Iranian border during the second year of my tour when restrictions were loosening up; I got up to Ronya, Rawanduz and Sulaymaniyah and up to Mosul and Irbil, which are primarily Kurdish and Iraqi Christian towns in the north. We were able to follow Iraqi efforts to move the Kurds out of sensitive areas to other towns and historic villages. We would build other villages for them and things like that. So we followed that and we followed the various discussions that were going on between Kurdish groups and then between the Kurds and the Iraqi government as they were working through all their political issues. The Kurds, when they weren't fighting the Iraqis and the Arabs, were fighting each other.

Q: Did you have the classic problem of trying to establish relations with a brutal regime like Saddam's, while some junior officers were saying, "This is terrible?" I was just wondering whether you had this.

WILSON: I suppose to a certain extent we did. We didn't have that many junior officers who were qualified to be "bomb throwers." They were mostly first tour officers who didn't have enough experience to really be that. Baghdad was a tough post to fill; we had some people who may have been disgruntled for other reasons other than that. During my confirmation hearings for Gabon, I got nothing but questions on Iraq; all the questions related to how we approached the human rights issue. I could truthfully say that we were very clear eyed in our criticism of the brutality of the Iraqi regime, as stated in our annual human rights reports. I don't think that we were under any illusions that this was a good regime and that it was worthy of our magnanimity. On the other hand, we made a conscious decision that the best way to encourage future moderated behavior was to develop a network of relations based on our own interests and the commonly perceived interests both with Iraq and with the region. This position, I think, enabled us to a certain extent to ward off whatever criticism of the brutality of the regime there might have been. Now, there were instances when people were absolutely disgusted with what the Iraqis were doinwhether it was "PNGing" one of our employees or whether it was killing an Iranian journalist whose girlfriend happened also to be the girlfriend of one of our employees. There were incidents like that. Certainly there was general revulsion at the Iraqi regime but not a lot of opposition to what we were trying to accomplish with our approach.

So the basic tenets of our policy in the aftermath of the Iran Iraq War were to encourage Iraqi moderation through a series of incentives including the Agricultural Commodity Credit Program, commercial relations, etc. This policy was not developed unilaterally, but it was conceived with the support and advice of our Arab friends in the region who told us that Saddam had been through this bloody war and had moderated his approach. Even if he hadn't moderated, they thought that this was the best way to deal with this tiger in their midsto weave a commercial and trading and investment cocoon around him that created disincentives to lash out as he had done in the past. So that was what we did.

As I mentioned earlier, we did not hide or under report the really gross human rights violations. We were very clear about the travesties and excesses of the Iraqi regime. But the agreed upon approach was to try and moderate his behavior by encouraging him to behave correctly. Obviously it didn't work. Had it worked, we would have been hugely successful and we wouldn't have had the war.

Lets turn to the run up to the war with Kuwait, which started when the Iraqis began beating the war drums against Israel. There was a lot of talk in March April 1990. Saddam said in a speech that Iraq was prepared to set fire to half of Israel and burn it to the ground. That raised a lot of alarm bells in Washington as well as elsewhere. Nobody really quite understood what was causing him to act this way. The United States at that point decided that it wanted to calm down the rhetoric. It didn't want this escalating beyond control. We had been through a number of exercises with the Iraqis including, as I mentioned earlier, interdicting them from shipping frog surface to surface missiles to downtown Beirut. The Iraqis were increasingly aggressive in the region and they were being very bellicose in their rhetoric against Israel. They were beginning to put soldiers on maneuvers in the south. The word that was that this was preparatory to a sweep into Israel. That was apparently the word that Saddam was giving to his soldiers; i.e. that they were exercising in anticipation of an operation against Israel. On our recommendation, President Bush sent a delegation of American Senators including Bob Dole, Frank Murkowski of Alaska, McClure of Idaho, Metzenbaum of Ohio, and Allen Simpson of Wyoming. They came out during their Easter break. They went to Egypt and other countries. They came to Baghdad bearing a message to Saddam from the president which was, "Knock off the rhetoric. Israel is not planning to do anything against you, and all you're doing is escalating tensions in the region." The message wasn't delivered very well. They were very disappointed. I'll just cite you two examples. After Bob Dole had gone through his piece, Saddam repliein which he said, "I didn't really say I was going to set fire to half of Israel. What I said was that if they attacked me, then I will set fire to half of Israel." After his reply, Senator Metzenbaum leaned forward in his chair and he said "Mr. President, I can tell you're an honorable man." I remember this very distinctly because I was the notetaker at this meeting. Then Allen Simpson, who is about 6'7" or something like that, leaned forward in one of these low chairwhen he leaned forward it gave the impression he was getting on bended knee before this potentatsaid, "Mr. President, I can see that what you have here isn't really a policy problem. What you have is a public relations problem. You've got a problem with the press. I know all about that, because I've got problems with the press back home. What you need is you need a good press guy to insure that the message is as you want it to be." So you can imagine, Saddam is listening to these Senators say this, "You're an honorable man," and "Gee, you really don't have a policy problem." What he took away from that meeting was quite fair.

Q: At that point why was Saddam doing this? You said he'd done it before. Was this just a general keeping his people on boil?

WILSON: A number of things were happening. Saddam at the end of the Iran Iraq War did not demobilize; he was keeping his key troops under arms and he was keeping another million as a home guard to basically guard the pipeline. That was 2 million men out of a population of 17 million. You can assume that another million or so had either been killed or injured in the Iran Iraq War, so there was a very high percentage of the population under arms or involved in national defense, all of which is pretty costly. He was running a rearmament campaign on a "guns and butter" budget. He was attempting to provide all the goods that his country needed, and he was basically chronically short on cash and credit. He had mortgaged the future of his country for several years forward. We all realized that; so, I think in retrospect, that the rhetoric against Israel was largely camouflage to what his real intentions were, which was to get the Arabs to underwrite his "guns and butter budget." In terms of the maneuvers, that was also a deception: saying that they were maneuvering in anticipation of an invasion of Israel was a deception because they were maneuvering in the south obviously preparing for some sort of action on the Kuwaiti border.

Q: Wasn't there any dissension in Iraq on this stance ? The Israelis were not exactly a target that you wanted to overemphasize that you were going to do something about.

WILSON: But they were a natural target for the Iraqis because of the Israelis attack on the Iraqi nuclear plant several years earlier. They were, in light of their situation in the region, a natural external enemy in the absence of other external enemies. I think the idea was to keep the tension level high in order try to get other Arabs to underwrite the "gunand butter" budgekeep people thinking about Iraq as a threat, so that there would be concessions made to it. The Iraqis were hoping to keep people outside of the region thinking of it as a threat to Israel in the hopes that they would react in a diplomatic way as opposed to a military way. Of course, all the Arabs were telling us through all this, "Don't do anything to provoke him, because all this is bluster." This became even more apparent when Saddam turned his sights on Kuwait. In the March April time frame, there was a lot of movement of material to the south. The Turks in particular, who had the best information in the country because they had so many trading relationships, were beginning to sense that there would be another war in the region and they were anticipating that it might be against Kuwait. The IraqKuwait was relationships was beset by a number of issues: forgiveness of Iraqi debt to Kuwait, increases in Kuwaiti aid to Iraq, Kuwaiti adherence to the OPEC imposed quotas to maintain the price of petroleum at a high leveallowing Iraq to realize more benefit from the export of its own petroleum. Kuwait had stopped slant drilling in one of the southern oil fields along the border between Kuwait and Iraq.

Q: You might explain why slant drilling was a problem.

WILSON: They were drilling from Kuwait territory into oil that Iraq thought belonged to iacross the border basically. Iraq was looking at its southern frontier. It realized that it was going to be a long time, if ever, before it could ever use Basra again as its principal outlet to the Gulf despite the fact that it had built a huge port facility in a place called Um Kasr which was maybe 20 or 25 miles to the west of Basra situated on a very narrow part of the Gulf. At the other side of this narrow strip of Iraq was Kuwaiti territory. At the opening to the Gulf stood two islandBubiyan and Warba. The Iraqis wanted Kuwait to give the Iraqis the right to garrison troops on that side of the outlet to enhance their security of the port and access to the Gulf.

This all came to a head in July when the Iraqis sent a delegation either Jeddah or Riyadh to meet a Kuwaiti delegation to negotiate an agreement on all outstanding issues. The Iraqis sent down Ali Hassan Al-Tikriti, who was known for overseeing the gassing of the Kurds in the northe was called "the butcher of Kurdistan." Later he became known, when he was the temporary governor of the 19th Province, i.e., Kuwait, when it was annexed to Iraq, as "the butcher of Kuwait." What a terrible man. He was one of the members of the delegation. The other members were Izzat Ibrahim, who was number two or number three in the regime. He is kind of titular head, under Saddam, of the Baath Party apparatus. They also sent Yassin Ramadan, who also was quite a thug.

Q: Were these all more or less from this one town?

WILSON: They've all were tied to Saddam from the very beginning. Ali Hassan Al-Tikriti is from Tikrit. I am not sure where the others came from.

Q: But still it was...

WILSON: This was the "A" team. If the Kuwaitis had understood the situation properly, they would have realized that the Iraqis were giving them an ultimatum; they were not coming to negotiate. During this period we noticed troop movements and the movement of tanks on rail cars to the south. Everybody was getting very nervous. There was a lot of back and forth with Washington about what actions we should take. The Arab League met in late July. Preparatory to that meeting, Arab leaders told us not to do anything because they would solve the problem; they insisted that Saddam was bluffing, and that if we made any moves, we ran the risk of provoking Saddam into taking those actions which we wanted to avoid. The Arab states wanted us to let them take the lead on dealing with Saddam's activities.

Q: Were relations such that you were meeting Iraqis to say, "Hey, you'd better watch out," or give them some warning?

WILSON: As I mentioned, we met with Saddam in April with when Dole and his delegation came to Baghdad. Dole went in and delivered a message. We met with Iraqi officials on a regular basis at the foreign ministry and particularly we'd meet Nezar Hamdun, who was then the undersecretary. At all those meetings we were basically briefed on the issues I just outlined and were told that the Iraqis were going to continue negotiating.

On July 25th or 26th, April Glaspie was scheduled to go talk to the foreign minister. She went over to the foreign ministry, but was then put into a car and taken over to the president's office to meet Saddam. During the course of that meeting, Saddam said to her, "We will not take any action military so long as there is a negotiation process ongoing." Just before the meeting began, Saddam was called out of his office to take a phone call from President Mubarak. He took the phone call from Mubarak, and then came out and told April wasn't there; this is how it was reported back to mthat he had just told Mubarak that there would be no military action as long as the diplomatic process was ongoing. That was July 25th or 26th. As I said, all the Arabs were telling us this was a bluff. Saddam had told both us and Mubarak on the same day at essentially the same time that he wasn't going to take military action. The Arabs were telling us not to do anything.

We were getting nervous. We went cabled Washington to ask for another presidential letter to Saddam requesting him to lower the tension level. During the course of the meeting I just mentioned, of course, April Glaspie told Saddam what American policy had been vis ï¿½ vis the Arab borders since the beginning of the division of the Arab region into the nation states; i.e. that the United States doesn't take a position on the merits of a particular border dispute but wants only that such disputes be resolved diplomatically or through international arbitration. That had been the U.S. position; it had been the Western position, and it had been most everybody's position since the beginning. Glaspie has often been criticized afterwards for not having given Saddam the "stop sign." The Iraqis, in the person of Tariq Aziz, would tell you, and have done so publicly, that they didn't call April Glaspie in to ask for a green, yellow or red light; they were not looking for that and that they understood perfectly what she was saying because that had been American policy. They took their decision based upon the failure of negotiations and not on the U.S. position. At the same time, we received President Bush's letter to give to Saddam which she delivered. The next day or a couple of days later, John Kelly, the assistant secretary of State for the Near East, appears before the House International Relations Committee. I think it was the whole Committenot a subcommittebecause the session was chaired by Lee Hamiltoand it was a public session. During the course of the that session Lee Hamilton asked a question to which he obviously already knew the answeor he could have found the answer by asking the Congressional Research Service. The question was: "Do we have a mutual defense pact with Kuwait that would obligate us to come to their defense in the event they were invaded by Iraq?" John Kelly gave the correct answer, which was: "No, we don't."

Q: Was it the feeling that Hamilton wanted to emphasize this; that's why he asked the question?

WILSON: I doubt that that was his intent.

Q: It was the wrong question.

WILSON: It was the wrong question to ask in public session, very clearly. For those who point fingers at who lost Kuwait, to me that was the defining moment because the U.S. Congress forced the U.S. Executive Branch to say that we have no legal obligation to come to the defense of Kuwait in the event of an invasion by Iraq. That was far more than anything that April Glaspie might said in her meeting with Saddam Hussein. As I have told people in the Bush I administration later, "What would you have had her say? We're going to bring the B52s over and bomb you back to the stone age if you invade Kuwait." That clearly would have exceeded her instructions if she had gone any further than she actually went.

Then Kelly testifies. His testimony goes all over the world at sort of lickety split speed. April by this time has left Baghdad. She left the day after she met with Saddam on a long planned leave which included home leave, medical leave for both her and her aged mother who was living with her at the time as well as consultations in Washington. This was consistent with what other diplomatic missions were doing. Most ambassadors were out of town during the months of July and August, and indeed at the time of the invasion of Kuwait almost all of them were out of town.

Q: Was there any discussion about whether this was a good time to leave?

WILSON: Certainly, yes. There was a lot of discussion; there was lots of back and forth between the embassy and the State Department. At the end this assessment, everybody was convinced that Saddam was bluffing and therefore April should do what she had to planned to do, which included consultations in Washington.

Q: You were essentially an "African hand." This was what you had been doing. Did you feel yourself trying to figure out what the Arab mind was and what they might be thinking? Did you kind of wonder what were these people thinking about, or did our Arab experts give you getting a pretty good reading?

WILSON: First of all, the Iraqi is not like any other Arab. He is not Levantine and he is not Gulf dweller. The Turks in one of their old dictionaries used to define arrogance as in to 'walk like a Baghdadi.' They are very direct. They are not circumspect in the same way that Gulf Arabs are, nor are they deceptively friendly as the Levantines are. Secondly, by this time, I had already been dealing with the Iraqis for a couple years on issues ranging from the Iran Iraq War to Arab Israelis issues to their activities in Lebanon. We had had some considerable success in stopping the shipment of the "frogs" to downtown Beirut.

Q: "Frogs" being...

WILSON: Being the surface to surface missiles that they hoped the Lebanese would use to inflict some damage on Syria by using Beirut as the battleground. So in some respects, the Iraqis were in this odd, tacit alliance with Israel. They were both supporting a Christian faction which was hunkered down in downtown Beirut, against the various forces. Aoun, being a Mennonite Christian, was fighting against the Syrian forces and the various other Lebanese groups. They were involved in the latter phases of the Lebanese civil war. The Iraqis wanted to seize this opportunity to ship some from surface to surface missiles that then could be used to attack Syrian interests in Beirut. We stopped that, and by stopping that we allowed the Lebanese presidential succession to go forward. Unfortunately, the President Mowad was blown up in a car bomb during his inaugural parade.

To answer your previous question, I felt that, while understanding the Iraqis was a huge problem, it was not one where I felt disadvantaged because I hadn't spent 20 years in the Arab world. It was one where we all were at a relative disadvantage because nobody had been down this road before.

Q: Including the other Arabs.

WILSON: The Iraqis had been through their war with Iran, and so the Iraqis had an advantage; they knew exactly where they were goinat least Saddam did. So I didn't feel terribly disadvantaged in this. At the end of the day, I actually think the African experience held me in better stead than most other if, by comparison, one looked at some of my European colleagues or at some of my colleagues who had spent most of their careers in Europe. The reason is that in Africa, as in Iraq and other parts of the Middle East, relationships are largely personal. European and American relationships are largely bureaucratic and institutional. So if you've accustomed to managing aspects of an institutional relationship, the experience that you bring to an intensely personal type negotiation are far different from those that would come from having worked in a series of countries where the personal relationships were really very important. I had already worked on pretty significant issues, in Central Africi.e. the Angolan peace process which was diplomacy at the highest level, with presidents of various countries on a regular basis. I think that that particular experience actually served me well in Iraq and more than made up for the relative lack of experience in the Arab world. Again, by the time of the Gulf War, I had spent two years in the Arab world working with one of our most highly respected ArabistApril Glaspie

Q: One other question: Somehow or another there was talk about us having an air refueling exercise. Could you mention what that was?

WILSON: Sure. At the time that John Kelly testified, the decision was finally made that we needed to do something to "show the flag" in the regiowe needed to express our concerns in a way that went beyond the Glaspie meeting with Saddam Hussein. So the decision was made with the Bahrainians to conduct a refueling exercise. We launched into the air a couple of our tankers in the region and we flew them around the Gulf off the coast of Bahrain to refuel aircraft for a couple days. That was a widely publicized joint military exercise that we were undertaking with the Bahrainian armed forces designed really to signal that we were present in the Gulf and that we were concerned. At the same time, it was designed not to be provocative in the sense that we were not seen to be moving troops into the region in anticipation of an Iraqi move.

Q: At this point were you talking to Chas Freeman or was there any talk, particularly with the Saudis, about problems?

WILSON: Sure. Chas will have his own take on this because he was in Riyadh talking to the Saudis. We were pretty busy just dealing with the Iraqis, but clearly all the Arabs, all the key Arab leaders, were indicating to us through every channel available that we should do nothing provocative. That message was coming through loud and clear.

I think the lesson in that should not be lost on anybody. Fundamentally in a situation like that, you're put in a position where a non Iraqi state would have to absorb the first blow. Somebody has to absorb the first blow before we could react. As I have said, the advice from other Arab and other states was that Saddam was bluffing; our own intelligence assessments up until about 18 hours before the actual invasion of Kuwait, were inconclusive. We saw the massing of the troops; we saw the logistical support moving south; we saw the establishment of supply lines, etc., but none of the various indicators that would lead an analyst to determine conclusively that the Iraqis were going to invade Kuwait turned positive until very shortly before the invasioso shortly, in fact, that it was really only a matter of hours before information that caused the analysts to reach the conclusion that Iraqis were going to invade became known to policy makers like Bob Kimmit and people in the office of the undersecretary for political affairs.

Now, the night before the invasion, which would have been the night of August 1st or August 2nd, I was having dinner with an Arab who served as Saddam's principal arms purchaser in Paris. He was the one who arranged all the purchase of French arms that the Iraqis had bought including, I'm sure, the missile system used to hit a U.S. Navy ship, the USS Stark, several years earlier before during the Iran Iraq War.

This dinner was a significant event, so I will describe it to you. It took place in the middle of the Arabian summeit must have been 120 degrees outsidlate in an afternoo5:30 or six o'clock. When we walked into his houswhich felt freezing to 45/50 degrees. It probably was warmer than that. It was probably 65% or 70%, but it was about cool as you could possibly get a house in that time of day. Our host had a fireplace in the house which had roaring fire blazing in it. There was a white baby grand piano in the corner, sheer white, and somebody was playing classical music on it. At the dinner there was just my wife and myself and our host and his wife and his four bodyguards. The dinner went from about six o'clock to when we finally got up from the tablprobably about 9:30 p.m or 10 p.m o'clock. It was a classic Arab meal during which you end up eating forever and then, as soon as the meal is over, you get up and leave, if you can still walk. During the course of the evening, we discussed virtually every problem on the global scene. It was one of the those wide ranging discussions. We touched on the Arab world, we touched on the Baath Party, we touched on alliances, we touched on Arab relations with the West, we did Arab Israeli affairs. The only issue we didn't touch was Kuwait. At this time down in Tayib the negotiations had already broken down and the Iraqi team had returned.

Q: Tayib being a town in...

WILSON: In Saudi Arabia, where the negotiations had taken place. We left about and got home and went to bed. At about 2:30 a.m. the phone rings. My house was not chilled to 55 degrees, so generally I slept naked. I jump out of bethe phone's on the other side of the roostumble across the room, trip over my dog who was sleeping at the foot of the bed. The dog starts barking, I'm grappling for the phone. I finally picked up the phone, and listened to the voice on the other enone of the security guards at the embasssaying: "Sir, I have the White House on the line." I was at that time the charge'Glaspie having left for leave. My immediate reaction was, "My God, the president of the United States is calling." I did what any patriotic American would do. I stood at attention and saluted and waited for the president, my president, to come on the phone. You can just have the image of me standing stark naked at 2:30 in the morning saluting this phone, while my dog was barking in the background, waiting for the president of the United States to come on the line; it is a picture that I will not soon forget. Then, of course, the line went dead and nobody came on. By that time I had kind of gathered my wits about me and I realized that, one, it probably wasn't really the president of the United States calling me and, two, I wasn't going to call the White House in the absence of knowing precisely who had called. I called the National Security Council staffer, Sandy Charles; she told me that the Iraqis had just invaded Kuwait and that our ambassador in Kuwait City was reporting that there was gunfire there and that they were seeing troops which, in fact, had circled the embassy. So I said, "Fine." I called Nat down in Kuwait, got him on the phone, and we had just started chatting when they cut the lines.

After that point I could not get an international line to call out. The Iraqis, who were very good at this and had done this during the Iran Iraq War, had basically unplugged one of the most modern telecommunications systems at the time and forced all people then to go through operators to get international calls. I took a shower and got dressed, and went to the office. By about 7:30 or eight o'clock in the morning, I was over at the foreign ministry with Tariq Aziz as soon as he got in. I had no instructions at that time; I was relying principally on what I assumed the American message in this instance would be.

Q: Which was?

WILSON: The message to Iraq was that, "What you have done is inconsistent with commitments that your president made to April Glaspie. It's inconsistent with the Charter of the United Nations; it's inconsistent with the Arab League Charter, and it's inconsistent with the draft Iraqi Constitution, all of which said in one degree or another that "thou shall not invade thy neighbor to resolve border disputes." Tariq, who for perhaps the only time during the whole time I knew him, was less than fully eloquent; he seemed a bit confused and appeared to me to be improvising He replied that Saddam's commitment to April Glaspie was that the Iraqis would not take military action so long as there was a negotiating process ongoing, and that, since, the negotiations had failed in Tayib, the military option was open to the Iraqis. I replied to Tariq that he knew better than I that one failed negotiating session does not a failed process make. He knew that very well because there had been in a series of failed negotiating sessions since the conclusion of the Iran Iraq War and the implementation of Security Council Resolution 598, which was the governing resolution to bring about the cease fire in the Iran Iraq War. They should not have concluded from a failed session in Tayib that the process itself had failed. Then I said to him that, insofar as we now had Iraqi troops surrounding our embassy in Kuwait City and throughout Kuwait and we had the U.S. Navy, which was still patrolling the Persian Gulf guaranteeing some sort of security in the Gulf for tankers navigating those waters, that it behooved us both to insure that we did everything in our power to minimize the potential for accidents between our forces in the region. I suggested that one of the ways we could do that would be to have direct contact between our respective embassies and our respective capitals. I asked him to restore my direct line from the embassy compound to Washington. Much to surprise, in about three hours they had done it. In life one takes the minor victories when one can get them. So within three hours we had our telephones up and running again.

Q: Were you getting any communications through the cable system or anything like that at this point or were things happening so fast?

WILSON: Thing were happening very fasso fast that when I went to see Tariq, it was before I had received any instructions from Washington. When I went to see Tariq about eight o'clock in the morning, it would have been about midnight Washington time. When the Iraqis invaded Kuwait and I heard about it, it was about two o'clock in the morning, which would have been about six, I guess, in the evening Washington timeight hours earlier. So very little time had passed. We were able to test our satellite phone. We had a radio telephone that allowed us to communicate, but had to go to the communications center and they were to go up to...

Q: This was sort of brand new technology, wasn't it?

WILSON: Actually this was old technology. This was before the satellite phone that we see now. This was a radio phonessentially a ham radio type operation. We also had our communications hook up for cable traffic. This was before the age of e mail. I was flying pretty much on my own when I went to see Tariq. I came back and reported that conversation. We then got the telephone connection re established tying us in on a 24 hour a day department's operations center, which housed an emergency task force on the Middle East crisis.

In the first hours after the invasion, the president, as one of his first decisions, issued an executive order basically stopping all commercial trade and imposing sanctions on all transactions between Iraq and the United States. In order to get a waiver from these sanctions, one had to go to the Office of Foreign Asset Control, an office that is part of the Treasury Department. That resulted for example in every time there was a shift change aAT&and to a certain extent I have to imagine this, because I was sitting out in Baghdaour telephone connection with the Department of State would go down. That mean that every eight hourthe length of the shifwe would have to send off a flurry of cables asking for these telephone lines the be reinstituted. After a couple hours the lines would come back up.

Q: This was an American company responding the presidential mandate by cutting its service off.

WILSON: This was an American company. My sense of how this would have happened, if you want to try and visualize the process, you would have a shift change, which meant that a new person would come in to control commercial transactions; he or she would look at the clipboard and notice that the line between Iraq and Washington was operational. As he or she understood the executive order, that was prohibited and so they would then instruct that the line be cut. It took three days to sort this out. The Department of State then had to go to the Department of Treasury, Office of Foreign Asset Control, to get a waiver which could be taken to AT&T which finally allowed the line to be re established and not be cut every time there was a shift change. That was one of the little hiccups early on with which we had to deal.

The other thinand I think that this sort of set the tone for our relationship with Washingtowas that we understood from early on was that if we didn't control the action in Baghdad, Washington would control it from Washington. We did everything we could do to be proactive. For example, I went to see Tariq Aziz and I laid a lot of our concerns. After that we sent in a number of recommendations and took a number of security related actions. We painted the windows white; we enhanced our security; we moved people into various compounds so that they weren't spread all over the citthings like that.

Q: I remember when I was in Saudi Arabia in 1958, an Iraqi mob had almost literally torn a few innocent Americans apart. Was that sort of thing on your minIraqi mobs or something...

WILSON: We got to that point but not quite then. We were initially doing everything that we could to get everybody together in the event that we had to evacuate. We hadn't scoped out the mob scenario just yet because we didn't have timwe didn't have the luxury of sitting down and doing that, although we did that on the third day, and I'll get to that.

Q: One other thing: When you were talking to Tariq Aziz, was there still a doubt in your mind of what the Iraqis were after?

WILSON: Yes. In the early days there was a sense that the Iraqis were intent on punishing Kuwait and to take what they needed from Kuwait, after which we thought that they would probably withdraw. The evolution of the 19th Province strategy and the transferring of the border to the hills just north of Kuwait didn't occur until the ensuing days. We're talking about August 2nd now, and all that didn't really come to pass until August 6th.

In addition to enhancing our security posture, we did the" burn down" we burned down to about five minutes. We did everything we could. We had a number of Americans who were hiding in Kuwait. There was a little 13 year old girl who had been on an airplane that had been stuck in the Kuwait City airport at the time of the invasion and was captured by the Iraqis. She was traveling alone going from father or mother to father or mother in India from San Francisco. We were trying to account for all the missing American citizens. We were trying to find her particularly because she had disappeared somewhere in the midst of all this. We were trying to locate Americans everywhere; we did a very comprehensive early report on steps that we had taken and what we intended to do, and we sent that back to Washington the first day.

Q: I don't mean to over interrupt, but I think in your desire to be pro activahead of the gamWashington will generally agree with you. Otherwise the concern is that Washington might be telling you things to do which might not make sense.

WILSON: That's absolute right. If you have the pen in hand and you draft what you think is the right thing to do, Washington will essentially edit from your piece of paper. They will sing from your music or they will change your music, but essentially it's your music that they're playing.

Q: Whoever writes the agenda controls the situation.

WILSON: That's right, and this became very clear in the first National Security Council meeting. I was told that by John Kelly, who was then the assistant secretary of State for NEA. The first National Security CounciSecretaries of State, Defense, Treasury, CIA director and a few othermeeting was chaired by President Bush himself. Kelly was there. Kelly said that in this first meeting the president was kind of brainstorming with the principals. The president was sitting up there being presidential and ruminating about what to do. He has made his line in the sand argumenl guess it was 'line in the sand' or 'this will not stand,' whatever it waand somebody leans forwarKelly claims it was him and it probably waand says to the president of the United States, "Mr. President, if you look at your executive summary here, you'll see that a lot of these things you're suggesting we do Joe Wilson has already done. It's right there in front of you." And that, according to Kelly, gave me enormous credibility, and gave the embassy enormous credibility in Washington as a functioning operation which could be counted on. That made us sort of insiders for all of what went on afterwards. I was told by David Welch, who is soon to be our ambassador to Egypt but was at the time on the National Security Council staff in charge of Near Eastern and South Asian affairs, that in subsequent meetings, the next three or four meetings while they were still doing the planning and thinking about next steps, every time somebody would come up with an idea, President Bush would say, "What does Joe Wilson think about this?" Now, that's a two edged sword. In Washington nobody really cares what they think about in the field, and to be reminded by the president every time someone comes up with an idea it has to be run it by Joe Wilson, is not something that appeals to a lot of power players in Washington.

That gets us up to the first days of the invasion. As I said, early on we actually were able to move people into a few locations. We were able to make plans for evacuation and drawdown of American citizens. We found the little 13 year old girl and were able to get her evacuated in the first group.

Q: How did you do that? You went to the Iraqis...

WILSON: I went to the Iraqis and said, "You just have to give her to us," and they did. The Iraqis had closed all borders. We made our plans to evacuate people by land to Jordan; that required us give the Iraqis ten days' advance notice, which was what we normally had to do anyway to get permission to move outside of a 25 mile area around Baghdad. In the midst of all this, one of my communicators died of a brain hemorrhage. He was a TCU [Technical Communications unit]. He was a guy who was very, very popular in the community. So at a time when everybody's emotions were running very high anyway, somebody who had meant a lot to many people in the embassy died of a brain hemorrhage, and we couldn't get the body out.

We were able to get the body moved over to a storage area. It wasn't a morgue because in the Arab world you bury the dead within 24 hours and you don't embalm. They don't have the same sort of facilities that we have in our worlfundamentally it was an ice chest in some downtown establishment. I went over and checked the body. We made arrangements to keep it housed there. We got everything ready to put it in a coffin that met international standards, which is something that I've always insisted at every embassy I've gone ti.e. that there be the necessary equipment to use when an American dies overseas, because I had spent most of my career in Third World countries and at every one of my posts somebody has died. You have to have body bags; you have to have internationally approved coffins so that you can ship the bodies home and stuff like that. We had done that, so we were prepared for this eventuality. But there were no planes flying in and out.

At the same time we also had an American who had been picked up by the Iraqis. He had also died of a heart attack. Those were our only two casualties during the whole crisis. We had these two bodies and we were able to make arrangements for them to be transported out of the country. I can't remember exactly what we did. It must have been a flight. Either we chartered a flight or there was a flight going to Jordan or something. But in the midst of all this, we had to come to grips with the community's grief. There was no English speaking priest in Baghdad. There was an Anglican Church, and the person who ran it was sort of a lay pastor; he was a wonderful. I contacted him, and we brought him over to the embassy, and we invited everybody for a memorial service in our courtyard. We had a memorial service and the pastor struck just the right tone. We took a half hour; we got all our nationals and we got all the Americans who wanted to come, and I said a few words and then turned it over to the pastor who conducted a service. We all took a half hour to grieve our colleague who had passed away and then went back to work.

At this time we were working literally 20/22 hours a day trying to get all our plans ready and to contact everyone. Every night I was getting calls at one o'clock in the morning saying that Nat Howell had just reported to the Department of State that Iraqi troops had amassed around the embassy compound and that they were in a formation that suggested that they were going to come over the walls and take the embassy. I would go over to the foreign ministry, flag flying on my car, go in the back door, go see Nezar Hamdun and report this to him and tell him, "Don't do it." A couple of hours later I'd get a call at home waking me up, and it would be Nezar telling me that a higher authority had just told hithat higher authority being Saddathat I should not worry; they weren't going to invade. I would relay that back to Washington, and an hour later or so Washington would report back to me that in fact the Iraqi troops had backed off from the embassy compound. This went on every night for several nights. We were not getting any sleep.

We had all our dependents still in Baghdad, so that we were having to deal with a lot the family issues. We had people stuck Kuwait, and it was pretty hectic. Iraqi courts were rounding up American citizens and making them hostages. On the fourth of August, I guess it was, they brought up a bunch of Americans out of Kuwaithey had been captured there during the invasion; they put them in one of the hotels in Baghdad. I went over to try to see them. They wouldn't let me see any of them. I was prepared to call a hostage a hostage and I called Washington. By that time we also had a few of the press people coming in. I called Washington and talked to Bob Kimmit about it. Kimmit was very reluctant at the time to...

Q: Kimmit being...

WILSON: He was the undersecretary for political affairs at the time. He was reluctanand I think that he reflected accurately the administration's positioto refer to them as hostages until the situation became clearer. I think there was a sense that, if we started referring to them as hostages, Saddam might get the idea that he ought to really take them hostage; on the other hand, the situation was still in such a state of flux that perhaps they would released at an appropriate time. The only one they did release was the young girl. Most of the rest of them were roughnecks. They were guys who worked for a Santa Fe oil company and a couple of the other oil companies who were working in the Kuwait oil fields. Then there were some Americans that they had pulled in off the streets and some that they had gotten off of airplanes.

Q: You were in a way fortunate. August in the Persian Gulf - I speak as someone who has spent three Augusts in the Persian Gulis not the greatest time. People get the hell out of there.

WILSON: That's exactly right. In fact, we had always used the number 2,000 as an estimate of how many Americans were in Kuwait; it turned out to be far fewer.

It is now about the fifth of August. We've had a lot of back and forth with Washington. The phone service had been restored. Dan Rather came into town. So did Ted Koppel and Forrest Sawyer.

Q: You might explain who they were.

WILSON: Forrest Sawyer was a correspondent with CBS. Ted Koppel was the host oABC's "Nightline" and one of their key newsman. Dan Rather at that time was the anchor for the CBS "Evening News." Forrest Sawyer was in first in, followed by Koppel, followed by Rather. When the first one came in, we put them up in our executive suitan office that was often empty. When we were inundated by the press corps, they all came to us and said, "We need to file our stories, and we can't file from any of the hotels because you can't get a direct line." Even then the technology was such that you could file directly from your computer through a telephone line to your home office if you could get a direct line. We were the only ones who had a direct line. So we converted our USIS Cultural Center into a press office and allowed the American press in particular but the international press also to set up shop there to file from there. We tried to set up a way to account for it, although I don't think that was ever run terribly well. It was important to us, we thought, that the story be covered fully from Iraq from the beginning. The more information that got out from Baghdad, the better off we all were, and as a consequence, I made myself available to the press on a regular basis. As I said, we housed the press initially in our executive office. After a few days, we decided that perhaps it was not so smart to have them quite that close where they could observe all of our inner workings.

The next big day in all of this was August 6th. When I arrived at the office, I was told to be at the foreign ministry at 10 o'clock or 10:30. I went with my political officer, Nancy Johnson. We went to Tariq Aziz's office and, lo and behold, were told that we would meet Saddam. As I may have mentioned earlier, Saddam never met chiefs of mission alone. He would meet them in the context of the foreign representative escorting an exalted political visitor, but he would not meet to discuss substance. He would not meet them to receive their credentials. Those chores were all delegated. So for him to have met with April Glaspie on the 25th or 26th of July and me on the sixth of August was unprecedented.

In retrospect, I conclude that the reason he gave the United States so much personal attention was because in his own calculations he did not fear not an international reaction to the Kuwait invasion, but he did fear a unilateral American reaction; he feared that the United States might react unilaterally. That was quite clear from my meeting with him that day. The meeting was attended by Nancy and myself, and Saddam, his translator, Zuveral Zubeti, Nezar Hamdun, Tariq Aziz, and a few others. We saw Mouza Houwi, who was the other under secretary for political affairs, and Ryad Al Casey, who was their chief lawyer twice and he actually may be at the United Nations. It was really the A team of the Iraqi foreign ministra very intelligent, bright bunch of fellows, very experienced, very tough. We walk in and Saddam's standing there and the cameras are going and he's wearing his gun. I walk up to him and we shake hands.

There were a couple things that I had learned over the years on how to deal with Saddam and I had seen some of the things come out since the invasion of Kuwait. One, it was clear to me that I was not going to be caught on camera smiling. If you look at the trailers and the clips that show of April Glaspie at the time of the invasion, they show her shaking hands with Saddam and smiling as if they were sharing a joke. That was not going to happen to mTwo, in all the pictures showing Saddam greeting people, the people would be caught on camera sort of bowing to Saddam. I had noticed this when I first got there. My first meeting with Saddam, as I mentioned, was when I escorted Arlen Specter and Dick Shelby. Arlen Specter was the senior senator from Pennsylvania, and Dick Shelby was the senator from Alabama. At that time he was a Democrat. I had noticed the phenomenon of people bowing to Saddam Hussein. This was about the time that Nancy Reagan had gotten in a lot of trouble when she'd gone to England and had been caught curtseying to the Queen of England. The American press corps had reacted in horror; after all we had fought a war 200 and some odd years ago against the monarchy to be republicans and here we were still curtseying to the Queen of England. I figured that if you can't curtsey to the Queen of England, you sure as hell shouldn't be bowing to this potentate in Iraq. I'd gone to the meeting with Shelby and Specter; afterwards I went home and turned on the TV and watched it and, of course, there we were. The opening news item was Shelby, Specter and Joe Wilson going up to shake hands with Saddam Hussein, and there's Joe Wilson bowing to Saddam Hussein. I said, "I can't quite figure that out." After a while of watching that tape, I figured that Saddam used a number of psychological tricks. For one, he broke that social space with the visitor, so that he actually got closer to you before shaking your hands; the handshake was the last of the introduction rituals. First, you stood face to face, and he stared at you unblinkingly with these very deep brown eyes; he might engage in some idle chit chat, "How's the day?" "What's the news?"the sort of stuff that one says when one greets somebody. Then after an appropriate amount of timwhile the chit chat was being translated by the translatohe stuck out his hand, but he didn't stick his hand out at a normal level. He stuck his hand out very low, about crotch level for want of a description; so if you were standing staring at him from a distance of about 12 inches and the time came to shake hands, his hand was real low, forcing you to look down to make sure that you grabbed his hand and not another piece of his anatomy. And that's when the camera caught you bowing to him. When I saw him, on August 6th, the time came to shake hands; I was prepared and I actually did just reach out and grab. That I'm here to tell you the story will suggest to you that I did get his hand and not that other part of the anatomy.

When I came back, I told that story to Tom Foley, who then was the Speaker of the House but who, as I said earlier, had been my boss when I was a Congressional Fellow and he was Majority Whip. I'm sitting in the Speaker's office in the Capitol building, which is quite an ornate office right in the heart of the Capitol, and Tom and Heather, his wife, were sitting there. I told the story, and Tom leans forward in his chaihe's got this big overstuffed Speaker's chaiand he says to me, "You mean to tell me that you were this close to having Saddam Hussein by the short hairs and you didn't go for it, and as a consequence we had to send Norm Schwarzkopf and 500,000 of America's finest to finish the job?" He also served at the time as head of the PIFIAthe presidential intelligence oversight board. He called me a couple days later and said, "You know, I have to tell you that I couldn't resist, even though you told me that story in the confines of our office, opening up the meeting of the president's intelligence oversight board today by telling that story. Now everybody in Washington knows. It'll be all around Washington by the time you sit down to dinner tonight."

Back to the meeting. Saddam and I sat down. He was still wearing his gun, and the cameras were still on as we're sitting there. I'll show you the picture afterwards. I still have the picture in my offica souvenir from the time when I did serious diplomacy for a living. Saddam says, "Well, what's the news?" By this time, we're four days into the crisis. I'm angry. I haven't slept a wink. I've got people who are being held hostage in Iraq and in Kuwait. I've got an ambassador down in Kuwait who calls me every night saying he's about to be overrun. I'm not a happy camper. So I figure I'll make a little joke here. I tell Saddam, "Look, if you want to know what's new, you really ought to address that question to your foreign minister and not me, because your foreign minister has a satellite dish which allows him to get American news stations such as CNN. I've been fighting with him for two years now to try to get a satellite dish for our embassy. I can't get one for our embassy. So if you want to know what's new, ask him. Don't ask me." Saddam laughed at that. I said it in a sort of jocular way. Saddam laughs, and I, as one who always likes to laugh at his own jokes, sat back up and started to smile to share the laugh with him. Then I remembered that the cameras were still there. I just stopped right in mid smile and leaned back forward as stern as I could be, which was a good move because you never see me on American television smiling to Saddam Hussein. You never see April Glaspie not smiling to Saddam Hussein. If there was one mistake that was madand of course it wasn't really a mistake because Saddam hadn't invaded Kuwait at the time, and it was normal to smile with a chief of state if you were in a meeting with hiit was to have the image of April Glaspie smiling in the American psyche. We spent almost two hours together, listening mostly to Saddam telling me the history of the demarcation of Arab borders and why the Al Sabah family was 'history'and this was his term.

Q: Al Sabah being...

WILSON: Being the rulers of Kuwait. I remember distinctly this was the one time when Tariq Aziz got into the conversation. Mostly it was Saddam speaking through his translator to me and then me back to Saddam; the first 45 minutes to an hour were a Saddam monologue. At one point he said, "Whatever we decide to do with Kuwait, the one thing you need to understand is that the Al Sabah family is history." The translator had trouble translating that, and so Tariq Aziz jumped in and said, "The Al Sabah family is history." That for me was a very interesting phrase because at that time, when you said somebody is history, that was American slang. It was very popular to say that somebody is historas i"You're history, man."

Q: Which means you're finished.

WILSON: Which means you're finished. One didn't heard that often in formal conversation; so for them, Tariq in particular, to have this much knowledge of not just the English language but American slang English really struck me. The crux of the Iraqi position was: "We keep Kuwait; you let us keep Kuwait; don't react, and we will become the guarantors for the Persian Gulf"much the same role that had been attributed to the Iranians under the Sha"and we will guarantee you a steady supply of petroleum at a reasonable price. We will not do anything against Saudi Arabia unless the Saudi rulers allow their country to be used as a platform from which efforts to destabilize my regime, the Iraqi regime, are launched." That was the crux of the deal. I had no talking points, since the meeting had been set up on such short notice. So I had nothing to give back to him. I essentially took the same line that I had used with Tariq. I mentioned the instability in world oil markets that this invasion had caused. Saddam interrupted me to digress for 20 minutes on oil prices. Then I got back to the points that I had thought of raising with him, which were the three that I had raised with Tariq Aziz: "It's inconsistent with the Arab League; it's inconsistent with your draft Constitution; and it's inconsistent with the United Nations for you to be invading a neighbor; in addition to that, there are three specific issues. One, you've got to quit looting American diplomatic properties. Two, you've got to open the border so that Americans and other foreigners can leave." The third point must have been something on human rights. When I said, "You ought to open your border so that Americans can leave consistent with the Geneva and Vienna Conventions," he said, "Are you talking about just Americans?" and I said, "Well, I'm only empowered to speak on behalf of Americans, but I would think that more broadly you ought to open your border so that all foreigners can leave." At that point he said, "Why? Do you know something that I don't know about a potential American response?" I said, "Well, Mr. President, I can assure you that if I knew something about American intentions, I would not share it with you, but what I will tell you is that I intend to be here so long as there is a role for diplomats to play in resolving this peacefully."

Q: At this point did have any idea of what was happening, in particularly the United States but also elsewhere about a response? At a certain point I think those of us who had been in the diplomatic business realized that we just could not let this guy sit on all that oil. This is not something that really can...

WILSON: It was not the Gambian peanut crop we're talking about. Two things were clear to me pretty much from the very beginning: one, that we were not going to allow this to stand; and, two, that if we were going to get Iraq out, we had to do it by being very bellicose. Either we were going to have to go to war or our threats of going to war had to be very credible. That was clear to me, and I told that to President Bush. When I went to the Oval Office to meet him, the first thing I said to the president was just that. We hadn't spoken directly during the early August days, but we'd had some telegraphic exchanges; nevertheless I felt from the very beginning that we were on the same wave length on this issue. In any case, President Bush said, "You're absolutely right," and then he turned and introduced me to everybody else.

In this meeting on August 6th Saddam laid out the deal. I laid out our concerns. He asked me if I knew something about U.S. intentions. I told him if I did, I wouldn't share it with him anyway but I intended to be in Baghdad as long as there was any diplomacy to be conducted. It was a tough meeting. I gave as good as I got. About halfway through the meetinjust another little atmospheriSaddam goes for his gun, and I'm going, "Hmmmm. Was it something I said? Did I forget to brush my teeth this morning or what?" But he really was just going for his gun belt because he wanted to take it off. He said, "It is really uncomfortable with my bad back and everything, to wear this gun sitting in this seat." So after the cameras were gone, he took off the gun and put it on the table. After the meeting's over, we're walking out shaking hands with everybody. Saddam, as we're walking out, put his arm on my shoulder and said, "That was a good meeting." I'm thinking to myself," hmmm, if it was a good meeting for him, shit." I think I had been plenty tough with him. I went back to the office and we did three cables. My political note taker wrote the...

Q: This is Nancy Johnson.

WILSON: Nancy Johnson wrote the formal memorandum of conversation. I wrote a real quick and dirty "This is the deal" cable. Then I wrote a shorter version of the memorandum of conversation basically encapsulating the main points and some of my thoughts about it. About at the time that I returned to the office, which would have been about 12:30 or one o'clock in the afternoon, Washington was about to convene another National Security Council meeting to be chaired by the President. About every 10 minutes we're drafting this up and there was a lot to go through. At that time we didn't have a computer screen on which you could make corrections. We had to correct the text on green cable paper with sort of inserts. It was a rudimentary communications system relative to what we have now. I got my cable off, and about every 10 minutes I'm getting a call from National Security Council saying, "Where's your cable? The president wants to convene this National Security Council meeting and we need your cables." I'm saying to them, "We're getting it out as fast as we can. If you keep calling me, you're keeping me away from doing the writing and editing." We did get them all out in time for the National Security Council meeting. I guess the president's calendar must have been such that he wanted to have this meeting on that morning because he then was going off to Colorado, or maybe he was teleconferencing the meeting or something, shortly thereafter with Maggie Thatcher. We got this all out; by this time we had instituted, to insure the secrecy of the cable traffic, a special code word encryptiocode word designator. We sent these cables out marked "Secret." For all intents and purposes, the only top secret material that you ever send out has to do with a nuclear holocaust or, nuclear weapons. Our cables were marked "Secret NODIS," which means no distribution beyond a select few. There was a further restriction on distribution by using the code word "Babylon," which was the word we used to describe the Gulf crisiDesert Shielat the time. So these cable went out 'Secret NODIS Babylon.'

The next day the long cable, the cable that was effectively the memorandum of conversation, showed up on the front page of the New York Times word for word, including some material that we might have edited out if we had had more time to send the cable. That was a sentence that should have part of a previous paragraph, but got dropped to a new paragraph, or vice verssomething like that. I noticed it in the original draft, but said, "Let it go. Let's just get this out. They will understand it in Washington." The next day when the New York Times carried the text of the cable, it included this editorial error that we had allowed to go out. Not only had the correspondents been briefed on the contents of the cable, but they actually had sen a copy of the "Secret NODIS Babylon" cable.

Of course, the Iraqis were furious. This happened two days after the meetintime devoted to drafting the cables and sending them out and then time to fall into the hands of the New York Times and its publication. I get called from the undersecretary, Nezar Hamdun. I am also furious because I believed in the integrity of the system that says when you send it 'Secret NODIS Babylon' it's not going to find its way into the press. Nezar says to me, "Look, what sort of operation are you guys running? One, you take a confidential message from my president to your president and you put it on the front page of the New York Times; and, two, your president is asked whether he has received a message from my president as he's walking down a stone walkway with the prime minister of the United Kingdom." Somebody from the press had asked, "Mr. Bush, did you receive a message from Saddam Hussein?" and President Bush says, "No." So Nezar said, "You put it on the front page of the New York Times but you don't give it to the president of the United States. What's wrong with you guys? Okay, be that as it may, we're still waiting for the reply from the president of the United States to Saddam's message." I said, "Okay, got it. I'll get back to you." I called the Washington the task force, and the guy on the other end was Skip Gnehm. I told him what Nezar has told me and I said, "Look, you guys need to understand that my credibility here right now is pretty low because you guys have managed to publish this cable." In retrospect, I suspect it was probably the secretary of State himself who gave it to the New York Times writer for domestic reasons, because we were beginning to beat the war drums at home. I said, "But anyway, be that as it may, how am I supposed to reply to Nezar?" Skip says, "You can tell the Iraqis, one, the president of the United States received the message and, two, if he wants to know what the American response is, he needs only to turn on CNN." I said, "Got it," and went back to Nezar Hamdun and told him just that. I was in his office, which by that time was wired up to CNN; CNN was on the television set in the corner. I told him that, "The president got the message and, two, if you want to know what the U.S. response is, look at CNN." As I said that, I turned to look at the TV monitor which was showing these big C5As taking off from American bases every 10 seconds beginning to ferry American material and equipment to the Arabian Gulf from all over. The deployment had begun. Then the program cut away from the airfields to ports where American tanks were being taken to be shipped across the ocean. This was just three days after I had met with Saddam. Three days after that, at the same time that I was meeting with Saddam, Dick Cheney was down in the Gulf meeting with the Saudis and showing them the satellite overhead pictures which indicated that the Iraqis had deployed all the way to the southern Kuwaiti border and that their logistic supply lines indicated that they could potentially hit the eastern Saudi oil fields, directly threatening Saudi economic interests.

Q: Had you gotten any instructions from Washington up to this point saying you should tell them that if they didn't get out, war would come, or anything like that?

WILSON: No; to this point the message was just to get out. The message was pretty clear to get out; it was a message that they had not sent to me necessarily, but one that they had given quite publicly. The drawing the line in the sand was the initial reaction. It wasn't until November 6th or November 7th that the President came out and said, "We will roll this back." So in August September, liberating Kuwait was not the objective.

Q: We were talking about the time period of "Desert Shield," which was for the protection of Saudi Arabia.

WILSON: That's right. The line in the sand was the Saudi Kuwait border, not the Kuwait Iraq border.

Q: What about other embassies at that point, including what would still be the Soviet embassy and obviously the British and French? Were they looking to you to find out what was happening?

WILSON: As the situation evolved, that became the case. Our relations in the first three days of the crisis with these other embassies were not as intense as they were later. We were preoccupied with the welfare of our citizens and getting our own policy right and getting our own communications right with Washington. But as we went forward, we would have meetings. I would have meetings every evening. We had a quartet that we would meet: the Turks, either ambassador or DCM depending on who was in the country; the French chargï¿½; the Soviet, again either ambassador or more often the DCM; and myself. We would meet, and discuss a number of different issues. I also would attend the EU meetings and would share with them what we were doing. Because of the nature of our relationship with Washington, we were much quicker than the Europeans in acting; we basically would act and start our cables to Washington with, "Assuming that this is what you would have done if you were in our place, this is what we did."

Q: Were you in a way doing political analysis of both sides? Obviously you were looking at Iraq to figure out what the hell they're up to, but were you listening to the Voice of America, the BBC and other media trying to figure out what was going on in the United States? Were you having to sort of reach out to try to get the feel of what was going on?

WILSON: Once we got past the first few days, after my meeting with Saddam, we saw that the troops were moving and the Iraqis by this time had essentially annexed Kuwait. They said that Kuwait was now the 19th province of Iraq. It became pretty clear that we were in for the long haul. We were preoccupied again with the welfare and whereabouts of our citizens. We were preoccupied with the evacuation of embassy employees. By this time the Iraqis were rounding up American citizens in Iraq, in Baghdad; we were one step ahead of them. We were able to get out and pull most American citizens into our diplomatic quarters. We got 150 people whom we lodged and fed in various diplomatic compounds. There were another 115/120 that were identified as human shields; they had been caught up in all of this and were unaccounted for. There were what we estimated to be a couple thousand Americans in hiding in Kuwait; our people in Kuwait were running a little operation to try to bring everybody safely into the embassy compound. So we didn't have a whole lot of time to think about much more than how we were just going to get everybody out in anticipation of a military action.

Q: Was anybody going around the streets of Baghdad trying to get the mood of the people or anything like that?

WILSON: Yes; we were on the streets all the time, but during the initial days as we set up our operation, we were focused on that. I was out all the time, but most of our people were hunkered down. I was going back and forth to the foreign ministry. I had everybody on the embassy side of the river, except for myself; they would be able to get into the embassy compound quickly without having to cross any bridges in the event the bridges were blocked or the bridges were blown up in an attack. The only reason I stayed on the other side of the river was because, one, my house was there but, two, more importantly, because the foreign ministry was there. In the event of a crisis somebody had to be able to go over and deal with the foreign ministry, and that was me. I had the armored car and I had the flag, and as a consequence that's what I did.

Q: Were you getting anything from the Arab embassies?

WILSON: Yes, but again this was after the first few days. The other thing that happened during the first few days was we had the influx of the American media, as I mentioned earlier. By this time Rather was in. Koppel had left. He had left on the desk that he knew that Rather was going to be occupying, a little note which he had written: "10:30 a.m., meeting with SH." He left that casually on the desk so that, when Rather came in, he would take a look at it and he would think that he had been scooped by Ted Koppethat Koppel had gotten the first meeting with Saddam, which he hadn't. Koppel still remembers it whenever I talk to him, which hasn't been for several years now, but he always remembers that little joke he played on Dan Rather.

We're now, say, about the eighth or ninth of August; we held a meeting in my office. We'd set up my office, the DCM's office, as the operations center; we put the telephone therthe one that was hooked up to the operations center in Washington 24 hours a day. We had a meeting that started late in the evening, 9:30 or 10 o'clock; it went until about three o'clock in the morning. At that meeting was myself, the station chief who was the head of our CIA operation there, the defense attachï¿½, the political officer and the consular officeabout five or six. During the course of these several hours, we gamed out all the possible scenarios. Drawing upon our collective knowledge of Iraqi history dating back to the time of the revolution in 1958 with the drawing and quartering of several American employees of Bechtel, and the Iraqi reaction to the outbreak of the Iran Iraq War, and what happened to an Iranian delegation that was in Baghdad at that time, we concluded that the chances were really very good that some of us sitting in that room then would not survive this particular crisis. Some of might, but others might not. Therefore we concluded very early on that some of us were probably going to die; that everything that we knew about the way the Iraqis reacted indicated to us that some of us probably would not survive.

Q: I might point out that there's always been talk of the Arab mob taking violent action, but that there had really been only two instances of a real Arab mob going after people and that was in Baghdad in 1958 and the other was in 1979 in Islamabad. When our embassy was burned, we almost lost 130 people; we lost four or five. But the possibility has always been thrown out there, as again it is today, but Baghdad particularly has always stood out as being the exception.

WILSON: We didn't fear the Arab mob because the Iraqi government controlled everything from A to Z. We feared that the Iraqi government would give instructions that the Arab mob should mobilize to take some of us out. The Iraqis had been involved in running a defense attachï¿½ off the road when they had not been pleased with some of the stories about U.S. sharing of intelligence with Iranians or because of concerns about the U.S. willingness to sell arms to the Iranians in exchange for the freeing of hostages in Lebanon.

Q: This was the Iran Contra operation run bOllie North and company.

WILSON: There was a long Iraqi history of intimidation of Americana long history of not respecting diplomatic immunities and of actually killing people. So we worked on that assumption; that was good because to a certain extent that allowed us to come to grips with this whole question of "are you going to die or not" early on; we became rather fatalistic about it. We basically concluded at this meeting with the question that if we were all going to die, how did we want to go down, how did we want to go out. Did we want to go out like sheep being led to slaughter, or did we want to get out being very defiant to the bitter end? We concluded that we were going to be defiant, and that set the tone of the embassy from that time on. We saw this much less as a diplomatic nicety and much more as standing up for what was right, and we comported ourselves in that way from then on.

Let me just add one thing to this. When I came out of Baghdad, I went over to CIA, to talk to a psychologist who studies foreign leaders and their character and their mental make up. During the course of discussing Saddam Hussein with him, I asked, "What is the most effective way to deal with somebody with these sort of character defects or this mental illness?" His response was, "The only way that you can really deal with him is to stand up to him, to be defiant and to be very much antagonistic and threatening." That, in fact, is basically what our strategy had been from the very beginning. Unfortunately the Agency had not bothered to share with us their assessment of how we should deal with this leader. We were sitting in Baghdad, without the benefit of their wisdom as we developed our strategy. As it turned out, several weeks later the Iraqis expelled a number of our employees. As I was taking them out to the airport to put them on the airplane, they walked through customs to get on one of these charter flights leaving the country. I realized that everybody who had been expelled and was leaving the country were people who had been at this meeting with me at which we had concluded that some of us were likely going to die during this crisis. Everybody except for me was getting on that damn airplane. I had not really thought much about it until then, but at that time as they were getting on the airplane, I thought to myself, "Boy, you really did draw the short straw this time."

You had asked earlier about dealing with other diplomats. It is a good time to tell you the story about Dan Rather and the Egyptian ambassador and how we planted a story that led to the release of women and children who were being held hostage from Baghdad. In the first few dayfirst few weeks anywaafter the invasion of Kuwait, the elitof American news broadcasting came through Baghdad. As I mentioned earlier, the first one was Forrest Sawyer, the second one was Ted Koppel, and the third one was Dan Rather. As I said, we had been thinking through our strategy on what we were going to do. We had made the embassy about as safe as we could. We hunkered down. We were working real hard to get the human shields released. Saddam was attempting to paint a picture of himself as the benevolent "Uncle Saddam." He appeared on international TV with a 14 year old hostage in a very eery photo.

Q: It was a British boy. I'll never forget that footage.

WILSON: The footage was of Saddam standing with the boy in front of him; the young man looked absolutely petrified. Saddam pats him on the shoulder, on the head, and makes like he's just invited this guy over to spend a few weeks with him in Iraq. Of course, the kid was there against his will; the kid's mother was there against her will. It was very chilling, and I don't believe that it achieve his propaganda aim. The propaganda aim was to convince viewers that these people were not in fact hostages; that they were just being held temporarily against their will, but they were being treated very well, as guests as opposed to as hostages. We were looking for ways to counteract that. We didn't want any piece of his propaganda to go out over the airwaves without its being contradicted by truth on the ground as we saw it. So we were looking actively for ways to make the point that what he was doing was in fact not benevolent, but it was malevolent and it was really inappropriate not to mention a violation of various international conventions that governed conduct in such a situation. About this time, the Egyptian ambassador called me and invited me over for tea that the afternoon; I went. He was a very good guy. The Egyptians had several millions citizens in Iraq. They were doing a lot of construction work; they basically backstopped the Iraqi industry while Iraq's boys and young men were at the front or in the guard units, either in the army or in a sort of national guard guarding the pipelines and oil facilities. The Iraqis had the Egyptians coming in to do the menial worbricklaying. painting and building and stuff like that. I went to see the Egyptian ambassador; we were sitting there talking and he said, "You know, Saddam has just built this big statue to himself at the Arab Conquerors SquarArab Heroes Squarand he's taken down the statue of an Arab on horseback to be replaced with a 40 foot high statue of himself. At the same time he's done that, his people have gone around and instructed all the various business establishments in Iraq that might have the Arab Hero in their business title, or Arab Conqueror in their business title, to change their names of their businesses because there is only one Arab hero in Iraq and they were not it. So, for example, if you were in Baghdad and you had the Arab Hero Drycleaner, somebody would knock on your door and say that you had to change the name of the business because there's only one Arab hero and they were not it. "So," the Egyptian ambassador went on, "what we ought to do is to turn this Arab Hero stuff on its head. We ought to make the point that Saddam Hussein, who is a self styled Arab conquering hero, is really nothing more than a coward because true Arab heroes do not hide behind little children or the skirts of women." I thought that was a pretty clever idea. I went back to my officand this was literally a couple nights before Rather was supposed to leavas we did on most nights, to smoke cigars and talk about what had gone on during the day. My relationship with the press was such that I would give them a background briefing in the morning and usually one in the evening. They would come to brief me on their activities during the day. Rather and I were sitting around talking and I told him this story, and he said, "That's a great one. I think maybe I'll use that." I suggested that he not use it in Baghdad because, even though he was the great Dan Rather of the American airwaves, they might not appreciate the story in Iraq, and they did have a tendency to kill journalists. They had just killed this Iranian born British journalist a couple of months earlier. So he didn't. He left the next night, and when he got to Amman, Jordal was told this; I didn't hear ihe used this story in one of his broadcasts; that was maybe on a Thursday or Friday night. On the next Monday or Tuesdaagain I was told this; I wasn't able to pick up this information directlMaggie Thatcher went to the floor of the House of Commons and pretty much used the same language in denouncing Saddam: "True Arab heroes do not hide behind the skirts of women and behind little children." Within about four or five days, Saddam announced that women and children would be permitted to leave Iraq, which basically opened up that floodgate, so we almost at once were able to have the hostages that we had in our custody released from the country.

Q: That must have been a great relief. Did you think that the United States was going to attack at any point?

WILSON: I thought from the very beginning that the United States was going to steel itself for an attack. I never doubted for a second that the president and his War Cabinet had the political will to roll back the invasion of Kuwait by military means if necessary. I felt that really from day one. That was an operating assumption in everything that I dithat I was backed by the military might of the United State. I believed that really starting with my first meeting with Tariq Aziz.

Q: What was your impression of Iraqi military might? You know, there was a tendency in the United States to play these people as if they were 10 feet tall; they turned out to be considerably shorter pygmies as far as military prowess, but then they had just finished defeating Iran in a huge war. What was your impression of Iraqi military power?

WILSON: First of all, they hadn't defeated Iran; they had fought Iran to a standstill. Not much territory changed hands by the time of the cease fire. The first question to negotiate in the aftermath of the Iran Iraq War was where the border between the two countries was going to be, whether it was going to be on one of the banks of the Shatt al Arab or whether it was going to be in the middle of the Shatt al Arab. So there really wasn't a clear victor in that war. Secondly, and perhaps more to the point, we fully understood that Saddam had a large and experienced military ground force; we fully understood that he had exotic weaponri.e. chemical and biological weaponand that he had already demonstrated a will to use chemical and biological weapons in artillery shells against Iran and in gas attacks against the restive Kurdish population in the northeast of the country in the aftermath of the cease fire. So we understood that he had a large and experienced ground force. We also understood that there were some gaping holes in Iraqi capabilities. This came out really in the invasion of Kuwait. We knew that the Iraqi military forces lacked a good logistical support base, so while the tip of the spear was experienced and bloody and it knew how to kill and how to wage war, supporting those troops once they moved forward was a challenge for the Iraqi military forces. In fact, when we went bacwe did this in our review of the military capabilitieto look at the Iran Iraq War, we noticed that every time the Iraqis would get five kilometers beyond their logistical support bases, they would get bogged down. They could never move their support bases up to where their troops were when they got too far ahead. When they got to Kuwait City, there was some evidence that they were prepared to go all the way to the eastern oil fields of Saudi Arabia around Dhahrahad they done that, it would have changed the nature of our reaction considerably. But it was clear that even by getting to the southern Kuwait border, which is as far as they got, they had outrun their logistical support capacity, so they themselves bogged down in Kuwait. Even if they had made a political decision, it's not clear whether or not they had the military capacity to go into Saudi Arabia.

Q: Even before the invasion started or up to it or particularly in the early days of the invasion, was anybody from Washington asking you for an appraisal of the Iraqi military?

WILSON: Sure. We had periodically done appraisals. We had a military attachï¿½ who was doing readiness and order of battle reports on the Iraqi military all the time. In addition to the logistical support issue, we also understood early on in the war that they lacked a lot of M&R capabilitmaintenance and repaifor their material. As the sanctions that we imposed and then the United Nations later imposed began to bite, we started a project to take a look at the impact of the sanctioninitially on the economy as a whole. As we refined the goals of the project, we determined that looking at the economy as a whole wasn't going to give us the information we needed; so we narrowed the target to what the sanctions were doing to the military infrastructure. For example, we would test fuelwe had some guys who knew how to do thifor the additives, because while Iraq had a lot of gasoline and refining capability, they didn't have some of the additives to make the fuel really good for their engines. They lacked the additives which meant that their engines were going to wear down requiring a higher maintenance program. We also projected tire utilization for their trucks, because they couldn't get spare tires in to replace the old ones. We went out and we looked at certain hardware, particularly trucks along the side of the road and things like that, and extrapolated from that that, while the sanctions in and of themselves would not in the short term bring down the Iraqi economy, they did have an impact in specific sectors. We said that one could reach the conclusion that the Iraqi economy was like a house of cards or one of these little stick structures, and that if you kept pulling the card or stick out, eventually it was going to collapse. We said however that that was not the right analogy, but that rather what would happen would be that the economy would just grind down. Those who were driving Cadillacs today would be driving Volkswagens tomorrow and riding donkey carts 10 years from now, but the economy itself would not collapse. On the other hand, in terms of the executing our military strategy, which is where we thought we ought to really be taking this analysis, you would be able to detect rather quickly the difficulties that would crop in the logistical support that the war machine in Kuwait needei.e. getting tanks and trucks up and running and keeping them up and running. That's what we began to focus on. And I think that our analysis was accurate. I think history has shown that the economy did grind down. We basically concluded that the way to look at sanctions was not as a strategy but rather as a tactic that allowed you to weaken your enemy before you ever fired the first bullet, and that's in fact what happened.

Q: Our generals including Colin Powell and Admiral William Crowe, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were saying at that time was to let sanctions run their course on the assumption that that would cause the Iraqis to withdraw from Kuwait.

WILSON: It was never going to happen. It was particularly Crowe and David Jones, who went up on the Hill...

Q: David Jones being an Air Force General.

WILSON: He'd been the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. He'd been an Air Force General. They went up on the Hill and testified during the debate on the "Use of Force" resolution. Admiral Crowe's testimony was particularly troubling because he had been the chairman who had been appointed and reappointed by George Bush. For him to testify while apparently not privy to the same information that we hawhich we had shared with the Agency and with relevant American authoritieand making the argument that we shouldn't use military force, was the wrong argument and sent absolutely the wrong signal to the Iraqis. The lesson for Saddam Hussein from Crowe's testimony was that the American military would not stand behind their president; that was very disconcerting for us because we were right in the throes at that time of making great progress on the release of the 115 human shields and the rest of the people that we had in hiding in Iraq as well as Americans who might have been in hiding in Kuwait. As soon as Crowe and Jones gave that testimony, all our efforts came to a stand still; it took us about a month to get things back on track and to leverage the release of these hostages, because a lot of our strategy was predicated on our assumption that in the grand scheme of things the U.S. was prepared to sacrifice the hostages in order to achieve its military aims and, that therefore, it was not in Saddam's interest to keep the hostages, because the anger, if something were to happen to the hostages, in the United States would have been such that that in and of itself might have forced the president's hand. We were telling the Iraqis, "You have to decide what you want to fight the war over. If you want to fight the war over mistreatment of some Americans who are being held hostage, that's one thing. If that's not what you want to fight the war on, then you ought to get this off the table and then we can go back to the core issues." To this day, by the way, I have not forgiven Admiral Crowe for that testimony. I talked to President Bush when the book he wrote with Brent Scowcroft was in the galley proof stage and I recounted to him just what I told you. He went back and edited his book and added a gentle barb in it about the effects of Crowe's testimony. But to this day I find it very difficult to be in the same room with Admiral Crowe.

Q: Whom were you and, I assume, other people from the embassy talking to about the war?

WILSON: Among the Iraqis?

Q: Yes.

WILSON: When Saddam was moving his troops into Kuwait, we were talking about war. In my own case, during my first conversation with Tariq Aziz on August 2nd, I said that with his troops in Kuwait City and our naval ships in the Persian Gulf, it behooved us at this tense time to avoid miscalculations. I used that to leverage 24 hour a day telephone contacts between the embassy compound and Washington. The embassy compound included USIA's Cultural Center. After we got through the cycle of Rather and Ted Koppel and the other heavyweights, we decided, as I mentioned earlier, that we needed to preserve the integrity of the front office and keep the press out of there except when specifically invited. So we moved the press over to the Cultural Center across the street, which was fine. It still gave them the opportunity to file directly, because it was the only place in town that could get direct connectivity with their home offices.

With respect to talking about war the rest of the time, the only person after the first evacuation, after the 11th or 12th of August, left at the embassy who was in a position to talk to the Iraqis was me. I had a political officer who would accompany me when I went to see Taziz or other high ranking officials.

But in terms of dealing with the Iraqis, I was the focal point. That became an issue when we offered our views on whether April Glaspie should return. We said that we thought that she should and that the political heat of having her come back and having this played out in the American press as the United States returns an ambassador to Irathe symbol of American respect for this potentate who's just invaded his neighbocould be offset by having her come back in a convoy with all the other European ambassadors who had been out on vacation at the same time.

The Department decided not to send her back. About three weeks later, because my wife was really very emotionally upset, I argued that one of the actions that might be takeso I could deal with this issue while at the same time maintaining a core of credibilitwould be to leave Iraq to accompany Jim Baker on his trip to Jordan and then to Russia and the European capitals, which would have given me maybe four or five days away from Baghdad during which I could have managed to calm my wife down before coming back. But the Department wouldn't let me come out because they were afraid that the Iraqis wouldn't let me get back, and then there wouldn't be anybody who could talk to them. That's about as close as you can be to being indispensable. When I put my finger in the water, there was in fact a whole a left after I took my finger out.

Q: All of us who have gone through times of crises find that, unlike the military who often leave their wives behind with a support system, we usually arrive with wives unless things really get tough and the wives are taken out with not much of a support system. This is a great strain on the wives, on the family, and on the officer. Could you talk just a touch about that.

WILSON: In our case it was particularly difficult. After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, we imposed the Presidential Executive Order which was followed by a UN embargo on trade with Iraq. That meant that everything from initialI think I told this stortelephone communication, for which we had to get a waiver, to regularly scheduled airliners and other flights became very limited. We obtained waivers for humanitarian evacuations of the people who were being held against their will or were stuck in Kuwait and Iraq, but otherwise we couldn't get people on airplanes. So the only way that we could get people out was to drive them across the desert, which was about a 12 hour drive, to Jordan or to drive them through Iraq to Turkey. We began organizing these evacuations literally on the second day. We went to a complete drawdown posture. We negotiated with the Department how far down we were going to get and we ended up getting down to about seven or eight in the first evacuation. The timing of the evacuation was further complicated by an Iraqi requirement that they be given a 10 days' advance notice before left an area more than 25 miles outside of Baghdad; they were pretty inflexible about that. In addition, ordinary citizens had stopped traveling, so that it was very difficult for people without diplomatic passports to leave the country. Then, of course, the Iraqis were taking these people hostage; we couldn't risk exposing our citizens to the Iraqi street for fear that they would get picked up and turned into hostages. In fact, some of the Americans that we took in and put in our diplomatic quarterthat's why we were housing them all in diplomatic quarters, because these were sacrosanct, they were inviolatwe couldn't keep there. We weren't going to force them to stay there; they would get antsy and they would go out to go do some shopping or something like that and would get picked up. We had a half a dozen guys who were staying with us who just decided they were going to go shopping or go back to the house and pick up their stuff; they got picked up and were made hostages. For our own people we managed a number of evacuations. The first one was to Jordan. The invasion was on the second and we were able to get them out on about 10th or 11th or 12th. The first group included the young girl that I had mentioned earlier that we had managed to get the Iraqis to give to us. They got all the way across to the Jordanian border, but were stopped because the coordination between the Iraqis in Baghdad and at the border was not very good.

Q: They were stopped by the...

WILSON: By the Iraqis. They had to turn around and come back. If you've ever run a convoy, you understand that there's sort of a mathematic formula related to how many cars in the convoy and how fast that convoy is going to move across.

Q: I led a convoy once, and it's the damnedest thing. You go fast and then slow.

WILSON: You ultimately end up going as slow as the slowest car in the convoy. I, of course, didn't know what was happening to any of the convoys. It was only in the aftermath that I realized that I would have to be more patient about their progress; we didn't have any communication with them, so we would just worry about whether they'd made it across to Jordan. It took them 20 hours to drive to the border and back. Maybe it took them a little bit longer. They came back. Organizing the convoy involved a certain amount of deception because we did not want the Iraqi authorities to know precisely when the convoy was leaving or from where it was leaving; we didn't want to run the risk that they would pick up everybody on the way out of town. The convoy left a few hours before we said we were going to leave. It left about sunrise. They drove all day through the desert. This was in August and it was very, very hot. Some people took their animals. There were two or three people to a car. We had our Marine security detachment accompany the convoy because we had already shredded all of our documents; therefore, their mission in Baghdad had been accomplished. We sent out all of the spouses and most of the nonessential employees. As I said, they got all the way to the border, but were not allowed to cross the border. They called me through the public telephone system. I was in constant communication with the foreign ministry. I told the people in the convoy to stay where they were. They didn't stay, but turned around and came back. On about one third of the way back, I got word from the foreign ministry that the borders were open and that the convoy could cross into Jordan. But we couldn't get in touch with them so they drove all the way back to Baghdad. We put the people in the convoy to bed and sent them back to the broader the next day, at which time they finally got out. It was extraordinarily stressful for them, for us and for everybody involved, but we did get them out.

There was a second group that we had to evacuatand this was a good thing frankly. There was so much stress within the families that it was impacting on our employees' ability to do their work. Among our staff there were some employees who had drawn the same conclusions as we had drawn in our meetinnamely that some of us were likely not to survive. They had concluded that they did not want to be among those who wouldn't survive. So as almost a sideline, I would have people that we considered to be essential employees, because of the roles that they had in our embassy, coming to me and saying that I had to find a way for them to leave because they were afraid they were going to die in Iraq. That was another issue that we had to deal with.

Q: Chas Freeman talked about this when he was in Saudi Arabia at the time. He said he was surprised. There were some people who just couldn't take it. He just had to get them out because they just couldn't take it. Some of these were rather key people. He said that he was a little bit unhappy because this attitude didn't seem to affect their careers later on. He felt that they'd let their side down.

WILSON: I take a somewhat different view of that. Everything that I did with my employees, any confidences that they may have shared with me about their personal fears and concerns and their desires to leave, stayed with me. We found other reasons for them to go. In a way, the fact that their careers weren't impacted suggests to me that either this attitude was uniqua once in a lifetime deaor else the system isn't set up in such a way that it can weed out people who are selected for leadership positions but who don't exhibit the sort of leadership qualities under fire that one would need in any particular servicwhether it's ours or the military. We did have one case where a guy came to me with his wife, who was our FLO, our Family Liaison Officer; he made the case, because he wanted her to be with him, that she ought to stay. There was some grounds for that because we had a lot of hostages and people for whom she could serve as a counselor. Then two days later he came to me and told me she was pregnant and therefore she had to go. These were the little things that one deals with as management.

In time we got ourselves down to about seven in this evacuation, but we still had all these people in Kuwait. They were estimating that there were over 100 Americans in Kuwait, all stuck inside the embassy compound. In addition, there may have been some Americans who were in hiding. In fact, we estimated that there were about 2,000 Americans in Kuwait, but we could never verify that. Our focus then became to try to get these people out of Kuwait. By this time the Iraqis had annexed Kuwait and they were continually moving in a threatening fashion around the embassy compound. They were looting embassy houses around town. I would get calls saying they were going to take over the embassy tonight and that I needed to do something to stop them. These calls would come to us via the State Department. But it had become sort of a stalemate. Nat and his staff had decided that they had adequate supplies, they were conserving their energy, they had the famous swimming pool, their water supply...

Q: You might explain the swimming pool.

WILSON: They had their water supply and they had the swimming pool there in the compound. When the swimming pool started getting a little dirty, they dug a well. They demonstrated how self sufficient they were; they were going to get their own water, which they did. I think they actually did find water in one of the wells they dug. About this time we started talking about what would the Iraqi reaction be if we were to draw down our diplomatic presence in Kuwait. I broached this subject with the Iraqis and got my knuckles wrapped by the Department because it was premature and they hadn't thought their way through that. Ten days later they asked me to go in and make the exact same representation I had made. Go figure. In my meeting with Tariq Aziz on this particular subject, I asked them how they would react if we were to reduce the size of our diplomatic presence in Kuwait City by bringing the nonessential diplomats and their families not just out of Kuwait, but out of the region. His response to me was that Iraq would abide by all of the relevant conventions, meaning the Vienna Convention, concerning the movement of diplomats from one country to another in times of conflict. As a consequence, I made a case that we ought to go ahead and withdraw nonessential diplomats out of Kuwait, perhaps first to Baghdad, and then prepare to move them out of the region. There were going to be about 100 people leaving, maybe about 20 from the embassy compound.

Q: When you say nonessential diplomats, were you including other people who had taken refuge in the compound?

WILSON: That's right, family members and...

Q: I mean also private citizens such as oil people or financial people.

WILSON: The oil people were somewhat different, but we were going to try to move them as well. Actually we thought that we were going to be able to get all of them out. In light of the Vienna Convention and then the Geneva Convention, if Americans were in our custody when they came to Baghdad, we thought that we would be able to get them exit visas so that they could then leave Baghdad. When Tariq said that to me that the Iraqis would abide by the conventions, I went ahead and said, "Yes, this is what I recommend." Nat Howell sent off a cable saying, "Tariq Aziz is a low life doublcrosser, and he's no doubt going to double cross us on this. They'll get up to Baghdad and they'll get stuck in Baghdad." I sent off a cable in response to Nat's saying, "I agree fully with the distinguished ambassador's assessment of the Iraqi foreign minister. That said, however, our experience has been that the Americans in Baghdad are, by and large, safer and better taken care of than those who are stuck in the embassy compound in Kuwait. The diplomats who are already here are allowed to move around. They have access to food in the market. They don't have to worry about Iraqi troops coming over the walls every night. So in my judgment, even if Tariq does what Nat suggests he's going to di.e., double cross uit is still a net plus for these people to be in Baghdaone country closer to freedothan to be stuck inside the embassy compound in Kuwait." I'm told that this cable debate went to the president of the United States, which is not unusual in a situation like this involving American citizens. Nobody wants to have their fingerprints on these decisions if they can get somebody else's fingerprint on them; so they go all the way up to the big enchilada. I'm sure the file went up to him with a little note saying, "I think that we ought to do this." The president checks the action he wants taken, and they do it. I'm told anyway that it went to the president and the president decided that he would go with the recommendation made by Joe Wilson. What does Joe Wilson think out there in Baghdad? The president approved my recommendation and we sent a guy to Kuwait to lead a convoy to Baghdad.

Q: Who was that?

WILSON: Charlie Sibel was his name. He was a political officer. Charlie went to Kuwait. He was an experienced Arabist; he could speak Arabic, and he helped the people in Kuwait to organize. We got everybody together, we got cars and we moved well over 100 people to Baghdad. The convoy left Kuwait about eight o'clock in the morning for about an eight hour drive. We figured that we would see them about four o'clock in the afternoon. Once again, we lost contact with them, and we did not see them until three o'clock in the morning. When you are responsible for American lives, you tend to worry. We spent a lot of time between when we thought they should arrive, which would have been around 4:30 p.m; we had not yet figured out that the longer the convoy, the slower it moves. We had not internalized that lesson. So when it became about four o'clock in the afternoon, we began to worry and did not stop until three o'clock in the morning when they finally showed up. For some reason, I had a clipboard with me. All day long we had been working on preparing for the evacuees. We'd gotten food because we were going to have a big barbecue. How do you feed 120 refugees? We had set up beds and mattresses. We had taken over the Marine house and made it basically a flop house for everybody. We put a lot of water there as well as beer; we put everything there to make the evacuees as comfortable as we could. As I said, the convoy arrived at about four o'clock in the morning. I went downstairs, still with the clipboard in my hand. I was walking around saying, "Welcome. This is what we're going to do." Some man who was about 6'4" and looked like an old pro football defensive en6'4" and about 300 poundcame up to me and starts berating me, asking me a lot of logistical questions. I finally said, "Take this up with the GSO," and he said, "Well, who the hell am I talking to?" I said, "Well, I'm in charge of the embassy." That didn't stop him. He was plenty pissed off after having spent 15 or 16 hours in the car. But he and I later became the best of friends. We finally got everybody bedded down at four o'clock in the morning, and we said, "This is what we're going to do. We're going to take all your passports"we collected everybody's passport" and we're going to get the exit visas"the Iraqis promised us that they were going to open up their office at six o'clock in the mornin"and we'll get you back on the road. We'll get you up to Turkey. It's going to be a long night and a long day, but you're going to be out of here."

Q: You were taking them to Turkey?

WILSON: We were going to Turkey. This convoy we were going to run to Turkey. We had everybody set on the Turkish side. So we took the passports to the authorities, only to find that nobody was there. Then the Iraqis decided that they were not going to issue exit visas, and by about nine o'clock in the morning it was pretty clear we had been double crossed. I went to talk to Nezar, and the answer I got from the Iraqis was, "What the foreign minister told you was that when you closed your embassy in Kuwait, all the diplomats and members of the mission would be permitted to leave. Your embassy is not closed. The American flag is still up there. Therefore, these people will not be permitted to leave." I said, "Well, that's no excuse," and he said, "You know, Kuwait no longer exists. It is no longer a sovereign country. Therefore, these people no longer have diplomatic immunity. Therefore, the Vienna Convention does not apply to them; so they're not going to be permitted to leave. They're subject to all the same travel restrictions as everybody else right now. I then made the case that at a minimum they had an obligation under Saddam's own edicts to allow the women and children in the convoy to leave, because they had already allowed women and children to leave. There were about 60 women and children. I think the whole convoy was about 127 peoplsomething like that. We were able to negotiate the departure of the women and children.. We sent all their passports to the Iraqi authorities and got the exit visas for them. In this group of women and children were about, I think, four kids who were 1just right over on the adult side of the line. They could not leave. Their mothers could leave, but these kids had to stay. That was a real trying time for the mothers. We also had a few interns, kids who had come out to do their internship in Kuwait and they had just a wonderful time. We had them manning our telephone 24 hours a day. But, you know, these were just kidyoung adults.

Q: I might interject right here that we have intern here, Danielle Kerline, who's monitoring this as an intern working for the Association.

WILSON: Wee like to believe that it's a little safer in downtown Washington. Twenty four hours after we had initially anticipated, we finally got women and children on the road. In those intervening 24 hours, while we were working full steam to get the visas, we also organized an event at the Marine house. We organized a barbecue; we had volleyball; we had beer and soft drinks, and we invited everybody from all the embassies just to relax a little bipeople from our embassy and from the U.S. embassy in Kuwait. We got people bedded down. Then we got the ones who had to leave the next morning into the convoy's cars with Charlie leading the way again. He drove them to the Turkish border, got them across, and then turned around and came back.

Q: Was there any problem with the Kurds at that time?

WILSON: No, there was no problem, no problems getting to the Turkish border. There was no Kurdish rebellion at the time, as least no more than usual.

Q: The endemic Kurdish rebellion.

WILSON: The northern provinces were pacified at that time. They were under control. We then ended up at my embassy with seven Americans who were accredited to Iraone consular officer, a couple of military officers, and a couple of administrative and secretarial stafplus approximately 63 Americans who were accredited to our embassy in Kuwait. The management question became how do you integrate these people whose loyalty is to their colleagues in Kuwait City and whose experience with Iraqis consisted of being on the wrong side of Iraqi guns for three weeks. How do you integrate them to make a functioning mission? And at the same time how do you deal with all the morale issues attendant with the experience that they'd gone through?

Q: I assume that you're talking about concern that the people who had come out of Kuwait had no feel for the Iraqi situation and might have a certain amount of hostility towards the Iraqi and, being ironic about this, might almost screw things up.

WILSON: There were a couple of things we were worried about. One, we figured that, if we couldn't keep them busy, they would be even more unhappy than they were. Then, we had to overcome their hostility towards the Iraqi regime. We didn't think that they would do something that would screw up our efforts, because they weren't accredited in any way, so that they could not have any official interaction with the Iraqis. What we worried about was that they would become bored and very, very demoralized, which would be counterproductive to our own efforts, to our own management. We wanted to channel the hostility. We wanted to make them productive within the embassy. Their team leader, the guy who led them to Baghdad was a guy by the name of Emil Skodon. He was the economic commercial counselojust as solid as the day is long. We had a number of really long talks about what to do, and we did some things that I think were really very creative. We reactivated the Marine security guard detachment, because the Kuwait Marines had come out with the convoy. One of the things that we had found is that oftentimes the morale of the Marine security guard detachment is directly reflective and impacts on, one way or another, the morale of a whole embassy staff. So we did not want these Marines, who were young and impressionable, in a less than disciplined structure; so we put some discipline in their structure almost immediately. We reactivated the battalion. We made them our Marines. We did it over their initial objections, but we did it and we did fast. Once they started taking orders, they did a good job. The other thing we did is was to make the American citizens, either in hiding or being held as hostages, our principal point of focus at the mission level below me and we organized a support system. We established a pen pal system. For every one of our hostages being held, we had one of our people responsible for communicating with them, sending them letters every week. I don't know if the letters ever got there, but it gave these people something to do. We produced a weekly news bulletin which we would tried to send to the foreign ministries of the hostages which would include such things as football scores, recipes, anodyne stories that had no political implication whatsoever, so that they would at least have some sense of connectivity with us.

We developed a scavenger group, which is one of the best things we did. We sent these out to, one, get moneyou could exchange money on the black market at incredibly favorable rates to uso that they would have enough dinar to purchase supplies. With the embargo in place, we couldn't get a ready source of imported food products anymore, so we sent people out with instructions to stock the embassy in such a way that we would be able to feed 150 people for six to nine months. That meant that they would go out, find sources for frozen food and for dry food and canned food. The would go to the markets. The Iraqis were looting everything that they could in Kuwait City, which they would bring back to Baghdad. Open air markets where they were hocking all this stuff that they had looted from Kuwait were growing up around Baghdad and other areas of Iraq. We would have a group of our "guests" go out to buy stuff. In fact, we became so well stocked in food and booze and everything else we needed that some of our people actually started going out looking for some of the stuff that might have been looted from their houses. That kept a bunch of them occupied. The Iraqis were kind enough, to use the term loosely, not to pick up Americans who were carrying diplomatic passports even if they were not accredited to our embassy in Iraq; so our people were pretty safe looking around and shopping.

We also set up a group to plot the movement of the human shields, and this was particularly important. What happened was that, as time went by, Saddam would release hostages periodically. He released French citizens because he thought that that would cause the French to drop out of the coalition that had already been marshaled against him. When these hostages were released, they would often come to the embassy to bring us letters from American hostages. Through these letters we were able to plot about 55/56 points on the map where they were being held. Saddam did move the hostages every 10 to 14 days. We were able to plot the movement of the hostages from one place to the next. The net result was that at the end of a couple months we had a pretty good picture of the 56 places that Saddam deemed to be of sufficient strategic value to put hostages in.

Q: Was he doing this with British, too?

WILSON: Absolutely.

Q: You almost have a picture of people staked out in the middle of an ammunition factory.

WILSON: That's right. That is a pretty good image. I don't think they were actually staked out there, but it is a pretty good image. Wee had and international committee because the hostages came many countries. We had the Japanese, ourselves, the Brits, Germans and the Frencwhen they were involved. We would exchange information so that we had a pretty good picture of the hostage situation which we would give to Washington.

If you take a look at a map to pin point the first night's bombing raid of Iraq, you'll notice that we'd sent the bombers over the places that Saddam considered to be of strategic importance to him; you will find that they match up pretty nicely with our analysis of where the hostage were, thank you. Saddam, by keeping these hostages in a finite number of places and by moving them around to a finite number of places, gave us a blueprint of what he considered to be of strategic importance to him, and we used that. That was pretty useful to us. So that was another group that we had.

Then we had Americans who were being held in diplomatic quarters, as they were called. They were American citizens who had not been picked up by the Iraqis, but who had sought refuge with us, and we housed them. We put them all at the ambassador's residence. There were anywhere from 35 to 50 on any given day. We would essentially assume responsibility for their care and welfare. We had a couple of cases of people who had to take antidepressant medications for various problems., they ran out of their medication; that raised issues with people who were off their medication and therefore not terribly well adjusted; we had to deal with that. We had the usual issues of anybody in less than optimum conditions, people doing things that they probably shouldn't be doing, drinking too much too oftethings like that. And we had, of course, sort of the general restiveness. We had a liaison office, and people would spend a lot of time there.

Q: Did you have any medical or quasi medical personneembassy nurse or embassy doctor or anything?

WILSON: No permanent doctor. I don't know if we had a nurse. We had a doctor who came in at one point and then flew back out, but that was it. So that was basically the structure we had for these 60 to 67 Americans that we hosted. Then we would have these Americans who would fly in thinking that they could make a differencsome of them very notable. I made a policy of receiving them if they came to the embassy, with the exception of former Cabinet members or very distinguished Americans. When Jesse Jackson came, I went over to his hotel and sat with him for a while. When Mohammed Ali came, I invited him to the embassy, but also offered to go and see him. He declined the offer, but I sent my guy Vern, a guy who was about 300 pounds. He became Mohammed Ali's escort officer. For that assignment, Vern is eternally grateful because he got to spend a couple days with the champ. When Ramsey Clark came, I put no restrictions on his movement; that was true for all VIPs. I asked people in the compound if any cared to meet with him because he had expressed an interest in meeting with the Americans who were being held there in diplomatic quarters. They allowed that they would be happy to see him. He came, and they jeered him, which was good. He decided he did not want to meet with me; he didn't want to come to the embassy, so I did not go to see hieven though he was a former Cabinet officesince he didn't want to meet with me.

I should note that one of the things that we tried to instill amongst the Americans who were in diplomatic quarters was the same sense of defiance that we were attempting to exude. I think we were pretty successful in doing that. I used to go out to see them frequentlonce a week or something like that; I had people from my staff out there every day. One of their representatives would come to our daily staff meeting; so we had this liaison relationship with them. I made a point anytime they asked me to come out, I would go out. We also allowed them to set their own rules. They determined that they wanted to have somebody who would serve as their spokesman with the press if the press wanted any sort of feedback from them. We made some rules on where the press could film within the ambassador's residence compound, which they accepted. The spokesman that they selected was a guy who was a man of considerable experience. We did a press barrage over the Thanksgiving Day weekend when I held a news conference and then they interviewed him. They took pictures at my house. We were cooking the turkey for some of the hostages. The press asked him what he thought as a spokesman of the Americans being held in diplomatic quarters, and he said, "Well, I've had a good long life, and I speak for everybody when I say this. We would certainly like to live a lot longer, but damn it all, some things are more important than us, and it is really very important that we roll back this invasion of Kuwait. If it means that B52s have to come over Baghdad, bring them on." That was exactly the sort of reaction we wanted out of everybody. The theory was that the only way to deal with the Iraqis was to be as tough or tougher than them. Any sign of weakness would be pocketed by them and they would be looking through.

Q: When you're talking about Ramsey Clark and Mohammed Ali, basically these have been sort of anti establishment figures, as has Jesse Jackson to a certain extent. Did you consider them to be in a way sending the wrong message? How did you feel about that?

WILSON: Our position at the embassy was one of studied ambivalence. We would argue that they were violating the U.S. government's prohibition on travel to Iraq, but having done that, they were still American citizens and therefore still had the right to see the senior American representative if they wanted. We were not going to deny them that. We welcomed any release of any hostages that might occur as a consequence of their visits. But we made it very clear that we thought that they were allowing themselves to be used by Saddam Hussein in his cynical game of trying to divide Americans and to deflect attention from his brutal invasion of Kuwait. We crafted this message through trial and error and finally tuned the message to about where we wanted it and it was pretty much broadly accepted as that. I mentioned earlier we had a symbiotic relationship with the press corps. Because there were only really seven of us who were accredited to Iraq and there were really only one or two who were going out to see what was going on, we depended on the press quite a bit. We wanted the press to be focused. We learned early on that the press needed to have a focus and then they would all write the story. If you give them the headline, they will write the story; so the trick was to give them the story right. Every morning I would have an intelligence briefing, including information on Iraqi troop movements in the Gulf or our own troops movements and how the situation was shaping up. As I mentioned, the staff meeting would include the liaison officer from the Americans, and during that staff meeting we would settle on the message of the day. Then the staff would leave, and I would invite the press in with the acting public affairs officer.

Q: Who was the acting public affairs director?

WILSON: His name was Thibault. His first name escapes me. We would them answer questions, but at the same time we would try and steer the press to the message of the day. It was typically about what Saddam was doing, what had his cynical behavior led to that day. We established a few ground rules for events that occurred day after day. For example, we would have demonstrators in front of the embassy every day. They were bussed in by the Iraqis, and they would stand in front of the embassy and chant, "Down, down, Bush. Down, down, Bush," and those kinds of sentiments. They would show up about 10:15 or 10:30; that was always a good time for me to take a coffee break and go out and smoke a cigar. My agreement with the press was that if they wanted to film the demonstrators, that was fine, and that if they would agree not to film me, then I would be happy to be out there with them and answer any questions and chat with them and have an exchange of information; that is what we would generally do.

Outside the embassy we would have these demonstrators. Behind them, because there was an alley that was closed off, were a bunch of benches where people used to sit to get their visawhen they were waiting to get their visas. I would go around behind the demonstrators and sit on these benches and talk to whoever the reporter of the day was, whether it was Jim Blystone from CNN or Dennis Trouwhoever. They would film the demonstrators and I'd be sitting back there smoking my cigar and talking to the press about what they were doing. That worked out pretty well. Then in the evening when the press would come back from their various forayoftentimes the Iraqis would send them on a field trip somewhere to give them their side of the story. When they returned, I would go over to their filing center, and we would talk and I would give them a "not foattribution" quote if they wanted one or a "for attribution" quote if it seemed to be appropriate at the time. At this time the State Department was even more nervous than usual about too many people speaking to the press. The State Department has always wanted just the secretary and the press spokesman to speak on behalf of...

Q: There was a very tight group around Jim BakeMargaret Tutwiler et all.

WILSON: That's right. Their edict to the Foreign Service had been that nobody can speak to the press without Margaret Tutwiler's personal approval. That just wasn't going to work in the Iraqi context; so we made an agreement that I could speak to the press. For all intents and purposes Margaret and Marlin and I would try and feed off each other...

Q: Marlin being...

WILSON: Fitzwater, the White House spokesman. That worked pretty well. One of the first things I would do every morning would be review the White House and State Department press briefings, so that I could see what Margaret and Marlin were saying. Then I would try and figure out how to make that relevant to what we were doing on the ground, and vice versa. We tried to coordinate our message to give the press corps a coherent view. That worked pretty well except for one occasion when somebody came up to ask me a question. I can't remember what the question was, but it was something like "What would happen if Saddam were to do something nefarious and execute a hostage or do something like that?" I responded off the cuff using some glib phrasI think it was casus bella little Latin from the California surfer. A couple of hours later, I got a phone call from Washington. The voice on the other ensomeone from the task forcsaid, "We just want you to know that Marlin Fitzwater and Margaret Tutwiler think the world of you. They think you're doing a terrific job. They just want you to know that. But we just got a call from the White House press officjust a gentle reminder that, generally speaking, the president reserves unto himself the ability and the right to declare war." I said, "Okay, got it." Other than that, we were in pretty close sync.

When Thanksgiving came, the president decided to go to the Saudi Arabia desert to have Thanksgiving supper with our soldiers there. We for a few weeks had been arguing that we ought to take advantage of the Thanksgiving holiday to do an exposï¿½ on what the embassies were doing for American citizens in difficulty. We thought we ought to do it because we were concerned that people might be losing a little bit of focus on the plight of American citizens in the Gulf. We thought it also would be good to burnish the image not just of our embassy in Iraq but of U.S. embassies in generai.e. what an embassy does. We pitched this idea. This was the only time in the whole crisis that I actually pitched something ahead of time to Washington on a sort of public relations level. We didn't get a response. So I called up and said, "We need a response." They said, "We'll get back to you," but they didn't. So I called up again and said, "What do you think? Do you want to do this over the Thanksgiving weekend? We want to have them take pictures of us cooking our turkeys. I want to do a press conference talking about the plight of the hostages. We want to have the hostage spokesman speak to them. We wanted to be sure that our message was coordinated with any other public relations efforts to be made around the world." Finally they said, "Look, nobody wants to tell you "no," but what everybody's worried about is that, if you do this, you will step on the president's story with his meal in the desert with the troops. But the decision is yours." That's always what they say when they're going to fire you if you screw up. So I thought about it and came to two conclusions. One, it was hard for me to imagine how our story was going to step on a story about the president of the United States being in Saudi Arabia. I thought that that was just not going to happen. Secondly, even if we did step on the story and I got fired, that was not necessarily a bad thing. So I concluded that we should go ahead and do it. It would have been good for the embassy; it would be good for the U.S. to get the story, and I don't see any particular down side to having it published. So we did it. I started out with a press conference on Thanksgiving morning. I went over to the foreign ministry with about 50 diplomatic notes related to individuals who were being held against their will, insisting on their release. I was pretty fired up; I went in to see the guy in the foreign office and I dropped all these notes on him and I berated him. As I mentioned before. Then I went to a press conference where I spoke for an hour responding to questions about why these hostages were being held against their will. The press then went to see the spokesman for the American citizens being held in diplomatic quarters, who said "bring on the B52s. " The press filmed in my kitchen and in the kitchen of these people the food being served, and they filmed people sitting around having their Thanksgiving supper. The Iraqis, perhaps anticipating what I was doing, invited a bunch of Americans to give them a Thanksgiving in a house that was literally just about a mile from mine; they had CNN over there filming that Thanksgiving dinner. I don't know what they were thinking, but CNN rushed over to my place after they had filmed the Iraqi dinner and asked for my reaction. I was standing in my door with the cameras going and I said, "It was cynical and, in fact, sadistic on the part of Saddam Hussein to do this to American citizens; having them at a place less than a mile away from here and not even permitting an American consular official to see them." That was really the icing on the cakto make the point that this was just inhumane treatment of American citizens. It worked out great. Two days later I get a cable, addressed to Joe Wilson from President Bush. "Dear Joe, I saw you recently on CNN talking about what you thought of Saddam's despicable behavior," something like that, and it went on and said, "I could not have said it better." Then there was another paragraph, "It's relatively easy for us here in Washington to speak out, but what you guys are going out there day in and day out is truly remarkable." After that, I figured that, we won our gamble. Aside from the fact that I didn't get fired and therefore had to stay for another six weeks, we were successful in our effort.

Q: I'd like to sort of interject here. One of the things you were doing was bypassing the spinners who think only in terms of their principals, George Bush and Jim Baker. They're not even consulting their principals particularly. They only think in one dimension. You have to almost understand the topography of the Washington scene.

WILSON: That's exactly right. I think from our perspective, one of the reasons that we were pretty successful in this is that we did understand that syndrome and did nothing that detracted from their ownership of the Washington part of it. Everything that we did was supportive of not just them but of their efforts. There were some things that needed to be said. We needed to project an image of strength and of 'devil may care' both to our own citizens and to the Iraqis. One of the lessons that we have internalized from the Lebanese the hostages event, for example, was that the rather plaintive wailing of the individual hostage and his or her family made a largely a political story into a human interest story. When you have a human interest story, it's very difficult for some in the political world to do what needs to be done in the larger interest. Therefore, we were insistent on creating an ambiance in our mission which made the larger interests most important, far more important than our own personal situation, and we got a lot of support from everybody involved in this. It was heartfelt. First of all, we didn't have a lot of crybabies, and secondly, in our approach to the issue, in our discussions, in our town meetings, in everything that we did, we tried to project the national interest above and beyond our own narrow personal interests.

Q: Did you run into the problem that developed in Lebanon and in Iran when the hostages' wives, sisters and all in the United States became a power unto themselves saying "Get our people out," and turned it into a personal story. You understand what I'm talking about?

WILSON: Yes. In fact, the wives came out a couple times on Iraqi organized trips to see their husbands. I met with them and talked with them, and we attempted to be very sympathetic to what they were doing, but perhaps because these hostages were held only for three months as opposed to 18 months, the relatives were unable to organize themselves into a power base. The second time they came, it was to pick up their husbands. The first time they came, it was to see them. I saw them as well. We went through a litany of what we were doing for their family members, and we were doing a lot. We had this weekly broad sheet that we were sending out to them. We had this pen pal system. We had stacks and stacks of diplomatic notes. We encouraged people, if they had any sort of medical ailment, to alert us to that so that we could make the case on their behalf. We managed to spring a half a dozen hostages. Every time there was a visitor we would have some input into which hostages got released, or we found loopholes in the management of the hostage program so that we were able to go in and say, "This person doesn't fit this category of hostage. Therefore, you should release him." We had some allies within the Iraqi foreign ministry that would allow that to happen. We would get a couple out that way, and then they would close the loophole and we'd have to go and find another loophole. We had a several pronged strategy. One was that we just papered them with diplomatic notes to get these hostages out. We would send notes like, "He suffers from hangnails. Therefore, he really needs to be home. You need to do this," anything would do. We tried to be very positively responsive to any family concern about their loved ones. We would go ahead and act upon it. We tried to find these loopholes, where we could find them. We were able, during the evacuations of various groups, to make the case that mothers and children should not be separated; it didn't make any difference whether the mother was Kuwaiti or American. So long as the child was an American, the mother should go with him or her. We were successful in that. We were successful in getting one or two hostages out every time, and we would try to load up hostages onto every American who came out. It didn't make any difference to us. The more, the merrier. If we could get 10 out with Mohammed Ali, if they promised us 10 we'd go for 12. So we tried to be very responsive.

The other thing that we tried to do diplomaticalll made this case starting in Novembewas to say that Saddam should be under no illusion that by holding hostages it was going to prevent war; on the contrary. I made that case in a four hour lunch with a Palestinian journalist, a female Palestinian journalist, who was firmly convinced that every insult ever visited upon the Palestinian people for the last 2,000 years had been the fault of the United States. She was no great friend of American policy, but she was a damn good journalist. She was well connected in North Africa and in Jordan, so I thought I would try this line on her, because it seemed to me that the frontal attack on the Iraqis was not going to necessarily be a successful attack; we had to try and come at them from another direction. I made the case directly, and I convinced her that the thesis that I was advancing was a legitimate oni.e the thesis being that holding onto the American hostages was not an asset; it was not going to prevent the war. "Given a military action of the size contemplated by Pentagon military planners"and you could see with 500,000 American soldiers in the desert what we're talking aboubig Army, 7th Corps, and everything in the desert that the planners, political and militar" they have basically determined that the United States could absorb the loss of 2,000 civilians, 150 hostages and 2,000 civilians and the 150 of us here in Baghdad. The Iraqis shouldn't delude themselves into thinking that keeping hostages would prevent the American military from throwing them out of Kuwait. On the other hand, what they really need to take into consideration is the impact on American public opinion and on the president's own maneuver flexibility if something happens to one of these hostages and it becomes public knowledge. Imagine, if you will, an American hostage dying either at the hands of some brutal Iraqi mob or even in a refinery fire in which he happens to be caught in just because he's a hostage at that site. American anger might be so great at that time that the president of the United States would have no choice but to go to war to avenge the death of an American citizen being held hostage. Therefore, it seems to me, quite to the contrary of considering American hostages as assets, they ought to be viewed as liabilities. They're not going to prevent war, but something happening to them might in fact bring the war..."

Q: You're back to the casus belli.

WILSON: That's right, but this was in private. I wouldn't have said it in public, so it was okay. "Therefore, the Iraqis need to think about what it is they are going to war for. Are they going to war over the hostages, or are you going to war over territory which they have tried to conquer? They should not confuse the two. If in fact in their deliberations they decide that it's over territory, which of course it is, then they ought to just get the hostages off the table. It's just one extraneous issue that's a complicating factor both for them and for everybody else." I spent four hours with her at lunch going over this with a couple of hours devoted to trying to overcome her sense of angst because the Palestinians were one of the most affected communities in Kuwait. They were the ones who basically ran the Kuwait bureaucracy. To try and justify what he had done, Saddam made the case that he invaded Kuwait to liberate Palestine, and somehow he had gotten Yasser Arafat to go along with that fiction. There had been massive upheavals in the Palestinian community in Kuwait. She herself had an uncle in Kuwait who had gone a little bit off his rocker. She said she had gone to see him. She said, "It was so sad. It was like he was on LSD, because he would tell me, 'We're so glad they invaded Kuwait to liberate Palestine, but my God, why did they do this to me?' looking at the wreckage of his home life and his home." We discussed all that. I laid this hostage thesis on her and she kind of bought into it. I said, "Look, I don't care whether you write about it or not, but I just think it's something that you ought to be aware of. Feel free to share it if you think it's valid." She was on her way off to north Africa; she was to be in the north Africa scene, the riots in Algiers and Morocco and everywhere else. About 10 days later I get a cable from Chris Ross, who was our ambassador in Algiers at the time, which said, "I've just spent some time with the Algerian Foreign Minister Hozalen, and he laid out a thesis as to why Saddam is holding onto the hostages when they are really a liability rather than an asset." Then he went repeating the A, B and Cs of the thesis that I had laid out. I thought "great, I'm starting to get some feedback. This is how we're going to apply some pressure." My point in doing this was to make the thesis as the conventional wisdom around the region. During all of this, we're having the "use of force" debate in the U.S. Senate, with Bill Crowe testifying to give sanctions a chance. All our efforts to develop this thesis that the hostages are a liability got sidetracked because Saddam began to think that the president was not going to have the military supporting him. That stopped our strategy dead in its tracks, but that's okay because our view of the hostages was becoming sort of conventional wisdom. A couple weeks after that King Hussein and Arafat both come to Baghdad. According to the Jordanian king's director of cabinet, in a meeting with our ambassador in Jordan to review a meeting the king had with Saddam, His Majesty and Arafat told Saddam that, "You ought to get rid of the hostages. It's not an asset to you. It's a liability," and went through basically the talking points that I had put out to the Palestinian journalist. About a week later the Iraqis announced that their defenses were then sufficiently strong that they no longer needed human shields and, therefore, they could go home. So it worked. I can't tell you that it was my interview that actually did it, but I can tell you that we had sufficient amount of empirical evidence to know that we could get under Saddam's skin and that we could get things done, whether it was the release of women and children or other things, by making him look bad or by just having other people talk to him in a way that we perhaps couldn't do directly. Given that diplomats are always blamed for everything that goes wrong in international relations, I'm fully prepared for our embassy and our mission to take full credit for this little activity having gone right, since we were the ones who were promoting the thesis and since ultimately all of the hostages got released. That's why nobody every talks now about the Iraqi hostages. It's because they weren't hanged. It's because they weren't paraded around blindfolded and cause the U.S. government to react instinctively; we got the thing solved in a reasonable period of time. We got everybody out safely with the exception of one guy who had a heart attack after they picked him ubefore he was ever made hostage, in fact before he even knew he was a hostage.

Q: Did he die?

WILSON: Yes. We lost two Americans within the first three days. One who was an employee of ourl've told that storand the other who was a mid 50 year old businessman who had a heart attack shortly after he was picked up.

Q: As you got the reports, it must have been rather awesome to see what was assembling in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia. You have the whole southern corps. It turned out to be probably the mightiest army in the world that geared up there. There was a debate on things we were going to use it, but were the Iraqis aware of what they'd stirred up?

WILSON: The Iraqi fundamental miscalculatioand it was explained to me by Saddam in our meeting of August 6twas that the United States was unwilling to spill the blood of 10,000 of its youth in the sands of Saudi Arabia, or the Arabian Desert. He thought that we didn't have the staying power for the sort of war that he contemplated. He was basing his view on a couple of things: one, his ability to have stalemated Iran for 10 years; two, his understanding of our experience in Vietnam; and three, his understanding of our experience with the Marine barracks in Beirut and the various hostages in Beirut. He failed to understand that we had in fact stayed in Vietnam for 15 years and that we had taken 50,000 casualties there. Up until early November, he had basically made a bet that if he could get the Iraq Kuwait issue thrown into the United Nations system, then he could have 20 years in Kuwait. That bet was based upon his understanding of the way the UN works, using the historical precedent of Israel occupying Gaza and the West Bank from the 1967 war on. He envisioned some toothless UN resolutions. He had already been the recipient of two resolutions on his use of chemical weapons. Nobody remembers them because they had no biting sanction to them. He anticipated that if he got the issue into the UN system, he could spend 20 years jockeying and negotiating, while at the same time plundering what was left of Kuwait, including pumping all its oil and moving Iraqis into Kuwait City. At the end of, say, 20 years, he could hold a referendum in which the people would choose to be part of Iraq. I think that was pretty clearly his objective vis ï¿½ vis Kuwait. His broader objective, I think, was the same objective that is enshrined in Baath dogma, and that is one huge Arab nation. He just assumed if there would be one Arab nation, why not have one Arab leader, which then, of course, posed the threat to all the royals and sheiks in the rest of the Arabian peninsula.

What he didn't understaneven though we tried to make him understand thiwas that the war that he fought with Iran was not going to be like the war he contemplated against the United States. When we made the decision in early November to move the 7th Corps to the desert and to move a lot of air assets out of Alaska, out of the NATO region, we were essentially calling his bluff. Up until that point, he had some reason to think that if he could keep this in the UN, then he probably could win. He could debate the issue for 20 years. In early November, when we brought the 7th Corps in and said that we were going to roll back the invasion, we basically called his bluff. He didn't understand two things about that. He didn't understand that, in moving the 7th Corps, we were moving a heavy mechanized army. This was not the 101st Airborne, this was not the 89th, this was not Special Ops; these were big tanks and big artillery and big armored personnel carriers. This force was for a conventional war, which was far different from trying to wrest him out of Kuwait with the 101st Airborne. The second thing, and probably more important, that he didn't understand was that we were bringing a lot of power out of the NATO theater of operations and that we were bringing a lot of air assets out of Alaska. We wouldn't empty our most strategic theater of operations of military assets unless we had convincing assurances from the Soviet Union that they would not take advantage of our relative weakness and mess around in an area of real strategic importance. Thirdly, he clearly didn't understand that in the context of the Iraq situation, we would have had to give Gorbachev the same assurances that he would have given us, since we were going to moving a huge military establishment right next to the soft underbelly of the Soviet Empire and its traditional area of influence. I think all of these Saddam views represented a terrible miscalculation on his part.

There were a couple of things that we attempted to do to insure that Saddam fully understood the consequences of his miscalculation if he did not decide to leave Kuwait voluntarily. Onthis was my idea from Baghdawe tried to get the U.S. military to put together a video of precisely how this war was going to be fought. We wanted shots of an M1 tank going up sand dunes at 45 miles an hour and as it comes to the top of the sand dune. the turret swivels 270 degrees, lobs off a shot, and kills a tank four miles over the horizoaction shots like that. We wanted to show pictures of close air support and actual the joint operatiothe way that the U.S. military was going to fight this war on land, in the air, and from the sea. We wanted to make the Iraqis understand that this was not going to be a trench warfare as they had fought with Iran. We had hoped that enough Iraqi generals would see the film and that they would determine that their future was better assured if they went after Saddam than if they went after the U.S. military. An American office, Wayne Downing, loved this idea and actually made a video. He later became the general in charge of special operations and, I think, is about to be assigned to be the counterterrorism office in the White House. Wayne put together a wonderful video, but, as he told me later, couldn't get the video distributed in a timely enough fashion to make an impact because State Department voiced some concerns that we would come across as being too bellicose if the existence of this video became widely known. The logic behind that view escapes me. We had 500,000 troops on the ground. We were about to wage war in which we anticipated taking 20,000 deaths or casualties. If you recall, we had laid in stocks of blood, we had hospital ships out there, we had the Dover Air Force base geared up to serve as a wartime mortuary. We had hospitals up and down the East Coast prepared to take on the casualties that we were anticipating. Somehow, somebody in the State Department thought that a videotape, which might persuade some senior Iraqi generals to do something other than fight the United States, was going to be too bellicose, too warlike. So we couldn't get this tape distributed until it was too late, because as we went down the road, it became pretty clear that for Saddam a military victory was less important than a political victory. He, I think, saw victory very much again in his own historical context. As an Arab, you achieve victory by just having confronted the West.

Q: This is a little bit like Sadat.

WILSON: Actually much more like Nasser. You reap the benefits of a tremendous political victory because you have had the audacity to confront the West; so it was a Nasser style victory, which Sadat also employed in the 1973 war. It was pretty clear by the time we got the video out that for Saddam just having the war was in and of itself justified. Curiously that was just one of the other missteps they took. With every step along the way from November 6th until January 15th, every time Saddam had a fork in the road, an opportunity to get out and save his army, he did something stupid, which made it much easier for us then to keep the coalition together and go to war. By December, my greatest concern was that he would take a partial step which might cause everybody to stop in their tracks and require us to marshal the political will to go forward.

Q: One of the concerns was that he would pull back from Kuwait proper and just sit on the oil fields.

WILSON: That's right. He had drawn a new border, which was really in the hills overlooking Kuwait City. That would have given him the high ground over Kuwait City and control of the northern Kuwait oil fieldthe Ramallah oil fields as they're calleand also would have given him control of Bubion and Warba, the two islands that were just in front of Emkasa, the port that he had developed at the end of the Iran Iraq War. I think there was some concern that he would pull back to that line posing for us the conundrum of whether or not to continue to drive him all the way out of Kuwait or to accept the de facto line that he might have imposed on us. So when Perez de Cuellar went out there...

Q: Who was the Secretary...

WILSON: He was Secretary General of the United Nations at the time. When French President Francois Mitterrand started making noises that sounded like appeasement, I think we were really concerned that there might be a partial withdrawal from Iraq, which would then throw the coalition into absolute disarray. But Saddam proved us wrong. He went right down the road to war.

Q: How did you all view the debate that went ol guess it was in November, was it, or was it December?in the Senate, I guess?

WILSON: The "use of force" debate. We were under no illusions. Our analysis indicated very clearly that there was no incentive for Saddam to get out of Kuwait. Sanctions were not going to get him out of Kuwait. He could survive sanctions for 20 years. So from our perspective, it was not a question of sanctions working to get him out of Kuwait. It was also clear to us, though, in our more lucid moments, that it was important for us to have a full and complete understanding of what we were doing and why we were doing it. As a consequence, as inconvenient as the debate might have been, it seemed to us to be absolutely necessary. In my discussions with peoplvisitors and the presthere seemed to be a fair amount of pacifist energy being generated. Saddam has brought some of the professional pacifists out to Baghdad. They had marched. Saddam was trying to present himself as a man of peace and trying to present the United States as the aggressor. This was beginning to take hold, so it was important to have a more complete understanding of what it was we were doing in the area. The administration had been not terribly adept early on. Jim Baker's comment about "it's for oil and jobs" was probably as controversial as it was elucidating. That said, it was clear to me and to the people who were with me in Baghdad that the only way to get Saddam out of Kuwait was to do it with military force. I conveyed that in a series of telephone conversations from ground zero to Speaker of the House Tom Foley and to Al Gore, then the junior Senator from Tennessee and who voted in favor of the resolution. He was one of the Democratic Senators who voted with the president on the resolution. I called him, after he had initiated telephone contact shortly after the invasion of Kuwait on a purely personal note. He called mthe first person outside the State Department to get through to mand asked me to stay in touch with him, which I was glad to do. I called him during the "use of force" debate. I didn't realize the timing of the phone call because we didn't get CNN; we got the wireless file. I called his office, and they said, "He's not here. He's on the Senate floor." I said, "That's fine. I'll talk to him some other time." They said, "No, we think he'll want to talk to you." So they patched the call down to the Senate cloakroom, which is the room off the Senate floor where senators come to take calls and meet people. Gore came off the Senate floor and took the call, and we spent about 20 minutes talking about the situation. We talked about sanctions and we talked about military action. I was very clear about the analysis that we had done. It turns out that it was the day of the "use of force debate" on the Senate floor and Senator Al Gore voted with the president on this. I like to think that we had some influence in that particular debate. I'm sure we did.

I also called Tom Foley and caught him in the midst of a discussion over the budget resolution taking place in the Speaker's office. I said, "That's fine. I'll call back." They said, "No, we think he'll want to talk to you." So Tom gets on the phone and we're talking and he goes, "Mr. Ambassador," and I said, "Mr. Speaker, it's nice of you to promote me, but I'm not yet an ambassador." He said, "Mr. Ambassador." Allow the Speaker his little foibles. If he wants to make me ambassador, that's fine with me. He said, "Mr. Ambassador," and then in very special English slowly enunciating every syllable he says, "Mr. Ambassador, I just want you to know that the debate in Washington may have people thinking that there is division within the United States government. That is not the case. This debate is a part of American democracy, something that we cherish, but when the time comes, we will all be behind our president in this matter. Let me repeat. Mr. Ambassador," and he said it again. It was wonderful. We were talking on an open line. I had called him on an open line on this. In fact, as time passed, the less I used the secure line and the more I used the open line.

Q: It's a great way of communicating to the real people in power.

WILSON: At one point I had said to a friend of mine, "I'm looking forward to the day when I can take Saddam's white horse and ride it through the rubble of his palace," which is on former U.S. embassy grounds. Several weeks later some journalist came up and asked me if I had really boasted about riding Saddam's horse through the rubble of his palace at some point.

Both of these conversations, I think, were particularly useful and they certainly set the stage. But within Iraq, as I have said, it was the Crowe testimony that attracted attentiowhen I say Crowe, I single him out more than David Jones because Crowe had been a Bush appointee, so he was known internationally as having been Bush's chairman. When he broke with the president on Iraq policy, the implication was that the military was not going to support the president. Powell, I think, was far more circumspect; he voiced his objections, which were held by the military across the board, to the president, but not in public. The active military officers wanted to insure that the political leadership had fully considered the consequences of military action and had fully defined the mission before it gave the orders to the military.

Q: I'm not sure exactly when it happened, but did you get the feeling that particularly the group around Jim Baker was focusing on April Glaspie to hang her out to dry? They were accusing April Glaspiif only she had said the right words to Saddam Hussein, none of this would have happened. Were you getting that? And what was your reaction?

WILSON: Very clearly. In fact, President Bush (41), when I saw him down in Houston several years ago, he asked me if I thought that April Glaspie had gotten a bum rap. I said, "Yes, she did," and he said, "Yes, I sort of thought so, too." I sat there with my mouth open thinking to myself, "She was the president's representative in Baghdad. She was a president appointee, and if he though she had gotten a bum rap, why didn't he do something about it?" From the very beginning it was pretty clear that the goal was to scapegoat April Glaspie on the grounds that perhaps she had given Saddam a green light or a yellow light or what she had said to Saddam had been interpreted as a green light or a yellow light. There were a couple things that might have given rise to this view. Her cable of her meeting with Saddam reflected far more of what Saddam said to her than what she said to Saddam. That is normal; that is the way you report meetings. It's more important to Washington to know what the other person says than what you say, because it is assumed that you are going to be faithful in following your instructions. As I said earlier, in her case she didn't have any instructions, but U.S. policy towards intra Arab border disputes from time immemorial has been that "we do not take a position on the validity of either side's claim, but what we do want is that these disputes be adjudicated through diplomatic negotiations or through an international legal system." That is what she had repeated to Saddam. That was the U.S. position then; it was the U.S. position before; it was the U.S. position afterwards. Even Tariq Aziz, in perhaps one of his few truthful statements, has said that Saddam was not looking for a green light, red light or yellow light; he didn't expect that from April Glaspie, and that that had not been the purpose of the meeting. I've never talked to Jim Baker about it. I've talked to Bob Kimmit about it. I think that you can make the case that at a time when you are attempting to exercise global leadership and build an international coalition, you cannot allow yourself to be bogged down in the 'who lost Kuwait' debate. In the congressional inquiry, in the press questions as to who lost Kuwait it would have made sense not to spend all your time defending April Glaspie. Every time you say something in defense of April Glaspie, you invite the next set of questions. At the end of the day an ambassador gets paid big bucks to take some particular heat. I'm not sure that that's what happened, but if I were Jim Baker, that's the way I would explain it.

Q: This is pure supposition, but again, knowing something about the topography of Washington, it sounded to me like the spinmeisters around Jim Baker were pushing the anti Glaspie line, because Jim Baker was not paying much attention. They, were trying to cover for their boss, and the immediate rationale was that, the ambassador didn't handle it right.

WILSON: That's possible. I think they all sort of deluded themselves into maybe thinking that was and then maybe came to believe it. In talking to Kimmit latehe was the undersecretary for political affairs at the time and later went on to be ambassador to Germanhe asked approximately the same questioi.e. why wasn't she tougher on Saddam? The counter argument is what else was she going to say. Was she going to tell Saddam, "If you invade Kuwait, we're going to bring B52s over and bomb Baghdad back to the Stone Age." You can't do that. You're under no instructions to do that. It would have been going far beyond her brief to represent the interests of your government. We have to remember that her meeting with Saddam took place before the invasion. As I mentioned before, while she was with Saddam, he took a phone call from Mubarak. In that conversation with Mubarak, he told him exactly what he had told Aprii.e. that he would not do anything militarily as long as there was a negotiating process ongoing and that Mubarak need not worry. We were being told by all the Arab leaders in the region, "Don't do anything because you might provoke exactly what you want to avoid. We'll take care of it." I think, if you're a country like the United States, fundamentally you have to absorb the first blow. You can't put yourself in a position where you're striking out first. You have to take the first blow. In the case of Kuwait, we didn't take the first blow; the Kuwaitis took it, but I think the point is that we could not have done much more than we did, which was fly a couple of bomber aircraft around Bahrain for a couple days before the invasion.

As I said before, the larger question seems to mand I've discussed this with Mike Van Heusen. Mike Van Heusen was the senior staffer for Lee Hamilton when Hamilton was chairman of the whole House International Relations Committee. A couple of days after April saw Saddam, Hamilton held a public hearing with John Kelly, who was the assistant secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, as principal witness. Hamilton asked Kelland I remember this vividly because it just jumped off the page and smacked me in the face when I first saw it in the wireless fil"Do we have a mutual defense pact with Kuwait?" The question really was whether an automatic response by the United States would be required by treaty in the event that Kuwait was attacked? Hamilton knew the answer to that, for crying out loud. It was his area of expertise. There's no reason for him to ask that, particularly in open session, unless he wanted a public response. Either they were really stupid in asking the question or they had reasons to which I'm not privy, but he obviously got the answer that we had to give and that was that we don't have a mutual defense pact with Kuwait. That opened up a whole different set of issues. If you're going to come to the aid of a country that's been invaded, you have to use a different set of legal justifications to do so. So if you ever wanted to send a confusing signal to Saddam, when a senior government official tells a senior member of the U.S. Congress that we didn't have any legal requirement for the U.S. to come to the defense of Kuwait in the event that Kuwait is invaded, that was it. That was the signal that you send.

Q: You haven't talked about the role of the Soviet embassy and Soviet supplies, because this was a Soviet equipped army. Could you talk about your relationship with the Soviet presence in Baghdad.

WILSON: Our relationship with the Soviets during this period was remarkably good. The Soviets had very good insights. Their ambassador and their DCM were both very experienced hands. The ambassador had been DCM there before. The DCM was a guy by the name of Kalugin whose father was the Kalugin of the KGB fame. We were pretty close to theas close as you could be given that there was still some Cold War rivalry. We used to see quite a bit of them. They had an awful lot of Soviet technicians working in the south, which was going to be where the Iraqi troops were as they moved into Kuwait and eventually a battlefield. They were running power projects; there were a lot of technicians there and a lot of money involved. The Soviets were owed a lot of money by the Iraqis for those services. They had very real concerns about what was going to happen to their citizens in south Iraq. They had to negotiate releases from their contract so that they could bring their citizens out because the Iraqis weren't going to allow them to go. The Iraqi position was that the Soviets were contractually obligated to stay to finish the projects; they were not about to let them out of the contract. The Soviets had a set of negotiations with the Iraqis on this issue. They had their own reasons for the actions that they took throughout this period. The connections between Gorbachev and Shevardnadze on the one hand and some of the underlings on the other hand did not seem to work very well at times. In particular, Primakov who later became the Russian foreign minister and had ambition at one time, I think, to be president, seemed to play his own hand.

Q: He was prime minister, too...

WILSON: He was prime minister at one time. Primakov had been a close buddy of Saddam's when he was in the KGB. He had been worked in that territory. He'd known Saddam for 30 years. He got himself stuck into this situation and started coming to Baghdad clearly trying to find a middle way. Every time Primakov would come to Baghdad, we would end up having to have higher level talks with Shevardnadzeither Baker Shevardnadze or Baker Gorbacheto try to rein in Primakov. I remember one situation in particular. Primakov was in Baghdad. This must have been in November, I guess; this was his second or third visit down there. I would get read outs on the Primakov visit because we met with the Soviets virtually every night which I would report. We had a standing meeting, the Soviets, the French, the Turks and ourselves, at either the chief of mission or deputy chief of mission level. It was open to all four. Primakov had come and had met with Saddam and had made some public statement and gone away. This public statement was far rosier than the circumstances merited, and we had reported that. Frank Wisner, who was then our ambassador to Egypt, sent in a companion report because he had met with the Soviet ambassador the following day; he used one of his classic lines. He said, "The Soviet ambassador came and briefed me about what Primakov and Saddam had discussed," and he quoted the ambassador as saying, "I was mildly encouraged by what I did not hear." Then Frank put in parenthesis, "Thin rule indeed." It was a wonderful phrase which supplemented what we were saying. This happened right about the time that Shevardnadze was meeting with Baker in Paris, and literally within 24 hours of Primakov's statement in Baghdad, Shevardnadze and Baker basically refuted and discredited it.

Q: Would the Soviet ambassador or DCM, when he'd report on Primakov, sort of roll their eyes and sort of say, "This is the son of a bitch from out of town," or...

WILSON: No, they were far too disciplined to do that. They would report pretty factually about what he was saying. They would not go into a lot of editorial comment. They were most concerned that their interests be considered as we were moving forward militarily. They were concerned about whether they were going to get paid, but most importantly, I think, they were concerned about their several thousands Soviet technicians who were in the south.

Q: Did the Soviet representatives there understand, when we started putting in the 7th Corps and all, what was going to happen?

WILSON: Yes. I don't think they were under any illusions that a very real possibility of military action existed and that we were buttressing our diplomatic efforts with very real power and real force. I think that they and we and everybody else who was in the diplomatic business labored intensively to try to find a way by which we would have achieved our stated objectives without having to resort to a prolonged military engagement. The Soviets had a lot at stake. They had major investments in Iraq. They had a major political relationship with Saddam. They had a lot of Soviet citizens there.

From our side, we were staring the possibility of 20,000 casualties in the face. It's not an exaggeration to say that we anticipated losing 20,000 American citizens within a fouor five month period. That was a pretty heavy burden to be contemplating. It therefore behooved all of us to insure, as we went into this, that all other options had been tested and explored and found to be wanting before we actually unleashed the military force. That was true ourselves, that was true for the French and the Turks and everybody else who was some stakes in the developments. At certain times resolution efforts became counterproductive to the broader aims of the coalition. When UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar came to Iraq, for example, on his 11th hour mission and when Mitterrand talked about finding some other solution, that undermined to some extent what we were trying to do, but by then it was too late in the game in any case.

I mentioned that the Turks had the best intelligence network in Iraq. They had a lot of commerce going back and forth; they had a lot of citizens in Iraq; they had a lot of history with IraSo we spent a lot of time with the Turkish ambassador, who was a very good friend, and his DCM, who was also a very good friend. We met quite literally every night. The Turkish ambassador and I lived within a mile of each other; so he and I and then most often the Soviet ambassador or DCM and/or the French chargï¿½, would meet to discuss the state of affairs. It was clear to the Turks and us that, while the Iraqis intellectually were concerned about U.S. military actioand I'm convinced that the reason that Saddam first met with April on the 26th of July and then me on the 6th of August, was because they wanted to blunt the possibility that we would react unilaterallthey wanted the issue to be debated in the UN system. If there was going to be a reaction, they wanted it to be a UN reaction because they thought that a UN reaction meant protracted negotiations and toothless resolutions.

Q: Did Perez de Cuellar seem to reflect this? Did you consider him a help or a hindrance?

WILSON: He sent out Kokiana, and we thought that Koki was coming out to secure the release of all hostages, but as it turned out that his mandate was to get all UN workers out of Iraq, in which he was successful. That didn't endear him to me, although I've since made my peace with him, or he's made his peace with me, and we are fine with each other. But at the time, since the vast majority of the UN employees were Palestinians who were traveling on Arab passports and were therefore free to leave, I thought that for him to spent so much time on them and so little time on other nationals was not very helpful. Clearly he was doing it on behalf of Perez de Cuellar. When Perez de Cuellar finally did came out, it was too late. I was already on the airplane on the way out. He literally landed as we were leaving. What was being done in New York was something that Tom Pickering was working on.

Q: Joe, before we move to the other topics that we want to cover, was anybody coming out or could they come out? In other words, somebody from Washington coming out and saying, "Is this guy Joe Wilson solid or is he going around the bend," or come out with instructions. Was there any personal communication from the Department or thNSC?

WILSON: We had a phone line set up 24 hours a day from the DCM's office where the phone was located. I moved from the DCM's office into the ambassador's office during that period, so that my old office could be vacated. We had some interns basically monitoring the phones the whole time. Depending on the time and the event, we would have various flurries of activity when we would be talking to Washington on a regular basis; then there would be times when either most of Washington was asleep or nothing was happening, but we would every 15 minutes we would do a channel check. One time we were walking into ou8:30 or 9:00 o'clock staff meeting. I remember this rather vividly; it was in Novembeand, the task force voice came on the line and said to the person who was monitoring the phone, "The balloon is going up," and that was reported to me. So I went to the phone and said, "I'm not sure I know what you mean. What do you mean the balloon is going up?" The voice on the other end said, "Well, the Iraqis have just launched an ICBM, or a missile, and we think its trajectory is going to have it landing at Haifa or Tel Aviv." I said, "Okay," and we went to our staff meeting to discussed this latest event. A military guy came in about 10 minutes late, looked around the room, and said that he had never seen so many pale faces in his life; we were trying to figure out what to do. We obviously activated all of our security apparatus, i.e., our systems to alert people and get them places where we could have a nose count and move them quickly if we had to. Then the voice came on the phone again and said, "Whoops, false alarm." The Iraqis were apparently just testing their missiles and navigational systems; the missile landed well within Iraqi territory, so we were able to stand down. But it was one of those very interesting moments when, among other things, we were considering whether or not to go upstairs on the roof of the embassy and check the wind direction to figure out whether or not we were downwind or upwind from the nuclear sites that they had.

Q: I was talking a couple days ago to Bill Brown, who was our ambassador in Tel Aviv at the time, about the situation. There's considerable worry about biological and chemical warfare today in Washington. He was saying that he was pretty sure that, if the Iraqis had fired one of their Scuds and if it had landed near Tel Aviv with a chemical warhead, regardless whether it had been effective, Baghdad within a half an hour would have been a nuclear waste site. He was pretty sure that the Israelis were ready to launch a nuclear weapon in retaliation.

WILSON: There were a number of things we did to try to keep the Israelis from going down that roaone of which was to give them the Patriot batteries. Two, we sent Eagleburger to Jerusalem before Desert Storm to talk to them. Three, we neglected to share with them any of our flight patterns or coordinates, so they had no radio contact with U.S. airplanes and they would have been subjected to a U.S. attack had they flown into Iraqi airspace, if they had they done so. I think it was made very, very clear to them that this was not their war. Having said that, I think that clearly had the chemical weapons landed in downtown Tel Aviv or somewhere in Israel, I'm sure they would have felt obliged to react in some fashion. One of the things we did do is when Baker met Tariq Aziz in January 6th in Geneva, was to make very clear to Iraqwhich was couched in a letter from Bush to Saddathat, if the Iraqis used weapons of mass destruction, then the U.S. reserved the right to use every weapon in its arsenal in retaliation. I think Baker made it quite unambiguous in that meeting that, if the Iraqis used chemical weapons against us, we would obliterate them.

Q: Back to my original question: was it possible for somebody from the NSC, from the State Department, to come to Baghdad and sound things out?

WILSON: We were able to move some of our people across to Jordan as non professional couriers, which we would do periodically. Our general services officer needed a break; so we sent her to Jordan for three or four days as a non pro couriethings like that. In terms of getting people in, the regional medical officer came one time in November or December. I guess he was non pro couriered in, which was a good thing because there were people among the Americans we were keeping in diplomatic quarters who had not had their medication in a long time. There were certain medical things that he could take care of, and that was very helpful, I think, for all of us. That was about the only U.S. government official who actually came into Baghdad.

Q: I'm surprised, because I would have thought there would have been somebody just to come to take a sounding to take back to Washington.

WILSON: No. We were on the phone to them all the time. The regional medical officer who was stationed in Washington was the only one that I can recall who actually came to visit.

Q: We want to talk about the hostages. When are we talking about, October? The children had left. Is that right?

WILSON: Women and children under the age of 18 had left. We had different categories of people whom we were worried about. One, we had people who were in hiding in Kuwait. Two, we had people who were within the embassy compound in Kuwait, which had gotten down to just a handful of key personnel at that time. We're now talking about the November time frame. Three, we had Americans in hiding in diplomatic quarters in Baghdad. Those were the people who were at the ambassador's residence, anywhere between 35 and 50 at any given time. Four, we had the human shields, up to 115 at one time.

Q: These were not just Americans?

WILSON: These were just American human shields. There were other human shields of other nationalities. There were the French, there were Brits, there were Japanese, and I think there may have been Germans. The Americans numbered 115. Americans and the Brits were the last to be released. The Iraqis released the French first. It's pretty clear to me that they did that because they hoped to use that as an opportunity to drive a wedge between the Western countries that were forming the coalition. I made it a point after that to be very open to the French presin Frencto discuss with them how we saw things, in the hopes that the French population would not forget that just because French were no longer being held hostage, that didn't mean that there weren't other hostages. I think that was reasonably successful. The French press covered it pretty well.

Those were the categories of people that we were most concerned about. We had set up our operations in Baghdad to service the two populations to whom we had some access. One was the human shields where we worked through the foreign ministry to get them mail. We produced the a weekly newspaper, with anodyne information like football scores and things like that. That we would send out there in the hopes that they would at least have something to read. We set up a pen pal program so that every one of our 70 odd people who were working within the embassy adopted a hostage or two and would serve as a funnel of information. They would communicate with their families back in the States when they got a letter. They would communicate with them when the family sent a letter to be sent to them. And they would write once a week letters to them or something like that. The other group was the people that we had in our housinanywhere from 35 to 50 people at the ambassador's residence at any one time. For these people we had to worry about their medical conditions. We had one fellow who ran out of his medicine. We worried about feeding and just taking care of them with the necessities of life. I have mentioned that we set up a "scavenger" unit as we called it, which went out and bought items on the local markets that had been pillaged from Kuwait. They would spend every day at these wholesale markets around Baghdad where these items from Kuwait were showing up.

Q: Was there any hostility shown towards our people?

WILSON: No, in Baghdad there was no hostility shown towards Americans. I made a point of having my flag on the car every time I went traveling around Baghdad, even if it was just to and from work. I made a point of going to do my Christmas shopping in the market. In fact, the press asked if they could come along, and they did; so it was all photographed. There was never any hostility shown towards me or any other American other than the government organized protests in front of the embassy which would be staged every day to burn the flag and effigy, and they would shout, "Down, down, Bush," and "Down USA." I mentioned earlier that I had an arrangement with some of the media, the television cameras in particular, that if they would not take any pictures of me, I would come out. It usually happened about coffee break time, about 10:30 in the morning, and it was be a good opportunity to just continue having a discussion with some of the media, and it gave me a chance to take a cigar break. I would generally come out and I sit on the bench behind the protestors and talk to the press while the protests were going on in front of me, and smoke my cigar and just to take a half hour to watch what was going on. That worked pretty well. They never violated that confidence.

Q: How did the release of the hostages come about?

WILSON: We saw that Saddam was going to use them as bait to lure Americans to come to Iraq in an attempt to, I guess, really portray Kuwait as the aggrieved party rather than the United States and to encourage them to violate the Executive Order and the UN which had imposed sanctions on travel to Baghdad. It was to a certain extent successful. We had a lot of visitors come through; the most notable two being Mohamed Ali and Ramsey Clark, former attorney general in the Johnson Administration. We made a practice of providing the Iraqis with medical documentation for any hostage whose family was able to provide it to us. Then we established criteria because the Iraqis would often ask us who should be released and who shouldn't be released. We, of course, always said everybody should be released, but in the absence of releasing everybody, "If you're going to release three or four people," we would name some based on a number of objective criteria including health and age, state of mind, family status, etc., that we had established and we would forward those names accordingly. But at the same time, we seized on the fact that they seemed to take medical status in consideration when deciding which people were to be released. We encouraged families to send us any sort of information on whatever malady their loved ones might have suffered from infancy on; we would incorporate that into diplomatic notes and send the information to the Iraqis. We would get letters saying, "My husband once suffered from a hangnail," and then we would send a diplomatic note saying, "So and so once suffered from a hangnail. Therefore, he is obviously medically unfit to be kept as a human shield, and you should release him." We inundated the Iraqi foreign ministry with these diplomatic notes. We also tried to shame them at every opportunity. Let me go back to when they still were holding women and children. I think I told this story. We made the point that true Iraqi heroes did not hide behind the skirts of women and children. We did something similar when hundreds of thousands of Indian and Pakistani and South Asian workers in Kuwait were being herded into refugee camps and there was a cholera outbreak. While they were in the refugee camps, Saddam was trying to position himself as a champion of the Third World and a champion of the non aligned movement and a champion of Islam. I went on CNN and said that this was balderdash, given that you've that there were these tens of thousands of citizens from Third World countries and from non aligned movement countries, many thousands of whom were Muslim being held in refugee camps where they were suffering from cholera. I said that one could see the epidemics that were beginning to rage in these refugee camps since Saddam, their champion, was doing nothing to allow them to leave. About three or four days later, he announced that they could all leave. We had some almost immediate feedback with these attacks on him; the confrontations with him were having some effect, so we did that as well.

In the "use of force" debate, David Jones, who had been an Air Force general and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and then Bill Crowe, who had been a Navy admiral, and also had been Chairman, testified. Crowe's was particularly important because he had been a Chairman under George Bush. Crowe said, "Give sanctions a chance; don't use force," We knew, because we had been doing a lot of studies on the effects of sanctions, that sanctions were not going to do it; they might be part of a broader strategy but they of themselves were not the strategy. But the fact that a recently departed Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff had testified in a way that was counter to his president's policy was perceived by the Iraqis as a demonstration that the military would not be with George Bush if he decided to launch his counterattack. As a consequence, everything that we were doing towards getting the hostages released dried up overnight. We were no longer solicited for our views on who should be the next ones to go. We were never solicited for our views on who should stay because we always refused to answer, but on who should go, what our priority was, who might be the four or five that we would think were probably the neediest and who should leave with the next American visitor. I must say that I have never really forgiven either of those gentlemen but in particularly Admiral Crowe for having said what he did say. I thought that it was not well thought out. He didn't have access to the information that he needed to allow him to draw the conclusions he drew in front of the U.S. Senate committee; the signal that he sent to the Iraqis was unmistakable and it was very much an anathema to what we were trying to achieve. That was a setback. Notwithstanding that, we were successful in getting everybody out of there. In fact, if you go back and you take a look at the history, of the several thousand Americans who were at risk during that period, we lost just two, one of whom was a U.S. government employee. He was one of our communicators who died of a cerebral hemorrhage the first or second night of the invasion. The other was an American who was swept up in the invasion, and while he was in custody in the first couple days he had a heart attack and died. Everybody else made it out and back to their loved ones by Christmas.

Q: What about all these people who were hiding in Baghdad and maybe elsewhere, but particularly in Kuwait? They weren't on anybody's list. Obviously you didn't want to let anybody know where they were, but at a certain point you have to say, "Oh yes, and we have 2,000 people in Kuwait who'd like to get out too." How did that work?

WILSON; The Iraqis knew that there were a number of people hiding in Kuwait. They didn't know how many, and we weren't going to tell them. We had an interesting experience where the German ambassadowe were not the only ones who had citizens in hiding; other Europeans had citizens in hiding as welat one point called the Japanese ambassador, the French chargï¿½, the British ambassador and me to invite us over to his office. He told u"I've just negotiated a deal with the Iraqis on behalf of all of us," although nobody had empowered him to negotiate on our behalf. The deal was as follows: The Iraqis had committed to the German ambassador that they would permit all of our nationals in hiding in Kuwait safe passage out of Kuwait City. That sounded really nice. I raised my hand and said, "That sounds very nice, but is this safe passage all the way out of Iraq or is it just out of Kuwait?." We'd had this experience already with the Iraqis double crossing us on people coming from our compound in Kuwait. He said, "It's from Kuwait. They will organize it, they will provide the safe passage, they will take care that nothing happens to them, and when they get to Baghdad, they'll be human shields. But clearly their fate as human shields will be better than what they're going through in hiding as fugitives in Kuwait." I said, "Well, thanks very much. I have to tell you in all candor that I really am not sure that my government would support anything like that, however humanitarian it may seen on the face of it, just because I don't think that we're going to support anything that puts more of our citizens under Saddam's thumb." I went back and I wrote the cable to Washington. Of course, I was far more candid in my cable to Washington than I was to the German. I said that this didn't make a lot of sense to me, that, however well intentioned it might be. The idea of having more people as human shields didn't seem to be something that we would want to supporthe U.S. government would not want to go on record as suggesting to American citizens that they come out of hiding to be made hostages. The Department agreed with me. The next day they sent Ambassador General Vernon Walters to see the German foreign minister, who at that time was Genscher, to read him the riot act about presuming to be acting on our behalf particularly on what was really a cockamamie idea. So we didn't obviously participate. We ran a number of charter flights in and out of Kuwait. Every time that we thought that we had enough eligible people to justify a flight, we would run a flight to and from Kuwait.

Q: Was it a the medical type?

WILSON: It was a flight designed to move people out who were eligible. There were still American women in Kuwait; we had Americans who were of dual parentage and therefore had dual citizenship. In those cases we insisted that they were Kuwaiti. So we offered a number of Americans the opportunity to come to the Kuwait airport and get on an aircraft flying out of the area. I think we flew something in the order of 11 or 12 flights. Typically if we had a group in Iraq that was ready, then we would bring the aircraft to Baghdad, fill it up and send it on its way. Typically there were never had enough Americans on these flights, so we would invite people of other nationalities to get aboard a first come/first served basis. If you took a look at the manifests, we had Libyans, we had Filipino maids, we had Palestinianwe had all sorts of nationalities on these flights out of there and very few Americans. If I were to go back and calculate how many Americans actually got out from August 2nd on, I think the number from Kuwait would number far less than 2,000, but I think all Americans, certainly all Americans who wanted to leave and could leave, got out.

Q: Did you have American girls who married Arab students in the United States, went to their husband's home, had children, and then all of a sudden found out that, one, they didn't like it therand this is in normal conditionand, two, that the kids weren't allowed to leave. That's a perennial consular problem, but in your case that must have...

WILSON: We had two categoriel'll leave Kuwait aside when I talk about this. We can talk about Kuwait later. Within Iraq we had two categories. We had a few of these kids who had been born of Iraqi fathers and American mothers in the States and the Iraqi father, after splitting with the American mother, had somehow gotten his hands on the kids and brought them back to Iraq. There was nothing we could do about that even thougl used to spend hours working on such problems. I actually met the father of a couple of these kids. We made innumerable representations on behalf of these kids who were American citizens, but in Iraqi law, were the sons and daughters of Iraqi citizens and, therefore, they were Iraqis and unable to leave Iraq. We did everything we could to facilitate contact between the mother and the father to assure the mother that her kids were okay and to try to facilitate some rapprochement which would allow the mother to see the children periodically. That was one category, which at no level could we bridge the gap. The other category was the one you mentionetypically American women who had married Iraqis, mostly in the '40s or the '50s when the first wave of Iraqis had come to the United States to go to school. These were people of late middle age who had spent most of the last 40 years in Iraq, including the whole period of the Gulf War, without ever having the opportunity to leave because there were restrictions on Iraqi travel outside the country during that period. They had basically decided their own fate by that time. They saw themselves as the wives of Iraqis. None of them approached me about leaving. Their whole relationship with the American embassy was one of just staying in touch with America and their American roots, but for all intents and purposes they all saw themselves as Iraqis. In another category, we had a fellow who was in hiding in Baghdad. He would pop up from time to time. He was an employee of an American firm. He did not stay at the embassy compound because he had a girlfriend, and he opted to marry the girl and stay in Baghdad; he didn't want to leave. These were the only ones that I'm aware of. Those were the categories and those were really the cases that we could not help them to get out.

In Kuwait, we did manage to run a couple of flights filled with women and children who had the dual national citizenship. The dual national case occurred usually in two ways. One was the children of an American male and a Kuwaiti female; they were Americans, and that was pretty easily resolved; they were able to leave. Then the second one were the offspring of American mothers and Kuwaiti fathers. The initial decision was that they were to be considered Kuwaitis through their father and, therefore, the mothers would be permitted to leave without her the children because all Kuwaitis had become Iraqis and therefore were subject to the travel restrictions imposed on Iraqis. A number of such cases had gotten on the airplane in Kuwait and showed up in Baghdad for processing. We had a processing center there. The Iraqis had a processing center, so people would fly from Kuwait to Iraq, be processed, get back on the airplane and fly to Europe. In this casl was always at the airport when they came througthe Iraqis were saying, "We're not going to let these people leave." I went into the head of the Immigration office and I told him that I was furious at what they were doing. I had my biggest cigar in my mouth and I had my face really right up in his facjust far enough away from his face so that I could smoke my cigar. Every time I was getting in his face, I was blowing cigar smoke in his face as well. I made it very clear to him that we were not going to put up with the idea of separating mothers and children. I got Nezar Hamdun on the phone, and he laid out the rationale that I have just mentioned. My rejoinder was that not just Iraqi custom but even under the Islamic faith, one would not separate a mother from her young children. As a consequence it seemed to me that he could use that as the rationale for letting these children leave with their mothers. I said that in any event we were just not going to permit this to happen if we could possibly stop it. I told Nezar, "Look, this is the way you get out of the problem. These are children of American mothers. While technically they're Kuwaiti children, the general principle of not separating mothers from their children should be overriding in this case." I added, "And if you don't, I just want you to know that your president made the decision to allow women and children to leave Iraq because he thought he was going to gain propaganda points through this decision. He thought that the world would see him in a kinder, gentler fashion. Now, right outside this door are television crews from CBS, ABC, NBC and CNN, and if I don't have satisfactory resolution of this problem within 30 minutes, when it is the time that the plane is supposed to take off, and if these people are not on that plane, then I will have no choice but to go out there and report to the world's media that the instructions of Saddam Hussein to allow women and children to leave were not carried out by his underlings out here at the airport or in the foreign ministrThe decision is yours." Twenty eight minutes later he called me back and said, "They can all go. Put the Immigration official on the phone." The Immigration official got on the phone, said, "Yes, Sir," and they moved all the women and children onto the airplane and they got out. After that, I went out; the press was all there and they asked me about it, and I was able to report that in fact there had been a successful departure of all these women and children.

Q: You had entered a new phase of diplomacy in a way. This is where it really hit the world, and that was particularly true for CNN but also for other television networks. The media became a very important tool of diplomacy. It could be used for you or against you. It was a watershed.

WILSON: It was particularly interesting in Iraq because the embassy had the only technical means for the reporters to file their reports without having to the Morse code telegraph system or some other outdated system. Fax machines were outlawed. They could communicate through an Iraqi operator and be connected, but whatever they were going to report would be listened to. They would have to then dictate the report, or they could come down to the embassy and the compound across the street which we occupied. Those were useless offices anyway, being occupied by USIS; so we had turned them into a press filing center. Our PAO had set it up in a way to provide everybody their own desk and their own telephone lines, all of which were connected to Washington; they were direct dial capable. We were the only place in Baghdad that had direct dial capability. The reporters would come in the afternoon and file their stories. Even in those days, one could take his or hers little laptop computer and hook it up through the modem that one could file the stories electronically. They could do it very, very quickly. It put the reporters in an interesting position. They wanted to file their stories, but they also didn't want to be perceived as being too close to the American embassy. We made no specific demands on them at all. What we did do was to hold a morning press briefing which was on background. Before that press briefing, we would hold our staff meeting in part to determine what the message of the day would be. We would determine what it was we hoped the press would cover in Baghdad from our perspective. So during the course of the press backgrounder, we would try to invite their attention to issues that were of great concern to us, and typically we would get some stories written about it. The press loved the opportunity to take pictures of me getting into the car; so we would give them those opportunities. Did I tell you the story about Thanksgiving?

Q: I think so.

WILSON: The one time that we actually worked with the White House and the State Department was over Thanksgiving. The arrangement I had...

Q: Bush was going...

WILSON: Yes, Bush was going to be in the desert, so I already told that story. But basically any opportunity to have an interaction that advanced our agendand our agenda was to be very confrontation to Saddawe used and particularly with CNN because it was...

Q: You were mentioning direct line connections, but how was CNN dealing at that time with their television signals?

WILSON: They had satellite hook up, so they were able to bring their equipment in. I can't remember what size it was at that time. I don't know if they needed a rooftop to put it on.

Q: Did you find the Iraqis getting restive with all this press coverage, or did they seem to think it was a good thing?

WILSON: The Iraqi on the street would never see it, because all dissemination of information was restricted; there were no satellite dishes allowed in Iraqi and, of course, the press was subject to enormous censorship. The only people that really saw foreign media coverage were the Iraqi elite, basically Saddam and his information ministry, which was charged with monitoring the coverage, and his foreign ministry for much the same reason, and perhaps parts of his inner circle. The number of people who actually saw the coverage was very small. The importance of the people who saw it was tremendous. I could tell who was watching it by who was pissed off at me on any given day, because I used every opportunity to go on and make really derogatory comments about Saddam. I was even called over to the foreign ministry one time and chastised for my aggressive and assertive behavior, to which I rejoined that when one had 117 of his citizens being held hostage, they could damn well expect that we're going to be assertive and aggressive on their behalf.

Q: Why didn't they kick you out?

WILSON: I don't know. I think they thought if they kicked me out, they wouldn't have anybody else to talk to. They kicked everybody else out. They kicked out our military attachï¿½, our station chief, and our consular officer.

Q: You mentioned interns. Who were the interns?

WILSON: These were kids who had come over to spend their summer to work in the embassy. We had a couple who had just arrived and we had a bunch from Kuwait. I think we had four altogether, kids who were either in their senior year or in the first year of graduate school. They came to Baghdad and they were terrific. They just went with the flow. For them, this was just a great experience. They manned the telephones. They did that 24 hours a day. They worked on six hour shifts. I would spend a lot of time with them, because they were in my old office. We took the approach to be just as open as we could be with everybody in our community. We had nothing to hide. There were maybe some things we wouldn't discuss openly with people, but most everything was open to discussion. I tried to make myself very accessible to anybody. So I spent a lot of time with these kids, and it was great.

Q: Was there any sort of distress on the part of the State Department of having interns there: parents saying "Come home, get them out of harm's way" and that sort of thing?

WILSON: Oh, yes, absolutellots of distress. But we fostered an atmosphere of defiance within our embassy. We took a look at some of the other models of people in hostage like situations; the ones that we had looked at were not terribly appealing in our own thinking to how we wanted to approach this issue. We did not want to be seen as whining about why isn't our government doing more for us. So we attempted to create an atmosphere of real defiance. The British ambassador one time accused me of acting like a cowboy sitting on my stoop with my shotgun across my knee waiting for the bad guys to come over the horizon. He meant that in the way only a British could mean it, which is really somewhat critical. I took it, and my staff took it, as a supreme compliment.

Q: What were the British and French and German embassies doing? Were they taking different courses?

WILSON: A lot of them were constrained by their commitments to the EU. In the EU system, there's a requirement to achieve consensus. So even though we had somewhat different ways of getting to the common objective, we all were pretty much on the same page. It was very clear that the country that was going to lead in this particular situation was the United States. We were the ones who were being paid to be the most belligerent. If there was somebody who was going to find a meeting of the minds that would accommodate both the U.S. position, as characterized by our president, and the Iraqi position, which was characterized by their presence in Kuwait City, it would have to be a third party. We were not going to be the ones who were going to be making any concessions whatsoever. We understood early on that in Saddam's world a concession would be pocketed, and viewed as a sign of weakness, and that the Iraqis would then move on to seek the next concession. We were not going to give them the satisfaction of any concessions whatsoever. The French were pretty good on the ground. In fact, the French chargï¿½ who was there when I was there is now back there as the head of their interest sectionow ten years later. We had very similar views on where this situation was going and how it was going. I said that we had nightly meetingthe French, the Soviets, ourselves, and the Turks, during which we would discuss the events of the day and how we thought that we might get from here to there. The Brits were invited to a lot of these meetings as well. The British ambassador found us insufferable, but that's not surprising. He found us particularly insufferable because we offered sanctuary to all our nationals, and as a consequence he was pretty much obliged to do so the same because, after all, if the Americans could do it, why couldn't the British? So he offered his nationals sanctuary on their embassy property in tents, and then they had to call us for things like washing machines and dishwashers and televisions and some of the luxuries that they needed really to take care of a population that size. They didn't like that very much at all. We, of course, loved it.

Q: He was more of the old school?

WILSON: Yes, I'd say so. I don't know how he would have done it differently and ultimately where they would have come down, but we were clearly the more strident. I think that he was actually out of step with his own government in a lot of these issues. But because we were doing things for our citizens, some of these other countries felt compelled to do similar things for theirs.

Q: The hostages had left by when?

WILSON: Early December, shortly after Thanksgiving.

Q: Our embassy in Kuwait: I think you mentioned it before, but when did that move to Baghdad?

WILSON: The first part of the embassy moved in late Augus110 to 120 staffers probably moved in late August; and the rest of them moved about the time that the hostages were released. I think there was some linkage between their leaving and the hostages leavinin fact, I know there was. They were permitted to stand down; we withdrew our diplomatic representation from Kuwaiwe temporarily left Kuwait, left the flag flying but took out all our personnel. After the hostages had been released, the rationale was that, since there were no longer any American citizens in Kuwait who wanted to leave or needed any embassy or consular services, there was therefore no longer any reason to keep our staff there under the circumstances; so they left. This was in the early December time frame, sometime between the 3rd and the 10th or 11th.

Q: What about the Iraqi and Kuwaiti foreign service nationals who worked in our embassies both in Kuwait and in Baghdad? Were they taken care of?

WILSON: Yes. I don't know about Kuwait, because we never went there and never provided any administrative support to them. In the case of Baghdad, they all stayed with us, even though many of them were being advised by their families that they ought to leave for their own safety. Some may have been harassed by their neighbors; they were all as uncertain or even more uncertain of their future than we were; they were under as great or greater stress than we were, and yet they stayed with us. My driver, who was an Egyptian, to whom I had said early on that if he felt more comfortable leaving, he should do so taking into account his own personal considerations, but he didn't do it. He was under tremendous stress. He was a very nervous guy anyway.

Q: Was there any way one could compensate them for this loyalty, then or later on?

WILSON: I don't think there was any way of adequately compensating them. I think we made some efforts to get them some legal status in the United States. But I don't know where all that went.

Q: How about your consular section? Were there any Iraqi students or others trying to get visas?

WILSON: No, because the Iraqis themselves had imposed travel restrictions; so Iraqis could not get out. They couldn't get passports.

Q: I would have thought this would have cause a lot of heartburn within the Iraqi elite community.

WILSON: Except they were accustomed to this kind of treatment. Those who could, did get out and those couldn't had already spent the previous 10 years stuck in Iraq during the Gulf War. Our contact with the Iraqi elite was very limited. We knew a few people who managed some of the establishments around town and a few professors at the university, but we tried to avoid our best friends during these times of stress because they would been watched as closely or more closely than anybody, and their contacts with Americans would put them at some risk.

Q: When we get into December, the hostages are gone...

WILSON: I should mention that a number of hostages got themselves out. We had a number of hostagethey were not actually hostages but housed in different quarterwho took it upon themselves to make a break for it. We counseled them not to do it; it was dangerous, but they were committed to doing so. Since we had no legal means of keeping them against their will, all we could do was counsel them not to proceed, but then we provided as much support as we could, including maps, compasses and such. A number of these peoplmaybe as many as three or four different groups over a period of three weekleft in the middle of the night and drove as far towards the Jordanian border as they coulusually within a couple of miles of the border. I don't know how they got through the checkpoints, but they did. They drove all the way to near the Jordanian border, walked a couple miles in the desert, turned towards the Jordanian border at some point, and then crossed the rest of desert into Jordan, where they would be met by American authorities on the other side. Although we didn't run these operations, we provided logistic support to those who determined that they were going to do so whether we liked it or not, and we didn't like it.

Q: I guess by December you'd sort of cleared the decks, hadn't you?

WILSON: Yes. By mid December, we were looking at Christmas. There were about five of us left in the embassy plus all the journalists we had therCNN and everybody was still there. All the hostages were gone. We had a general services officer, a communicator, a secretary, and myselthat was probably it, four of us, I guess, maybe five. Maybe we had a fifth one.

Q: We had made the decision to fight; that was well apparent. What were you getting from the Iraqi side, just monitoring whatever you could? Did they understand what was happening by this time?

WILSON: A couple things happened. One, the president had indicated a willingness to go the extra mile, which, curiously enough, was perceived by the Iraqis as a concession and as a sign of weakness. Therefore they attempted to negotiate the offer to go the extra mile. The initial offer was 'we'll send Jim Baker to Baghdad and you can have Tariq Aziz come to Washington and we will have these two meetings just to make sure that every avenue for a diplomatic solution has been explored before we actually have to go to war.' The Iraqis said, "Nah, that's a unilateral proposal. It wasn't proposed after any discussions with us. It wasn't agreed upon. We don't agree with it." But we finally settled on a meeting in Geneva. But during the month of December, in fact for several months prior to that, I had been arguing that we needed to produce a tape. I may have told you this story.

Q: You told a story about the military...

WILSON: And Wayne Downing, and we were producing it. We felt that it was really very important that the Iraqi military high command understand that this war was not going to be prosecuted the way the Iran Iraq War was, and the way to do that was to give them a good show of the various weapon systems that we were prepared to bring to bear on them. That was distributed in December, although I don't know how good the distribution was, but by that time I think it was too late anyway. I think ultimately, if you had looked at the situation as a poker game, Saddam had his bluff called in November when the president moved the 7th Corps to the Saudi desert. Even though his bluff had been called, he kept raising the stakes. So by the time the middle of December rolled around, everybody was pretty fatalistic about what's would happen. The Iraqi street was pretty fatalistic.

We believed that everything diplomatic ought to be done that could be done. We had this exchange of historical references: War is a failure of diplomacy versus war is just diplomacy by another means, and which camp did you fall into? I had said that, from my perspective as a diplomat in the field, we would continue to pursue diplomatic ends thinking that war resulted from a failure of diplomacy. Eagleburger had come out and said war really was an extension of diplomacy and politics by another name. So we had the debate on where we were going to end up and ended up in Geneva in January. At the same time we're trying to come up with ways that would allow us to achieve our objectives without having to run the risk of the 20,000 casualties that we were being foreseen. Remember, that at the time all the East Coast hospitals were bringing in extra supplies of blood and extra beds. We had the Dover Air Force base, which is the national military mortuary, being set up to handle all these casualties. We're looking at a big war. We have 500,000 troops. The Pentagon and the political powers were predictin20,000 or 30,000 casualties in an engagement of this size. We had the 7th Corps, which is the corps that was instrumental in winning the Second World War in Europe, in the desert, etc. So we said, "Look, at this stage, it strikes us that Saddam has already seen his move as a political victory even if he suffers a military defeat. We don't think he's going to back down, but if there is a way for him to back out and save face and if we decide that it's in our interest to have him back out and save face, then we ought to consider a number of things." For one, we said, "Quit demonizing him. Quit calling him the second coming of Adolph Hitler, because you make it just way too personal when you do that; two, even though this is not clearly an invasion of Kuwait to liberate Palestine, we need to find an occasion to rededicate ourselves to the Palestinian question and Arab/Israeli issues, in the aftermath of this side show that Saddam created; three, one of the great incentives we can hold out to him is that if he withdraws voluntarily from Kuwaii.e. isn't driven out of Kuwaihe essentially keeps his army intact. We proposed these tactics, and lo and behold, Jim Baker went on "Meet the Press" a couple days later and used them all. Saddam didn't pick up on any of them, not surprisingly since he just really hadn't understood or hadn't wanted to see the situation in the same way that we saw it. To this day I'm convinced that he saw this engagement probably very much as Nasser and later Sadat saw the engagements with the Israelis in the wars of 1967 and 1971; that is to say that a military defeat could become a political victory because an Arab had shown enough mettle to stand up to the West. So even if he hadn't defeated us, he would have gained stature in the eyes of the Arab people because he had shown the courage to stand up to WesI think ultimately that was Saddam's view.

Q: You were pretty well occupied with your current challenges, but was there any thinking by you or by other diplomatic colleagues from other embassies asking, "What if Saddam suffers a real military defeat, a real collapse of his army, whither Iraq, looking towards another type of government or looking for its successes?

WILSON: No, that was not what we were doing in Baghdad at the time. We had not looked at a scenario for the collapse of the Iraqi regime or an alternatives solution to Saddam's rule. If in retrospect, you look at the situation and ask the question of why didn't we go all the way to Baghdad at the time, then that question really rises or as it's been phrased more commonly, "Why did you let Saddam stay in place?" The answer really is that the coalition was blessed by the UN Security Council. It was the first time that the Security Council had sanctioned this type of military engagement since the Korean War. It was important in the context of the vision of future wars to have an international legal basis and sanctions and support and a war being fought by a coalition under the auspices of the UN Security Council. It was really important that the first time out of the chute since the Korean War to abide by the Security Council resolutions. Therefore it was important to expel Iraqis from Kuwait, but not route follow them all the way up to Baghdad and to throw Saddam out. The coalition's actions were going to be limited to the expulsion of the Iraqis from Kuwait.

I think people who looked at Desert Storm will tell you that a lot of Saddam's Republican Guard, his core forces, had left Kuwait before the invasion took place, so that he had actually managed to save a good part really elite forces. We didn't go into Iraq because it would have violated the UN Security Council resolution. It was also pretty clear that our Arab allies in this confrontation, while understanding the rationale for getting Saddam out of Kuwait, foresaw a worst nightmare and that waand probably always will ba Western power acting to overthrow an Arab government just because it didn't like it, thereby inflicting severe humiliation on the Arab world. Had we gone further than the Kuwait Iraqi border, we could have easily stimulated disaffection among our Arab allies almost immediately, whether they were the Saudiprobably not the Saudibut certainly the Egyptians and the Syrians. Thirdly, had we gone into Baghdad, one of two things would have happened. Either you would have had a continuation of the pictures we had been taken during the first couple days after we got into Kuwait CitU.S. troops riding along the " road of death"pictures of a lot of dead Iraqis and a lot of carnage brought by our air attacks and our artillery attacks. You either would have had those sorts of pictures being published running the risk of public opinion changing rather dramatically or, the closer the coalition forces got to Baghdad, the more the world might have seen the Iraqis defending their homeland. Their defense would have been much more spirited than it had been in defense of their occupation of Kuwait causing a much high numbers of casualties on our side for something that was clearly not one of our objectives at the time we launched our military actions. Finally once we got to Baghdad, we wouldn't have found Saddam and we would have been stuck with administering a really fractious societnone of whom probably wanted you to be there. It would have been a real mess. I think we've proven that we're much better at winning wars than we are at occupying foreign lands. Fifthly, which is one that comes up as much in hindsight as it ever did at the time we gamed this out, had we gotten rid of Saddam and had we completely destroyed his military, we would have created had a vacuum and an opportunity for Iranian mischief making. As the Iraqis would tell you, the Iranians have been trying to redraw the border between Iran and the Arab world for 150 years. So I think in retrospect you can make the argument that it was not in our interest to have an Iraq so weakened that it fell prey to an Iranian assault, which could have happened.

Q: How did the play end? Everything was in placour hostages are gone, the southern corps is ready...

WILSON: And we're sitting there on Christmas eve still trying to negotiate whether we're going to have one meeting or two between Baker and Aziz, where it would be, and who it's going to be between.

I sent off one last bit of advice to the president and the secretary of state. This was right before Christmas. It was no brilliant insight on my part, but one of my informal political advisors, which is to say the mediin this case it was an American journalist for the London Sunday Timecame to see me. Marie Colvin is her name. She was probably one of the best writers on the Middle East. She had spent years in and around the Palestinian camps in Lebanon and has been involved in every major Middle East crisis for 25 years. This is part of our relationship with the press. We'd send them out; we'd give them our message and then when they would come back to the USIS building to file their stories. I would wander over to the filing center in the late afternoon just to sit around and chat with the press and glean from them what they had learned during the day. The press, which is very good at asking questions, is also very open about what it found. They were always seeking some feedback, some validation of what they were about to write. Anytime they could get an additional quote, they would add it to their story.

When I think of all the things we did, mastering the art of dealing with the press was one of our better efforts. In any case, Marie came to see me and said, "You know, I've got to tell you that in Baghdad, out there on the street, and with Iraqi authorities, they think that you guys are bluffing." I said, "How can they think that? We've got 500,000 soldiers in the desert, and we've got Norm Schwarzkopf out there, Stormin' Norman." She said, "Well, it's because every time the president of the United States and the secretary of state open their mouths, they talk about bringing war to Saddam and Iraq, but they think you're bluffing. If you really want them to take you seriously, they ought to just shut up. You don't need to say this anymore." I thought about it and I concluded that her advice sounded like a good idea. It was true. The war drums were beating so loud that one just had to wonder whether they were so loud because we didn't intend to do anything and just hoped that by beating the drums we would get the Iraqis to leave Kuwait. Saddam had his theory that the United States was temperamentally incapable of spilling the blood of 10,000 soldiers in the Arabian Desera direct quote to mor had the staying power to remain in the desert for the time that it would take to end such a war. So I wrote a cable to the president and the secretary saying, "If you want Saddam to take us seriously, shut up"a little bit more elegant than that, but that was the basic message. This friend of mine, Larry Drawl, who was in the Secretariat at the time, he's the one who actually...

Q: State Department Secretary?

WILSON: State Department Secretariat. He actually picked up the cable and hand carried it to the secretary of state. He was the senior watch officer running the Secretariat. He said that he read the cable on the way down to the secretary's office and thought that I'd gone off my rocker, because one did not address cables like these to the president of the United States or the secretary of state. He said that he took my message to the secretary; three days later he opened his newspapers and was struck that in the American press at that time there was nothing, no quote, from the president of the United States or the secretary of state or any other Executive Branch official on what we were going to do to Iraq. He said that "Then I realized that you were a genius." By that time, unfortunately everybody elsevery pundit, every retired military officer, anybody who could find a microphone, every member of Congreswas rushing to the microphones to fill the void. So the silence from the policy makers was lost on most people, and if it was lost on most people, it was probably lost on Saddam. But I think it was still an effective tactic and one that I still sometimes advise governments, if they're going to war, to quit beating the war drums.

We spent this very quiet Christmas in Baghdad waiting for the other shoe to drop, waiting for either Baker to come or Tariq to go or the meeting to take place in Geneva, which was what ultimately happened. The negotiations there went on very late into December.

Q: What is the problem of exchange of visits?

WILSON: The problem was that the meeting was something that had been foisted upon the Iraqis. They had been told to have it rather than ask for it. They wanted an opportunity to negotiate even that. In fact, when Bush made his statement "I want to go the extra mile," my reaction and the reaction of some people out of Baghdad was that the Iraqis were going to read that as "the bazaar is open"the negotiations have now opened. They didn't see a meeting as one last chance to explain to them precisely what was going to happebefore it happened. They saw it really as the first step in a negotiated departure, which from their perspective would take as long as it has taken the Israelis to leave Gaza and the West Bank except that Kuwait was a much more lucrative piece of real estate.

It was clear to me that the Iraqis were going to move towards a referendum, after they had populated Kuwait with Iraqis which would decide the outcome. We got through Christmas and New Year's. On New Year's there was a party at, I think, the French chargï¿½'s house. He had this New Year's Eve party. I wasn't going to go because I felt that it was absolutely inappropriate on the eve of a major military conflict for me to be out partying in downtown Baghdad in any way whatsoever. But somebody prevailed upon me. It was actually the correspondent from the New York Times. I said, "I will go only because it's just a way of showing respect to those who were hosting it. I don't want to be seen to be boycotting this affair, but I'll go only if you promise that my attendance there is strictly off the record." In her book on the Gulf War, it's the first or second paragraph of the introduction or chapter one in which she said that the American chargï¿½ danced the night away. I went, I spent about 20 minutes, then I left; yet it still showed up in the book. That is something that has always irked me, but nonetheless, there it is.

During the first week of January we basically just waited. On January 6th the meeting between Baker and Aziz took place. Jim Baker told me afterwards that at the meeting he had four agenda points. One of them was securing Iraqi permission for the withdrawal of American diplomatic representation and American diplomats when and if the United States made that decision. He said that four times he raised that with Tariq Aziz and four times Tariq said, "I have to refer that to higher authorities" higher authorities being Saddam. Of the other issues that were on the table, the only other one that I remember offhanI know that letter has been published sincwas telling Saddam that, if they use weapons of mass destruction, all U.S. military options would be available for use. I think that was really important. If you ever want to raise a possibility to insure that ultimately a government, even a government like Saddam, was going to make rational decisions, that was one. The only way that they had of possibly stemming the tide against 500,000 American soldiers on the ground in the desert would have been to use exotic weapon; the fact that they didn't do that, I think, is indicative of their concern that they would be obliterated had they done so. When we talk about national missile defense and things like that, the presumption that we make is that government like North Korea might actually be tempted into using those kinds of weapons. Our position makes the risks quite clear.

They had the meeting on the sixth. We heard nothing. On the ninth I got a phone call from Nezar Hamdun, the undersecretary at the ministry of foreign affairs. He had formerly been head of the Interest Section in Washington and then later was the Iraqi ambassador to the United Nations. He said higher authorities have confirmed that, "Should you decide to withdraw your diplomatic representation, you can do so. We pose no objections." I phoned Washington, and Washington replied, "Well, that's fine. Why don't you get on an airplane?" There were will airplanes going back and forth to Ammaor drive to Amman, one or the other. Get on an airplane to Amman and get on a commercial flight out of Jordan." This is the 10th of January when we were talking. I said, "Well, that's very thoughtful of you." We had run several these charter flights to Europe taking everybody and their uncle and their dogs and maids and everybody else, but for they were going to have us fly to Amman, Jordan, and then wait around for a commercial flight. I made the rather flip comment, "I suppose we'll be flying economy class, but do you think we can at least get the 20 extra pounds of air freight for international flights?" The rejoinder was, "I think that can be arranged." After stewing about that conversation for about five minutes, I called back to a somewhat higher level in the State Department with a suggestion. I said, "It doesn't make any sense because the Jordanians have already said that if and when hostilities break out, they're going to close the airport. There are already 300 Americans at the Amman International Airport looking for flights to get on. After all that we've been through, I don't think that you want the four or five of us to be in that position at a time when the airport is closed in Amman, Jordan. Therefore, I have a better idea." My idea was to charter an Iraqi 747, because when we ran our charter flights, because of the nature of the sanctions and the Iraqi counteractions to the sanctions, the Iraqis only allowed Iraqi charter flights to take off. So I suggested we charter the one Iraqi Boeing 747...

Q: Which is the largest American airplane in a commercial repertory.

WILSON: That's right. It was in the Iraqi air inventory. I said, "We'll charter that. We'll fly to Amman, Jordan, and we'll pick up the 300 odd Americans who are stuck in Amman, and we will fly everybody to Germanall the Americans who are stranded in Amman." They came back and said, "Well, we take your point, but we don't think that we want to charter this flight to go to Amman, Jordan, and pick up everybody; so why don't you just charter a smaller aircraft, the 727, and fly yourself and all the Americans still in Iraq to Germany." So we did that. We chartered the 727; we reserved seats for ourselves and four or five others, and then we cast about for any other Americans who might still be in Iraq and who might want to leave, including this one American who by then had married an Iraqi woman. He decided he wasn't going to go; he was going to stay with her. We ended up taking two American journalists with us. One was Jim Blystone from CNN who had been behind the lines when Saigon fell and didn't feel the need to do it a second time. He left with us to be followed in Baghdad by Peter Arnett, I never met Peter Arnett in Baghdad. He arrived literally as we were leaving, so I never met him until after the war. The second press passenger was a journalist from the Boston Globe; he also had been stuck behind the lines when Saigon fell. The rest of the American journalists who were there, including Marie Colvin, and the CNN team, which by this time was John Hollaman and Verna Shonin and Peter and their producers, had decided to stay. Robert Weiner and the others decided they were going to stay. Then we offered seats to other diplomats on a first come/first served basis. Curiously the Brits, feckless allies in this, had decided to decamp two days previously; they had departed under the guise of darkness, and sent me a note saying, "By the time you get this, we will be across the border. So long, sucker." So they had made that decision. It was very ironic because at one point there were discussions underway about extracting us clandestinely. The Brits had come up with an elaborate scenario which would have had us driving out east towards Iran, leaving Iraq through the Iranian border. They were going to fly some helicopters in and pick us up in the middle of the night and fly us off to safety. I said, "Absolutely not."

Q: You'd thought a bit about the Iranian attempt to get hostages out?

WILSON: I was certainly familiar with that. But that was not the reason. The reason was that I felt that we had been the glue that had held everything together in Baghdad. Since we were still in Baghdad, all other diplomatic mission were still there. It was quite clear that they were going to leave if and when we decided to leave, and they were going to stay so long as we stayed. It was important in everything that we did that there be others than the Americans involved; it was useful to us to have them there. It was useful because you always wanted an intermediary, somebody who was going to soften the blow, somebody who was going to try and find a third way, somebody who was going to report back to the Iraqis that, 'gee, it's really a stupid idea for you to keep these hostages because the Americans are coming whether you want them or not,' which is what Primakov told them. Even though he tried to manipulate the situation to his advantage, his last message to them was, "The Americans are going to come whether we want them or not. We're not going to stop them, and you're not going to stop them." We needed third parties; it was important then not to abandon the other diplomats as we left in the darknesthese people and their governments who had been part of this drama. That is what I basically told Operations Center and they who put this plan together still remember. They've since forgiven me for it, but they still remember that this "jerk" was sitting in Baghdad saying, "The only way that I'm going to do this is if I'm given a direct order from the president of the United States. When I say 'direct,' I want him to call me on the telephone and tell me that that's what he wants me to do." They didn't do it, so my position was upheld obviously. We went out. We took the flag with us and flew out on the 12th. We took most of the other diplomats. The French stayed and left by automobile the next day. The Turks stayed a little bit longer. I can't remember when or if they left. I think they stayed until after the war broke out. Some of the others stayed; the Algerians stayed and a few others stayed. Most of the rest, certainly all the Western diplomats, we took with us and we flew to Germany.

We spent the night in Germany. One of my fondest memories of arriving in Germany, in Frankfurt, was of one of my longtime colleagues in African Affairs, Harry Geizl, meeting us and carrying my suitcase. He a very interesting character, and if you didn't believe that, he would to tell you; a man full of enthusiasm and very competent. That moment was carried bCNN. We then flew back to Washington on the 13th on a regular PanAm flight, and on the 14th, which was Monday, I went to the office. I went to the office only because I didn't know what else to do with myself. I had to deal with jet lag and culture shock, but perhaps even more dramatic was the fact that the whole drama had played out suddenly and there's nothing more I could do; it's such a letdown. I still couldn't sleep. We had existed on maybe three or four hours of sleep per night. I would stay up until the 2:30 in the morning when the news coverage was oveBBC broadcasted from 2:00 to 2:30 coverage using their leading Middle East experts. I would be up at 6:30 and be in the embassy to get the last briefings from Washington before I started my day. I would read the press clippings from the previous day, which would have been our night, and then I would be ready to go. I would go home shortly after lunch and take about a twhour nap; so I ended up sleeping at most four hours at night and then maybe an hour or two in the afternoon, and this went on seven days a week for six months. It got to the point at which we were always trying to get an angle on these guys. It became really an obsession with us on how to get these Americans out of Irahow to save them, how to keep them from a terrible fate. Even at night I would sleep for an hour or so and then I would get up and do something I had never done in my life: I would pace. I had marble floors, and I would pace back and forth, back and forth for hours on end. There came a time when I had no idea where else to go with all of this. This was in early November and I was feeling pretty poorly. I had the flu or something; I got Kissinger's book on how he saved the world for the American way off the shelf, and I read up on his meetings in the 1970s with Sadat while enmeshed in the Arab Israeli conflict as our national security advisor. I remember he said that he went to see Sadat and found Sadat a most impressive individual, a man of considerable integrity and a man who had assured him that nothing untoward would come of the tension between Egypt and Israel. He left feeling that peace was in the offing. This was three weeks before the Egyptian army crossed the Sinai only to get their butts kicked. So I figured if the Middle East had defeated old "Hank" Kissinger, "Super Hank," what the hell, I could be excused for not having a real quick, successful solution either.

The day after I got bacl got back on the 14tl went to the officagain really because I just didn't know what else to do with myself. I couldn't sleep; I was just really sort of strung out. I got a call to be over at the White House at one o'clock or something like that. I went over in a State car with John Kelly, the assistant secretary for Middle Eastern affairs, and one or two other people. We get there and were ushered into the Roosevelt Room, which is the room outside the Oval Office. We were met by Chief of Protocol Joseph Verner Reed, who had been David Rockefeller's executive assistant for a number of years, was appointed to be our ambassador to Morocco. After that he became the chief of protocol and then went to the United Nations in a management josomething like that. I think that was his career track. Reed took me to meet the President. It's not often one would see the chief of protocol doing something like this. Anyway, the time comes and the door opens and there's the president of the United States. I went up and shook hands with him, and I said to hiwe'd never really talked, we had a couple of exchanges of cables but we hadn't really talke"We never talked during this past six months, but I have to tell you that I felt from the very beginning we were on the same wave length," which was true. I felt from the very beginning that this was a very serious situation that we would confront militarily, and he did as well. He said, "You're absolutely right." Then he turned into the Oval Office. Behind him was basically the War Cabinethe vice president, the secretary of state, the national security Advisor, the head of the CIA, John Sununu...

Q: Secretary of Defense?

WILSON: The secretary of defense was not there. He was the only secretary that wasn't there. The head of the FBI was there, and there were three or four others. I didn't hear what the president said to participants but John Kelly told me later that he had turned to them and he said, "Gentlemen, let me introduce you to a true American hero." I shook hands all around, not knowing what he'd said about me. He could have said, "Let me introduce you to this asshole that we had out there in Baghdad." Kelly came up to me afterwards and said, "That's not what he said about you. He said something else." I'll show you the picture afterwards; I think I've got a picture, maybe not. In the Oval Office the desk is here, the windows are there, there is a sofa over here and chairs on either side of the fireplace, then another sofa. I'm sitting on the sofa next to Jim Baker; the president is sitting here, and on the other side there were all the other people; right by the desk is sitting Brent Scowcroft. The press comes in and the president says, "Don't say anything to them;" so I didn't say anything; I just smiled. They took a bunch of pictures. Then the door was closed and we started talking; I started talking. I'm answering questions from the high level officials and talking about the Iraq situation as I saw it. I'm running literally on sheer adrenalin; I'm not conscious in any way; I have no nerves and I'm not feeling uptight; I'm not feeling nervous being with these people. I'm just theranother day at the office. About halfway through, I looked around the room; there was a lull, somebody else was talking. I looked around and across, sitting next to the president's desk, is Brent Scowcroft. He has his legal size pad, and he's writing down everything I'm saying. It was my first conscious thought since I had awakened that morning. I looked across and I thought to myself: "Who would have ever thought that this California ex hippie surfer would someday be sitting in the Oval Office briefing the president of the United States and his War Cabinet on matters of military import, and that the note taker would be the national security advisor?" When I came to this realization, I got nervous and tongue tied. But by this time the meeting was almost over. The meeting ended and I walk out. The president's personal aide, I guess, comes up to me and says, "The president wants to know if you would like to come over to the residence and meet Mrs. Bush. She'd like to meet you." I said, "Sure." I thought to myself: "I've got nothing else on my schedule." So we walked over to the residence. We actually walked out in front of the residence, the diplomatic entrance. Mrs. Bush was in a wheelchair at the time; they brought her out. I didn't know what to say to her, but I remembered that when she was in the Arabian Desert, some soldier carrying his gun had come up to her and said he wanted a hug. She said, "Well, I've never hugged a gun before." So I walked up to her and I said, "I read what you said in Time Magazine when you hugged that soldier, and I just wanted to assure you, "I'm not carrying a gun but I could sure use a hug too." She said "absolutely." At that time she had broken leg from a sledding accident. So she was in the wheelchair with her leg propped up. She reaches up and grabs me and she gives me a great big hug. To be hugged by Barbara Bush is really something. It's something not to be missed if you ever have the chance. She's great at that, and she's a great lady. As she's hugging mit's a January day, it's a bright January dasuddenly there's this shadow coming across. I looked around, I was still in her grasp, and I looked around and it's the president. He has walked out of the Oval Office to join us, only to catch me in an embrace with his wife. He understood that there was nothing else there. We stood there, just the three of us, and Millie, and the photographer always followed the president.

Q: Millie being the dog?

WILSON: Millie being the dog.

Q: A cocker spaniel?

WILSON: A cocker spaniel. We talked for about another 15 minutes. The president asked me questions about what it was like in the streets of Baghdad he was interested in some human interest stories. Then he said, "I've got to go take a phone call." We walked back across the rose garden. I have a picture that I'll show you before you go, something that I keep in my office. This was literally 36 hours before Desert Storm kicked off.

Q: I'd like to ask you about how you were or weren't used by the Department of State during the Desert Storm period.

WILSON: By the time I got out of Baghdad I was pretty much a spent force. I was physically exhausted and I was mentally exhausted. Seeing the president and then 36 hours later watching CNN as the bombs began to drop on Baghdad was all very, verI don't want to say 'stressful' because we're sort of beyond stresit was very discombobulating. Frankly, for the first couple weeks after I returned all I wanted to do was sleep and get out of town. I found life in Washington to be so far different from life in Baghdad, particularly having come back after having been on television a lot. I would get on elevators and people would stare at me not knowing whether they should say hello to me. Some people on the sidewalks would stop me and talk to me about Baghdad. That was kind of fun, but it was difficult to go back to being a private citizen. I actually turned down requests to go on the Larry King and the Leslie Stahl programs. She was doing some interview program at that time, but I just felt that I had done my bit and wanted to go back to being anonymous. I actually left and went away to the Caribbean for a couple weeks and came back refreshed and rejuvenated, tanned and rested. I went back to the Department, and Ron Newman, who is now our ambassador in Bahrain, was then the director of the office of Northern Gulf AffairIran and Iraasked me if I'd be willing to help out, which I did. I on the desk and dealt with those issues that come up during the time of war. Now admittedly there wasn't a hell of a lot. We discussed some post war stuff but not a lot. Most of the work on the desk was worrying about various groups which some interest or another and which wanted their views to be heard, or about people who had offsprings in Iraq who had been taken by, most often, by the father back to Iraq and thereby separated from the mother. I did some bomb damage assessment, VDA, in the bowels of the Pentagon. Every time the Iraqis would show a damaged sacred site, Baghdad Museum or a mosque or something, I would go to the Pentagon to work with staff there looking at pictures to try to figure out where these bombs had hit and where the sites were that the Iraqis had refused let us get in. We had one bomb that skipped off an intended site and actually hit, I think, the Algerian embassy. There was a bit of work to be done on that. But by this time most of the action had shifted from the State Department to the Pentagon; so there wasn't a whole hell of a lot for us to do. I spent several weeks doing that and then transitioned off into my next life, which was in the Senior Seminar in June.

Q: This was sort of a critical point, and we're not getting good answers. Was anybody that you were aware of looking at peace?

WILSON: No. I think everybody who kind of thought about this period ten years later has agreed that during the prosecution of the war, nobody had taken a good look at what we were going to do after the end of the war. I've talked to everybody from Richard Haas to Brent Scowcroft and most people in between since then about this issue. In fact, we hadn't really figured out what talking points we were going to send Norm Schwarzkopf into the tent with.

Q: When you way 'into the tent', what do you mean?

WILSON: At the end of the ground campaign, the 100 hours when the Iraqis essentially sued for peace, which...

Q: This would be the negotiation. He was the point man for that.

WILSON: Yes. Schwarzkopf, who was in command of the troops, is the one who with his generals went off to meet with Iraqis on the Iraqi Kuwait border after we had driven them out of Kuwaito discuss and negotiate the terms of the cease fire.

Q: Sometimes at the lower ranks you at least get people talking about 'well, what are we going to do?'

WILSON: Not that I was aware of. Curiously, the office that I was assigned to was a pretty small office; there weren't a lot of people around there. As I said, most of the action had shifted over to the Pentagon; so if there was any thinking going on about post war, nobody was calling me to ask me what I thought about post war Iraq.

Q: Nobody asked whether Saddam Hussein could survive?

WILSON: Nobody asked me. We did talk a bit about whether Saddam Hussein was suicidal or not. That was always a question in everybody's mind as we were looking at how far we might have to go and how hard we might have to prosecute the military action. April Glaspie was back in Washington at this time. We used to discuss at some length with people in the Department, and with people at CIA what we thought was Saddam's driving force. I think we concluded, and I think we were correct in this, that ultimately Saddam might not have feared death, but that Saddam was the ultimate survivor and Saddam was very much in the mode owas it Louis XIV who uttere"L'ï¿½tat, c'est moi [French: I am the state]."

Q: Or "Apres moi..."

WILSON: "Apres moi, le deluge," but it was really more "L'ï¿½tat, c'est moi." Saddam was prepared to kill as many Iraqis as necessary because as long as he survived, he was the embodiment of the state of Iraq; he was Iraq. He was more than willing to sacrifice literally tens of thousands of his fellow citizens in his really fruitless enterprise. As long as he survived, then the state of Iraq and the glory of Iraq survived in his somewhat twisted mind. We concluded that, while he didn't physically fear or worry about dying, ultimately he saw himself embodied as the spirit of the state and of the Iraqi nation and as a consequence his survival was of some interest to him.

Q: David Mack, who was in NEA during this time, said that he attended a major meetinCIA, Pentagon and alduring which somebody raised the question "Well, what if Saddam Hussein survives this?" and it was met with universal laughter.

WILSON: I was not in that meeting.

Q: But it was the mindset. This was the problem.

WILSON: I think that's right. I think it's very clear that the administration at the end of the war assumed that all that was needed, as President Bush said, was for the Iraqis to take matters in their own hands. That led to the uprisings by the Shiite and by the Kurds which Saddam was able to put down because he had superior military assets and was able to fly his helicopters against them. I think very clearly that it was the assumption of everybody involved at the decision making levels that Saddam would not survive this massive military defeat. I think Bush has actually written this in the book he wrote with Scowcroft. Clearly they did not anticipate Saddam's ability to hang on in the face of such a major military defeat and the subsequent humiliation of having sanctions imposed and having the no fly zones, etc.

Q: Well then, let's move on. Then you went to the Senior Seminar?

WILSON: I went to the Senior Seminar. I had a lot of issues with the Department of State's administrative operations over things like insurance claims and what not with which I had to deal. I found that the bureaucracy was very unpleasant experience to deal with, particularly after all that I had been through. It was very unpleasant to come back to find petty bureaucrats dealing with our insurance claims in what can only be describeat besas a cavalier manner and at worst treating us as if we were criminals until proven otherwise. That took a lot of time. In fact, it took me almost three years to sort that out. I had to make several visits to the inspector general's office and to the undersecretary for management and to the undersecretary for political affairs before I could get some response from the Claims Bureau. If there was one thing that soured me and most of my colleagues and their families on working for the State Department, it was the treatment that we received from the people who were there to provide support services.

Q: You mentioned families. Your wife and children, did they get much support from the State Department?

WILSON: My wife stayed in France. We had an apartment at the time down in the South of France. She got very little support at the beginning. According to Jim Baker, he had to call our ambassador in Paris to get State people in Marseilles and Paris to pay some attention to our evacuees in those cities. Part of that may have been that they just weren't focused on having an evacuee in their consular district and, therefore, let it slip. Why it had to go to the secretary of state before it was resolved is anybody's guess, but once he got involved, then it worked out pretty well. Most of the families have varying degrees of dissatisfaction with the system. I think the higher level of satisfaction on the part of the people whose husbands had been taken hostage was due to what the embassy was trying to do in Baghdad; it was far higher than the level of satisfaction of the family members which relied on the support from the Department of State. This became a big bone of contention and was something that was hashed out at great length with the undersecretary for management, the family liaison office, the director general's office over a period of several months. I think subsequent evacuations have been handled a little bit better. There has been some more sensitivity to the needs of the family members, although for the life of me I cannot believe that it would be so hard able to crack the nut of the Claims Office, which basically operates on the assumption that you're all criminals until you prove otherwise when you file insurance claims for everything that you have lost in life.

Q: Senior Seminar, you did that from when to when?

WILSON: I did that from the summer of 1991 to the summer of 1992.

Q: How did you find that year?

WILSON: I thought it was great. It was a terrific year to be back in the States. It was an opportunity to look at exactly what the Seminar is designed to d.i.e. to give an officer a much broader perspective on what the United States is all abouwhether it's traveling to Alaska or traveling through downtown Baltimore with city cops. We did all of that. We spent time on farms in Indiana. We went to Nome, Alaska and to Prudhoe Bay. We went to military bases in Texas and drove the Bradley fighting vehicle and the Abrams tank. We flew onto aircraft carriers off San Diego. We saw a lot of how the military works, which is key if you are in a senior policy making position. You want to know how that military operation functions so that you know what you are talking about. Then we had the opportunity to do a number of things related to the criminal justice system and to other Cabinet level departmente.g. Health and Human Service. We learned something about how to deal with our own society and our own social problems, and things like that. I thought it was a most worthwhile year. The one thing that differentiates the military from other elements of the U.S. government is the amount of attention they give to training. In the military you essentially do one line job, staff job, and then one training assignment; so you can expect during the course of a 27 year career to have at least six or seven training assignments. It makes for really a well rounded officer as you rise in the system. In the State Department you're lucky if you can get two years during the course of a 2or 26 year career. One might be the Senior Seminar, which is restricted to 16 or 17 officers per year; so you don't get a lot of officers who have this experience.

Q: I went through in 1974 or 1975. I think you have pointed out one of the problems. There is another one: the military takes care of what we don't officially, and that's what we're doing right here. They have a very active oral history prograwhat did you do, how did it work, how didn't it work, and all that. That's what we're doing here, but we're doing it without government sponsorship. It's sort of goes against the system.

WILSON: If there was one area in which we really need to put some more resources, it's in the training of our diplomats; you can see that. The Department of State had a personnel system that for years was operated to the disadvantage of minorities and females. The Department of State did not take care of the problem. The solution was finally judicially imposed upon us. One of the remedies was to put females and minorities into leadership positions. The Air Force, where I worked later, had seen this as an issue way ahead of the State Department; it actually began training so that, when the time came, there were minority people who were well prepared to move in and succeed in the leadership positions. The State Department, because the change was judicially imposed and required to do it within a very narrow time frame, ended up setting people up for failure by not giving them the training, by not preparing them to assume the responsibilities that they were going to be called upon to accept. Training is key if you ever hope to have a successful State Department. The employment of retired generals in various foreign policy and diplomatic positions is clear evidence of the competence of the military bolstered by their training, while the State Department just continues to issue visas or not, as the case may be. That's too bad, because at the end of the day, military training and experience gives one a view of issues from a military perspective, which is not the only perspective and certainly can not be the prevailing one in sensitive diplomatic negotiations.

Q: In 1992 you're coming out of Senior Seminar. Whither?

WILSON: Before I went to the Senior Seminar, I had lunch with the senior deputy assistant secretary for African Affairs, during which he slipped me a piece of paper which had a list of about 10 ambassadorial jobs on it. He asked me which one I wanted. I looked at it and I concluded I wanted the one that fit me most nicely, Gabon. So I said, "I want Gabon," and so they gave me Gabon. I got nominated. The whole nomination process is one that goes on for months.

I was informed that I was going to be nominated in September, something like thaSeptember October 1991 time frame. I filled out all of the forms, got everything in, and finally was nominated about February March of 1992; then I went up and had my hearings in June of 1992, received my confirmation and was sworn in at the consulate in Marseilles on July. My papers from the president were signed on July 14th, Bastille Daa French national day. We had the swearing in ceremony in Marseilles shortly thereafter.

The nomination process was interesting. I went up for my hearing, which was chaired by Paul Simon, the Democratic senator from Illinois. The ranking minority member was Nancy Katzenbaum, now Nancy Katzenbaum Baker, who was the Republican senator from Kansas. They were both active in the Senate African Affairs Subcommittee. There were five nominees. I positioned myself consciously between Princeton Lyman, who was going to South Africa as ambassador, and the fellow who was going to Ghana as ambassador because I figured that all the questions would go to theall the tough questions: "What are you doing in South Africa?" etc. Everybody knew Ghana; nobody really knew much about Gabon or Sao Tome and Principe. The senators asked the questions. They came to me and they asked a couple of questions on Sao Tome, a question on Gabon, and then the door opens behind Paul Simon. As you know, the senators sit on a dias in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing room; they look down at you, which is a great way of intimidating yoand they're very successful at doing it, I might add, even though both Nancy Katzenbaum and Paul Simon are just as nice as the day is long. But it is an intimidating experience if you haven't done it before and you haven't really had to address that sort of conclave before. The door opens behind Simon and Peter Galbraith comes in. As I mentioned before, Peter was Claiborne Pell's staff assistant who had been very active on Kurdish matters in Iraq. He had seen me come into the hearing and we had exchanged pleasantries and gone on our way. He came in and handed Simon a bunch of questions. Simon looks down at me and says, "Mr. Wilson, now I'd like to ask you a few questions about your previous job." He had about 14 questions on Iraq, and most of them were designed to produce some statement that would be potentially incriminating to either Larry Eagleburger or Jim Baker or people up in the chain of command. Fundamentally what Simon wanted me to say was that we had advised the State Department that Saddam Hussein was engaged in the systematic abuse of the human rights of its citizens, which is the trigger phrase for the cutting off of U.S. assistance programs to Iraq. We had a billion dollar commodity credit program which was an agricultural subsidy program. We gave the Iraqi short term credit, short term loans, at commercial interest rates to buy American agricultural product, but since these were U.S. government guaranteed loans, the bankers really lined up to get involved. So it was of some benefit to U.S. bankers; it was of benefit to the Iraqis because they could get a ready source of money to buy foodstuffs; and it was good for American farmers. But the program was contentious because it was so large and Iraq had become such a flash point of congressional interest. All 14 questions were designed to somehow get me to say that. Paul Simon, God bless him, asked the first couple of questions and then said, "Look, let me just ask you to go ahead and submit your answers to these questions in writing." I went back and I called up the Department of State and said, "I've got all these questions. Can I get somebody to help me answer them, because they're related to U.S. policy towards Iraq before Desert Storm?" The response from the Bureau was, "No, we've thought about it, and you really just ought to go ahead and answer those questions yourself." I said, "Okay, fine." It was really a stupid answer. If you wanted to protect Jim Baker and Larry Eagleburger, then they should have been prepared to write the answers to these questions. They didn't see it that way.

I went and I got all the human rights reports that we had written during the years I was in Iraq, and I spent the weekend with a typewriter answering the questions. The questions had to be inserted in the Congressional Record, and had to be answered as if you were answering a senator face to face. The question from Senator Simon to Joe Wilson would read: "Mr. Wilson..." and then the answer from Mr. Wilson would read: "Senator Simon, if you would take the time to review the Department of State human rights reports, which are submitted to Congress every year, and if you look at the period of time that I was in Baghdad, you'll see that these human rights reports said and I quote in part: 'Saddam systematically killed people, Saddam tortured people, Saddam did this to them and did that to them and did everything else to them.' Senator, I frankly think that the embassy discharged its responsibilities admirably in this matter." Of course, nobody reads these questions and answers, but they are entered in the congressional record as part of the testimony. I think Peter at least was hoping that I would say that,"Yes, the embassy reported on this and the damn Department didn't do anything about it," but I wasn't going to do that. I turned the answers around by making the point that these human rights reports were submitted to Congress every year as part of a congressional requirement. I got away with it. I've seen Galbraith a couple of times since. He called me up afterwards and said, "You know, I didn't do that to put you on the spot. I did it because we wanted to get on the record what the administration's thinking was." Then curiously I got a call from Tom Callahan, who at that time was a staffer for Jesse Helms; he had always been the big bugaboo for the Department of State. He had actually interviewed me before I went up to my hearing. He called me up to say, "Look, I just want you to know that we did not expect this. We were blind sided by those questions. I want you to know that I would not have allowed that to happen had I been able to put a stop to it. I consider that to be unfair," which I thought was very decent of him. It didn't help me in my views of Senator Helms, but he knows that. It was very decent of him, and he has remained a friend to this day.

Q: By the way, I'm interviewed Peter Galbraith now.

WILSON: Ask him about that. Tell him I haven't forgotten.

Q: Obviously the Kurds were his thing.

WILSON: Yes, they were, and for good reason. I think he's a little over the top on that issue. At the end of the day, as history has since proven, I used to say, "If the Kurds don't have an Arab to fight, they'll fight each other," and that's clearly what's happening.

I went to the Gabonese Republic. It's always called the Gabonese Republic because Bongo wants his country to be known in the feminine tense in French, because 'La France' is feminine. 'Le Gabon' is masculine, which in the great scheme of things was viewed by Bongo as being of lesser stature than feminine 'La France.' So you don't call it 'Le Gabon,' you call it 'La Rï¿½publique Gabone;' that gives it stature. I was also ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe. My orders read that I should serve concomitantlbeing ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe came without additional compensation; so it was a two for one. I got to be ambassador to two countries; got paid for being ambassador to one. I resided in Libreville. Had a great Peace Corps program in Sao Tome and Principe, had a $60,000,000 Voice of America transmitter station built while I was there. We basically were the GDP of the country for the three years that I was there with our investment.

Q: You were there essentially from...

WILSON: I was there from 1992 to 1995.

Q: Why don't we do Sao Tome and Principe first and then we'll go to Gabon. What was the situation in the period from 1992 to 1995?

WILSON: Sao Tome was one of the very first countries in Africa to move successfully from a dictatorship to a democratically elected president. The incumbent, Peter Dakoshta, had been voted out of office. They'd gone through something akin to a national conference and had moved to elections. A number of parties had grown umaybe three parties. We should note the Sao Tome and Principe was a former Portuguese colony; it gained its independence in 1975, when most of the Portuguese colonies got their independence and had been ruled by Peter Dakoshta since. It had been a one party state. It comprises of three main islands, which straddle the Equator about 200 miles off the coast of Gabon which have a total population of about 160,000 people. When it came time to say farewell to Secretary of State Jim Baker, I went up to his offiche's got a big ceremonial office and then he's got a little hide away office where he did most of his work. He had me into his hide away office. He actually had opened his atlas to Sao Tome and Principe. He had been looking at the map and had some interesting questions to ask about the mountain range that went through the spine of Sao Tome and other geographical highlights. It is one of the poorest countries in Africa, and it is the one country that doesn't have the tribal structure to support it in time of poverty. It was discovered by the Portuguese in the 15th century. There's some question as to whether there were actually people living on Sao Tome at the time. During the intervening several hundred years, people moved to Sao Tomfrom Angola or Cape Verde or some of the other Portuguese colonies. They moved there to farm and to the harvest the cocoa plantations. Cocoa was its big cash crop for several centuries. The Portuguese landowners and plantation owners had set up really elaborate social structures to take care of their indentured farmers, farm staff and farm laborers. They had hospitals, they had schools, they had housing but it was very much like what you would see on plantations in the south of the United States.

At the end of the 19th century, I guess, there was a Brit who decided that Sao Tome cocoa, which at that time was the most highly prized and most expensive on the London cocoa exchange, was being produced by slave labor and, as a consequence, there had to be an investigation into the labor practices that was producing the cocoa. It took about three years to produce a cocoa crop. During the course of those three years, the hullabaloo over the procurement of Sao Tome cocoa was so great that it went out of favor and the chocolate that replaced as the best seller came from Ghanaian cocoa field owned by a certain Brit, whose name was Cadburthe same person who had raised questions about Sao Tome labor practices. So Cadbury actually engineered the collapse of the Sao Tome economy for his own benefit and the economy has never recovered. The market collapse raised serious social problems because so much of the labor had been importeeven if it's been imported several decades or hundreds of years. When that labor was imported, it was taken out of a village structure in the former country and put into a plantation structure. As the plantations fell apart there was nothing for that labor to fall back upon.

Q: They couldn't go back to the village.

WILSON: They couldn't go back to the village. There was nothing there. There was nothing there except for the plantations. So the workers just continued to squat on those plantations. It is very interesting to watch how they made this transition over the past several decades. They've managed to keep the peace. If there is one thing they understood, it was that violent outbursts had to be contained because at the end of the day there was no place else to go. They were stuck on this island together, and they seem to understand that better than some of the countries on the continent.

By the time I got there, they had held elections which Miguel Trovuarda had won. He had been a figure of some historic importance in Sao Tome's independence movement in the 1960s and the 1970s, and he was the president. Peter Dakoshta still lived on the island. He had gone away for a while but had returned and was living in semi retirement. They had a flourishing prime minister's offica prime minister run government. They had a nice port facility. They were generally abused by everybody. European and Japanese fleets would come and fish in their waters and then sail away with the catch without paying whatever they were supposed to be pay, because there was no coast guard to guard their territory. There was one old South African who ran a good part of the island; he had been there for many, many years. He ran who knows what in and out of Angola during the Angolan War, and he used Sao Tome as his base. The Angolans had a certain amount of influence. Bongo himself had a certain amount of influence. We liked Sao Tome because, for one, we had a little Peace Corps program there which was great. They did a hell of a job there. Secondly, it was a good location for setting up our Voice of America transmitter station after Liberia fell apart. We invested quite a bit of money and quite a bit of time to build a repeater station for the Voice of America programs which were beamed to Sao Tome, then across the water to Central and West Africa. We found out that the location was just perfect. We actually got far greater reception range than we ever anticipated when we went into this project. For some reason the water just amplified our transmissiothe waves coming off of it or coming over ito the point that we were in a constant fight with Radio Vatican, because we were kind of overrunning their frequencies. We were all over them like a dirty shirt. You dialed up thinking that you were going to hear the Pope and you got the Voice of America. That was interesting. That was about it for Sao Tome and Principe.

Q: The Cold War had just literally come to an end, because the Soviet Union, just when you arrived, was no more. Had we been working on denial of port facilities to the Soviets? Had that been a principal thing there?

WILSON: Sao Tome and Principe had never been very high on anybody's screen. When Peter Dakoshta was president, it was firmly in the Marxist Leninist camp, and yet all the kids went to Portugal for school. We were not going to be in the lead of fighting the Soviets for Sao Tome and Principe. We had very little to do with it. When it was firmly in the Soviet camp, we just basically ignored it and nobody went over there. Their port facilities were minimal. It was not used the same way that Pointe Noire was used in the Congo to traffic Cuban soldiers and Cuban equipment to the Angolan War. When I was in the Congo in the late 1980s, Sao Tome had just been benignly neglected by us. That said, during the time that I was there, the French had a big development mission there and the Portuguese were trying to maintain their status as the former colonial power. The French were giving them a run for their money. They were trying to talk the Sao Tomeans into adopting the French backed CFA currency so they'd be part of the CFA zone. The French were trying to make them part of this larger grouping of French Central African countries. I remember going Sao Tome one time and having dinner with the Portuguese ambassador. Over coffee he couldn't contain himself anymore and he started talking about the French aid director, who was the brother of the French ambassador to Gabon. They were both from Corsica, and he said to me, "We in Portugal, we've had a lot of experience keeping the Corsicans from taking over our territory."

Q: A reference to Napoleon.

WILSON: A reference to Napoleon. He said, "We did it a couple times in the 19th century, or 18th century, and, by God, we'll do it again here." I had lunch the next day with the French aid director. Toward the end of the lunch, he could no longer restrain himself and said to me, "You know, the Portuguese here, they have this long history, but frankly they're just no longer up to the task of providing what's necessary for these little countries,"as he smoked his Gaulois cigarette. That was the unkindest cut of all. Later the relationship between the two of them got so bad that they wouldn't talk to each other and they wouldn't go to the same events. If there a ship come in on a diplomatic event, they would not be on the same boat going out to the ship. In a small town like Sao Tome that becomes the talk of the town. It was great fun and very, very humorous, but it showed how, even in a period of rapid communications, even at the very end of the supply chain you can get these little tiny conflicts between these representatives of two countries. It was kind of a throwback to a different ersort of Graham Greene in all his glory. I can see him writing the ultimate story on this.

Q: What was the Peace Corps doing?

WILSON: The Peace Corps was doing everything. We had a great AID funded program which was designed to teach cooperative management skills to Sao Tomean cocoa growers. At the time of the collapse of the plantations, there had been considerable land reform. They were trying to get these little cocoa growers to come together and figure out how they're going to manage their affairs and their crops cooperatively and how they might band together to become more powerful. Peace Corps volunteers were doing everything from digging wells to teaching English to doing health supporthings like. There were only about 25 or 30 of them, but on a small island, they were all over the place.

Q: Were we doing anything to try to promote chocolate purchases from the area?

WILSON: No.

Q: That was sort of an international cartel?

WILSON: Yes; they have their own marketing system. Guys who buy chocolate know how to do it; guys who sell chocolate know how to do it. I think we would have liked to have worked with them on processing the cocoa. There are a number of stages that you have to go through from raw cocoa to a chocolate bar. It has to be dried and then it could be roasted and then it could be powdered and made into a paste. In San Tome, they only dried it, then did whatever they had to do to stabilize it before they sent it off for further processing. They sent it off in bulk; most of the other rendering of the cocoa, the next steps, were done elsewhere. Clearly that was one of the things with which, if we could have, we would have liked to have helped them.

Q: What about Principe? Where did that fit into this?

WILSON: I only went to Principe once. I had a helicopter and flew over there onconly the second time in the history of the island that a helicopter had landed on it and only the first time in the lives of almost everybody on the island. So it was quite an event. Principe has only about 6,000 people on it. It has the most beautiful little port facility, but there's not very much there. The same South African had developed a little resort area for deep sea fishermen who would come from South Africa and spend weekends there fishing. But that was about it.

Q: But they were part of Sao Tome?

WILSON: They were part of Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe. The relationship between the islands was always reasonably good. There was never any sense that they were going to become a splinter group. They were going to stay Sao Tome and Principe.

Q: Let's move to Gabon. Could you give a little background about where it had come from and then what happened while you were there.

WILSON: Gabon is the home of Omar Bongo. Gabon was a former French colony. It straddles the Equator. It is probably best known to Americans and Europeans as the site of Albert Schweitzer's mission and hospital where he worked with lepers and other people in Lamborini. He wrote of his experiences over the years. Gabon is a land well endowed in natural resources. It has a lot of oil, uranium, manganese, and timber. It has good fishing both in its rivers and off the coast. It has a coast, it has forests, and savannahs in the interior. Gabon is lightly populated; there are only about 1,200,000 Gabonese. The country is about the size of Colorado. It has had a peaceful history. It is the one country in the former French colonial empire that actually voted to remain French at the time of independence, but we denied them that right: "You will be independent." To this day it has remained staunchly in the camp of the French. French interest in Gabon is predicated on its historic ties and also on the very real and pragmatic consequences of being a petroleum exporter. So ELF has been active in Gabon since ELF has been active.

Q: ELF being the French oil company.

WILSON: ELF being the French state run petroleum company until recently. During the time I was there, it was still state run. It later became privatized and was gobbled up by Totol, so it is now Totol Pina ELI think that is its name now.

Q: When you say 'privatized', I think that's done with quotations, isn't it, with ties to the French government?

WILSON: Initially for the transition period the French government held what they called the "golden share," which gave the government veto power over any management decisions. Once it was listed on the New York Stock Exchange and on a number of other exchanges, then it became subject to shareholder rights. Once it became part of Totol Pina, it has been essentially privatized. The consequence of that has been a long inquiry and audit into the way it did business when it was a government enterprise.

Q: Wasn't there some scandal about a mistress?

WILSON: That's right, that's exactly right. There were several mistresses, but the one who was mistress to Juman, the French minister of foreign affairs, who later became the head of the constitutional court. She and he had concluded a number of deals that were either government deals or were ELF deals or other deals that were deemed to be inappropriate and illegal. Everybody was dragged into ieverybody from Mitterrand to Juman to Servan to Lebo to anybody who had ever been tangentially attached to Africa or to ELF. Bloit, who was the former director general, spent almost three years in jail. This has been a nasty bit of business, but the French keep the inquiry going and nobody knows where ultimately it is going to end up. ELF Gabon has been one of the entities that has been most heavily implicated in all of this scandal. The ELF Gabon relationship with Bongo is one that has been very, very tight and has been the mixture of politics and business interests for the benefit of both. I remember the French chief of staff, equivalent of our chairman of the Joint Chiefs telling me at one time that every time he went to Africa, he was just amazed to see the extent to which organizations, both private and public, were in the business of carrying suitcases full of money back and forth. In Gabon, ELF just laundered money. They would bring money from France to pay for the Gabonese elections, which meant the reelection of Bongo; then they would take money back to France to pay for the election of whoever their favorite of the moment wawhoever was running at the time. It was a very nasty little relationship. When I was there, the French did everything they could to undermine the Congo because the Congolese president had had the audacity to sell a lot of oil at below market pricway below market pricto Occidental Petroleum. The Congolese had sold it for about three dollars a barreall of it was up front. It was about 50,000,000 barrels; so it was a $150,000,000 cash payment, and for that ELF thought that their position in the Congo was going to be undermined. As a consequence it was prepared to destabilize the country to get the price increased. They succeeded in doing so. At the end of the day I think that they succeeded and we saved lives in the country as well. Scandalous. But anyway, they were a fact of life on the scene. The French ambassador had been there for 12 years. His name was Luis Dominici, he is well known in the annals of Francophone Africa. He was one of the last ambassadors whose education had been in what they called the "French overseas"schooa colonial administrative school. Gabon was for the French one of its prime postings. Ambassadors there served for a long time because they were essentially viceroys who ran the country. Bongo was personally selected by the French to replace his predecessor, Leon M'Ba when he died.

Q: When did he come in power?

WILSON: 1967. He is still in power, the brightest politician I know in West Africa; in fact maybe the brightest politician I know anywhere.

Q: Could you talk about Bongo and your relationship with him?

WILSON: El Haj Omar Bongo stands about five foot three or five foot four. To compensate for his lack of stature, he wears boots that have maybe three inch heels to give him a little bit more height. In his younger days, he was an inveterate sipper of champagne and had an eye for the women, which in this day and age would land him in lots of trouble with the politically correct. He was known for actually chasing women around his officobviously quite boorish behavior.

Gabon is a different part of the world. I like to say that the difference between the central Africans and the west Africans is that the west Africans don't have a lot of resources; with what they do have they manufactured goods, and then they trade back and forth. Great trading societies grew up in west Africa. In contrast, in Gabon, you found lots of forests, making transit difficult. They had to use a river system, which is cumbersome. Natural resources are plentiful. If you want to eat fish, you just put a line in the water. If you want meat, you just go out in the wooda place abundant with meat. If you wanted wine, you just cut into a palm tree and waited. There isn't a lot of social interaction between ethnic groups. In fact, the first marriage between a member of an ethnic groups in the north, the Fang, and an ethnic group from the coast and the south, the Gneni, took place in 1954, which was the same year that the U.S. Supreme Court decided on" Brown versus the Board of Education." That marriage was such an event in the history of Gabon that it is still discussed to this dain terms of the upheaval possible with ethnic groups.

Bongo is Bateke; he came from the interior, and grew up in the Congo, Brazzaville. Batekes sit astride the Congo Gabonese border. From early on, he was directed into the bureaucratic work. I think he always seemed to be rather clever. The rumor is that the French tested hilike a young Albert Bernarhis tests results were right off the charts, at which point they decided that this was going to be their guy. They moved him into positions of increasing responsibility as Gabon moved through independence and the post independence phaswhen the French still ran the country but behind the offices instead of at the front desk. When Leon M'Ba died in 1967 of cancer, Bongo was the one that the French supported for president. In his youtI used to talk to him about this and kid him about ithe stories are that when he would host a party at his palace, his minions would lock the doors and nobody could leave until Omar himself had left, which was often not until three or four o'clock in the morning. Many in the diplomatic set liked to be home by 10:30 and in bed by eleven o'clock; they'd have to sit there until about three o'clock in the morning. One of my predecessors at Gabon told me that someone finally realized that if you went to a certain bathroom, you could open the window and crawl out to get away from these parties. I used to kid Bongo about it. I used to go to these parties and they still would go on until two o'clock in the morning, but by this time, they left the doors open so that people could leave earlier. As a matter of principal I used to stay until the president left. First, I thought it was a wise thing to do in accordance with proper protocol. Secondly, with everybody else leaving early, you were the last person seen by Bongo. Since we wanted our interests to be favored in Gabon, it was useful to be seen to be consistent with protocol and to be seen to be enjoying oneself. We enjoyed the Gabonese tremendously. I enjoyed Bongo tremendously.

When I first got there, we used to talk on a regular basis. In fact, the whole time I was there, we used to talk on a regular basis. At the beginning, we focused principally on the run up to their election at the end of 1993; that was an 18 month project. We also talked at length about the convening of the second African American Conference. The first one had taken place in Abidjan two years earlier; the next one was going to be in Gabon. There was some question about what the American government's role in this was going to be. Our ambassador in Abidjan had essentially ignored the first meeting and had done nothing. We decided we would try to make this something that we could buy into and use it to our advantage; so we offered some support. We gave a reception in my house, we offered some liaison assistance...

Q: Could you explain what the organization...

WILSON: The African American Summit was the brainchild of Leon Sullivan, who just recently passed away. He was a Philadelphia civil rights leader and clergyman who was very active in his city helping black youths attain equal opportunity. His organization put together all sorts of programs. Then he took this program internationally to Africa, where he saw some opportunities. I first ran into him in Togo. Leon Sullivan is probably best known as the architect of the Sullivan Principles, which were guidelines for American businesses doing business in South Africa during the period of apartheid, which were very effective.

Q: It was essentially that, if they met these principles, like giving equal opportunity and all this...

WILSON: And equal treatment.

Q: Yes, equal treatment. They were very good. In fact, they became almost an anathema to some of the peoplthe absolutists, who didn't want us to have anything to do with apartheid.

WILSON: He basically insisted on corporate America assuming some social responsibility for its actions in South Africa if it hoped to continue to operate there with a regime that was essentially discriminating on the basis of color against the majority of its population. It was pretty successful. It was a good compromise between those who would say, "Disinvest completely," and those who would say either, "Business is business. What are you doing mucking about in the business of business?" or those who would say that it's important for American business to remain engaged. He made the case that American business ought to remain engaged, but should comply with some the principles. Sullivan was a big man, six three, with a big ego; he had all of the classic attributes of a good black preacher. He was a stem winder; he could get on a roll. He'd get people saying, "Hallelujah. God praise," and such responses. He was great. He was wonderful to watch, and a lot of fun. When he came to the AfricaAmerican Summit, he brought the top people of the civil rights movement with him. We decided we were going to host this reception for the Americans, and we did.

I have to say there are some experiences in life that are really meaningful. At that time we had a living room which was below the entrance, so there was a little balcony which looked down into the living room. After having been in the receiving line for our guests on that balcony, I remember looking down at my living room, seeing Jesse Jackson anLouis Farrakhan with his harehe had a bunch of ladies with hiand Cecily Tyson and Mrs. King and Lewis Sullivan, the former HHS Secretary, and Joe Lowry, who was head of the Southern Baptist groul can't remember what it was called noand Dorothy Hite from the National Negro Women's Association. Everybody who had been involved in the civil rights movement was sitting down there having drinks in my living room. Andy Young was there; they were all there; everybody that you could possibly imagine was there. So it was quite an event. In the end about 1,200 Americans showed up; many were businessmen who Leon had put the hammerlock on. He was a member of the General Motors Board of Directors and was active in getting American businesses involved in helping disadvantaged youth and working basically in ghettos. He was really good. He was far more subtle than Jesse Jackson in shaking down the business community on behalf of the African American community. He was very good at what he did. Sullivan had advertised this meeting in all the black churches in the States. There were 1,000 African Americans who took this opportunity to come back and see the land of their roots. They were just wonderful souls who really wanted to see Africa because they knew that their ancestors had come from there. We had the leadership of the African American community; so it was a great mix of people. We had invited about 600 people to our house. We hadn't invited Farrakhan because we didn't know that he was coming to the event, but Farrakhan arrived in Gabon. His chief of staff came to see me, a big guy, thiccould play defensive tackle, strong looking...

Q: One of the fruit of Islam, I think, was his bodyguard.

WILSON: Yes, no doubt. He said, "Look, Farrakhan's noticed that you're having this cocktail party tonight and you hadn't invited him." I said, "With all due respect to Mr. Farrakhan, we didn't invite him because we didn't know he was coming, one, and by the time we had realized he was coming, we had 660 people invited to the house already and frankly, if it rains, we don't know what we're going to do with them. But I'll tell you what. If Farrakhan came with his entourage of 40 people, I can't possible accommodate all 40 people, but if Minister Farrakhan and maybe one or two others would like to come, we'd be more than happy to have them." He said, "That's just fine. It'll be just Farrakhan and his wife and myself." I said, "Sure, no problem." When the time came for the reception. Farrakhan shows up with his entire harem. He had literally 40 women with him; so we had all 40 of them in. The Angolan ambassador was the dean of the diplomatic corps; I'd been dealing with the Angolans for years on their war and I had met the Angolan ambassadoWe didn't have diplomatic relations with Angola at the time, but I had met the ambassador on the airplane coming in, and we had chatted and got along real well. So I invited him to the reception, and he showed up with nine ministers. This kind of busted the constraints. Fortunately it didn't rain.

Leon Sullivan, Bongo and I had worked through this reception. I had also managed to have Assistant Secretary George Moose, to come. I told Bongo, "Well, look, we have this conference, and you're going to chair the conference, but the night beforwe've got our assistant secretary cominit would be a great opportunity for you to have a chat with him. Rather than do it in your office, why don't you come up to the house for dinner," and he agreed. When you host a chief of state, it means that have to have the protocol people there, as well as the food tasters and the security people; you get everybody up there. They're checking the seating arrangements. They're trying to make sure everything happens right. Some get into a fight with your wife over who's going to sit where, how this is going to be served, what's going on, but it all worked out. It was the first time that Bongo in his entire tenure as president had left the president's mansion to eat at a diplomat's residence. As he told Moose "You know, I'm doing this not just because I want to meet you but because Wilson and I get along just fine; we have a good working relationship and it's very useful."

In fact, it was beginning to bear fruit. We got permission to have some oil companies work in Gabon. We had gotten democratic and republican democracy institutes and other prdemocracy to work with the Gabonese on the planning of the elections. Things were going along pretty well, so the Summit worked out pretty well. Needless to say, it drove the French ambassador right around the bend. The French were real nervous about me anyway. I had a French wife; I spoke very good French, and I was pretty close to Bongo and we were starting to see the results. The French could see that their interests were being disadvantaged by this new American ambassador who would talk to them like they talk to each other. I wasn't intimidated by the French in any way and wasn't going to be subservient to the French.

All of this is happening as Central Africa is going through its election cycle. They were having elections in Bangui, they were having elections in the Cameroon. The American ambassadors in both places were very high profile, very vocal and very zealous in their commitment to seeing change. The ambassador to Cameroon was Frances Cook. Cameroon is a bilingual country, and she had been successfully branded by the French as being for the English candidate. The French were not going to allow the English candidate, to win. In the process of assuring that John Frundi would be defeated, the French also managed to get our ambassador on the cover of Jeune Afrique as the bane of everybody's existence in Cameroon. Our ambassador to CAR, Dan Simpson, had been so adamant in his opposition to the incumbent that when he left there was actually a tickertape parade given by all of the opposition supporters who cheered him on his way to the airpormuch again because the French had supported the incumbent. They had felt that Dan had been mucking about trying to change for just the sake of change and that that was undermining their security interest. All of this goes back to our perception of democratizatioquite apart from our rather parochial commercial interests which are not big even for the French in the grand scheme of things. The French trading relationship with Africa only amount to about three percent of their overall trade. In Gabon, unlike Cameroon and Central African Republic, it's an important component, but nonetheless it is still pretty small potatoes compared to the broader picture that we wanted to paint in both Paris and Washington.

The difference philosophically was how much instability could you countenance for the sake of democracin other words, should you support only a structured move to democracy or would an unstructured move to democracy be acceptable? The French put a premium on security. They wanted democracy, but they didn't want instability caused by moves toward democracy because the their own nationals there, they had economic interests, they had history. They knew that their troops were going to have to deploy in the event of instability, as ultimately they did in CAR. We, on the other hand, had very little at stake there and we had a rather unsophisticated sense of what we should be doing. For us it was democracy and who cares what the consequences are? In Gabon as they moved towards election, we took the position that we were going to be faithful to a process and not allow ourselves to be dragged into the partisan bickering. We took the position, as told Bongo and everybody else who would listen from the very beginning including the French ambassador, that we didn't care who won or lost so long as the process was transparent and permitted all Gabonese the opportunity to express their wishes. We also, during the run up to the election, did something that hadn't been tried either in Gabon or anywhere else up to that time. We actually had quarterly dinners with heads of all the partieabout 12, 15. I talked to Bongo about this before I did it. I said, "Look, it strikes me as I look out at your system that you've got this relatively new national assembly. You've made a transition from a one party to a multiparty system, but your politicians don't really talk to each other except in the rather formal well of the national assembly. They don't go and have a beer afterwards together. You know, Ronald Reagan used to always say that from nine to five he was a staunch Republic and was going to fight Tip O'Neill every step of the way, but after five o'clock they were just a couple of old Irish Americans who could just sit down and have a drink and talk about things. That's the way we do politics. A lot of it, at least in the old days, was behind closed doors or after hours when you could sort of make deals and reach compromises. So," I said, "this is what I want to do"i.e. give the dinner parties. He said, "Yes, that sounds like a good idea." So I actually talked to Bongo about this, not that I gave him a veto over it, but I figured it was useful to inform him so there would no question that somehow the American ambassador was engaged in some nefarious activit"Interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign country" is how it's usually described. So we did these dinners. We would put people together and I'd stand up at the beginning of the dinner and say, "You guys understand that anything goes except for physical violence. I'm bigger than all of you, so if your passions get to the point where you're going to be physically violent, understand that I will step in." Then we would sit down and have a nice dinner. We had just enough Americans. We had maybe five tables with an American at each table; the rest of the people at each table would be Gabonese of different political persuasions. It was great. They would get to know each other personally. They would spend a half hour talking politics and then an hour and a half talking about their cultural differences, because all parties were essentially ethnically based and geographically based. So they had different cultural experiences. The forests or the sea would mean different things to different ones. The intermarriage between the Fang and the Bateke was a different experience for the Fangs than it was for the Batekes, for example. We would talk through all this. It worked pretty well. That helped us to have good relations with all political parties. We had facilitated their contacts with each other, and put us in the position in the run up to the election to have good contacts across the board.

Again, the French viewed our activity quite negatively. The French ambassador had been there for 12 years, was broadly thought to have had a relationship with one of Bongo's daughters which had resulted in an offspring, and therefore everybody called him Bongo's son in law. Whether that was true or not I don't know, but it was very clear that, as pro consul basically, his relationship was with Bongo and with nobody else.

The election was in December. The African American Summit had been in April or May of that year. By April, the French had taken my measure and they didn't like what they saw. They were real worried. During the presidential election campaign, the French ambassador decided that he was going to try to capitalize on the paranoia running through the palace. That his is not just the Gabonese trait, but I think most if not all executives are going to be paranoid during any election campaign. That's just part of politics. So the French ambassador decided that he was going to play on this paranoia to try and assert, as his colleagues in the Central African Republic and Cameroon had done, that somehow the United States was tied to the opposition. H did that, and as the campaign became more heated, the government press started talking about how the American ambassador was favoring the opposition. The opposition had a radio station which the Gabonese press was saying, from gossip planted by the French ambassador, had been financed or donated by the American ambassador. They decided that they would go after me personally, not just our policies, because they figured if they could got rid of me, then they wouldn't have to worry. At one point the French ambassador called me up and he saithis was in October, I guess, October or Novembe"We need to talk." I said, "Fine, no problem." He said, "Can I come over to your office?" I said, "No, why don't you come over for breakfast? Why don't you just come over to the house?" He said, "No, I don't want to come up. Why don't you come down?" I said, "Fine, I'll come down." He was on the beach; I was up on the mountain. I went down for breakfasa great French breakfast, croissants, good French coffee, the whole bit. During the breakfast he said, "You know, this radio station is broadcasting sort of hate messages against French citizens, and my French citizens here are getting very nervous. They turn on this radio station and the radio station says, 'Go out and kill the French people.' You finance this radio station. You support this radio station. Can you do something to stop this?" I said, "First of all, let me be very clear. We haven't financed it, and we don't support it. We deplore those sort of messages, and we tell them that every time we see them. Be under no illusions that somehow we're involved in this. We don't like it any more than you do. We will continue to tell them that, as we know you will also." Then we moved on to other subjects. I went back to my office to summarize this conversation. I wrote a little report to Washington saying what had happened; I also informed our embassy in Pariour Africa watcher in Paris. I said, "This is what the French ambassador asked me, and this is what I said," and then left it at that. Commented that the breakfast was good. "Maybe the French had another agenda, but clearly they're worried about their citizens," etc. The French ambassador wrote a report on this breakfast in which he said, "At his offices I met with the American ambassador today, and he admitted that they had financed and supported this opposition radio station," etc. In Paris the official who ran African affairs and the Elysï¿½e was essentially the presidenAfrica was sort of the president's fiefdom, so it was his office of African Affairs...

Q: This was Mitterrand?

WILSON: This was Mitterrand. It was his office that really counted when it came to African policies and issues. When I was in Paris, I would go see the French foreign ministry as a courtesy, but when I really wanted to do business or when they wanted to do business, they would send somebody from the Elysï¿½e, the presidential office, to see me or I would go see them. I had pretty good relations with the guy who handled Africa at the Elysï¿½e; he had good relations with our Africa watcher. Gabon was important to the French, so we would get a lot of attention. The two cables about breakfast went to Paris. The presidential aide and our Africa watcher got together and compared them. The presidential aidGod bless hibought my version. As it played ouand it was later reported in a French newspaper called Levin Manu Judene that this exchange had happenethey had taken a look at the cables, and after the Gabonese elections, the French ambassador went to Paris in part to see the presidential aide. There was a third party present at this meeting and I understand that the ambassador was accused of lying in his report. That was actually borne out in April of the following year, four or five months after the election, when French ambassador, who described himself as 'un grand ambassadeur,' a great ambassador, a very senior ambassador, was given his onward assignment. After 12 years in Gabon, a plumb assignment for senior French diplomats, he was assigned to Albania as ambassador. I took great delight in calling Washington on a phone which was clearly tapped by the French and saying in special English how the French ambassador had just gotten his just desserts by being assigned to Tirana, Albania, as ambassador. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Back to the run up to the elections. The French ambassador is trying to put the fix in to make sure that Bongo wins and also to make sure that the relationship between the United States and Gabon suffers as a consequence of my relationship with both Gabon and Bongo. IFES had come through, and IFES at that time was peddling a...

Q: Could you explain what that is.

WILSON: IFES is the International Foundation for Electoral Systems; they have developed a wonderful data bank on how elections are run, what goes into running elections, what an electoral law ought to look like, who ought to be responsible, what sort of commissions ought to be in power to run them, what the adjudication process ithe whole nuts to bolts on elections; they do a very good job. At that time they were peddling something that was anathema to French systems. They were pushing for an independent electoral commission. The French all believeand Charles Pasqua was the minister of interior, a very powerful man in French politiche started from selling Perno, which is their licorice drink, to being one of the most powerful men in French politics...

Q: Rather gruff spoken.

WILSON: Speaks with this great southern Marseilles accent. He was a Corsicaa very interesting character. He had been minister of interior a number of times. In fact, I showed up in French intelligence files in the mid 1980s when he was minister of interior as an intelligence agent. I was then the Deputy Chief of Mission in Burundi. The French had it wrong. They didn't understand that CIA employees don't make it to deputy chief of mission; that is just not our system. But anyway that was all right. Being an intelligence agent was something I always liked. I take my martini stirred not shaken.

IFES came out and met with the Gabonese minister of interior who's saying, "This is our responsibility to run the election," while IFES is saying, "No, you've really got to have this independent electoral commission. It should be taken out of the government's hands." In the end it's still an ongoing debate, and there are problems associated with both systems, so I'm not sure who has the ultimate wisdom on this issue, but that was the debate that was going on. Then we had NDI, the National Democratic Institute, comes in; they're the ones who kind of put together election observer teams. They came in and took a look at how the election was being organized. They determine whether or not it's going to lead to a free, fair and transparent election and whether it's the sort of election they can support. If they determine they can, they write a report, and then they put together an observer team that observes the elections and essentially certify their validity. NDI also had some problems. They sent a kid out who was maybe 22 years old, looked 14, had maybe voted in one election in his lifetime; so young that he probably had never shaved in his lifetime. I took him to see Bongo and some of the barons in Bongo's party; it was clear to me this was like feeding meat to the sharkthis poor kid. The barons had been running Gabonese politics for 30 years; you can say a lot of things about Bongo, but the one thing you have to acknowledge is that he is political animal from the top of his head to the tips of his fingers. He knows every Gabonese in his country. He knows what he has to do to get their vote. He could win any election going away. This is not a guy who in his political years throws people in jail or kills them. He does have a history of going after his first wife's lovers, that's true, and there was some history in his youth of some rather oppressive measures being taken, but it was related primarily to family love affairmore than it was against his political enemies. Most of his political enemies were still around, were still doing very well, thank you, and were still his political enemies or they had become his political allies. Bongo knew the Gabonese political scene. He had mastered it, and the guys around him had mastered it. These were the guys who had bilked the World Bank of over a billion dollars in the construction of the train track from Libreville to Franceville. It started out as a billion dollars and then got to be a $4,000,000,000 project and the $1,000,000,000 disappeared. So these guys were masters of their own destiny. We send a kid out there to tell them about democracAmerican style. It was unfair to the young man; it was unfair to the Gabonese. It was not serious exercise on our part.

In any case, the NDI team went back and wrote its report; somebody in their office leaked the draft report and sent it out to the Gabonese. These guys probably thought that the Gabonese were honorable people. As a consequence, honorable people don't read each other's mail. But this was a Gabonese regime that was intent on reelecting itself. They were going to do just like any other campaign did; they were running hard for election. They also had some good help from the French. They found somebody in NDI's offices who sent them a copy of the report which said, among other things, that "the diminutive Omar Bongo stands five foot four and wears high heeled shoes,"something you just don't say about a chief of state in a serious report that is designed to frame an election. Then they also said the constitutional court, which is the body that adjudicates the election returns, was headed by Bongo's wife, which it wasn't. In fact, I think the head of the court was a very accomplished jurist. She had very close ties to Bongo; she may have had his children, but she was not his wife. It was factually incorrect. Needless to say, this report just added fuel to the fire. It was said that the Americans obviously wanted Bongo gone and that Joe Wilson was the one who escorted NDI in to see Bongo; therefore, he's responsible for this. Clearly NDI was disqualified and another group had to be hammered together. The African American Institute came in, and put together an election report.

The elections took placIt was very close. There were three candidates. One was a Fang candidate from the north, and they have the largest plurality of the population. They have about 35 or 40 percent of the country. Bateke live in the south and the southeast, principally the southeast and the inland. That was Bongo's group. They had about 35%. Basically in Gabonese politics there are the Fangs and then everybody else, who got 35% or 40% of the vote. There was a third group which lived along the coast and it had its own candidate. They were the swing vote. In the first round they're going to vote for their own candidate, getting maybe 20 percent of the vote. That was the way it looked before the elections with Bongo slightly ahead.

The French could not abide, and Bongo himself could not abide, the idea that he would not be reelected in the first round. The French ambassador commented to me, in an inadvertent moment, that neither the French nor the Gabonese could afford a second round. I think that was right. I think ultimately that they were afraid that, if they didn't win the election in the first round, they would have trouble keeping it all together in the second round. I think frankly that if the Mienay would have thrown their weight behind Bongo, that he would have won in the second round. The Gabonese did not share that view. So they decided that they weren't going to allow a second round to take place. At 12:30 at night the chief justice of the constitutional court announce that 51.17 percent of the vote went for Omar Bongo, who therefore was declared the victor in the first round. The opposition just went bananas; the were not happy. They take to the streets and rioted. The Gabonese minister of defense, who was Bongo's cousin, decided to deploy his troops. He took his artillery pieces out and he shelled the opposition radio station and the opposition leader's house. There were riots in the streets; the Gabonese trashed and burned and overturned cars belonging to foreigners in particular; and then dragged some of them out and beat them up. They didn't beat too many up, but they were roughing them up a little bit.

So we had a security problems on our hands. My house was in an area controlled by the opposition. The opposition had for a long time decided that they were going to play street theater in front of the American ambassador's house. They would start all their riots right in front of my house so that the American ambassador would see what was going on. A person was killed in front of our house. I think we had two people killed in front of our house. It got pretty nasty. We couldn't go in and out; so we ultimately moved. In the aftermath of the election, this is what's going on. We held a meeting and decided that at a minimum, since we still had to move around the town, to give it some measure of protection. Since nobody was really mad at the Americans, we flew the American flag in our cars. We put flags up on all the windows of our private vehicles. We gave everybody a flag, and we put flags on the official vehicles. We would drive through the city and people would come up to the car in a threatening way; then somebody would say, "No, no, look, there's the American flag. These are Americans." People would applaud and we would be able to drive on. It was great. It was so great, in fact, that the French ambassador complaint to Bongo and said, "These Americanin addition to everything elshave put American flags in their cars so that they wouldn't get hurt."

At some time during this period, I had to see Bongo about to complain about the shelling of the radio station. I told him, I said in no uncertain terms, "You know, you didn't like what the radio station said. I didn't either. But, you know, when you've got a legal problem, you don't send the army to deal with it. You send your attorney general, you send your lawyers. Go arrest the station managers. Put them out of business through the legal system. You don't send your army there to shell them. That was really a stupid thing to do." I was really blunt with him. I was coming down with hepatitis, so I wasn't really feeling real well at the time. My eyes were all orange, and my face was orange. So I'm in there talking to him and he says to me, "You know, the French ambassador was just in here and told me that you guys put American flags in your cars. What's this?" I leaned forward and I said, "Look, Mr. President, my first responsibility is the safety and security of my citizens who are living here in Gabon. I know you share the concern that no foreigner should harmed on Gabonese soil. It would look bad for you, it would look bad for me. It would be really be bad for the people who were injured. We did fly the American flag. We decided that we would do everything we could to enhance our own security. We put American flags on our cars, and you know what? It worked. If the French ambassador has a problem with that, I suggest you tell him to give me a call, because I've got a lot of American flags in my warehouse and I'd be more than happy to give him a bunch of them to put on his cars as well." That was the last I ever heard about that one.

We had the odd presidential candidatnot the major presidential candidate but one of the minor presidential candidatewho showed up on our doorstep one night asserting that he has been chased by the Gabonese forces and was seeking refuge. We invited him in, talked to him and then sent him on his way. Of course, the press published the story that we had harbored the main presidential opposition.

I'm came down with hepatitis at this time. I was really sick. I went to see the doctor, who said "Your liver count is really off the charts. We should evacuate you." The situation in Gabon was calming down a bit, but it was all happening the press. The press was trashing me and trashing the Americans, and I'm sick as a dog. I said, "All right. There's not much more I can do anyway. I might as well go and get well." I took an Air France flight to Paris, checked into the American hospital for a couple days, and spent about 10 days just getting well. Hepatitis is one of the maladies that limit you to just sleep; it changes your appetite because your body needs certain nutrients. I would wake up every four hours or so and I would eat a half a dozen oranges and then go back to sleep for another four hours; wake up for 30 minutes and eat another half a dozen oranges and then go back to sleep for four hours. I did this for about 10 days or something like that. Even though we had left on the commercial flight as quietly as possiblwe hadn't really said anything to anybodthe Gabonese press on day following our departure accused me of fleeing the country. They had some horrible picture that somebody had taken several months before on which I looked like a deer in headlights.

I'm in Paris cooling my heels getting well, thinking about what my next steps might be. I got well and I flew back to Gabon. According to the Gabonese press I was never coming back, and there I was again. The first thing I did was to call the president, telling him that I've got to see him. I went to see him and I sat down with him. I had a couple of the old newspapers with me, and I said, "You know, if you really think that you will win by doing this, you're wrong. First of all, if you want to martyr the American ambassador, that's fine, but you understand that you make me a hero in my own Department and in the U.S. government. You don't win there. You make yourself look bad, and that's pretty silly. Secondly, you and I have known each other for quite a while now. I've broken bread at your house, you've broken bread at mine, and we've been pretty frank with each other. You know, there are some people around here who have been saying things that are just simply not true," and I went through chapter and verse of some of these items. I said, "Frankly, between two people who know each other as well as you and I know each other, and who have broken bread togethethat's important, to break bread togetheit is really dishonorable to do this." Then I said a couple of other things and then left. The offending person who had been the viper in all of this was fired the next day, and our relationship got back on track. That relationship was very, very helpful. We managed to avoid the real estrangement that we had seen in other bilateral relationships as a consequence of presidential elections that were less than peripherally successful. The reason I took this tact rather than the tact that we had taken in Togo or Cameroon or in the Central African Republic is that our bilateral relationship was built on more than just whether or not a presidential election was successful or not. We had to compartmentalize this part of it. This was not the be all and the end all.

Secondly, even in terms of democratization, it's important to understand that presidential elections are the culmination of the democratic process, not the beginning, but we in our approach to democratization see presidential elections as everythinthe beginning, the end, and everything in between. The foundations of democracy are based on what goes on in localities and communities and everything up to presidential elections. We do ourselves and our friends in Africa a great disservice when we put all of our eggs in the presidential election basket. I was bound and determined not to do that. I made a lot of enemies in Washington for not doing this, but at the end of the day we still had to do business with Gabon. They were very active in the Angolan peace process. They've proven themselves to be active in the Congo, in Chad and in CAR in positive ways. It was important not to deny the lack of transparency in the presidential election but to put it in its proper context. To this day, if you take a look around Africa, Bongo is still the most adroit and the best politician on the continena man who knows his country better than anybody else. He also has the luxury of having a lot of liquidity so that he can spread the money around as inducements. So we got through the election.

Q: This would have been in 1993?

WILSON: This was the end of 1993. We got rid of the French ambassador in 1994. His successor came just on the eve of the Gabonese National Day, which is August, and he presented his letters. He didn't know Africa very well; he was prissy, and Bongo didn't like prisses very much. He likes manly sort of men. The French ambassador had not received his invitation to the National Day celebration in a format that met his requirements under his understanding of what protocol should have been. I think he received a phone call instead of an engraved invitation. So on National Day he was seen downtown eating a pizza in some local pizzeria while everybody else was at the palace celebrating National Day with the president.

For this particular National Day, Peter Krough from Georgetown University just happened to be in town; he came with us to the festivities. We had a table with Africans. We always made a point of sitting with the Gabonese, not with the diplomatic corps. We made that almost sort of a condition; we would go in and we would sit with our Gabonese friends. We had this table; there were hundreds of people at this reception in the palace. Bongo and his wife were at the head table. There came a point when there was a pregnant pause between one dish and the next coursin this case between the main dish and the dessert. There was a lull in the conversation while everybody was kind of looking around wondering what was going to happen next. In this lull, Bongo called somebody over, raising the question in everybody's mind about what's Bongo was doing. He called over this guy and whispered something to him. Everybody was watchinBongo's up at the head table and everybody's down below. This guy walked all the way around and down, and came to our table and whispered to me. He said, "The president would like to speak to you." I said, "Fine." I got up and I excused myself from my guests, and walked all the way back through the people, back around behind the end of the table, and out the back door. By this time everybody's intrigued. There was just silence. I said hundredthere were thousands of people at this dinner. After we gone out, Bongo got up and he walked out as well. He and I just sat out in the back and had a little chat. The issue was most ridiculous; it had to do with a money laundering scheme, but Bongo wanted to talk to me about it. It had nothing to do with any substance; he could have called me anytime and talked about substance. In having everybody see that he and I had left the banquet room, he wanted to make a point to the thousands that our relationship was were good and that we were back in good relations. We were out there for the appropriate amount of time; we yuck it up a bit, and then came back in together yucking it up. Bongo went back to the head table and I walked back to my table. For this whole time, thousands of peoplthe elite of Gabonese society and the hoi polloi of diplomatic societwere watching this, while the newly arrived French ambassador, was not there because he was in some pizzeria downtowall because he was pissed off because he didn't get his invitation in the format that he wanted. So it was gag for the French. It was very clear to everybody what Bongo had done; there were no secrets about what Bongo had done. Later that evening, my wife danced with him and I danced with his wife; it was just sort of a real love fest, and that was the signal that was sent. We then did a lot of interesting things together. For example, the Equatorial Guinean president, Obiang, was having some problem with his opposition, so he was coming to see Bongo. He was having lots of trouble with the American ambassador in Malabo.

Somebody from the palace called me up and said, "Bongo is receiving the president of Equatorial Guinea this afternoon. Is there anything you want him to say?" I said, "I wish I had known. I could have given the president a paper on American complaints about the way the president of Equatorial Guinea was acting towards his population. But on such short notice, I don't have much. He can say whatever he wants. But he should know that we have some human rights concerns in that country." I left it at that and went back to my business; 10 minutes later I got another call from the palace saying, "Bongo wants to know if you'd like to come over and tell President Obiang yourself." I said, "Let me talk to Washington. I'll get back to you. It's somebody else's turf and I don't want to be poaching on his turf." So I called up Washington and talked to Bob Pringle, who said, "Yes, sounds good. Why don't you go over there. Go on over there. You know what to tell him." So I called the palace back up and said, "Sure, I'll come over. Tell me what time. I'll be over there." They said, "Sure. We'll get back to you." I got a call back from Bongo's daughter, who's is director of the cabinet. She said, "Fine, the president would like you to come to dinner, you and your wife, at his private residence. It will just be the president, his wife, and myself and their foreign ministejust a very small dinner." I said, "Look, I'm under instructions to tell Obiang what we think of him and his regime, but I don't really want to break bread with the man if I don't have to. I don't want to have a meal with this guy. This guy's a thug." She says, "Okay, got it." Ten minutes later I got a call from the chief of protocol at the residency; he was a general. Now, a general in the Gabonese army is maybe not a real general like Colin Powell, but they have a certain general bearing. He gets on the phone and says, "Monsieur l'Ambassadeur [French; Mr. Ambassador]," and I said, "Oui, Mon General [French: Yes, General]." He said, "The president will receive you at his residence with Mrs. Wilson for dinner at 8:30," or "You will arrive at 8:30. You will have your meeting with the president and the president of Equatorial Guinea, and your wife will arrive at nine for dinner with the president and his wife and the president of Equatorial Guinea and his wife." I said, "Oui, Mon General." There it was. I been given my instructions.

I took my junior officefirst tour officewith me. His name was Greg Thome and he was a very fine officer. I figured that if were to talk to Obiang, that would be good fun for him; it would be a good experience. He could be the note takel wouldn't have to remember anything or write anything down myself. So we go over there. We showed up at eight o'clock, and there was President Bongo, President Obiang, the Prime Minister Oemba, myself and my note taker. We go to sit out on the porcthe patithe palace had a swimming pool. Bongo and I follow Obiang. The prime minister doesn't say anything, and my note taker is sitting there just taking notes. Bongo hits Obiang high, I hit him low, and we do this for about 45 minutes. We're talking to him about these human rights problems, about how he treats his people, about what's going on there and what he ought to do. Bongo finally said to him, "What you need to do is have a government of national unity. Bring other people in, teach them how to govern so that they will at least have some experience for down the road, and then you'll be able to divide and rule; you'll be able to coopt." As I said, we talked to Obiang for about 45 minutes. Then time came to have dinner and I sent the junior officer home. We go in and we sit down. During the course of the dinner the Equatorial Guinean foreign minister was sitting next to me; he told me about the issues he has had with our ambassador, an officer by the name of John Bennett. He said that our ambassador went jogging in the middle of the night, that he carried a gun in the waistband of his jogging shorts, which, by the way, were "way too short." He jogged through the part of town where the women of dubious moral fiber lurked, and that was just not acceptable to the Guineans. There was a litany of complaints.

If you want to know anything about Equatorial Guinea, the best book ever written on that country was called Tropical Gangsters. It is a wonderful book written by a former World Bank representative who was there; you get the feel, the odors, just the sense of what that a society was at that time. It has changed because they found oil since then, but in those days it was just kind of corrupt and backwards. Obiang's predecessor had literally taken cash from his capital and had buried it at his village. Of course, all the cash was in paper, and it rained and all the paper just rotted. When Obiang came to power, they took this guy Nguema out and strung him up. I guess they had had the trial in the downtown stadium, and then they strung him up at sundown. We have had really a checkered history in Equatorial Guinea. We had had an embassy there with two people. We had a chargï¿½ d'affaires and a communicator and their wives; the chargï¿½ d'affaires was having an affair with the communicator, which went sour and the chargï¿½ d'affaires stabbed him in the communications vault. There was a shortwave radio system that linked all embassies; this whole thing had been on the radio, so that everybody up and down the coast from Liberia to Gabon or Congo had been able to hear this argument and the stabbings that followed. This was in the early 1970s; this was long before we got to Gabon. Obiang came from a strange clan. He was the nephew of the guy who'd taken all the money and buried it in his village. In any case, we had this nice dinner and the Guineans are telling me how weird our ambassador was. After dinner Obiang and Bongo started to walk towards the swimming pool; I figured that they were just going to have a little tï¿½te ï¿½ tï¿½te; I hung back talking to the president's daughter. The two presidents got about halfway out to the swimming pool when Bongo looked around for me. He signaled me to come over with him. I went and joined them; the two of us spent another 45 minutes going after Obiang. Obiang and I to this day remain good friends. It was great fun. Obiang returned to Equatorial Guinea, didn't do what Bongo suggesteat that time these guys had no money but Bongo volunteered to help with the financeand Bongo was pissed for the whole remainder of my tour. Every couple of months he would remind me of that meeting we had with Obiang and how Obiang had not taken his advice. He was not happy about that. That was the sort of relationship we had.

Bongo got himself into a little bit of trouble. There was a French tailor by the name of Smalta who catered to the rich guythe sheikh typein the Gulf, along North Africa and through Africa, providing them with suits. When he came to measure the clients and later to deliver the suits, he would also bring a bunch of high class Parisian and European hookers to service them on what other needs they might have.

Q: This was a service industry.

WILSON: This was a service industry; that's right. Smalta was picked up by the French police for pimping or whatever the legal term is; he had files on all his clients including Bongo. When he went to trial, the hookers testified that Bongo never paid them; they were all mad at Bongo because he didn't pay. Bongo took great umbrage at that because they had singled him out. The police had combed through the files on the Gulf clients and the North Africans, but had singled out the one on Bongo. Bongo felt that that was really racist on their parthe way that they treated him. When this whole affair broke in the newspapers, I was in Port Gentil at the time, which is a coastal town. I was there talking to some of our oil companies. I came back on a Sunday afternoon. I called Bongo at home and said, "I just heard about this story breaking in the newspaper, and I just wanted to call you as somebody who has been a friend of yours for a couple years and just say how sorry I am that this sort of trash is bandied about the French newspapers." Of course, I enjoyed giving a few digs to the French; I was the only diplomat to call him up. The French ambassador wouldn't do that. So that was a good move on my part. The problem with Smalta was the way the French judicial system handled it. It gave me an opportunity of getting a dig in at the French free of charge. I pointed out to Bongo the next day that that was yet another reason why he should buy his suits from the United States instead from these trashy Parisian tailors.

The French ambassador pulled their ambassador out after only about 16 months. I think he left just about the time I did. They were really worried that they were going to lose everything to us. By this time we had half a dozen oil companies working in Gabon; we were taking oil concessions away from the French right and left and Bongo was being very helpful to us on all these issues.

Q: What about these oil concessions? ELF obviously was in there greasing the transactions. This is their modus operandi, but we were now working under the new rules of no corruption, no bribes and all that? How did our oil companies work?

WILSON: Of course, they're not going to tell me if they're bribing anybody in violation of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, but Bongo understood that to be 100 percent dependent upon the French was not in his own interest. Before I arrived in Gabon, there was an open bidding round; just before the bids closed, the French had managed to sabotage the process and pick off for themselves the choice concessions that they wanted. ELF had managed to do that. The American oil companies howled in protest. Keith Wauchope, who was my predecessor, had been very aggressive in his defending of the American interests. The French had used that to turn the Gabonese press against him, and the American oil companies had basically been shut out. We were able to turn that around, because, among many reasons, we were able to make clear that it was not in Bongo's interest to be so dependent upon just the French.

By that time, his relationship with the French had soured in some respects anyway. He didn't like the ambassador. He thought the French hadn't been treating him quite the way he wished. At the time, in France there was the beginning of a debate on their Africa policy. The ministry of finance was beginning to realize that French policies towards Africa were beginning to cost a lot of money. We're getting towards the end of Mitterrand's years. The right was in power and Chirac, who was close to Bongo was the head of the party even if he wasn't prime minister. There were some dislocations within the French governmental system, and Bongo didn't like that very much. He didn't like the fact that they'd taken the French ambassador away and that they'd replaced him with this guy that he just couldn't stand. All that gave us an opportunity to press our case for having American oil companies participate in the development of the oil sector. We obviously were concerned about possible violations of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. We were at a net disadvantage with ELF in head to head competitiovery clearly.

Q: Were we providing any economic or military assistance?

WILSON: No, Gabon had one of the highest per capita incomes of any country on the continent because of its oil resources; so we were constrained by that fact. We had no development projects. We did have a regional project that was just in its inceptiothe preservation of the rainforest which was to cover Gabon, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo (Brazzaville), and maybe Zaire. But that was the only infusion of development assistance we had. There were some relationship in Franceville between CDC and Gabon because there was a research center there that had originally been put there by the French to study the high incidence of infertility in Gabon. The Gabonese population growth rate was very low. Initially they thought it was because of the high incidence in venereal disease that resulted in sterility, but they were examining other possible causes of low fertility rates. The research center then started exploring retro viruses and subsequently HIV AIDS. Gabon had a large primate population and that also interested the CDC. They had a liaison relationship with the institute and had the people working there. That was really about it in terms of a non political relationship, with the exception of a Peace Corps program which had about 120 volunteers.

Q: Was AIDS developing as a problem?

WILSON: We are now talking about the mid 1990s. Gabon was not publishing statistics that reflected the high incidence of AIDS. It was not as bad there as it was in Burundi or Rwanda, for example, but it was clearly a problem. Gabon was on the northern edge and the western edge of the problem that was, by and large, an eastern and southern one.

Q: I was wondering whether, as AIDS became known, it had any effect on the morale or the operation of the embassy, particularly because it was sexually and a blood transmitted disease. You know, you're driving around and you have an accident and blood is needed. Did this cause people to be uneasy?

WILSON: I think people were uneasy. We did everything we could to insure that we had safe blood supplies. We had, for example, lists of potential donors, all of whom were presumed, because they were Americans, to be AIDS and HIV free. We had done everything that we thought that we could to keep the staff safe. We hadn't gotten to the point where we were donating blood for freezing. We didn't have that technology to do, but we did have a list of potential blood donors so that we could...

Q: You had your own needles.

WILSON: We had our own needles. We had our own health center; we had a doctor, we had a nurse.

Q: What was the Peace Corps volunteers up to?

WILSON: They were up to everything. They were in health, in education; they built schools and roads; they did a little bit of everything.

Q: Did the French get nervous about that?

WILSON: The French had initially used the Peace Corps in its early years as a way of arguing, and had done so in Gabon, that the Peace Corps was really just a CIA operation. In fact, the Peace Corps was thrown out, I think, thanks to the French in the mid 1960s. By the 1990s, that was no longer the case. The Peace Corps was a pretty successful operation. The French, if they didn't like it, at least kept that to themselves. The volunteers were all over the country. It was great; it was a good program.

Q: Is there anything else we should cover on your tour iGabon?

WILSON: No, I think that's about it. After we vanquished the French, it was life in paradise.

Q: I have to note that the French Americans contest is amusing in a way, because we were seen as sort of the enemy in Africa in their trying to take over, where as all we actually wanted was to protect our commercial interest, but our other interests were so minor.

WILSON: I would put it somewhat differently. I would say that the French always perceived us as the enemy, but you're absolutely right. The French were driven in all these places by two things. One was the protection of their population in the African countrietheir population was a constituency. It was there earning a living and didn't want to lose that lucrative living. Then there were the broader commercial interests, and more loosely their political, historic ties and cultural ties. By the end of the day, it was their other former colonies in Africa that give the French a chance to play with the big boys in the international geopolitics arena, either at the UN or elsewhere; they can bring to bear all these voices that nobody else can. Why they saw us as the enemy is not entirely clear. We were only going to operate on the marginhowever many contracts we were ever going to get. It got so bad that even for contracts of less than five or ten million dollars for cell phones, for example, the president of an African country would get a call from the president of France lobbying on behalf of the French company. It was a lot of fun. I've always said that I fought the Cold War where the war was hot down in Africa and where the enemy often spoke French. I have scars diplomatic scars on my back to show for it. But I did not have to go to Tirana, Albania, to atone for my sins.

Q: We have now covered Gabon. Where were you assigned in 1995?

WILSON: I went to Stuttgart as political advisor to the Commander in Chief, US Armed Forces, Europe. Stuttgart is in the Schwabian region of Germany, the home of Porsche and Mercedes, I guess.

Q: You were in Stuttgart until when?

WILSON: I was in Stuttgart from 1995 to 1997. As I said, I was the political advisor to the Commander in Chief of U.S. Armed Forces European Command, who is "two hatted" as the Supreme Allied Commander of NATO. So he is SACEUR, Supreme Allied Commander Europe. His headquarters are in Mons, Belgium, and although I worked for him, I worked at his American headquarters in Vahingen, Germany, just outside of StuttgarPatch Barracks, it's called. My daily point of contact was his deputy, also know as the DCINCEUR, or Deputy Commander in Chief U.S. Armed Forces Europe, DCINCEUR, who was an Air Force four star general by the name of Jim Jamerson. He had been the person who had set up "Operation Provide Comforts" in northern Iraq among other things; so that we had some previous connection over Iraq and the Gulf War.

Q: Let's talk about what were your principal concerns while you were there?

WILSON: When I arrived at Patch Barracks, we were in the process of focusing on the future role of the European Command. A joint command is responsible for the planning and execution of military operations in its theater. Our command had historically been responsible for defending NATO, defending Western Europor the Fulda Gap as we used to saagainst an invasion by the Warsaw Pact forces. Despite the fact that the Berlin Wall had fallen in 1990 and the Cold War had been over for five years, the bureaucracy, which was our command headquarters, was still focused largely on its responsibilities to defend Western Europe against an enemy which may or may not have gone away by this time. When I got there, we were being obliged to respond to threats from elsewhere in our theater which covered something in the order of 89 countries and 112 embassies, consulates and international missions. We covered all of Europe with the exception of Russia. We covered the Near East up to and including Israel.

Q: When you say "except for Russia," does that mean that you were covering the Ukraine?

WILSON: That's correct. We were running programs in the Baltic, Ukraine, Belarus, etc. The only country with which we did not directly interface with was Russia, and that was because Russian relations were handled by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs in Washington. It was a Washington held program. We covered the Near East up to and including Israel, but we did not cover Jordan. Jordan and the Arabian Gulf and Syria were covered by Central Command. We were responsible for Lebanon and Israel, although Israel was also a unique situation because of this historically close relationships between the Pentagon and the Israeli defense forces and between Israel at all levels and the American body politic here in Washington. We covered all of Africa with the exception of the Horn of Africa, from Egypt through the Suez Canal and down around the Horn of Africa; so we had most of the countries of Africa. In the period 1995 to 1997 while I was in Stuttgart, there were a number of very interesting operations. For example, we transitioned from "Operation Provide Comfort" to "Operation Northern Watch" in Turkey.

Q: You've got to explain what "Provide Comfort" was.

WILSON: "Provide Comfort" was the operation that was designed to restrict Iraqi use of their air assets above the 34th parallel, I think it was, or the 32nd parallel don't remember. We flew to interdict their flying fixed wing aircraft in that area.

Q: This was mainly to protect the Kurds?

WILSON: It had the effect of protecting the Kurds, but it was essentially just a part of the cease fire. It was an interdiction of use of fixed wing aircraft, and we enforced it. This operation when I first got there in 1995 was operating out of northern Iraq out of a place called Tako, which was a Kurdish support operation; so our air operation insured that the Kurds were not subject to Iraqi air attacks. That, in fact, was the first trip that Jim Jamerson and I took together, to northern Iraq, which was quite interesting.

We also managed during my tour, the deployment to Bosnia. That was a NATO run operatioNATO Plubut the troops belonged to their respective home nations until they got to Bosnia. We owned the assets from the time that we started identifying and training them until the time that they were turned over to the NATO commander in Bosnia. That meant that all transportation was our requirement, all the training was our requirement, all the transiting of foreign countries on the way to Bosnia was our requirement, and we shared the requirement with NATO for the briefing of the various countries that were going to be involved one way or another. I'll just give you an example because this was an interesting operation. We were going to deploy 20,000 troops. Imagine, if you will, the Commander in Chief U.S. Armed Forces telling the Commander of the Army, "I want you to get 20,000 troops and 300,000 tons of equipment and materiel to Tuzla, Bosnia, by December 20th." The Army general would say, "Got it. Yes, sir," and pulls out a map, drawing a straight line from Kaiserslautern, where his troops were training, to Tuzla. He would get ready to march across Europe to get there. In this scenario, we in the political advisor's office would raise our hand and make the point that, "In moving these troops you're going to be moving across a number of sovereign countries, some of which are former Warsaw Pact countries. Perhaps it is in our collective interest to insure that we have prepared the diplomatic groundwork before you go." That included such things as negotiating status of forces agreements, insuring the all countries understood what might happen, what might not happen, how we would deal with incidents, what would happen if an American fell off a train in a foreign country, who would be responsible for the health and insurance, etc., what would happen if an American in transit got drunk and fired off his weapon, how they would carry their weapons armed across these countrieall these various things that needed to be done and which might occur. As I said, some of these countries were former Warsaw Pact countries and, while they agreed in principle with what we were doing, that didn't mean that they couldn't make some political hay one way or the other over the fact that American forces, which had been arrayed against them for an entire generation, were now going to be transiting their country and setting up behind their linethe lines that they had been manning for 34 years.

So we set up an operation which I led; we took majors and lieutenant colonels and flew to a number of capitals, from Paris to Bratislava basically and most places in between including Belgrade. We briefed all these countries on our operational plan; we briefed them on our logistics plan, so they understood what we were planning to do and how we were planning to doing it. The level of briefings was at the level requested by the government. We would just say we're going to be there and we're going to brief our embassies, and we will brief you at whatever level you wish to be briefed at. In some countries the level was very high. In Austria we briefed very senior advisors to the prime minister including the minister of interior. In Bratislava we briefed senior political officials who were worried that the opposition was going to accuse them of having sold out to the Americans and basically abandoned 35 or 40 years of principle in doing so.

In the Czech Republic we briefed the guy who had made the trains run on time when they had separated the assets of the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. He had run that operation; he was the one who wanted to take this particular briefing because he was going to be required to make the trains run on time during the transit period. Each one of these countries had different issuedifferent bureaucratic issuethat needed to be resolved, and they had positions that they needed to have considered. We laid the groundwork for all of that. We went to France, because we wanted our friends, the French, to understand precisely what it was that we were doing; this was in the context of a number of other things we were doing with the French.

Q: Technically this would be the military side of NATO, which France was not in.

WILSON: That's correct, but they were in the NATO Plus. They were in the "plus" column; they were part of the political organization and then they offered their troops in this as well.

Q: I'd like to go into a certain amount of detail on how something like this happens. Essentially when you were there, was this pulled out of the blue, that the troops were going, or had any preliminary planning, somebody saying, "Has somebody been doing a plan if we've got to put troops in Bosnia?" The problem in Bosnia had been around for some time.

WILSON: The problem in Bosnia had been around for a long time, and there was a lot of dispute and debate at political levels over what we might do in Bosnia. The die was cast really when everybody met in Dayton and signed on the Dayton Accords. That then obligated us to put together a plan. Essentially the plan we had to put together was the plan dealing with our contribution to the multinational force that was going to be there.

Q: You have a whole bureaucratic organization planning to stop the Soviet at the Fulda Gap. Had that at all been transferred to the planning to what we were going to do in Bosnia? Had somebody been sort of brainstorming this?

WILSON: The bureaucracy was sufficiently large and sufficiently versatile that it could take on contingencies. Certainly within our planning operation we were able to switch rather quickly to took a look at everything. We took a look a cost effective ways of shipping 300,000 tons of war materiel. We had people on the medical side geared up to go and the same on the logistics side. The legal staff was ready to work on status of forces agreements. It took us very, very little time to organize. That said, once we started organizing, we were briefing new versions of the plans on an almost daily basis. The briefings were held at the highest levels within our commands, so that two or three times a week we would brief what we called the CINC, and virtually every day we would have a briefing on the status of our thinking on various issues.

Q: Let's get a feel also for the cooperation. What about, let's say, Budapest? We ended up with quite a large base in Hungary. How about our embassy there, including the military attachï¿½s and our embassies other places? Had somebody drawn the line where they would go more or less? Did they figure that they would come through here and through here and here and how they would go? Were our embassies in the game?

WILSON: Yes. What we found early on was that you could not ship the amount of equipment that we wanted to ship on our delivery schedule using only one route; so we had to use a number of different routes to get there. Some of our calculations were purely physical. You could not ship certain items through certain countries because the tunnels in those countries wouldn't permit that size item to get througreal logistical problems. We also had an issue which was rather curious. The Swiss were in the midst of a debate of redefining what neutrality meant in the post Cold War era. The Swiss chief of defense came over to visit us and pretty much begged us to plan and route a shipment through Switzerland so that they would be able to demonstrate to their population that in fact they could be neutral and yet be supportive of an international operation.

Q: It was basically a peace keeping operation.

WILSON: It was a peace keeping operatiopeace making essentially. I don't know what it was in the context of the UN, but it met all the characteristics of a Article 7 operation in that we were able to use force as...

Q: So you did send some stuff through Switzerland.

WILSON: We did. That was particularly difficult to do, because moving stuff through the Swiss mountains required resizing the packages so they would go through the tunnels without major problemThat was important. Now, in the case of Budapest we went there early on. We had a great ambassador there, Ambassador Blinken, who had been working very, very closely with...

Q: Was that Donald or David? They're twins.

WILSON: It was the one who was not in Brussels.

Q: I've interviewed the one who was in Brussels.

WILSON: It was his older brother. I don't think they were twins; I think they were just brothers, but maybe they were twins. In any case, the one in Budapest was most helpful; he arranged for a series of meetings at very high levels of the Hungarian government, during which the Hungarian government expressed its full support of what we were doing and made the offer to host a support base in southern Hungary. So that was not a problem, and, in fact, most countries were helpful, with the exception of the Slovak Republic where the government was very sensitive to what the domestic political fall out might be, and Italy. When we went to Rome, we met with the Italian J4 and the J3 teams, which were the logistics and the operations staffs. During the meeting with us, I was called away from the meeting unexpectedly by the Italian chief of defense. He called me up to his office and said that he was sorry that he hadn't been able to meet me at the door when we came in. I had expected to meet with him; he had wanted to have a chance to talk with me privately, and he took that occasion to air with me every grievance the Italian military forces had had with the United States since we were "allies together in the Second World War." Far be it from me to remind him that, in fact, we weren't allies in the Second World War.

Q: They declared war on us, by the way.

WILSON: He was dedicated to the principle that we were historic friends from time immemorial. He asked me, of course, to relay all this to George Gawin, who was CINCEUR. The Italians were particularly sensitive that anything we did on Italian territory was to be done under the auspices of NATO and not as American military forces. So even though we owned the forces and were training as U.S. forces, we were training as a NATO or NATO Plus operation and had to basically call it that. The other country where we had an interesting experience was the former republic of Yugoslavia, Belgrade...

Q: Which was essentially Serbia.

WILSON: ...which was essentially Serbigreater Serbiwe flew there. Again, we thought we would meet with their planners, but their chief of defense, General Peresech, showed up at the meeting. The General really was not interested in what we had to say, even though the people around him were keenly interested. This was a wonderful intelligence briefing for them. They were going to know what the Americans were going to do and how the Americans were going to do it. We were going to lay all that out for them. General Peresech didn't want that; he wasn't interested. What he wanted was to sit across the table from me and tell me how the Serbs had been friends of the Americans forever, fought in all the wars together, and how the Serbs had been the aggrieved party and been put upon by their enemies since the battle of...

Q: 1389, wasn't it?

WILSON: ...1389, whatever the battle was.

Q: Kosovo.

WILSON: Yes. He did that, chain smoking all the while. During his diatribe against ml was really struck by the extent to which he tried to impose himself on me and on everybody else at the meeting. I remember having a very conscious thought that this guy had really misread me completely; he didn't know that I had sat across from major leagued thugs like Saddam Hussein; if he really thought that a minor league thug like him was going to impress me, he's had it all wrong. After it was over, he got up and walked out. When he walked out, it was a signal to everybody in the room that the meeting was over. So we got up and walked out, and as a consequence the Serbs did not get the benefits of either our J3 or J4 briefings. I got on the airplane and called George Gawin and reported to him what Peresech had done. The CINCEUR arranged to fly four C17s to Belgrade the next morning; he got off the airplane and strode right past General Peresech to see Milosevic and set things straight. Whatever issues may have been outstanding were no longer outstanding after George finished that meeting.

The other discussions were also very interesting. Levels of embassy engagement differed from embassy to embassy. Pam Harriman was probably the most engaged.

Q: She was our ambassador...

WILSON: She was our ambassador to France. Even though she was suffering from the flu, she insisted not only on having a pre briefing, which I always gave to every interested American ambassador, but she insisted also to be at the briefing for the French, and as a consequence her presence, there was a much more senior presence on the part of her staff; so she gave a level of importance to it. She was, not just in this operation, the key to some other things we were doing with the French, which I'll go into in a few minutes. So that was very, very helpful in getting that high level attention. Other ambassadors were less interested or less engaged, I guess.

Q: How about in Austria? So often there's a political ambassador usually not at the top rung.

WILSON: Our ambassador to Austria at the time was Suwanee Hunt; she was very engaged and she had some good defense attachï¿½s around her. She did not attend the full briefing, as I recall, but she was interested. We did do a pre briefing with her. She had her own interests in Yugoslavia. Her husband was a conductor and he wanted to go to Belgrade to conduct the symphony orchestra there on New Year's, which I think he ultimately did. So Ms. Hunt was keenly interested in what she could do to help us. I think that since she left Austria, she established a foundation to support women in Yugoslavia; so she's done really quite well.

Q: You mentioned Bratislava. I don't have a map in front of me, but looking at train routes did Slovakia play a communications role in this, or was this just being nice?

WILSON: I don't remember. We did send trains through Bratislava, because we had to send them through the Czech Republic, and when they went through the Czech Republic, they ended up going through the Slovak Republic as well. In fact, in the category of "even the best laid plans often do go awry," we had laid out for them precisely how we were going to do this and we promised that we would give them advance notice. We promised that we would take care of all issues. The Slovaks wanted a liaison officer at Kaiserslautern to make sure that the necessary paperwork was done well; we acceded to that. Everything was set for the trains to go through, but the first train was something like 48 hours late. On the Czech side they were terribly disappointed because they had tickertape and balloons to greet the train coming through. On the Slovak side they were disappointed and angry because they had tried to assure everybody that they had this operation was well in hand; it was going to be well managed, but when the very first train went through late, the opposition accused the government of being bumbling idiots. We did send trains through Slovakia.

Q: Were there any problems in these countries? I can see setting up a major supply point, wasn't it, in southern Hungary?

WILSON: Yes.

Q: This means a lot of line of supply fruit sitting around to be looked aftemaintenance things, supplies and all this, and they're pretty rough and tumble people. I would think there would be problems.

WILSON: That's right, but there were surprisingly few problems. The discipline of the American armed forces in this operation was exemplary, as it was everywhere where we deployed. When we deployed, a review team went down to see our troops in Gabon and Brazzaville, where they were deployed with French intelligence troops and English troops. The discipline of our troops was far better by comparison with others; it was good by any standards. There were very few incidents. There were prohibitions on drinking, for example, in Tuzla itself. Hungary was a staging area for R&R, but even in Hungary there were very few problems.

Q: You mentioned what I call Serbia, but Yugoslavia then. Did the line go through there, or did it go through Croatia?

WILSON: Actually both. We had ships that went in through Croatia. We talked to the Croats. We went to Zagreb. The Croatian main concerns were that we might do environmental damage. They felt that we should assume liability for any environmental damage that we might do in the movement of our equipment and troops. I remember thinking at that time, that these were people who have been involved in a civil war for the last 150 years; I bet one couldn't cut one single tree down without finding bullets and shrapnel in every one in that country. But that was their concern. We did, for the purposes of making the point, move stuff through Belgrade. I think the C17 by air was principal way that we did that.

Q: When was this movement started?

WILSON: It started really in the fall of 1995.

Q: So you were right in the...

WILSON: This was pretty much my first task. I can't remember when we ended it, but we had everybody there and then were reducing the resupply operations...

Q: How did the Supreme Commander use you? Were you sort of the point person on the diplomatic side or what?

WILSON: As I said, I was basically reporting to the DCINC. He was responsible for the day to day supervision of all operations. We would come up with a plan, get his approval and then we would execute it. In this particular assignmenl was pretty operational, because I led the team going to all these countries. We had an airplane, we had briefers, we had a Power Point show, and then we had me to go and...

Q: What Power Point show?

WILSON: We had a slide show which visualized everything that we were planning on doing. That was basically my operation. I would coordinate with the embassies and the attachï¿½s, set up the times and places where we would go, and then we would go and do it.

Q: I go back to my experience when I was in Saigon as consul general. The military briefings are so different than State Department briefings when usually a State Department officer would get up and discuss the situation a little more professorial. The military would get up and it would be full of very precise things. Sometimes they were dead wrong, but whatever it was it was very impressive because there was no hedging or...

WILSON: They were very certain of themselves.

Q: Very certain of themselves even if they were on the sticky wicket. How did you find that you fit into this?

WILSON: I found the melding of the two cultures to be very easy. I found that, depending on whom we were briefing, my role would be lesser or greater. Just to give you an example: if we were briefing only military officers, the military would go through their briefings; I might interject or I might answer questions from the participants. In briefings for civilian authorities, who think much more like Foreign Service officers than they do like military officers, there would be need for greater involvement on my part to round out what the military was trying to say; I would add a little bit to what we saying in terms that civilians might more easily understand, making sure that there was enough sensitivity to sovereign interests as we were going forward. For example, when the military briefed the Slovaks that we were going to bring 20,000 troops and 300,000 tons of arms through their country, I would sort of jump in and say, 'consistent with international agreements and consistent with your own sovereign concerns." so that their sovereign concerns were not offended..

Q: This is always one of the great differences between the military and the diplomatic side. We are trying to be sensitive. You don't do something without being sensitive of the culture in which you're dealing, the foreign culture and often sovereignty, whereas the military: 'We have a task to do, it's a good cause, and of course these people will fall in.' Was there a new breed of officer more aware of this, or were you acting as sort of a Foreign Service Institute professor from time to time with the military to get them to understand what some of the sovereignty issues were?

WILSON: I didn't act so much as a Foreign Service Institute professor; I did periodically remind them that as an ambassador I carried the personal rank of a threor four star general. They understand that much better.

Q: You had that sense of a rank with them for NATO command?

WILSON: Within the CINCEUR command. Everybody understood that in the manner the command protocol structure was set up, I was the "number three," even though I did not have any line responsibilities. The top management staff consisted of the DCINC who was a four star, his boss who was also a four star, the chief of staff who was the senior operating officer who was a three star, and myself. There was one two star who tried to challenge that at one point; he is now retired. That didn't work. The mistake he made was that he didn't understand that my office was right next to the DCINC's office and that the DCINC and I were inveterate cigar smokers and golfers, so we spent 70 percent of our time together. We were either on airplanes traveling somewhere or we were at meetings together or we were on a golf course together smoking cigars every weekend. The two star made the mistake of not understanding that relationship.

Q: How did the thing go, and what was your impression of how this deployment worked, and what were some of the issues that came to your attention? Did you get involved in the Bosnian issues?

WILSON: I was amazed at how smoothly it went. I was amazed by the willingness of everybody from these various commands to cooperate and coordinate and to iron out any differences, because, when you do start an operation like this, you have not just the joint command planning but you also have the respective services thinking through how they're going to do it. The Air Force has its responsibilities, which was transport goods and personnel as well as providing private aircraft. The Army has its responsibilities, which are to provide infantry, artillery, tankers, etc.; and the Navy has its responsibilities. It is up to the joint planners to harmonize all these relationships and make sure that you truly do have a joint operation going on at the same time. That required a lot of work, and these guys worked day and night. I was also struck, I must say, by the sophistication of the management of a complex organization, despite the fact that the hierarchy is pretty rigid. When a four star says you're going to do something, you salute and you do it. When issues needed to be resolvewhen there was a conflict between services or various divisions within a command on implementatiothey were resolved quickly, with an emphasis on pragmatism and on getting the job done. When there were issues with foreign governments, the military was quick to respond. The military was good at insuring that it maintained good relations with ambassadors and that it was responsive when issues arose. When guys got sick, when a guy fell of a train, when people got injured, when people got hospitalized, all these problems were resolved really very quickly and I think to the satisfaction of most. When I was there, there were virtually no issues that came to my attention that remained festering sores. I came away very impressed with the military organizatiothe way they treat their people, the way they're task oriented, the work ethic within the military. That is not just the officer corps, because we spent a lot of time with the troops in the various operations that they were runninand with their ability to achieve what they set out to do.

Q: Once the troops got to Bosnia, then they moved into a different command.

WILSON: Right.

Q: You arrived there just before this whole movement started. It's almost forgotten today but there was a brief air was against the Serbs in Bosnia. What was the impression at the Air Force? Were they feeling that they had done well?

WILSON: The air war had been principally if not exclusively run by the Navy. It was run off the Adriatic by Admiral Snuffy Smith, who was a very interesting character and whose clashes with George Gawin were the stuff of legenmost of which took place before I got there but I saw the two of them in the ring together a couple of times and it was something to behold. The clash of four star egos was something to behold.

Q: Was it mainly ego rather than...

WILSON: Oh, yes; it was sort of a manly strutting abouwho's got the biggest chest type of thinbut it was very amusing. The one sterling quality of Jim Jamerson, the Air Force four star, was that he was not encumbered by an oversize ego and he was able to accomplish everything he set out to do with a quiet confidence in a rather self effacing manner. That's not to say that he just laid down and rolled over for guys, but he didn't need to strut his stuff the same way that Snuffy and George did.

I think that the bombing campaign had been pretty much wrapped up by the time I got there. It was not an operation I had much to do with or knew much about, except that Snuffy would come to brief the DCINC periodically.

Q: Obviously this Bosnian thing absorbed you for awhile, but NATO must have been looking beyond thilooking around for 'what the hell are we here for?'

WILSON: NATO was different. George Gawin had his own NATO political advisor; there was a POLAD SACEUR.

We did most of the stuff that was not done in the NATO context. That is why "Operation Provide Comfort" and all the African operations came under our umbrella and which is why when George went down to Israel I accompanied him instead of SACEUR political advisor because Israel is not a NATO country.

It is important to understand that, at the same time that we were conducting operations in Bosnia, we were also very concerned with "Operation Provide Comfort" and how that was progressing. We had a series of running battles with the Turks over the management of that operation. The French withdrew from the operation early in my tenure. The Turkish parliament had to reapprove the operation every three or six months; that was a constant source of friction as it was a constant source of political debate within Turkey. The Turks nickeled and dimed us to death in the day to day operations of "Operation Provide Comfort. " We spent a lot of time on that. Mark Grossman was the ambassador to Turkey; he had been the deputy there when I had been in Baghdad, and Mark and I also went to the same university. Even though we didn't know each other there, we had sort of a similar background. So we dealt very, very closely with him. We had constant battles with the Turks. We used to have to get the deputy chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Joe Ralston, to go to Ankara on a periodic basis to break the deadlocks.

Q: Was it the Turks just wanting to extract from us or was it the Kurdish thing that seemed to concern...

WILSON: Some of all of the above. The Turks were concerned about how much money they had lost in cross border trade as result of the sanctions. They were concerned that by operating "Operation Provide Comfort" we were strengthening the Kurdish hand and that a strong Kurdish element in Iraq would bring brought forth the specter of an autonomous or independent Kurdistan which might encourage Turkish Kurds to continue to strive to achieve the same thing at a time when the PKK was still...

Q: That was the Marxist...

WILSON: Marxist Leninist Kurdish terrorist group that has been on our list of terrorist organizations for 15 years. The Turkish concern was that the Kurds would gain some sort of inherent legitimacy through our operations and/or that this sort of decade long move for an independent Kurdistan carved out of Iranian, Turkish, Iraqi and Syrian territory would come to fruition. So they were concerned about all of that. They were also concerned, I think, more generally about the notion that we would be dropping bombs on Iraqi civilians from airplanes that would be taking off from Turkish territory and that one day we would leave and go home and Turkey would still be there with Iraq.

One of the most telling comments that was made to me, which I repeat to my Turkish friends on a regular basis, came while we were in Turkey for one of our negotiation sessions. After the session we had dinner with the Turkish General Staff; the then deputy chief of the Turkish General Staff was a fellow by the name of General Sevik Beer, who had worked with April Glaspie at one stage. He had run a UN operation in Somalia when April Glaspie had been in Somalia. Beer stood up and in the course of his toast he said, "You might find us difficult on issues related to "Operation Provide Comfort," but the one thing you really need to understand is that in Turkey we have nine neighbors, we have nine countries with whom we share borders and that in our neighborhood our very best relationships are with Iraq." That was said to us so that we would have some understanding of the complexities of the issues as they saw it from their perspective. My reaction was' "Boy, they really have a problem in their foreign ministry if they've got nine neighbors and they can't get along with any of them and their best relationship is with Iraq." That told me that they needed to work on their diplomacy a little bit. It was in that context that we would have to deal with them on "Operation Provide Comfort." This was also at a time when the Muslim Fundamentalist Party was gaining some strength and stature and was threatening to form a traditional party block. I can't remember whether it was the Motherland Party or the Reform Party; I can't remember what it was called. The Turkish General Staff was real concerned about this situation and didn't want to give them any fuel for the fire. It was a highly nationalistic party and one that threatened the status quo; ultimately the Turkish General Staff saw it as a threat to their responsibilities under the Turkish Constitution to safeguard both the Constitution and the secular nature of the government of the regime. So at the same time we're working on Bosnia, we're implementing "Operation Provide Comfort," and also at the same time we're beginning to focus on Africa.

Q: Before we leave the Turkish Kurdish issudid you have any dealings with the Kurdish rulers in Iraq?

WILSON: Not so much with the leaders. We went to Zakhu on our very first trip. Jim and I flew to Interlake, which is where our base was, and then to Diyarbakir which is in southeastern Turkey. After meeting the civilian and military authorities in Diyarbakir, we then helicoptered down to Zakhu, which is just across the Turkey Iraq border where we met with our people. We had some military people there; we had a headquarters there, and that's where our operation to support the Kurds was based. The Kurdish leaders at that time were all in Irbil; so we met principally with the Americans who were there as well as with a guard force which the Kurds that we had hired to insure our own force protection while we were in Zakhu. We were there at an interesting time because there were some threats on our people and there had been a building that had been blown up...

Q: By the Iraqis or the PKK?

WILSON: Iraqis. At that time the KDP, which is one of the Kurdish factions, and the PKK were pretty much in alliance. The PKK had not posed a threat to our operations in Iraq. In fact, the PKK, to my recollection, hadn't targeted any American assets; they had targeted principally Turkish assets throughout their long terrorist campaign, which had killed a lot of innocent civilians. It was a great homecoming because the Kurds knew that Jim Jamerson was the guy who had set up "Operation Provide Comfort" in the first place. As soon as got off the helicopters, word went out that he was back. That was coupled with the fact that people recognized that I was the last American to have met with Saddam Hussein. I thought it would be in our interest for Saddam Hussein to understand that his nemesis was back in northern Iraq. We put the word out and assumed that Saddam Hussein knew it before we left, given the extent of his information gathering operations. That was an interesting trip and an awful lot of fun for us. We found that we had tremendous support. Our troops who were operating there, even though under some threat, seemed to have a lot of confidence in the Peshmergas around them; they certainly took good care of us when we were there.

Q: Let's turn to the African operations.

WILSON: As I said, the third piece of my work dealt with Africa. All the efforts I described were happening pretty much simultaneously, so that when I wasn't traveling to the Bratislavas of the world or to Turkey, we were traveling to Africa or to the Baltics, where as a consequence of the end of the Cold War, we had put together a number of engagement programs with the former Soviet Union states.

Q: There were U.S., not NATO?

WILSON: These were U.S. efforts. We used the National Guard and the Reservists to help us. We had National Guardsmen based in these countries conducting training and exercise programs. That took us to the Baltics when we weren't in Africa. In Africa, we were doing things like moving the Marine expeditionary unit into position in the Mediterranean to evacuate our people in Sudan if we needed. We drew down our embassy staff in Sudan because we had received a threat to our personnel. We were in Rwanda; we were in Sierra Leone; we moved our troops to Liberia; we conducted some planning operations later for eastern Zaire. In the course of our first trip that Jim Jamerson and I made to Africa, we took The Department's deputy assistant secretary with us and went a number of different places. This was at the beginning of 1996 and we were the third of three envoys going to Angola on behalf of the U.S. governmenthe first having been Madeleine Albright in her capacity as UN ambassador, the second being AID Director Brian Atwood, and the third was us. Our purpose was to support and advance the peace process which was designed to bring about the end of the Angolan War. That was Jim Jamerson's first trip there. We came back through Cote d'Ivoire and went to see President Houphouet Boigny to talk to him about guns being smuggled from Burkina Faso through Cï¿½te d'Ivoire to the Liberia. This was a piece of pretty serious diplomacy we were trying to advance, and our message to Boigny was, "You need to remember that given the ethnic divisions that you have in your own country, which are very similar to those in Liberia, you should not be sanguine about what you're doing with respect to Liberia. The guns you send over there today may well come back to Cï¿½te d'Ivoire tomorrow." They had done in some respects. Jim Jamerson, who had the mandate from George Gawin, realized that there was a lot of interests there. When we came back, we thought long and hard about some things we might do. We came up with a number of ideas. For example, we had historically trained African troops on a bilateral basis. We would undertake a joint exercise with the Malian troops. We came to believe that if we put the Malians and, the Nigerians and the Burkina Faso and the Burkinave together, we might have a multiplier effect that was twofold. One, we would be able to train with three different military organizations at the same time; and, two, these military organizations would be able to train together and get to know each other. George Gawin was very supportive of this idea because he had taken the same approach when he had been in charge of Southern Commanthe Latin American command. One of the things he used to always say was that when he had gone to visit there, he had realized that the military leaders from the various countries hardly knew each other. If you don't know each other, the potential for misunderstanding is far greater. So had a lot of support in putting together operations, which we ended up calling the "Flintlock" series of exercises, where we would bring people from different countries together for an exercise program. This was consistent with the philosophy behind the creation of the Marshall Center, which was a post Cold War idea to education bureaucrats and defense officials from different countries both within NATO and from the former Warsaw Pact together on how to program defense and national security affairs in a democracy. Implicit in this objective was to allow people of different backgrounds and countriesome of which might have been enemies in the pasto get to know each other in a different way than they might have known each other otherwise. We applied some of same reasoning to Africa.

At the same time, and not altogether for altruistic reasons, I must say, I broached the subject of beginning to work with some of the European countries on how we might work together in the future on issues. The theory behind that was that we would be going to war in the future much like we had gone to war in Iraq or much like we were going to go to war in Bosnii.e., with a coalition of friends and allies. Therefore, why don't we start working with friends and allies now in anticipation of future operations together so that, when the operations actually happen, we will have developed the relationships necessary to do things smoothly. Part of this came out of a discussion we had with a master sergeant down in Mali, where there our Special Forces had gone for a three week training mission. We were talking to him and I asked him how he was doing. He said, "This is great. We live for this sort of stuff. This is terrific, to just fire off guns out in the desert. And by the wathis is our third time here in Mallast year when we were deployed in Haiti for a policing operation, one day we were walking around and went around a corner and met this fellow in a military uniform. I looked at him and he looked at me, and we realized we had known each other because we had trained together here in Mali the previous year." He said to us, "As a consequence of the training we had done together here in Mali, we were able to coordinate and meld our operations immediately in Haiti. We were up and running. There was no sniffing armpit time necessary. We knew what we were going to do and how we were going to do it."

I should say that, selfishly, all my career I had wanted to serve in Paris. That is all I ever wanted to do, and it was pretty clear to me that I was never going to get that chance. Stuttgart was probably as close as I would ever get. I thought to myself, "Well, maybe one way of getting to Paris more often is by promoting this idea and suggesting that we use the French as the first target country. I argued that for one, it was pretty clear that we were going to have to deploy in Africa more often than we wanted. We had the strategic lift, the French had historical connections and bases in Africa, we had a congruity of interestwe wanted to save our nationals; we didn't want the security situation to fall into chaos in any of these countries. Why shouldn't we try to work with the French on African issues, develop a relationship that will allow us to deploy in Africa in a more efficient and expeditious manner. Jim Jamerson bought off on it, and as a consequence I got to go to Paris about every three or four weeks. Being a diplomat I didn't feel compelled to fly in in the morning and fly back in the afternoon. I could take two or three days and at my leisure deal with the French generals and the admirals. I never had to deal with the feckless French diplomats at the Foreign Ministry. I was always dealing with the Ministry of Defense or the French armed forces.

Q: My understanding is that the French military has been really very close to our military.

WILSON: When it comes to Africl think maybe even generallthe French military culture matches up much more closely to the American military culture than does to the French Foreign Ministry culture to our diplomats. I think I could probably say that American generals get along better with French generals than they do with American ambassadors, just because there's a certain professional fraternity there. It is also true that when you're dealing with the French military, much like with the American military, you have to understand that they're task oriented and pragmatic. When you're dealing with the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the American State Department, there are various interests that are fostered by intrigue and petty jealousies and rivalries, etc., and something called national interest. It was much easier to deal with the French military. I spoke good French, and the French military came to trust me; the American military in Paris came to trust me as interlocutor, I could go and conduct a lot of business at the most senior levels of the French defense establishment including the chief of Defense, including General Duran, who was the Air Force commanding general at the time. We did this. We had intelligence exchanges; we moved the liaison officer to our joint command headquarters; we established a much closer liaison relationship with their intelligence unit in Paris, and we actually began to put some exercises together. We would invite them as observers to exercises that we were conducting in Africa. They would invite us to exercises they were conducting in Africa. Then we began to do exercises together, which turned out to be both timely and very effective. When we went into the Central African Republic to settle a blow up there, we did it with the French. It was not without its friction, but the fact that we had this relationship allowed us to deal with the issues at a technical level before the friction got out of hand. Equally, when we went into Sierra Leone there were some problems. The French had some ships offshore, and there were some problems over how we were going to manage it. Again, we were able to solve the problems.

Q: What were we doing in Sierra Leone?

WILSON: We were evacuating foreigners at a time of a coup d'ï¿½tat. A major problem arose when Paul Kagame decided to get involved. Paul Kagame was the vice president and minister of defense of the Republic of Rwanda. He was the man who had led the military force that had overthrown the Hutu dominated government of Rwanda after the genocide in Rwanda in 1994.

Q: This was the group that came from Rwanda?

WILSON: They came from Uganda. They were essentially Rwandan refugees who had been thrown out of Rwanda in the 1970s, had grown up in the refugee camps in Uganda, had organized themselves into a military force, and then had entered Rwanda and overthrown the Hutu dominated governmenafter the Hutu dominated government and its most extreme backers had engaged in this genocide against the Tutsis. As a consequence of the Rwandan civil war that had spilled over into eastern Zaire, some refugee campthe Rwandans allegewere being used by the ZaireanMobutu in particulaand by defeated rebels as a staging area and training ground for a force that was being built to try to overthrow the Rwandan government. Their argument was that the United Nations, which was the protector of these refugee camps, had an obligation to move them further back. But the United Nations was incapable of accomplishing that particular task. I went to see Kagame with Jim Jamerson. He basically said to us, "If you don't do it, we'll do it ourselves; we're going to have to do it ourselves." Nothing happened and the Rwandans invaded Zaire and attacked the camps, and after they did that they just went ahead and marched on to Kinshasa and looked for Mobutu. But in moving the refugee camps, they sparked a return to Rwanda of several hundred thousand refugees and also forced 50,000 100,000 other refugees to flee into the forest. The international community decided it had to do something to protect these several hundred thousand refugees. The United Nations was debating the kind of authority relationship that it was going to develop to allow an operation to proceed. At the same time that it was doing that, we convoked, with the French and with Belgium and with a number of other countries who had interest including African countries, a planning conference in Stuttgart to map out an operation, which was going to be headed by a Canadian general. We would never have been able to convene such a group in Stuttgart before, had we not actively pursued a whole new set of relationships with these other countries and their military; so this was a real first.

At the same time this was all happening, we and the French, who for their own political reasons had a different interpretation of what was going on from us, were at loggerheads over how many people had fled into the jungle, what was the extent to which there were crimes being perpetrated against these people, etc. Because we had developed the multilateral relationships which included sharing intelligence, we were able to convene at the technical level the intelligence analysts every two or three days to narrow the differences. When you deal in subjects like this, you deal not just in information but you deal in methodology to interpret the information and analyze the information. The discussions became so detailed that we were actually sharing methodologies used to count people, for example. So even though we never did agree completely on the numbers, again, because we had developed these relationships, we were able to contain the parameters of the dispute, and that was really important as we moved forward. We ended up not deploying because most of the refugees returned to Rwanda on their own.

Q: It seems that it actually worked relatively well.

WILSON: The return to Rwanda worked very well. The deployment itself was never going to go forward as long as there were so many groups in Zaire shooting in so many different directions. We had to have a policy which was consistent with our own Presidential Decision Directive 25 which said that the parties involved had to be responsible for insuring that there would be a cease fire, so that you wouldn't put peace keepers in unnecessary dangea Chapter 6 type peace keeping operation. In the case of eastern Zaire, there were so many different groups shooting at each other that you would never going to get anything authoritative on cease fires. In the end, if you ask the French, you will get a much different interpretation of how well it went because the French counted more the people who might have been lost in the jungle than they counted the people who might have been repatriated back into Rwanda. The bottom line is that we then were able to develop a track record. We ran a multinational planning conference at our headquarters designed to plan for a peace keeping operation in eastern Zaire.

Q: Let me ask a question because I recall that here in Washington, really at the Foreign Service Institute, they had several conferences on this problem. One of the things that was brought out was that the people who often end up taking care of many problems after the military action has taken place, are the non governmental organizationthe NGOs. However they are often left out of the planning until after the military has taken action. It makes sense therefore to include the NGOs in the planning because they become the professional organizations which become responsible for feeding, shelter, medicine and all this. Could you talk a little about those.

WILSON: That's a legitimate point of view. We used to call it the melding of the "shorhairs and the earring" set. It was something to which we in our command were very sensitive after 1994 when we went in to Rwanda, spent $500 million in a few weeks, and had very little to show for it other than burying a lot of dead, purifying a lot of water to keep the living from dyinthat in and of itself was a good operation once it happened, but we spent the equivalent of two thirds of our annual development assistance budget for Africa for that purpose. As a consequence, George Gawin and Madam Ogata, who was the UN Commissioner for Refugees at the time, began to work much more closely together to insure that we had a coordinating mechanism which included the NGO community for those things for which it would be responsible normally. That was something that was in the interest of the military to do, and it was something that was in the interest of the NGO community to do. The military didn't want to take on any more nonmilitary tasks than it absolutely had to do. It wasn't trained for it, it didn't have the resource for it, it detracted from its core responsibilities; so it just didn't like to do it. It couldn't do it very well. The NGO community, on the other hand, as good as it was at feeding people and providing some necessary services once it got the trouble spot, had great difficulty in mobilizing and getting there in an efficient fashion. As Gawin put it to Madam Ogata in one meeting that I attended, "The difference between you and me is that when I give an order, my guys salute and go to get the job done; when you give an order, your people take it as an invitation to debate," which I think is a pretty accurate description of the difference between the ways the military and civilians do things. What we tried to do after 1994, for every operation that we conducted in Africa during the time that I was in Stuttgart, was to establish an office in Geneva. We would send somebody from our command to Geneva, who would be responsible for insuring that the relevant people under Madam Ogata's umbrella in the NGO community would be privy to all the briefings we were giving and would be invited to contribute their ideas on how we could do it better. We did everything we could to have a higher level of cooperation. One of the things that we found was that the NGO community, by and large, was more suspicious of the military than the military was of the NGO community.

Q: That is part of the culture in the United States after Vietnam, I think.

WILSON: That's right. That's why we called it 'the short hairs versus the earring set'. The military didn't like guys with earrings; the guys with earrings didn't like guys with short hair basically. We had to figure out how to make the cooperation happen, and we worked very hard at it. I'm not sure that we will ever completely succeed, but I think we've gotten a lot better. We've gotten a lot better in the former Yugoslavia, we've gotten a lot better in the Africa. There are two types of NGO communities. There's the "advocacy" crowd, the Human Rights Watch and what not, who are always looking at what might be done differently given their conception of what is the perfect way of doing things; and then you have the development NGOs who actually get involved and provide the sort of support and assistance that is needed and don't have an obvious overlay of political agenda. So that worked pretty well. Jim and I were down in Africa about every six weeks. We would cycle back through Angola every couple months to talk to the Angolans to try and keep that peace process moving forward. We put together a military action program which came to be known as the "African Crisis Response Initiative." We were already working on the military program when the diplomats in Washington came out with the diplomatic overlay. The "African Crisis Response Initiative" came about as a consequence of international concerns that Burundi was on the verge of a genocide similar to Rwanda which raised the question on how the international community could respond more quickly than it had in the Rwandan crisis. The conclusion was that there should be an African military force prepared to move quickly to create zones of safety between the various belligerents and to protect innocent civilians. We devised a number of training programs that would enhance African capabilities to serve these purposealthough we came to find out that African forces had a lot of experience in peace keeping operations. The second thing that we tried to enhance was their ability to operate together; we worked very hard on interoperability and command and control of battalions from different countries. While they were thinking this problem through, we were independently coming up with our Flintlock Series and were already beginning to work on command and control type exercise with militaries from different countries. The two programs actually melded together very nicely.

Q: We saw as our role, as I take it, operational, mainly transport and supplies and getting the troops there.

WILSON: We saw our role as providing unique capabilities. Secretary of Defense Bill Perry said that when he came to see us. We briefed him on our concept for Africa. He bought what we were doing, which gave us a lot of impetus for continuing. But what he said was, "Look, Africa is clearly an issue for this theater. We need to be responsive without having to put our boots on the ground. Any country can put boots on the ground. What we ought to do is what other countries cannot do. That ought to be our contribution." We defined that contribution as training above the battalion levemost of these African countries don't have militaries above the brigade level, so we wanted to be able to train command and control operations above thamulti brigade or multi battalion type command and controas well as providing intelligence, communications and transport. Those were the things that we thought that we could do that other countries probably couldn't do quite as well; those were the things we began to focus on.

Q: Looking at Liberia and Sierra Leone, where there were some really horrible situationessentially civil war at its most brutal levewas there concern that intervention on any level didn't seem to work? The slaughter went on for a long time. Correct me if I'm wrong on this. Was this of concern to us?

WILSON: That was true for Liberia in particular, which was the situation that was most acute when I was in Stuttgart. The economic community of West African States had already mobilized, using a preponderance of Nigerian troops, and had deployed into Liberia under the auspices of relevant UN resolutions. They were trying to do some peace keeping in the run up to the elections that ultimately brought Charles Taylor to power. They were hampered by poor leadership for a while and by a lack of discipline. Eventually, they changed their generals and then they got a lot better. We were operating principally out of Washington to try to support the operation by bringing together a group of donor nations who would provide supplies and support to match the Nigerian contribution. To a certain extent we were hamstrung in our relationship with Nigeria because the Abacha regime was anathema to our administration, for good reasons. It was a dictatorship, it was a kleptocracy that was engaged in a repression of its people; it was just not a very good crowd. But we attempted to figure out ways to work with them on this issue of common concerthe resolution for the Liberian civil wawhich had been going on and off for the past 20 year10 or 15 years anyway. We had worked very hard. We had a guy by the name of Howard Jeter, as our ambassador in Nigerihad been our ambassador in Botswana. He was running around trying to get everybody to contribute money and materiel and what not; we were working with him on how we could transport the materiel and what we as a command could do to be supportive of his efforts. He would come to Stuttgart frequently. We would meet with him. Jim and I had met him first when he was ambassador to Botswana, so there was a good personal relationship. I had known him for a number of years obviously. We had been in Botswana when he was ambassador there; Jim was able to develop a good personal relationship which allowed us to work more closely with him.

I should mention one thing about these whole Africa related issues. When I first got to the command, I met a lieutenant colonel who was in the Africa Division of J5, which is the Policy and Planning staff. I met him at an airport because we were meeting somebody coming ian American ambassador going to Africa. This happened literally the first week I was there. The lieutenant colonel was telling me about what a great Special Forces officer he was, how he had made high altitude, low opening jumps; he had been a Special Forces guy all his life, and then he complained that he was now stuck in this backwater operation worrying Africa, sort of lost and forgotten, his career not going anywhere, in an area he didn't understand or know and didn't care anything about. Within six months these guythere were three of them in this officwere the stars of the command. They were the ones who were traveling with the DCINC every time he went down to Africa. They were the ones who had seats on the airplane, they were the ones who had face time with a four star, they were the ones who were known by name by the four star. They were the stars of the command. It was Jim Jamerson's dedication to seeing that the command really reflect the threats that were arrayed against us and that it be able to respond to them that allowed the bureaucracy that was the European Command to shift from defending the Fulda Gap to thinking about the threats that it currently faced. It helped us become more flexible as we looked not just at African threats, but also at European activities and activities like "Operation Provide Comfort." It gave a much different dimension to the way that the command thought about doing its business. Jim and I often still talk aboubecause we still play golf togetheis the defining moment for the post Cold War command. It was there and then that we actually restructured the command. At one point he and I came back to Washingtoit was just right after Tom Pickering had been named undersecretary for political affairto lay our vision. Our vision was that in the post Cold War world you were going to have conflicts that are, by their nature, as bloody as any other war was for a specific geographic location, but would in the grand scheme of things be smaller, and that there was an inverse relationship between the level of diplomacy and political thinking required and the level of military thinking, depending on the size of the war. The smaller the war, the more diplomacy and politics would have to be involved. The bigger the war, the more the politicians would have to stand aside and let the generals took care of business, which meant, as we extrapolated, that in the environment of the next 20 to 30 years, we would witness small, intense conflicts with a political and diplomatic dimension, which made it essential to have political advisors with the military commands who were of sufficient stature and seniority that they could actually have an impact on the way the command was thinking. From the State Department perspective, we being a small and shrinking agency in the foreign affairs arena; this would be a great opportunity to leverage a much larger agency in the foreign affairs arena to do our bidding and to really be an asset, one of our assets, as we went forward. Since then there have been a number of articles in the Washington Post about the phenomenon of the CINCdoms created by Goldwater Nicholthe CINCdoms being the commands that have been set up giving "pro consul" responsibilities to these generals with all their power and their assets of the enormous American military strength. We actually got Tom to buy into this, and as a consequence they now name political advisors the same way they name ambassadors. It goes through the deputy secretary's Committee, to insure that people assigned as political advisors are senior enough to have a lot of stature and a lot of authority and yet young enough to still have a lot of energy as well and still have some lift in their careers.

Q: That came to a cropper when an officer who served under me as a junior officer back in Saigon, Larry Pope, became the POLAD to General Zinni...

WILSON: At CENTCOM.

Q: For not reasons for what Larry did, but just for political reasons. He had been an ambassador but was stopped from being an ambassador again by the Helms committee because they wanted him to repudiate Zinni, I guess.

WILSON: That's right. Larry was in charge of Gulf affairs in the Department when I was in Baghdad; he and I are very good friends. It did come a cropper there and he did not get a hearing. It was very clear. The story is, and it's written up and available in the public domain, that the Helms staffer told him. "You will not get a clearing, you will not get cleared until such time as you repudiate Zinni."

Q: It's pretty disgusting.

WILSON: It's disgusting but, you know, part of an ambassadorial job description is that you're going to get hung out to dry. Eagleburger used to say, "Hey, if you can't take the heat of getting fired, then you've got no business being an ambassador."

Q: Going back, how about France and pulling out of the Kurd situation, the "Operation Provide Comfort?" My understanding is that France was one of the main instigators in getting us in there, maybe because Madam Mitterrand, who was the wife of the president of France, was very much interested in the Kurdish issue; so she sort of led a campaign on TV and everything else to get us in there. Why did the French pull out?

WILSON: I don't know why they pulled out. It is true that Danielle Mitterrand was a Kurdish hugger. One of her closest friends was a good friend of ours, a guy by the name of Katzemlu, who was the head of the Iranian Kurdish party; his wife was French and he spoke perfect French. He had been educated in Czechoslovakia. He was later assassinated by the Iranians in Vienna. By the time the French pulled out, there was a difference of opinion on how we ought to be prosecuting a containment strategy against the Iraqis. The French, being French, were looking for ways not to lose their primacy in that part of the world and in Iraq. As you may recall, the French had been principal arms sellers to Saddam Hussein during the Iran Iraq War including the Exocet missile that landed in the USS Stark and killed 34 American sailors.

Q: One of our destroyers in the Gulf.

WILSON: It's one of our destroyers in the Gulf. So I think that they were probably hedging their bets to a large extent. It also came about the time when the French were professionalizing their armed services, which meant that they were getting rid of their draft They were downsizing, and it was a burden on them to continue to maintain this presence in Iraq, although I suspect that it was as much for political reasons as it was for military ones that caused them to withdraw from the operation. In fact, I know it was.

Q: What was the feeling that you were getting at your headquarters? You had to interface with the UN from time to time, particularly in Africa. What was the feeling, that this was a difficult organization, ineffective, or one to be cultivated? How did you feel about the UN?

WILSON: We interfaced with the United Nations on two levels. One, we used to go see Madam Ogata periodically. We would set up liaison offices every time we had an operation, so that we had a connection with her and the NGO community. Then, two, our other principal interface with the UN was in Angola, where the UN secretary general had a special representative, who was the former Malian foreign minister, Blondin Bay, who was later killed in an airplane accident in Cote d'Ivoire, I guess. Part of the Lusaka process had involved a UN operation to disarm and demobilize UNITA soldiers. We liked Blondin Bay a lot. We liked him personally; we liked what he was trying to do. We liked the Lusaka process. We thought that that was the best way forward. So at all levels we were very supportive. We relished the opportunity to go to see him, and Jim and I went there a lot. I was in the White House for our last trip and I made sure that Jim came with us when we took the president to Africa and then he and I went up to Angola for one last time. So this time it was the president's special assistant accompanied by a senior military officer. Before it had always been the DCINC accompanied by his political advisor. But we always welcomed the opportunity to engage Blondin Bay and to be supportive of what the UN was doing there. We tried to be supportive of Ecous and their operation in Nigeria. I think at the most senior levels of our command we understood the difficulties that some of these African militaries and the UN had. When we were constructing the "African Crisis Response Initiative," we made a point of going to New York and meeting with the UN peace keeping operations office to learn from them how they had internalized in their own interaction review after Somalia and what procedures they were attempting to develop to make their operation more effective in the future than had been in the past. We went as representing the European Command but then we also sent our Special Forces officer who worked on Africa out of the third group of the Special Forces to meet at a more technical level. We had a series of meeting during which we exchanged stacks of documents on how training was to be done, what sort of procedures you establish, how you think about peace keeping and humanitarian relief operations. The explicit objective in these exchanges was to get as much harmonization between our schools of thought as we possibly could so that, when we were training, we were training in a way that was consistent with what the UN might ultimately do when it went into peace keeping operations; we worked very hard at that. Again, I think we had a healthy respect for the constraints under which the UN operated at the most senior levels. Clearly when you went to see some of their operations that weren't working as well as one would have liked, you bemoaned the fact that they didn't have the authority they needed and they had all these problems dealing with it. But the military again is very good at thinking about how do we fix problems.

Q: Rather than piss and moan.

WILSON: Ascribe blame, yes.

Q: There's been talk about the European Union creating its own European force. Was that something that was being bandied about while you were there?

WILSON: Sure.

Q: How did you all feel about that?

WILSON: We went to talk to them in Brussels. We figured, what the hell, we should be talking to them and figuring out what they were doing. This was about the time that Mobutu was being overthrown and we were going to be conducting some operations with the Belgians in any case. So we took the opportunity to talk to European Union at the same time. Obviously there were a number of very serious political issues.

At the same time that we were dealing with this, we were also dealing with France's reintegration to the NATO military command. The French were making unrealistic demands, particularly considering that NATO had survived and had indeed thrived without them for 35 years. They essentially wanted us to give them control of the 6th Fleet. We always used to say the difference between the French and the British is that the French wanted to use our equipment whereas the British wanted to use our equipment and command our troops. We were not going to give the French command of our equipment in the Mediterranean. The French then started talking about the European Security and Defense Initiative; there were some legitimate reasons to do so. The French and the Europeans generally are nervous that one of these days the United States is going to withdraw from European territory and the European collective defense system is going to be the responsibility of the Europeans and, therefore, they ought to begin to think their way through that potential development and staff for it now. Realistically speaking, at a time of shrinking defense budgets, the chances were that they were not going to be able to create a parallel European Security and Defense Initiative without detracting from NATO capabilities and NATO's ability to execute its mission. And, of course, the French response to this was that, 'Well, we will just use NATO equipment if we go and do something under the guise of the European Security and Defense Initiative'. The American position was, 'over our dead bodies, because if you use NATO equipment, then you're weakening NATO's ability to do what it has to do'. The Turkish had a different take, which was what the Europeans are really talking about is that they will provide command and control over Turkish ground troops, because Turkey had the second largest army in NATO. The Turks could see what the European defense budgets and defense policies were; there were very few soldiers on the ground and, therefore, somebody was going to have provide them. So there were all these issues that percolating up to the NATO level. Our concern was really more in the context of combined joint task forces. Combined joint task forces basically means that you have militaries from different countries and from different services combined to operate jointly in a task force designed to solve a problem. That's where we did things, that's what we thought about, how we would be able to do things better with friends, allies, and partners in mission specific activities.

Q: Was there concern or secret pleasure or something at that time when, the growing disparity between the effectiveness of the American military, particularly in the air with smart bombs and command and control and all, and with the European forces, was so evident?

WILSON: What we were most worried about was that the United States was getting so far ahead of our European allies that fairly soon we were going to be unable to operate togethei.e. that our interoperability was going to collapse. We were concerned that we had just gotten ahead of the Europeans. We were concerned that European budgets for defense and procurement cycles were just not going to keep them at a state of readiness that would enable us to operate together as a NATO force, and I think that remains a legitimate concern.

Q: During the time you were there, were we doing anything from the American side, as opposed to the NATO side, with Russia?

WILSON: Yes, oh, yes. Again, most of this was taken care of out of Washington, but we had a Russian three star over at NATO headquarters. George Gawin was really proud that the Russian was at NATO headquarters and was working with NATO at the operating level. We had Russian troops in Bosnia. We were always trying to think about ways that we could do things with Russia. We even were trying to figure out how we could get to Moscow from our command to try to build up that relationship, but it was still jealously guarded by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Hugh Shelton, at the time. Very clearly within our command we were looking at ways to work more closely with the Russians to bring the Russians inside the tent at the operational level, and we were pretty successfuGeorge was pretty successful. That was mostly done up in Mons and it was mostly done under the NATO umbrella.

Q: How about the relations with Israel from your perspective?

WILSON: We made one trip down to Israel when I was there. George and I went. George went in his CINCEUR hat. That was the only trip I took with him, because most everything else he did at that time was in a SACEUR hat. So he and I went to Israel. We also had the Israeli chief of defense visit the European Command while I was there and we also had the chief of the air force to our command headquarters as part of his tours. One of the things we found about the Israelis was that they tolerated us as the regional command, but it was pretty clear that, if they didn't get what they wanted out of us, it didn't make much difference because they would go right to the Pentagon. So they were extraordinarily difficult as potential partners, because there was no sense of shared need.

Q: In other words, their political clout was such that they could get what they want.

WILSON: That's right, and the relationship between the Pentagon and Israel...

Q: It really wasn't the Pentagon. It was really between Congress and the Israelis.

WILSON: All the branches of the US government. The Israelis did most of their business directly with the Pentagon if they had business to do. Not having served in the Pentagon, you might be absolutely right. Perhaps the Pentagon guys feel exactly the same way, that they were superfluous...

Q: Well, looking at the mega picture, the Pentagon has gotten very annoyed when it had to provide equipment and all when they felt they really couldn't but with Congress holding the purse strings and being the abject slave of the Israeli..., anyway, the political process being what it is. We're both laughing here.

WILSON: I think I'll let that one slide.

Q: Is there anything else we should discuss, do you think?

WILSON: The only other thing we did is was to spend a lot of time with the Brits. The Brits were just setting up their own joint command structure; so we were over there and they were over with us quite a bit, working through how we might work together. We started with the French, we moved over and started working with the Brits, and then we started working with the Belgians, particularly as it related to Kinshasa and the evacuation...

Q: This in the African...

WILSON: Africa was the easiest one because you didn't have the same sort of political constituency groups looking over our shoulders; you could keep the discussions at technical level. We had shared security interests.

Q: And they had their own long term former colonial interest and experiences there.

WILSON: They had responsibilities that made it easier to call upon them if we needed to. It was in everybody's interest to do so. We ended up putting together operations exercises where we observed and they observed, and we later did joint exercises with them in Africa, in Zimbabwe and in Ghana, where they were the leaders and we were observers in one and we were leaders and they were observers in another. We deployed in a combined fashion in central Africa. We had troops in both Gabon and in the Congo in the event that we had to evacuate Kinshasa. The Brits were in Gabon. We had Belgians and French and ourselves and maybe some Brits in the Congo. It was an interesting operation because we found, once we had everybody there, that there were differences of opinion on how we should use these troops. The French and the Belgians in particular were anxious to secure Kinshasa so that there would be a minimal loss of life and so foreigners could withdraw across the river in relative security...

Q: To Brazzaville or...

WILSON: ...to Brazzaville. We were more reluctant because we felt that by securing Kinshasa preemptively we would really not prevent but only postpone the inevitable, which was the departure of Mobutu. Nobody had the stomach for supporting Mobutu's continued stay in power in Kinshasa. We won out. The fall of Kinshasa was peaceful. The Belgians and the French were unable to move without us and could not keep Kabila from coming in. That was a source of political friction with us later on.

Q: Were the Europeans saying, "You know, we depend on these bloody Americans to use their air lift and all to get us there and support us. Let's get our own," or was the budgetary situation such in Europe that it wasn't going to happen?

WILSON: Air lifts are very expensive and always had to be negotiated. The large issue was not so much that they depended on us but how difficult it was for them to get it at a reasonable price. There was a lot of looking for alternative strategic lifts. What the Europeans found out and what the UN found out as well was that it was cheaper, more efficient, and less of a hassle to go to the Ukrainians to provide the strategic lifts than it was to go to the U.S. Air Force. I used to kid Jim Jamerson that, if you want to charter one of their goddamn Air Force airplanes, you had to pay the Air Force budget for a year in order to get it. It was outrageous. It was incompatible with everything that we were trying to do to develop a sense of shared responsibility for these operations. We took a whack at the cost issue a couple of timetrying to get this problem solved in a way that was satisfactory to albut it was just too ingrained to deal with. We made no headway.

Q: To move on then; in 1997 where did you go?

WILSON: At about the beginning of 1997, people started asking me what I wanted to do. I started coming back to Washington to talk to people. Beginning about February of that year I started getting queries about whether I'd be interested in coming back to Washington, which I wasn't, but I was asked to come back, I think, three times from February to April. Each time I was interviewed it was at increasingly higher levels of the NSC. Finally I was offered my choice of either being a special assistant to the president as the senior director for Africa affairs at the National Security Council or being the principal deputy assistant secretary in the Bureau of African Affairs. I chose the job at the NSC.

Q: Why?

WILSON: For a couple reasons. One, I had never worked at the NSC and I thought it would be fun to do that. Two, I thought that it would be more interesting being head of the directorate than being the principal deputy. Three and perhaps most importantly, I didn't think that over the long term the incoming assistant secretary of State and I would be terribly compatible in terms of our policy views.

Q: Her name was Rice, I think.

WILSON: Susan Rice.

Q: She came from the Hill, didn't she?

WILSON: No. She had been at the NSC as a senior director, and prior to that she had been in the Office of International Organizations, but she was an academic who had worked on the Dukakis campaign and then on the Clinton campaign and had moved from the campaign into a succession of positions at the National Security Council and then over to the State Department.

Q: Did you feel that you were concerned about her management style or her policy views?

WILSON: It was principally her policies. I didn't know much about her management style, although I learned a lot more about it as time passed. I thought that I would be better positioned to influence policy at a competing pole rather than under her. Frankly, I'd had a hell of a lot more experience than she had. She was 34 years old, had never served overseas. I'd served in seven African posts. There were a lot of things that she was doing that, as it turned out, were not what I would have done.

Q: There is also the endemic problem of somebody like yourself, who's been around the block a long time in an area, and a new person coming in without that experience. Being their deputy often doesn't work very well.

WILSON: I hadn't really looked at it in that context, but I suspect you're right. I looked at it more in terms of how I could impact policy and where my efforts could be best put to use. I had just come from the European Command where we had restructured the way the command looked at threats. We had done a major push on Africa. We had succeeded in a lot of different things, and I thought that it would be interesting to try to run Africa policy from the White House. It was fascinating; it was great.

Q: Let's look at the NSC. In the first place, this was at the beginning of the second Clinton administration.

WILSON: Clinton was inaugurated in January of 1997, and I joined the NSC staff in June of that year.

Q: You'd been watching it from Stuttgart looking at our policy, how did you see the Clinton policy towards Africa?

WILSON: In Stuttgart, we were focusing mostly on how we could establish better security relationships with African militaries and with the European militaries dealing with African related issues. In that context, building on some of the really disasters of previous years, notably Somalia and Rwanda, we had been thinking about how to make African militaries more capable of responding to crises within Africa, understanding that the UN system is very slow to react and understanding that the American political system is even slower to develop the political will necessary to take action unilaterally. We were working on a piece of the agendi.e. the security piece of the overall African agenda. Part of that was conflict resolution, which is and continues to be a major preoccupation of anybody who deals with Africa. We were involved in supporting our diplomatic efforts to resolve the Liberia crisis and subsequently Sierra Leone, both of which had gone through difficult civil wars. We provided the security underpinning for the fall of Mobutu in the Congo to make sure that there was not a vacuum in Kinshasa as he left and before Kabila came to power. We were involved in evacuating various embassies, one of them being in the Central African Republic. We continued to maintain, and we developed really, a whole new set of working relationships with European militaries so that we could operate more effectively in Africa.

Going from there to Washington and the National Security Council, there were many other issues that we were taking a look at as well. In terms of the Clinton administration's policy proclamations on Africa, there was very little for me to really criticize. I thought that they fit very nicely with my view after 25 years of experience in Africa.

I always thought that Africa deserved a little higher place in our foreign policy constellation than it typically got from administrations and from Congress frankly. Administrations, being responsible for foreign policy, are always interested in it. Congress, being responsible for the expenditure and appropriation of monies, are always less interested in it than they are in other matters. The president was partly, I think, making a silk purse out of a sow's ear because experience had taught us that this was probably the right way to go. He had decided on a course which emphasized the private sector as the engine of development over governmental assistance. When I say 'making a silk purse out of a sow's ear,' I mean that it was pretty clear that Senator Jesse Helms was never going to give the Department of State or USAID anything like the sort of monies that was needed to run an effective assistance program. His favorite phrase was, "It's money down a rat hole." So faced with no more money for public investment activities, we came up with another formula, which was to emphasize private sector involvement and then try to get the private sector more engaged in investments in Africa. I must say that there were a lot of examples of public sector programs in Africa that hadn't worked. I would argue that you probably had no more AID failures than you had in any other area. If you consider the rate of business failureroughly nine out of every 10 businesses that start up faithere were more AID successes, I think, that one in 10 of the projects. If you talk to people who worked Africa for 30 years, they and everybody else will acknowledge that Africa has been in a prolonged economic decline, but those who worked in specific regions would argue that, very much thanks to the efforts of the international community, the quality of life has not declined to the same extent that the economic productivity has declined in Africa. Whether that's a good thing or not, I don't know, but if you talk to people who worked on the Sahel was in the Sahel in 197they will tell you that at that time the conventional wisdom was that people would not be able to survive in the Sahel within 25 years. In fact, they have survived and they've grown, and production has grown to meet population growth. While they've not thrived, they've at least managed to stay afloat.

Q: As you looked at that from the perspective of the 1990s, were there actions that we took that were useful?

WILSON: I think we've done a lot that has been very useful in the Sahel. I think we've done a lot to help develop strains of crops that do better in that environment than what had been traditionally grown. We helped to set up distribution systems. We've helped to build a basic infrastructure which allowed people to function more easily, enhancing economic productivity. We had been involved both through AID and through Peace Corps in programs designed to assist health systems at the basic village level in ways that hadn't been done before. I think all of that has been a net plus. Whether it's going to solve the fundamental problems of governance and how you deal with self sustainability, I just don't know; time will tell. We're still really in the first generation after colonialism, or the beginning of the second generation, and 40 years is not a long time in the history of a country. If you think back, in the 14th and 15th centuries, some of these West African countries were the centers of tremendous accomplishment. Mali, for example, was one of the centers of Islamic publishing. Timbuktu was a great publishing center in the 15th century. This present cycle has been particularly debilitating for those of us who have been alive during it and for those of us who have worked in and for Africa as well as for Africans. I actually think I would give AID and the role of public sector investment a much higher grade than Jesse Helms does, but then I would probably view most foreign policy issues differently from the senator. I also think and have thought that it is in fact in our strategic interest to be active in Africa.

We had at the NSC made the argument that we needed to defend ourselves against threats that might emanate from Africa because failed nation states might become havens for terrorists or international criminal activities. You see that very clearly in Afghanistan as that particular scenario has played out rather vividly in the year 2001. I think increasingly we need to focus on health issues of a pandemic nature, whether it's AIDS or whether it's some of these exotic viruses such as the Bola that are currently isolated in Africa but could well expand beyond that. So there's lots of reasons to be involved there. But quite apart from the threats that we might be defending ourselves against, I think that we have to recognize the opportunities that the African continent presents. It is the largest land mass that has yet to be put into production in a meaningful way as a contribution to the global economic well being. Within the borders of the continent of Africa you could put the entire United States, most of Western Europe, a good part of South Asia, and Australia, and still have room left over. It is home to enormous natural resources. People continue to say that the oil in West Africa offshore, off the countries from Angola to Nigeria, could well be as much as the oil in the Arabian Gulf. And there are all the basic minerals and metals on the continent. In addition to that, you have a population of something over 700 million that fundamentally live on international largesse. One of our largest exports to Africa when I first went therthis could still be the caswere used clothing. They lived on international donations and mafia controlled used clothing from the United States. The challenge is to make these 700 million people productive so that they actually contribute to, rather than be a drain on, the global wealth. Furthermore a market of 700 million would be a market of a size that would entice anybody, as we've seen in the case of China since the opening of China 10, 15, 20 years ago.

Q: Your training essentially, after you got through the administrative phase, was as a political observer. When you came to the NSyou're the new boy on the blochow did you size up this creature, the National Security Council, as a political entity at the time you were there in 1997? What was making it tick? What were some of the dynamics within it from your perspective?

WILSON: When I got there in 1997, it was a time for some change in the U.S. government foreign policy team. Tony Lake had left and was replaced by Sandy Berger, who was particularly close to the president politically and had already been the deputy national security advisor for four years. He was well anchored in his relationship with the president and knew how the NSC functioned. At the State Department, Warren Christopher had departed and Madeleine Albright had just gotten there. His undersecretary for political affairs, Michael Armacost, had also just left and been replaced by Tom Pickering. Pickering was an experienced officer, but he had not been in Washington in quite a while. He'd been in New York and then he'd been overseas and then in the Bureau of African Affairs. I arrived and at the same time I arrived Johnny Carson arrived. He was our ambassador in Uganda before he coming back to Washington. The assistant secretary had not yet been confirmed, in fact had not yet had a hearing. That waDr. Rice, who was on maternity leave having a baby.

The president was planning to go to Africa. As a consequence, at about the time of my arrival, power was shifting from other agencies to the NSC. It was being centralized in the NSC even though we didn't have the horses to do all the demarches and all the cables. But we certainly were able to make decisions and compel their implementation. So that worked pretty well. We were able to take some actions and we were able to stop some actions that other people might have wanted to take but which we didn't think was in our interest to do so. I think the power pretty much resided in the NSC during the second Clinton term. Whenever there were key questions or matters of interests to the principals, it was the NSC that had a lot of the influence on how those decisions were going to be made. We chaired a lot of the interagency groups that worked on issues. Assistance to the Congo, for example, was one issue that was preoccupying us because there was a population of 47 million people in essentially a political vacuum. How were they going to survive the rough transition they were embarked upon was a good example. We were key players right at the time I left in the Ethiopian Eritrean conflict; we were the ones who hammered out the agreements necessary to demarcate cease fire lines and things like that. The reasons we in the NSC African directorate retained a fair amount of influence during the time I was there was, one, there was a void in the State Department; two, we had the trip and so...

Q: You might talk a little about how a presidential trip really gives everybody a chance to strut their stuff and to focus policy and everything else.

WILSON: There's nothing that quite focuses a mind like a presidential trip, and I'll get to that. Then, three, Dr. Rice was such a controversial figure within the bureaucracy that we were seeing people gravitated towards us to get our support in their battles against whatever the State Department might be trying to do. That allowed us to maintain a fair amount of influence during the time I was at the NSC. That influence ebbed because Rice had her political contacts throughout the bureaucracy that dated back to the various campaigns (she was also Albright's goddaughter); so once the trip was over, and particularly after I left the NSC, she was able to reassert the primacy of her position, which was unfortunate but that's the way it was.

As for the president's trip, I got to the NSC in June. The issues that we were focusing on included the Sudan. That was one of our first issuewhether or not we were going to put an ambassador back in the Sudan.

Q: Would you explain what the situation was.

WILSON: We had had some intelligence that suggested that the Sudanese were going to do something against our interests, either in Washington or in Khartoum or somewhere in the area. Everybody was very, very sensitive to what the Sudanese were up to since they had in the past been a safe haven for international terrorists including Carvos and including at one point Osama bin Laden. From Sudanese territory had come the assassination attempt against President Mubarak and one in Addis Ababa. They were in the throes of establishing an Islamic government in Khartoum. They were prosecuting the civil war against the southerners with great vigor and enthusiasm including bombing of civilians and the harassment of humanitarian relief efforts. They were enslaving people, things like that. So they were in pretty foul odor in Washington. In fact, as a result of one of these intelligence pieces of information we had gotten, we had decided to withdraw our ambassador and all of our diplomatic staff from Khartoum because we were afraid for their safety. When I arrived at the NSC, there was a certain amount of interest, particularly in the State Department in putting an ambassador back in Khartoum. I think the State Department was quite correct in its view. Their analysis was that we ought to be there, that the intelligence reports on which we had acted had proven to be flawed, and in fact all the reports that we had acted upon were withdrawn from the system, which means that essentially they were discredited. So the rationale for not having an ambassador there no longer existed, and the Department felt that we should have somebody in the Sudan as a platform for collecting information and as a flag of moral support to people who would want to undermine the government in Khartoum itself, and to perform the necessary embassy services. The trouble was the State Department decided that it was within the purview of the secretary of State to open and close embassies and to send personnel out to these embassies and that it was not a White House prerogativa mistake on their part. They decided they would push the issue by taking advantage of my recent arrival and by just circumventing the White House completely by just briefing Congress and briefing the press and doing it over a weekena slow news weekend. The person who was spearheading this was my old ambassador in Baghdad, April Glaspie, who was then the head of the office of eastern African affairs. They started taking actions necessary to reopen a post; we got wind of that and made the determination that since the decision to close down the embassy had been made by an interagency committee chaired by the NSC, and since it was related to security and terrorism and not to foreign policy, the decision to restaff the embassy had to be considered by that same committee that had considered closing it down. We pushed this view late on a Friday afternoon, and over the weekend we forced the State Department to back down, which was seen by some as a black eye for Tom Pickering and for Madeleine, particularly for Pickering, and for April Glaspie. I told them on Monday exactly what I just saithat the issue was not the merits of putting an ambassador back there; the problem was the process through which they went. I called Pickering directly and told him that my office would support putting an ambassador back in Khartoum if the Department wanted to raise that question again through the appropriate committee structure. They never did while I was there. They were still licking their wounds about the issue a year later, which was too bad.

Q: Do you feel that this was a sort of a Washington battle, showing your stuff rather than being practica"let's get an ambassador in there?" It was seen as a way of exerting authority of the secretary, do you think?

WILSON: Yes. By the secretary's staff, Pickering and certainly April Glaspie. They had some good reasons for doing so; they were of the opinion that we should have an ambassador back there, a view which I shared. They did not believe, for some reason, that they could succeed in achieving their objective by going through the committee system that had made the original decision; so they were going to circumvent it. It became an issue of whether a department could circumvent a system that was in place. Since the issue concerned security matters and American lives, we had no choice but to oppose it on procedural grounds. We had to have CIA input, we had to have Department of State inpuother than the Office of East African Affairto make sure that the issue was properly vetted. That was kind of an interesting issue.

The first six months in the NSC we were occupied with Sudan. We ended up enhancing the sanctions against Sudan, which I did support because at that time Sudan still appeared to be a country that was allowing its territory to be used by international terrorists and, therefore, posed a direct threat to our national security interest and, as such, should be subject to economic sanctions.

A couple of the other big issues were Congo. We took the position that, whether you liked Kabila or noand nobody particularly liked Kabila, who was the person who had replaced Mobutu as presidenthat you had to, one, consider the geostrategic location of the Congo in central and west Africa and, two, you had to consider what the consequences would be if it were allowed to fall into even greater chaos with its population of 47 million people. We worked very hard to put together an AID program. We called it a "hub and spoke." We didn't have a base in Kinshasa; we had hubs throughout the provinces, so we tried to have this run, despite Kabila and his people in Kinshasa. At that time he was defying the international community on such things as whether there would be international investigations into genocidal type massacres that had taken place in the country during the war that brought him to power. There was a lot of concern that an awful lot of people had been killed bringing him to power. Some of the people may have been his people, some may not have been people. But Kabila didn't want anybody poking around in that sordid affair. We were fending off a Congress that wanted to make sure that the investigation went forward, and was trying to use our assistance program as leverage to force Kabila to allow access to the Congo for the UN Human Rights Commission. We resisted that. Other issues included Angola.

Q: Angola seems to be a running sore. Was it particularly bad then?

WILSON: I was at the NSC at a very interesting time. We had the UN Secretary General's special representative, Blondin Bay, the former Malian foreign minister. We were shuttling throughout the region. As I mentioned earlier, I had worked with him when I was in Gabon and knew him quite well. We had flown together, we traveled together, we had seen Bongo together, and what not. We had put together some meetings between the UNITA military structure and the government's military people. While at EURCOM I had been in Angola; I would go there every couple of months. When I was assigned to the NSC, we were pretty much finished with the disarming process, quartering and then trying to retrain UNITA people so they could be part of the broader Angolan society. This was all part of the Lusaka process and the cease fire. The Angolan government was extending its reach into the countryside peacefully. They had formed a parliament that included members of UNITA who had been sent from Savimbi's headquarters as part of the Lusaka process. Events were moving towards a cease fire, but at the same time when I was there we were getting disturbing signs that Savimbi had gone as far as he was going to go and was not going to take the next step and that in fact his actions to date were perhaps a ploy that he could use to give himself a little bit of time while he in fact was importing arms and materiel at a dangerous rate. We began to look for ways to try to bring some additional pressure to bear on Savimbi, including sanctions on a rebel party. The Clinton administration from its beginning had sought to improve relations with Rwanda, and I think that that was right. We proceed on a pace with that in mind. As a consequence, Savimbi had become sort of increasingly isolated from the American body politic. In the post Cold War period he was no longer the darling of the right that he had been before. But Angola remained an ongoing problem, trying to support the UN Secretary General's personal representative and trying to put into place the right mixture of incentives and disincentives to try to get Savimbi and UNITA to really moving forward in the integration process. We remained committed to UNITA playing a full role in the Angolan political process. We did not want to see UNITA disappear completely. We wanted to see it transformed from a rebel guerilla movement into a thriving political party representing the interests of the population that supported Savimbi. We never quite got there from here, but it was not for lack of trying. Savimbi's a tough nut.

Then in West Africa we had a number of things going on. We had Nigeria which was in the clutches of a very bad Nigerian general, Sani Abacha, who was stealing the country blind to the tune of several tens of millions of dollars that were disappearing from the economy. There was pressure building. Also in West Africa you had the phenomenon of Charles Taylor in Liberia, and then we had the RUF (Revolutionary United Front) in Sierra Leone which was a horrible group of thugs, with no political agenda whatsoever. They just terrorized their population in the most despicable fashion, cutting off legs and limbs and arms...

Q: Small children.

WILSON: ...small children. They just terrorized the civilian population, and had literally had no political agenda. Those were some of the issues that we faced. The president was keenly interested in Africa. He had issued his "Partnership for Growth and Opportunity" in June of 1997 just as I arrived at the NSC, which was, I think, the most comprehensive guide to us who were looking at how we were going to deal with Africa. It was predicated on getting the private sector much more involved and using our governmentgovernment relationships to create within Africa a new set of priorities that would encourage rather than discourage international and domestic private sector investment. We were very supportive of the "African Growth and Opportunity Act," which was then being considered by a committee in the House. We wanted to see that passed because that would provide the legislative underpinning to what we were trying to achieve. In fact that was the first piece of legislation that actually dealt with what American approach to Africa should look like. It offered a series of incentive by opening access to U.S. markets for Africa importAfrican exports to the United States. I think that in the first couple of years since its passage, we actually have seen African imports to the United States increase by about 10 20 percent; I think that that's a good thing. The "African Growth and Opportunity Act" does have incentives: if a country takes certain actions, then it will get greater access to U.S. markets than if it doesn't; if a country pursues sound economic and public administration policies, then the United States will be more inclined to support debt reductioactions like that. It was to be accompanied by annual ministerials and periodic summits with those countries that have done the best. It was all predicated on sort of best business practices, and it made sense to do so. That was the underpinning and that was the environment in which we worked. Then around Christmas time...

Q: Christmas of...

WILSON: It would be Christmas of 1997; it was actually right after Christmas, in early January 1998. We got a call from the White House's domestic issues stafthe President's schedulersaying, "If you want, we can give you the last two weeks in March for the president's trip to Africa, or you can have the last two weeks in August, but we can't be certain that the president will not want to take a vacation in the last two weeks of August; so if you want sure dates you can have the last two weeks of March, or you can roll the dice and bet that the president would prefer to go to Africa rather than to Martha's Vineyard the last two weeks of August. Before you make your decision, you should know that typically it takes six months to organize a presidential trip. You decide if you want to do a presidential trip in two and a half months.." We said, "Oh, yes, absolutely, we'll do it. We'll just telescope everything and do it." And we did. We learned on a Thursday or Friday that we could schedule the trip for the last two weeks of March. About Wednesday of the following week, a captivated American public watched as a breathless Sam Donaldson stood on the lawn of the White House and said, "If it proves true that the president had a sexual relationship with an intern, he'll be out of here within 48 hours." As we were watching this, we were wondering, "What's going to happen to our trip?."

Q: We're talking about the Monica Lewinski scandal.

WILSON: That's right. It broke just literally days after we had been told that we should start planning for a trip in March. For us this, trip was a major event; for anybody who has worked on Africa this trip was a major event. It turned out to be the most significant visit to the continent of Africa that any president since the founding of our republic had ever taken. It was only the second time a president of the United States has set foot on Africa, at least on Sub Saharan African territory, for the express purpose of visiting with African leaders. Roosevelt had been there on his way to Morocco; I think his plane refuel in Liberia or close by. Jimmy Carter had traveled to Liberia and Nigeria in his around the world tour of emerging nations. George Bush had stopped in Somalia to see the troops at the very end of his administration. Other than that, no American president had gone to Africa. So we got the trip. The president got splattered with the Monica Lewinski scandal the following Wednesday; by the following Saturday we were in the Oval Office while the president was calling Nelson Mandela to ask him if March 26th or 27th was a good date to visit South Africa; that was going to be the centerpiece of our trip and was going to be a state visit. The president got on the phone with Nelson Mandela. My deputy, Robin Sanders, and I were sitting in the Oval Office with the president. The speaker phone was on so we could hear the conversation. The president is sitting at his desk; Mandela comes on, and the president says, "Hi. Just wanted to go over a couple things." He has got three talking points. "I want to come to Africa. Is March 28th good for you? This is what we're looking forward to." Basically, that was it. All Mandela wanted to talk about was Monica Lewinski, and more than that, all he really wanted to do was to spend the whole time telling the president how everybody in Africa loves him and what a terrible thing it was that was happening to him. What is the press doing undermining him with this stupid scandal, etc? Every time the Mandela began to speak, President Clinton opened his mouth to say, "Well, gee, I really just want to come March 28th. Would that work for you?" Mandela interrupts and says, "Mr. President, we all support you. All of Africa supports you. What the press is doing to you is horrible." This went on about five times. We are sitting in the Oval Office listening while the president was undergoing this sort of water torture, Chinese water torture, at the hands of Nelson Mandela. I am kind of looking at my feet, I am looking at the ceiling, I am looking all around just praying that we could move on and get to the president's talking points and then leave the Oval Office. I finally looked at the president, who by this time had his head pretty much in his arms, holding the phone leaning against one arm on one elbow, waiting for Mandela to get done with his expressions of passionate support in the face of this assault on his character. We finally got through that and we got approval of the visit date and the President hangs up. Robin and I get up and we start shuffling out the door. "That was a great phone call, Mr. President. Thanks very much. See you later." We are trying to get out. The president gets up and walks around the desk and blocks our way and says, "This is going to be a great trip, isn't it?" That got us thinking about the trip and not about Nelson Mandela and not about Monica, so Robin and I ended up spending about another 20 minutes sharing with the president discussing our various experiences in Africa. Robin had served in Sudan and in Senegal and I had served in many other places; so we regaled the president with stories of Africa for about 20 minutes. After I left, I thought about the meeting for awhile, and it became clear that there were a couple things that happened in the Oval Office. For one, we had had this just wonderful opportunity to spend 20 minutes with the president of the United States on a subject about which we were passionate; we got him jazzed up to go to Africa. Secondly, it was pretty clear that the president, always a politician, did not want us leaving the Oval Office with our last thoughts being of his rather difficult and embarrassing conversation with Nelson Mandela; succeeded in that, because as we left, all we were thinking about was what a great trip we were going to have.

When you plan a presidential trip, everybody gets involveeverybody who thinks they have a claim on the president's heart and mind even if they don't. By everybody, I mean everybody from the Secret Service to the president's staff that worries about the domestic agenda, who did not like the idea of the president going out of the country during a key part of the legislative calendar and who argued that we should scale the trip back to six or five or four days, and that we should make three stops instead of six stops, and that we should do this, that and the other thing. The State Department had its views. As we programmed the trip, we would rise every morning, go to the office to argue about which five or six places we wanted to go on the trip. We get that settled by nine o'clock that night. We would then go home, come back the next morning and start all over again. Should we go to Ethiopia or should we go to Uganda? Should we go to Ghana or should we go to Nigeria? Would we go here or would we go there? Everybody had something that they wanted to say about that; those who shouted loud enough and made their points clearly enough, would get their way. In the end, we agreed on those things that we had essentially agreed upon in the first hours of our planning process, and that was that the overriding objective of this trip was going to be to show a picture of Africa to the American people unlike any picture most of them had ever seen about Africa. For the last 20 years or probably since the massacres of the Belgian sisters in Zaire in the civil war of the 1960s, Americans have seen really nothing but the most horrible pictures of Africa, whether it was famine or disease or war or other disasters. We wanted to change that image. We wanted a picture that was more representative of the Africa that those of us that worked in Africa knew. Basically that meant showing other images of Africa and using the president's presence in Africa to showcase those. Secondly, we wanted to make the point that African countries which followed the best political, business and economic practices would benefit from the prestige of an American presidential visit; so we looked for countries that had actually undertaken political and economic reforms, where there were democratic movements or emerging political cultures, and where there had been a sustained period of economic growth as a consequence of past economic and management decisions. Those were issues that we factored into the decision of what places to visit. We also came up with a number of additional issues that we wanted to showcase and we matched countries to those issues. We wanted the president to have a good time; so we wanted him to go to a game park and we wanted to underscore the richness of the African environment. In the end, I got my way on everything. We understood that we could not go to Africa without addressing one of the arcs of crisis either in West Africa or in Central Africa going from Angola through the Great Lakes region of Africa. The question was where were we going to do it. Every ambassador came to see me to plead his or her special case as to why the president should go to their country and not somewhere else. Jesse Jackson went to the president a couple times to get him to go to Zimbabwe. We said no. The Secret Service told us that we couldn't fly into Rwanda. We had a special meeting with the Secret Service to tell them why we could, and we did. We set up a summit meeting in Entebe, Uganda, to which we had invited a number of regional African leaders to discuss the crisis in Central Africa. We had major debates as to whether you would invite Daniel Arap Moi, the President of Kenya, or Laurent Kabila, the president of the Congo, with one faction saying, "You can't do that because these are despicable characters, dictators," etc. We said, "You have to do it because, after all, these guys are figures who represent power bases in their continent and, after all, the president is going to have an opportunity to act as our senior diplomat to advance an agenda that will be helpful to us." We won on that. We got the president to go to Botswana. We arranged that in such a way that it occurred right on the day that the peaceful transition of power was taking place in Botswana from one president, who was retiring, to his vice president; so we were there for that. We took the president to one of the most magnificent game parks in Southern Africa in Mawana called the Chobay Game Park along Chobay River. I made two trips in preparation for the president's journey. I had to explain to the prime minister of Ethiopia why we were not going to the seat of the OAU and, why we were going to Kampala, and than I took another trip to Angola to deliver a message on behalf of the president in support of the peace efforts in Angola. In the end, we settled on Ghana, Uganda, Rwanda, South Africa, Botswana, and Senegal on the way out; we had different themes that we underscored for each stop. We put together this trip. It turned out to be 11 days long. It was the longest time that the president spent out of the country in his eight years in office. It was the most significant trip that he made in terms of number of countries visited and time spent. It was probably the most difficult trip that any administration had ever undertaken, just because the infrastructure in Africa is so poor that you pretty much have to do everything yourself. You had to have communications, you had to have vehicles, you had to bring everything with you; they were basically stand alone trips. I think the president will tell you to this day that it was the best trip he ever made.

Q: He went with his family?

WILSON: His daughter did not go. Hillary went, and he took a number of Cabinet officials. We also took members of the House African Affairs Subcommittee including is chairman, who was a Republican. We took Jesse Jackson with us. We took my old boss at European Command, General Jamerson. We took members of the Black Caucus. We took one American businessman, Bob Johnson, head of BET. There was another delegation that went to a ceremony that the president presided over which was the opening of our commercial center in Johannesburg, South Africa. We had Air Force One for 11 days, and Air Force One takes generally a delegation of 40 to 46 people. We visited Ghana. One of the big debates we had was where the President was going to make his speech in Ghana. The Secret Service had gone there and the advance people had gone there, and they had chosen this big square, Independence SquarBlack Star Square it was called. You needed to have up to 500,000 people in it to make it look full. There was some concern that if the president of the United States was there with only had 25,000 people in the square, it would look like nobody had come out. So they suggested this other square which would only hold about 25,000 people. The Ghanaians were saying that we couldn't do that, that we had to hold the ceremony in the big square because this is where they did all their major functions. They argued this issue back and forth, and finally we held a meeting. I had delegated this part out; finally the tie had to be broken and I went in and sat down with the most senior people on the advance staff and said, "Look, I've been in Africa 25 years. I have seen the Pope. I've seen Omar Qadhafi come to Africa. I can guarantee you the president of the United States is going to draw 500,000 people to that square." That won the case, and we put him in the big square. Hell, there were 500,000 people on the streets from the airport just going to the square and another 500,000 people in the square for the president. The president drew enormous amounts of energy from the population there, so it was wonderful. It was a great way to start the...

Q: One of the things that one recalls one hearing about previous administrations, particularly the Reagan Administration but also the Carter administration, how much emphasis was placed on having the right setting and having it look good on TV back home, and the hell with wherever they are, just as long as it looked good on evening TV. Did you run across this type of...

WILSON: Absolutely, sure. We were very sensitive to that because it was our primary objective. Our goal was to send back a positive image of Africa. We made that really one of our operating principles.

Q: That was the mega politics rather than making the president look good. It had more of an underpinning than the usual.

WILSON: We felt, and I do feeand we were criticized for "all show and no substance"that that was the only way that you were ever going to get a constituency supporting Africa, which is what we needed. It was not enough for Chet Crocker to say, "Africa is important; therefore, I'm going to work on Africa." You need a constituency which is going to say, "We need more of this or that policy towards Africa. We need people to have positive views towards Africa and U.S. involvement in Africa. So we wanted the "show;" we saw this as a main way of educating Americans about a continent that was far more complex than what they usually see watching CNN. We looked for every good shot, whether it was thousands of Africans cheering the president of the United States in Ghana or whether it was the president walking hand in hand with a couple school kids outside Kampala, Uganda. Absolutely, we wanted people to see that Africans are human beings, that they had the same concerns that Americans did. We wanted the president to be seen with African families, with African children, with African leaders, with victims of genocide as well as with productive business entrepreneurs.

Q: With the press on the trail of the Monica Lewinski scandal, that must have intruded a great deal.

WILSON: Once we got out of Washington, it was fine because the journalist who traveled with the president were people who were going to write about Africa; they weren't going to write about Monica Lewinski.

Q: So it wasn't something that dominated...?

WILSON: No, it did not dominate. On the contrary, it gave additional credibility to the thesis that if you're in trouble domestically, travel overseas.

Q: I can't help thinking about Richard Nixon going to the Middle East as the end game of Watergate was being played out. It's a relief for the president to get away from that. What was Sandy Berger's role in all of this?

WILSON: Sandy was on the trip. When we planned the trip, it was ours to build; our offices were in charge of the substance; we had only occasional debates or disputes on the substance or on where we were going to go. There was some question about to the value of going to Rwanda because there were those in the administration who didn't want to be reminded of our slowness to act in 199'our' being the international communities including the United States.

Q: What had happened in 1994?

WILSON: That was the genocide in Rwanda that had amounted to about 800,000 deaths of Rwandan citizens. The international community had largely stood by and not reacted. We pushed argued against the "no go" position and won that.

Q: As a matter of fact, the president made a rather significant speech at that...

WILSON: He did.

Q: Could you explain the background of getting this out.

WILSON: The question was why would we go to Rwanda which might bring up yet again an opportunity for the press to write articles about the American failure to react quickly when genocide was taking place. We said, "You cannot go to Africa and ignore the crisis in Central Africa, and clearly the place that we ought to address this issue should be Rwanda. You have to render homage to the victims of the genocide." Finally we got everybody to agree to that. We got the Secret Service to agree to the flying in, but the concession we made was that we wouldn't leave the airport. We moved the whole program out to the airport so that we wouldn't expose the president to the streets. There was a lot of concern, because there were still a lot of Rwandan Hutus who had been in power and then had been overthrown in the aftermath of the genocide, but they were still around. They were principally on the Congo side but they could infiltrate.

Q: And two president had gotten knocked off on an airplane.

WILSON: Two presidents had been shot down landing in Rwanda. Then the question became what was the president going to say and what was he going to do. We wanted him to meet with survivors of the genocide, not so much to hear from them how bad things had been and how they were suffering, although it was clear he was going to hear some of that, but to hear and see how they had managed to put their lives back together in the aftermath of this really horrible tragedwhat it had been like for them to move back to their villages, to live back with their neighbors, some of whom had been responsible for the killing of their family members. The second question was what was the President going to say, and we had a number of formulations. As we were flying into Kigali, the president was reviewing the speech that we had drafted for him and called Hillary, Sandy, Susan Rice and myself into his office. We sat there and went over the speech line by line. The important words were, "Never again will we stand by and allow a genocide to occur without reacting;" the question was: Can you really say 'never again' to genocide? There were two schools of thought on the plane. One school was, "Mr, President, you can't say 'never again' because you're committing the United States to do something that the United States might not be able to do, and in any case your government has not agreed that we would do this." In other words, there hadn't been a series of interagency meetings; there hadn't been a decision memorandum forcing the U.S. government to make a decision as to how it would act in the face of a genocide in the future. That was the Sandy Berger side. I know that Sandy may not have felt this way personally, but he was the defender of the process designed that the president did not get so far out in front of his government which might not really act upon commitments he might have made. That was the prudent approach. Then there was the other side, which I articulated, which posited that if there was ever an opportunity for the president to provide direction to his government, this was the time and this was the issue. If the president didn't direct his government to address this question, his government would never come to him with a decision memorandum, because you could never get the Pentagon to buy into this as a mission and, in the absence of directing the Pentagon to undertake this study, they would never allow this issue even to raised.

Q: Was Kosovo an issue at this time?

WILSON: No, Kosovo was not an issue at that time, although down the road it was going to be. Clearly Bosnia had been an issue; we had lived through Bosnia. The military didn't like the Bosnia operation. The Congress didn't like Bosnia. I remember being in Stuttgart when Senator Stevens of Alaska came and said, "If you guys go into Bosnia, you're be training with plywood tanks next year, because you won't get any money for your budget." The military view was that Bosnia didn't fit nicely into our two "major wars" doctrine and, therefore, we couldn't do it unless we trained and had resources and had everything that goes along with ithe same arguments they've used to not get involved in the war on drugs, the same argument they used before September 11th not to be assigned a lead responsibility in the war on terrorism. The discussion got really passionate. Hillary was asking key questions. Susan was weighing in with her views. The president was listening to all of this, and people were screaming and yelling and talking loudly. The next thing we knew, the plane had landed and we were all still sitting or standing there as the plane landed. Nobody had buckled up or anything. The president was still at his desk and he hasn't buckled himself in. We just landed in Kigali, Rwanda. The president says, "Thank you very much," and we left, not knowing what the president was going to say. We got off the plane. The president met with the survivors of genocide and had his meetings with the president and the vice president of Rwanda. Then he moved to where he was going to speak. I'd gone ahead of him. I had not attended the survivor meetings; I had gone ahead to where he was going to speak. I was going to be responsible for spinning the press, talking to the press about what he said in his speech and making sure they understood what he meant. The president entered and stood at the podium and he started into his speech. Suddenly I heard what he was saying; it was not written in his speech. He had just spoke extemporaneously. He had discarded his text, and was very clearly speaking based on what he had seen and what he concluded from his meeting with the survivors of the genocide, which fit in very nicely with his overall theme. I think one of his guiding philosophies about the human condition was that one major challenge was to draw strength from diversity rather than using diversity or using different ethnicity as an excuse to destroy each other. It was truly a moving speech. People who were sitting around me were all in tears. I myself was having great difficulty swallowing. I got up and walked out because I was really choked up, and I don't usually get that way. I was standing in the area between where the president was giving his speech, the antechamber, and then a walkway to where the press was. The president left the room where he had spoken. Everybody else is still in the room. The president came around from behind the screen, and there's only two people in this sort of holding area. One is the president of the United States and the other one was me. There was nobody therno Secret Service, nobody. The president, who had tears in his eyes, looks at me, and said, "Did I do okay?" I'm sitting there and I can barely talk, and I stammer "Yes, just fine." He then came over to mhe's about six two, six threa pretty big guand gave me a great big bear hug; we sort of are supporting each other after that. It had been obviously a very emotional day for him; his speech reflected that much more than that written by his speech writers. In the speech he gave he did not commit the United States to 'never again' on genocide, which was something that nobody had argued for. What we had argued was that he go as close to that as he possibly could; the formulation he used was something like, "While we can never be certain that there will never another genocide; we must do all in our power to prevent it, and be vigilant." Of course, you got people like Tom DeLay who would argue that this was the apology trip and that this was one of the things that he would apologize for...

Q: Tom DeLay being an extreme right wing Republican hater in Congress.

WILSON: Soon to be the new majority leader. So we had this momenthe president and I had this moment. Then as things happened, people started milling about and you go about your business. The president went back to do his business, and I went off to brief the press. I had agreed that I would fly back on the press plane. One of the guys that worked for me had never flown on Air Force One, so he and I switched places. He flew back with the president on Air Force One; I flew back on the press plane afterwards, and we spent a lot of time dealing with the press on that.

After that, we had a summit meeting in Entebe, Uganda. It's just right outside of Kampala; it's where the airport is. We had invited the heads of government or of state of East and Central Africa to a meeting to addresses conflict and post conflict reconstruction and reconciliation in the context of Central Africa. It was a good meeting. It was very, very useful; a number of ideas that were proposed that were later incorporated in what came to be known as the "Great Lakes Justice Initiative." There was an Entebe declaration which laid out some common goals and which tried to address the methodologies. Those pretty much fell apart when Ethiopia and Eritrea went to war a couple of months later, but there was value in the document and there was certainly value in the discussion.

Before we left for Botswana, I had awakened in the morning in Johannesburg and was about to take a shower and shave. I looked in the mirror and I noticed that one half of my face wasn't moving. When I winked at myself saying, "What a good looking guy you are this morning," as guys always do every morning, one side of my face wasn't smiling back at me. I looked at it and it had pretty much collapsed; it was frozen in place. I thought to myself, "My word, I've either got a spider bite or else I've had a stroke." I felt around for a spider bite and couldn't find one. I thought this was strange. So I took a shower and got ready and went to get on the airplane. I mentioned my finding to the president's secretary. She said, "Yes, one side of your face is pretty much paralyzed." So we got the president's doctor and he said, "Let's call back to Walter Reed. Hospital" So we were sitting on the airplane talking to Walter Reed, and they determined that I had gotten Bell's palsy, which is an inflammation of one of the three nerves. There are three nerves apparently that activate one side of your face, and it was an inflammation of one of these nerves that caused my face to freeze up. It's a classic case of not being able to drink soup because you can't keep one side of your mouth closed.

Q: Like having a big shot of novocaine or something.

WILSON: That's exactly right, yes. I could not smoke cigars. To smoke a cigar I had to kind of hold it in the other side of my mouth. I couldn't smile with both sides of my mouth; I would drool. I flew to Angola and I got off the airplane only to be met by the press because, after all, there was a presidential envoy traveling directly from South Africa to Angola to meet with President Dos Santos bearing a message from the president of the United States. I stood on the tarmac with the Air Force general just behind me and the American ambassador next to me, and I read to the Angolan people the message of peace from the president of the United States of America. Then we went off and met with the prime minister, the foreign minister, the president, and a bunch of other people, the UNITA figures, and the Troikthe group of ambassadors from countries which were responsible for supporting the peace process on behalf of the UN Security Council, etc. We had lunch with Blondin Bay. I should say that the meeting was great. We had everybody from their side and everybody from our side. We walked into this meeting, and there was a translator there. I had never met Dos Santos before, although he knew who I was and I obviously knew who he was. I knew a lot of the people around there. We sit down in sort of a L shape with Dos Santos and myself right at the corner with my delegation going one way and his delegation going the other way, and with a translator sitting right behind us. He's a Portuguese speaker. We started with a translator, but soon I said, "Look, how's your French?" He said, "My French is pretty good." I said, "We can either do this one of two ways. We can either go through this translator, which is really going to take a lot of time and who knows if it's going to be accurate or not, or you and I can just talk in French." He said, "Yes, let's just talk in French." So Dos Santos and I just talked in French. Half of my delegation didn't speak French, half of his delegation didn't speak French, but it didn't make any difference because he and I got along just fine; we conducted our business in French. I told him, I said, "You know, I've been working on the Angolan civil war not quite as long as you, but I've been doing it for a long time. I've been doing it since the early 1980s. You take a look at my guys and you take a look at your guys; there's something that's really striking in this, and it is that all of you who have been involved in this war on the ground look so young and refreshed, and you look at my delegation and they've all got gray hair, hearing aids; they all look old and worn out. What does that tell you about the effect of your war on you versus the effect of your war on us?" He loved that; he thought that was great. We had Paul Hare with us, who was 64 but looks about 90; he was the personification of somebody who's been ravaged by timhe also is my weekend golfing partner to this day. So Dos Santos and I talked and we went through everything. The focus of my message to him was the question of what was going to happen after the war is over, in particular "What are you going to do, because at the end of the day your most dangerous time is still ahead of you? How are you going to deal with providing public services to your population when you no longer have an enemy that you can point to as a reason for sacrifice and inability to provide services? How are you going to be a respected member of the international community at a time when such things as transparency and fighting corruption and what not are going to be key elements of what you do? These are the things that you need to focus on." That's what we focused on for an hour and a half, which is pretty good. That was a lot of fun. As we walked out and went on our way, Paul Hare later told me that our ambassador to Angola, Don Seinberwho was a very good friend, a person who is secure in his beliefs of how good he is at doing what he doeas they were driving back in the car, had turned to him and paid me the ultimate compliment by saying that I had done it almost as well as he could have done it himself. Just as we got to the airport that afternoon and getting ready to board the airplane, a journalist came up to ask, "Can I have just one more radio interview?" I said, "Sure." He and I go off to the VIP lounge, and as we walked in, there was an Angolan television on the wall. We walked in quite literally just as the national news broadcast was beginning. The lead item on the national news broadcast was that a special envoy of the president of the United States' special envoy had come to Angola to deliver a message of peace. I looked up there, and there was I delivering the message of peace looking very much like Edward G. Robinson in a Grade B gangster movi"There will be peace, you dirty rat"because only one side of my mouth worked. Everything else was frozen. Fortunately the Angolans hadn't spent a lot of time watching Grade B American gangster movies, so they didn't make the connection between my talking out of the side of my mouth and the typical American gangster as portrayed in movies of the 1940s and 1950s.

We got back on our airplane and flew back down to Botswana. The next day we did another environmental activity which gave the president an opportunity to talk about the environment in Africa and the fragility of the African environment and to share with his audience and with the American press, his experiences in the game park, not just seeing the game but what it had meant and the need to be good stewards of the environment.

Then we flew off to Senegal. We stopped at Senegal for a couple of reasons. One, you really can't cover Africa without stopping somewhere in Francophone Africa. Senegal was also, because of Gorey Island, an opportunity to underscore the cultural and historic ties between Africa and the United States. Senegal in the person of Diouf had long been a moderate, functioning democracy even though Diouf's party had been power since independence. We did a couple of other things. We went to see an AID projeca women in development project which was about the empowerment of women, an important sub text, and then we went up to review the troops in an exercise that European Command was doing with Senegalese troops. That gave the president an opportunity to talk about the "African Crisis Response Initiative," which was something that Jim Jamerson and I had been working on for a number of years from the military side and Susan Rice had been working on from the diplomatic side. Then we went out to Gorey Island to see the old slave house that has been turned into a museum and shrine to the Africans who had gone through the door of no return to go off from their African homelands to America as slaves. We were walking around the slave house; our interpreter had wandered off with a couple congressmen to show them the slave house. I was left with the President and Hillary and President Diouf of Senegal. I was going to do the translating. Diouf turned to his wife, who was over in another corner, and called her over, "Elizabeth," and says to hel'm translatin"Elizabeth, you know Ambassador Wilson, don't you?" Elizabeth says, "Yes, of course." Diouf then said, "You know, it's thanks to Ambassador Wilson that the president of the United States has come to Africa, and in particular it's thanks to him that President Clinton is here in Senegal with us." I'm doing the translating on this. When you get somebody as respected as President Diouf to give you such compliment, I thought that it might be about time to retire. It didn't get much better than this.

I later went back to Senegal with the intention of suggesting to Diouf that he not run again for president at the suggestion of a number of government people. I went to see him and I sat down. The press was there, and he repeated in front of the press what he had told me on Gorey Island. After the press left, he said, "You know, what I told you on Gorey Island I really meant it, but I really want everybody in Senegal and everybody in Africa to know it as well." It was a disastrous meeting, because after the president had said something like that to you, how can you say something like, "Well, Mr. President, thank you very much. Now it's time for you to leave." Senegal was wonderful. The president gave a great speech on Gorey Island in which he introduced all of the African Americans who were on the trip with hipeople from Susan Rice to Betty, his secretary, to his Secretary of Transportation Rodney Slater, to the secretary of Labor and a number of other African Americans, members of the Black Caucus such as Charlie Rangel. The point he was trying to make was that, no matter how humble your originand no origin could be more humble than being a slave in a society 150 years agyou could still aspire to be a minister and a secretary and a senior government official. Africans should be proud of what their fellow black people have been able to accomplish in the United States since the end of the Civil War. It was very well done. He obviously did it much better than I could ever describe it. It was quite a moving speech. Then we were in Senegal. Monica Lewinski, the scandal, invaded our little bubble again, because the Paula Jones suit got thrown out, so there was apparently some celebrating. I was not present at that, but there was apparently some celebrating that was seen by the press stalking the president. The Senegal story for them was that the president had been seen through lace curtains beating on bongo drums in celebration of the Paula Jones case being thrown out. I think that that was a pure fabrication, but that was what was reported.

We got back to the U.S. 11 days later. We got back on April 2nd. We'd left on March 19th or something like that. A couple things happened in the next couple days. I went out to get married the next day, with my frozen face and all.

Q: You had been divorced when, or were you divorced?

WILSON: I was divorced before I got married, yes.

Q: Diplomats try to do these things...

WILSON: Sequentially. We're sequential Muslims. Yes, I'd been divorced. We got married. We had already bought a house in the Palisades Foxhall neighborhood. It was clear when we got into the house that on my salary I was not going to be able to afford to live in the house. I could own it but I couldn't afford to live in it unless I got a different job. I could retire, and so I did. I got married, and the same day or the next day it became clear to me that I was the most detested person in both the NSC and the White House domestic side, because I had learned that the domestic side of the White House would never forgive me for having taken 11 days of their president's precious timnever again would Africa appear on his schedule.

Q: There's nothing more jealous than those that keep the books.

WILSON: That's right, and for them we had exceeded our quota. On the NSC side, my very good friend Don Bandler, who was my counterpart in charge of Europhad gone in to brief the president and Hillary about a trip to Europe that the president was going to make in June. White House procedures requires that you meet with the president and Hillary in the initial planning stages so that you get some feedback from them on what you are thinking, what they're thinking or what they want to achieve, just to see if you're on the same wave length. Then you go and develop the trip, and then you brief the president and all interested Cabinet officials and senior officials in the Cabinet Room in a formal briefing. I did these briefings differently from other people. I insisted in fact, that all the Directors come with me to brief the president of the United States, which was the first time that anything like that had been done. I'll go back to some of that in just a minute. Bandler went for his initial briefing with the president and Hillary; and he had barely sat down when the president said to him, "What I want you to do is go talk to the Africa folks, find out how they did their trip, and do the same thing. Then come back and talk to me." Bandler wasn't real happy with that because he had already done all his preliminary planning. We had done some things in that trip that hadn't been tried before.

The White House is a notoriously insular place, and the NSC especially. You work for the president and you don't develop a domestic constituency. We turned that on its head. We thought that, if there was one thing that Africa needed in this town, it was a constituency. We also thought that this trip was of such historic significance to people who were interested in Africa that they had a right to be engaged in the planning. We also thought that, if we could get them engaged, we could make them our allies and our advocates, and if we didn't engage them in a meaningful way, they would just ultimately become our critics. For everything that you do, there's half a dozen people telling you you're doing it wrong. The first time I had briefed the broader African American community on what we were planning on doing, the first question came from Sally Booker, who at that time was on the Council of Foreign Relations. I said, "Yes, Sally, what would you like? What is your question?" The answer was, "It's really more of a statement. I just want your assurances that you're not going to go out there and embarrass us." I think that underscores the sort of level of mistrust or distrust or lack of trust between people who are in the White House and people who are basically paid to be critics of whatever the administration is doing. We did not embarrass Sally Booker, I might say. But what we did is set up a series of what we called "roundtables." So as part of our planning process, we invited groups from different constituencies to meet wit us. We talked with the PVO/NGO communitprivate voluntary organization/non governmental organizatiowe met with the business community, for example, and appointed team leaders and we assigned them tasks. We invited them to spend three hours thinking about we should accomplish in Africa. We tried to incorporate some of the best ideas that came out of that in some of our subtexts, but very clearly in even doing we were supporting our overall objective of portraying to America a view of Africa that was different from what they were used to getting.

We did select three or four different subjects, and had these "roundtables" on them. We invited people to say whatever they wanted to and provide any sort of advice. One of us from the NSC staff would participate in the whole "roundtable," and I was at every one to at least kick it off and I generally would come and sit in for some of the dialog. That way we got an incredible buy in to what we were doing. It worked very well, because after the trip when we went around to various constituencies we were invited to all these receptions where we were congratulated. Some people made money hosting receptions at which we would go and speak about the president's trip. For one of my linewhich was greatly appreciatel would stand on the podium, with 300 people in attendance, and I would as"Did any of you see your ideas incorporated into the president's trip?" And people would say, "Yes, we did." I'd say, "Not every idea got incorporated, but if you saw some of them, at least you know that we took into consideration everything everybody suggested." So we developed this little army of people who were prepared to support us through thick or thin on Africa policy. I think that helped us, as we went down the road, to get the "African Growth and Opportunity Act" passed. Both sides of the aisle will tell you that it is a piece of legislation that will stand the test of time. There was an article just this morning in the Wall Street Journal about the effects of it on increasing exports to the United States from Africa. We were criticized for all show and no substance by the Republicans, who of course had no substantive objections other than the fact that we were there and it cost money for us to be there. But I think it was a huge accomplishment, because I think the trip really did what we wanted it to do. It made Africa of a size and intensity that people could really begin to understand. When they looked on their evening news broadcast and they saw the president in Africa, the continent was suddenly not so remote and not so dangerous, not so forbidding. All that, I think, was good seeing the images of the president walking hand in hand with little kids in Uganda or the president at the game parks or with civil society people talking about things like attending church or like being part of an association or using this school as a way of teaching this and thatolerance and things like that. So I think it was all very good.

Q: How did you see, in this very intimate glimpse of how they operated, the role of Hillary Clinton with the president on a trip like this?

WILSON: She was very clearly a very close advisor to the president, and she made her views known in ways that made it difficult for the president not to accept her advice. She was pretty tough minded. In my case, she was also very interested in Africa. She had already been to Africa on a trip. Her issues were issues that we cared about a lowomen and children, families, things like that, which are also core African issues. So she was extraordinarily effective. She was also effective in articulating some of the difficulties of some of the things that we were trying to accomplish, in forcing us to think more clearly and focus our own minds more clearly on why we were trying to achieve. Going to Rwanda was one of them, for example. She understood better than most the potential political pitfalls of going to Rwanda. She understood, as we were reviewing the speech, what the consequences were of trying to do something that we perhaps could not act upon and how we needed to be very careful of the way we phrased it; so she was a voice of considerable good judgment, and considerable reason. I have enormous respect for her as a person and as somebody who is committed to a set of ideas and principles.

Q: This is very early on, but how did you see Madeleine Albright at that point from the NSC perspective?

WILSON: Madeleine did not go on the trip with us. My first dealings with Madeleine were all pretty positive. We met early on about Nigeria. It was Pickering, Madeleine, myself, Susan and a couple of others. We had been some conflicts between State and the NSC on Nigeria, and this was our first meeting to try to figure out what to do. There were not a lot of good options. We could eliminate some useless sanctions, but unless you were going to get the international community to impose international sanctions on the oil sector in Nigeria, you were not going to do anything that was going to hurt Sani Abacha and his thugs. We understood that. There were those who said, "Well, we have to do it because, as Jesse Jackson put it, we have to be on the moral side of history,"that great moralist Jesse Jackson.

Q: Who at this time was running around with a pregnant girlfriend talking about moral values to the president.

WILSON: More than that, there were probably even more scandalous things that have not yet come to light that he was doing, but that was his position anyway. Madeleine's position when we first met with heshe said something that has stuck with me ever sincwas "Look, the way I see it, we want to be part of the solution, so we need to calibrate everything we do with that in mind. It seems to me that we need to avoid, in our efforts to isolate Nigeria, isolating ourselves from its future and from the solution." That was, I thought, very pragmatic and very thoughtful. Later on, we had two distinct camps. We had what we called the "whackers," those who would take a whack at Nigeria at every opportunity no matter what, and then we had what we called the "appeasers," which included me, although I've never been known to be much of an appeaser. I did believe that what we needed to do was we needed to figure out where we could work with the Nigerian government on matters of mutual national security concern, such as international criminal activities, narco trafficking, the horrible conditions at their airport that caused it to be put on our list of airports you should never travel to, and things like that. Then we should try to build some rapport with the Nigerians that would allow us to more effectively engage them on issues on their domestic political agenda. We won that debate, but only because Sani Abacha died. We were clearly holding a weaker hand as we went down the road. Then the untimely demise of Sani Abacha was timely, very timely indeed, for a number of...

Q: Was champagne broken out?

WILSON: We put a bunch of people on the first plane to welcome in the new regime. Madeleine was okay in the beginning. I must say, on other issues where we had to engage the State Department, it struck us that there was not a lot of interest in riding herd on the assistant secretary, who frankly needed some guidance.

Q: You'd mentioned a couple times your disagreements with Susan Rice. What essentially was the problem?

WILSON: The problem was that she had a set of view on Africa that bore little relation to reality of the situation. In Sudan, for example, the focus became exclusively terrorism, even though the intelligence that we had obtained was tainted and even though the Sudanese were making overtures on terrorist related issues. We lost sight of the need to play an active role or the need to address a civil war that had been going on for 25 years at a cost millions of lives.

Q: Between the north and the south.

WILSON: Between the north and the south.

Q: Islamic and Animist Christian.

WILSON: So the policy was skewed in ways that just could never be undone by that administration. In Angola, after six years of the administration having positively supportewe were one of the original Troika membera peace process and understanding that the impediment to the peace process was increasingly Jonah Savimbi, the UN and its representative and the Troika all agreed that we should enhance the sanctions regime against Savimbi to bring more pressure to bear. Susan decided, without saying why, without giving any reason, that she would threaten to veto the resolution. That decision got communicated to New York without any State Department or White House concurrence on the cable that went out. That leaked to the Angolans in a way that reinforced their own paranoia that the United States truly did have an insidious plan to make Jonah Savimbi president of Angola. While we were never going to veto any resolution, just the mere threat of it, even an unauthorized threat, set the peace process back a year and a half. There were things like that.

In working with the Europeans, we had fundamental differences on how we would work with the French and the with the British on issues of common concern. I always believed that we should work on those issues where we could cooperate and where we could work together, and disagree where we could not agree; then we would competed. Susan's belief was that we didn't work with those sons of bitches at all unless absolutely forced to do it. The trouble with that approach is the French are so ensconced in their zones in Africa that we couldn't steamroller them; you just couldn't do it. Time and again they would outflank us very easily and we wouldn't know what hit us, whether it was the Central African Republic, the Congo, or West Africa countries. In 1994 after Rwanda, French policy was pretty much on the ropes. In 1997, I guess, after Mobutu was overthrown, it was clear that the French were going to have to reassess the effectiveness of their African policy; they did that. We could have been very helpful to the French on that. In fact, I went over to Paris and participated in a significant debate with some 300 French scholars and academics and journalists on Africa policy. It was called "Convergences and Divergences in U.S. and French Approaches to Africa." It was written up and published in book form. It always seemed to me that we should be working to helping the French through this debate, because the outcome of the debate was clear even before they went into it. The outcome was going to be that Africa would be mainstreamed into French foreign policy thinking. It would no longer have the policy priority that it had in the past, nor would it be subject to the same political machinations that it had been in the past. Historically French presidents used Africa as their playground both literally and figuratively. Literally they'd gone there to hunt and receive diamonds...

Q: I was going to say, pick up a few diamonds.

WILSON: ...pick up a few diamonds, mess around with a few wives of dictators and whatever. Figuratively they would launder money through African states back to French contractors, who would then finance reelection campaigns. It's been a rather interesting history. But going into this debate, it was pretty clear that the outcome was going to be something that we could live with. Rather than work with those who shared our views on this, we didn't work with anybody, and as a consequence the Neanderthals were able to undermine some of the goals we were trying to reach. I refer to people like Michel Depuche, who had been ambassador to Cote d'Ivoire for 13 years, during which that time he had been the proconsul and had run the French involvement in the civil war in Liberia from there; he then had gone on to be Jacques Chirac's advisor on Africa and had reasserted some primacy of place.

We differed on the whole concept of a new generation of African leaderthis idea that Melish of Ethiopia and Izais of Eritrea and Museveni of Uganda were all really great people, the reincarnations of the messiah, and everybody else was just a bunch of dictators. I think it was proven to be very simplistic and frankly wrong headed. When the Ethiopian Eritrean war broke out, we had the president call both Izais and Melish three times each to stop the air war. We then had Susan go out with two instructions. One was to make this a temporary trip designed to stand between two friends and neighbors at a moment of high passion so that they wouldn't do something rash and stupid, and then to get out of the way and turn it over to some broader organizational framework to help them resolve their differences; and the second instruction was keep a very low profile. We did not want to make their problem our problem. She went out there, stayed 12 days and ended up getting involved in a process that took her two years, and which required lots of compromises. You can go back and take a look at the money that's flowed into the region as a consequence of this. When it was clear that the Ethiopians and Eritreans were playing her, just as we told her they would play her, she got huffy and had this big press conference and invited the world's press attention on what she was trying to do and then flew off uninvited to an OAU summit to brief them on what she was doing. It not an approach that was taken seriously.

Q: Very briefly, in 1998 you had to pay for your house in Potomac Palisades...

WILSON: We got back in April and I started transitioning out. I basically said that I wasn't going to stay on. I got offered a number of ambassadorships. I said no; I'd been there, done that. We worked through the death of Sani Abacha and then the outbreak of the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea and then left in June and went off into glorious retirement.

Q: Just as the footnote, what are you doing now? What did you retire into?

WILSON: I have a number of clients and we do a number of different things. We do investments in projects in Africa and in the Middle East and in southern Europe. We also do investments here in the United States for foreign investors who are looking for and are interested in an investment portfolio here in the States.

Q: I'd like to raise one point, because I've been mulling this over, and this goes back to the Gulf War. I've almost finished a series of interviews I've been doing with our counsel general in Dhahran, Ken Stammerman, and he was talking about a problem that he had, which was also mentioned by Chas Freeman in Riyadh and by Bill Brown in Tel Aviv. A number, not a large number, but a number, of people, and not just staff but officers, couldn't take the pressure of the war, the threat of scuds, biological warfare, the whole thing, and had to leave. To use military terms, they chickened out. I served 18 months in Saigon during wartime, 1967 70. I listened to a lot of people, I've interviewed a great many of our people who served in Vietnam, and you might say that the chickening out incident just didn't occur. Maybe people didn't go there and were able to do their chickening out before they went, but it didn't seem to happen. You may have mentioned il'm sure you havbut could you look at it again. Did you see this as a new manifestation of the new Foreign Service or not?

WILSON: There are lots of manifestation of the new Foreign Service that you see going through your career, without a doubt. That, however, was one that probably affected me far less than it might have in some of the other countries, for the simply reason that, as soon as Iraq invaded Kuwait, we were instructed to draw down to the minimum staffing level; so within 10 days we had drawn down to maybe 10 or 12 offices, something like that, and within a very short period of time after that we had gone down to the bare minimum, which was five or six officers. Most of our staff from the time we drew down until the time we finally left in January were those people who had come from Kuwait and were not allowed to leave; so they were forced to stay there. In our case we had the wife of one officer, who was actually a part time temporary employee at the embassy, and because of the position she occupied, I had acceded to her husband's wishes that she remain in that position. She was a family liaison officer, temporary, but she stayed. Then when she became pregnant, the circumstances changed and so we moved her out. I had one other officer who came to me and said he couldn't take it, he wanted to leave; so we made him redundant and sent him on his way. Our rationale for doing that was that if you didn't want to be here, we didn't want you here, because you're not going to be of any help. In his case, I'm surprised that his career has gone on as long as it has. He seems to have done as well as he has done, for some of those reasons that you pointed out. But I don't think at the end of the day that, given the numbers of people that we were looking at, the percentage of people who sort of chickened out was any higher than one would expect in any other sort of situation, whether it's police officers in a gun fight somewhere or any other sort of emergency situation that you don't expect that you're ever going to have to meet. In the Foreign Service you expect general hardships, but you don't necessarily expect that you're going to be physically threatened. In our case, of course, we assumed really from the second day, from our meetinl think I described the meeting to yothat some of us were not going to survive; so it became incumbent upon management to make sure that the staffing levels got to be as low as possible as quickly as possible, and we did that.

Q: Okay. Well, this has been a fascinating series of interviews. Thank you very much.

End of interview