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

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHESTER ARTHUR CROCKER

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Q: Let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

CROCKER: Born in New York City, October 29 of 1941.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your family. Let's take your father's side, sort of the Crocker side, first, then we'll move to your mother's side. Where are they from and what do you know about them?

CROCKER: Yeah, my father's side is from New York, also, before that, from both Albany, New York and New England. And the Crocker side primarily from Massachusetts, originally, going back to the 18th century and before. The Crockers came out of the western shires of the UK. People who were named Crocker made crockery in the old days. So that's kind of the root of the word.

Q: What were the Crockers doing in Massachusetts?

CROCKER: They were into finance and trade and the church, a little bit.

Q: What church?

CROCKER: Baptist and then Episcopal. If you go way back you'll find lots of Old Testament names in the Crocker lineages. And then on my father's other side, the Albany types, the name up there was Masten. Arthur Masten was my father's grandfather and he was the nephew of Chester Alan Arthur, the 19th century president. So the Masten side is kind of Albany based and is important in my life because Albany was the jumping off place for the Adirondack Mountains and I spent my youth, when I could get away from school, fishing in the Adirondacks and still have property up there that I like to visit in that wonderful part of the country. So those are the roots, on that side. On my mother's side, her maiden name was Verdi, as in Giuseppe Verdi, only not directly descended.

Q: Joe Green.

CROCKER: Joe Green, exactly, good old Joe Green. She also was a native of New York. Her father had come over at a very young age from Italy, so, more recent arrivals in the country. But I guess you'd have to say I'm a born and bred New Yorker.

Q: What line of business was your father in?

CROCKER: He was an investment banker, working in a number of Wall Street firms and then retired at a fairly young age and became a fulltime environmentalist, a very, very active environmentalist in the New York area and was for some years the chairman of an upstate New York environmental activist group called the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks. He stayed active in that until his dying days, which were actually just about a year and a half ago.

Q: Did you father go to college and all?

CROCKER: Yes, he was a Princeton grad and Harvard Business School.

Q: And your mother, was she active in affairs, or what was she?

CROCKER: I would describe her as exposed to the arts and she adored high culture. She loved travel, music and foreign languages. Her father was a great collector of operatic music and other music, had a marvelous collection of old 78s that I can still remember fiddling around with. She was an amateur singer, loved the opera and I think the arts were probably her main interest in life, apart from family.

Q: She go to college?

CROCKER: No, she did not.

Q: Then you grew up right in New York City itself?

CROCKER: Grew up in New York City and then moved to areas just outside it, in one case to a town called Suffern, New York, right on the New Jersey border, about thirty minutes or so from New York City. Today it's probably longer, then it was thirty minutes. And then we also moved out to Long Island, which is where my father had grown up, near Oyster Bay, on the north shore of Long Island.

Q: Was your father, you mention Oyster Bay, at all, was there any contact of any nature between his love for the environment and Teddy Roosevelt?

CROCKER: Oh, I'm sure, I'm sure. In fact, the place in the Adirondacks that was in my family, had been in my family for some generations was a staging place when Teddy Roosevelt was informed that McKinley had been shot, he came down in a series of horse-pulled relays and they stayed, they switched horses at a place that is now a clubhouse where the family spends time. So I'm sure there was a TR link - not a family link, just one talked about him reverently, at the family dinner table one talked about TR with great reverence.

Q: Speaking of family, you have brothers, sisters?

CROCKER: Two older sisters, yes.

Q: As a small child, were you, what was sort of the family like? You sit around the family dining table and talk about things?

CROCKER: Yeah, I think the general ambience was that if children are going to be at the dinner table they better participate in the adult conversation or else shut up, because the adults were going to have a conversation. So, one learned at an early time about words and about messages and about speaking in whole sentences, maybe you could say. But the exposures I really remember are not so much early childhood, being a young adolescent and then wanting to be able to communicate with adults at the table.

Q: Where did the family fall politically?

CROCKER: I think it's fair to say that my father was throughout his life a New York Republican, a Rockefeller Republican, if you like, not the kind we currently enjoy the leadership of but East Coast Republican, maybe a Hank Paulsen or Chuck Hagel Republican, to be up to date. There used to be a lot of Republicans on Wall Street and there still are some.

Q: One thinks about, for many years, Jake Javits and all of this

CROCKER: I would add, though, that that didn't remain my dad's political orientation as the party moved to the right.

Q: What about religion? Did religion play much of a role or not?

CROCKER: It was part of one's experience as a child and as an adolescent, yes. My father, more than my mother, went to church on Sundays and made allusions, Biblical allusions and references were not uncommon in things that he would say, although they were very uncommon in things I might say. Brought up Episcopal and confirmed at a tender age, but, it's derivative, I guess you could say. My religious experience is derivative of his, really and when I was at home, which was not all the time, he would go to church and he would ask if I wouldn't like to come and join him and I sometimes did out of solidarity when I was a teenager, but it was really out of solidarity.

Q: Well then, where did you go to elementary school?

CROCKER: While we were living in Manhattan I went to a private school on the East Side of Manhattan which was called Allen-Stevenson, which is still alive and kicking, which was in the upper Seventies, off Lexington Avenue, roughly through fifth grade and then we moved and I went to public junior high school in Suffern, New York for a year and that was an interesting change of pace. We then moved again and I went to private school for two more years on Long Island, before going away to private school at Phillips Academy Andover, which I did for about two and a half years.

Q: In the private school in New York City, how would you describe it, was it a progressive school, was it a traditional school?

CROCKER: I'd say it was reasonably progressive in terms of a varied student population of New Yorkers, many from different national origins, I'm sure but private schools aren't cheap, so there was that degree of selectivity. Had a very good sports program, which I liked a lot. Had a first class music program, which really turned me on. I became very into playing woodwind instruments and things like that while I was there at that school. Unfortunately I didn't sustain it but I liked music. Music was part of my life, because my mother was very musical and she had a sister and brother in law who ran a music conservatory and so I got more exposure to it through them, as well.

Q: On the music side and other things, was there an Italian streak to what you were getting from the family through your mother or not?

CROCKER: Probably so, yes, in terms of some of the musical choices. When people ask me what are my roots I often say - partly in jest - that I'm one quarter Italian and it's my best quarter. I don't really mean that, but it is possible that my temperament and tastes have some Italian traces. .

Q: Well at Suffern and also on Long Island what subjects did you sort of like more than others?

CROCKER: I'm not sure I was terribly intellectual at that stage but I'm sure history and languages would have been part of what I liked. I think we had some exposure to both in junior high, anyway, that I do remember. And obviously reading and, I said, music. But it really wasn't 'til I got into high school and then college that I developed any sense of direction.

Q: Were you much of a reader?

CROCKER: I think I was a late bloomer, probably, in that sense. I became an avid reader and I'm more of a reader all the time. As you get older you begin to realize the enormous depth of what you don't know. It's very exciting, constant discovery. But as a teenager I was pretty focused on the immediate things, my social life and my sports and what was going to happen tomorrow, rather than sitting up in my room and reading Charles Dickens, which I did more of when I was in high school, probably.

Q: Then you went away to, was it Phillips

CROCKER: At Andover, yeah.

Q: Andover. You were there for how long?

CROCKER: I stayed there until the middle of my junior year and then I had an amicable parting with Andover, largely because I don't think I was, at that stage of my life, fit for the rigors of that very disciplined environment, as it was then. I really was something of a rebel.

Q: You would have been at Andover when?

CROCKER: I would be the class of '59 if I graduated and I left in the very early months of '58.

Q: And during the time you were there and even in junior high did world events intrude much on your horizon?

CROCKER: Yeah, they were certainly starting to. There was a lot of discussion of the election, of the Eisenhower-Stevenson contest, with all the discussion in the house about that but also at the school and I remember having one of my early political debates, with the older brother of a girlfriend, who was quite convinced that Adlai Stevenson would have been a vastly superior president to Ike. He drove me from New York up to Andover once and I remember debating him all the way up there and of course he won every point 'cause he was about four years older. That helped to refine and sharpen my awareness of some of the issues in world affairs. We also had as our chaplain at Andover William Sloane Coffin, who passed away recently and he helped to sharpen some of our ideas and critical thinking, you could say, about different issues related to war and peace and racial equality.

But if I think back to what I most enjoyed as a student in those years at Andover, probably history and languages, again. I became very focused on ancient languages, on Latin and to a lesser extent on French, which I kept up.

I forgot to mention along the way, one of the things that got me interested in world affairs and superficially informed about them was being a stamp collector. That was one of my early interests in life and then I kept it up, going back to when I first had a surgical procedure and the parents were trying to keep me happy so I got a little baby stamp collection at about age five and I kept it up. Still have it to this day. But that's how I learned about political boundaries and historical changes and the different names of countries and where they are on maps and then began to look at maps and understand about geography. That was actually a unifying experience, in a way.

Q: Andover, of course, has a beautiful campus. I took a summer course there back in '45, took physics in order to enlist in the navy as a radar operator. But luckily they dropped an atomic bomb that summer and that took care of that, for a while. But

CROCKER: It's a good school.

Q: It's a very good school.

CROCKER: Had very high standards and I had some very good friends there but I was going through some issues myself at that stage of life, in the junior year. My parents had divorced some years prior and I was on a fast track as an adolescent and really didn't like the confinement of being in a boarding school under lock and key, so to speak. So I decided that I would depart.

Q: So, '58, where'd you go?

CROCKER: I went back to my dad's place. At that point he was my primary parent. However, I didn't stay much with him, either. I promptly turned around and left home altogether, as a young 16 year old. I just became a teenage devil. I ran away from home and changed my identity and dyed my hair and got another name and got myself employment using an assumed ID. So I went underground to avoid being followed.

Q: Tell me, at the age of 16, I'm now 78. I'm not quite sure how I would do it today. One, how'd you find out about it, how'd you do this?

CROCKER: Well it's not really a crowning moment in my own history but it was in one sense a shaping, a forming experience, obviously. No, I just located a place where I could live in New York at low cost and emptied out my bank account, such as it was and made contact with someone I knew a little bit who ran a bar on Lexington Avenue and asked if he'd hire me and he hired me. Not legally, of course.

Q: How long did you keep this up?

CROCKER: I kept up my new life, my independent life, I like to call it, for about a year and three quarters and then I realized the time was passing and I had reconciled a bit with my father and mother and probably wouldn't be a bad idea if I kept up with my age cohort and try to get into a university. I never finished high school and at that point I had ripped it up, academically speaking, but I did have some advanced SAT scores from the beginning of my junior year. Those got me accepted on a probationary basis to a place where I had a distant connection, which was Ohio State University and I decided to go. I knew that I wasn't going to be competitive at the kind of school my father would have wanted me to go to but I was a rebel, anyway. So what the hell, I'll try going out beyond the Alleghenies and see what Ohio is like, and I went out and registered at this enormous campus of what was then 48,000 students, it's probably more like 70,000 today and I actually became very connected to my peers but also connected to myself and to my sense of direction at Ohio State. It was a good experience for me.

Q: You were at Ohio State from when to when?

CROCKER: Full four years, from fall of '59 to the June of '63.

Q: At Ohio State, did you have trouble sort of adjusting or did the system more or less take care of you?

CROCKER: Well, it's a good question because the system there was one in which every high school graduate is admitted until they flunk out and they put you into a lottery and you draw three roommates and that was quite a different experience for me. But, I had spent the previous year and a half, two years living in a cold water walkup apartment in a Puerto Rican neighborhood in New York City on $25 a week. That's how I had been living. So I had broken away from the somewhat protective, sheltered environment in which I was raised in New York and therefore the adjustment out there in Ohio was one I enjoyed and I met some interesting people of very varied backgrounds: army brats, air force brats, the kids from farms, kids whose parents worked in the tire plants in Akron and diesel locomotive repair plants, kids from all sorts of backgrounds and it was a very broadening experience and I enjoyed it. Ohio State had at that stage (and probably still does), a strong honors program and they would reach out to people they thought might be capable of handling that and they recruit you into it and so if you did okay you got some recognition. You got, as a student there, if you were in the upper tier of performers you probably got more attention than you might have back East at a big Ivy school. In any case, I really took off academically at Ohio State and became, I was straight As, Phi Beta Kappa and everything and I really enjoyed it.

Q: What sort of thing were you concentrating on there?

CROCKER: History, well first of all it was languages, I majored in languages for the first year, I declared a major in languages at the end of my first year and then I switched to history with a minor in languages and then in my third year I made it a double major in history and political science, which got me obviously closer and closer to international relations. But the core of the interest was history with languages, at the outset.

Q: History, which

CROCKER: European.

Q: European history.

CROCKER: European history and diplomatic history and diplomatic history of the U.S. and European diplomatic history. Actually I did an honors thesis in British history, which took me the better part of a year and I was working in primary source materials. Had a wonderful professor who gave me all kinds of stuff, access to primary sources through interlibrary loan, political party newspapers from the turn of the century, (previous century) in the UK and to some extent France. So I was working in those kinds of things, comparing British and French colonial policies before the Great War.

Q: That got you into the African thing, didn't it, or not?

CROCKER: Well, in a way, it was all part of a process, that's exactly right. The focus of that work was primarily British, with a minor on the French side, but it got me into study of the events leading up to World War I, in broadest sense, including North Africa, including the Balkans, including events that surrounded the "sick man of Europe," the Ottoman Empire as it was declining, but also the issues flowing out of the Boer War, which was for the British a huge experience, a very major experience and issues of reform in British India, the Belgian experience in the Congo, those kinds of things were part and parcel of that research work. So, yeah, it very much oriented me to what had taken place in the relationships between Europe as an imperial power center and the non-European parts of the world.

Q: Looking at your courses, you say you had quite a bit of diplomatic history, was there a different focus, this was a different era in a way and you're much involved in this today, in one way and another, including teaching. Did you see, was diplomatic history taught differently, in your experience?

CROCKER: Well it certainly was taught differently in lots of ways. Of course I continued on in graduate school in some of these same areas and we had different people teaching it then. I was taught American diplomatic history, U.S. diplomatic history, by Foster Rhea Dulles, who was of the Dulles family, at Ohio State and that was a real treat. We had a hell of a history department at Ohio State. I don't know if we still do, but we did then, really good people. Had Harvey Goldberg teaching French revolutionary history and 19th century French history, Philip Poirier teaching the history of the British Labour Party, which he at that stage was one of the great authorities on. So, yeah, you obviously follow in the tracks to some extent of the professors who turn you on and who get you motivated. I think the European diplomatic history came later. It was more the history of European countries that I was getting at that stage.

Q: Well speaking of movements and all, '59 to '63, did the Kennedy-Nixon election engage you at all in 1960, because this was a turning point for an awful lot of people ended up in the Foreign Service, I think?

CROCKER: I think it probably did, yeah. Once Kennedy had won, there's no doubt that his message was one that reached a lot of us, including myself. The creation of the Peace Corps, for example, something that was destined to be an experience that would affect the minds of young people. We had one of the first Peace Corps training programs anywhere in the country at Ohio State and there were lots and lots of Peace Corps volunteers being trained on our campus, in different disciplines for different parts of the world. We also had some people working in our political science department who were quite interested in emerging Africa at that stage and of course 1960 was the year in which many African countries became independent, not all of them but many of them. So there were visiting lecture series and the fact that the Peace Corps was going to some West African countries was very much on my mind. So I associated all that with the kind of uplifting message that Kennedy represented when it came to U.S. relations with the emerging nations. I guess you could say I bought the Kool-Aid, the hopeful message that maybe there could be a new era and new relations with these countries but at the same time with a very clear reference point that these places in Africa, the Middle East had been run for many years by Europeans and Europeans knew them very well. And so I was a kind of person who was deeply conflicted by the whole experience of Suez, as I look back on it at that point and the stance that Eisenhower had taken at Suez, which of course had two consequences: it saved the British and the French and the Israelis from a real mess in the Suez Canal Zone but they didn't like it very much and it drove the British and the French out of the empire business, it accelerated their decolonialization process.

Q: And obviously turned Nasser, I don't know where he was going anyway but it didn't help.

CROCKER: Didn't help, no.

Q: Well did, did the "Soviet menace" loom much in your studies or thinking or anything?

CROCKER: I was young and naive enough to want to believe there were, there might be some possibility for getting better relations with Moscow, but I was disabused of that on a number of occasions, not least, one of my experiences on the Ohio State campus was becoming president of the student YMCA and YWCA, which were kind of a joint entity on campus and I ran a speakers program there, made it a point of reaching out to different kinds of speakers to come on the campus. So we had debates between the, there was a socialist party, the Socialist Labor Party of Ohio, they had a political party and the John Birch Society and everybody in between was offered a platform at the YMCA to come and talk.

Q: The John Birch Society was an extreme right wing

CROCKER: It was and it was founded out in that region of the country. So they were strongly represented but the Socialist Labor Party came to speak on campus at my invitation and the Birchers were furious that I would allow them to come and speak. So I got in the middle of some of that. We even had some Russians come to speak, some Soviet types, they were so-called Soviet youth leaders, most of whom were in their forties, and I got a taste of what it was like when I was trying to host a meeting between them and some other people and soon realized that they were only interested in ideological warfare, not communication. This was my first taste of the way the Soviets conducted their 'people to people diplomacy'. They were about as bad, on their side, as some of the worst of the Birchers on the other side. The idea of getting a serious and substantive dialogue going, forget it. Wrong era, wrong players.

Q: Was there, within the faculty, were there, Marxism had remarkable staying power within the academic world. Was there much of this at Ohio State or could it survive there.

CROCKER: As I'm sure you know, Columbus, Ohio is not a hotbed of progressivism the way San Francisco is but it is a state capital of a state that's often been seen as conservative. Some people call southern Ohio part of the Bible belt. And so I would say that the campus environment reflected the full variety but it was remarkably cosmopolitan and especially that was true of the social sciences and languages. That is often the case. Many of the faculty came from other places and the best of them were world class and I was very lucky to be associated with them and trained by them. I remember having a lot of economics with a labor economists who was quite well known in the American labor movement and favorably known, as well as some development economics. But most of the economics I learned was Paul Samuelson and it was pretty straightforward economics.

Q: We all read the same textbook.

CROCKER: Yeah, I think so, back then, especially. So nothing terribly unusual about that. But if you look at the broader environment of a campus like Ohio State it was a big land grant university, 80,000 people went to football every Saturday in the fall and they all cheered for the home team and if you didn't have that in your bloodstream you shouldn't be there.

Q: What about the Cuban Missile Crisis of '62? Did that impact on you or were you

CROCKER: I remember it pretty well from the headlines and I remember the scare stories and how dramatic it seemed to be and it was in fact a very real crisis. How real it was I don't think I fully appreciated.. It's a little hard to appreciate it when you live in a town that has one newspaper and it's always saying the same thing, anyway. So it just didn't seem all that immediate, as it probably should have. It was a scary time, looking back on it. I remember the discussions about bomb shelters and having campus briefings about bomb shelters and what should we do. Civil defense, I first heard the words civil defense in '62, '63, as I guess we all did.

Q: You worked with the political science department. Had political science, what was the state of it, because political science, my understanding is, has gotten very computer oriented and formulas and all that sort of thing. Where stood political science?

CROCKER: History never, at that stage, was infiltrated by those unfortunate pseudo -scientific diseases. It may be now but it wasn't then. Political science was just at the beginnings of the great debates about which kind of political science, is it going to be normative, is it going to be essentially political philosophy? And what I learned in political science was either on the political philosophy side or alternatively comparative politics, comparative government and politics, which I really very much enjoyed. The study of different countries' political systems, reading from great American writers, British writers and French writers about the different qualities of political systems, political party formation. We had some focus on systems theory in international relations. I'm talking about the early Sixties now, when that stuff was just getting going but it was not quantitative so much until the middle and late Sixties. I managed to duck and miss most of that quantitative stuff.

Q: You were fortunate, I think.

CROCKER: I think I was, too. I know that's the case when I talk to young people today who think about getting a doctorate in political science and I realize what hideous choices they face in light of the discipline's quantification imperative.

Q: Yeah, it's sad. You were getting ready to, as you move on to graduate in '63, what do you see for yourself? How were you pointed?

CROCKER: Well, it's a good question. I guess, like many impressionable young people, I was very inspired and probably shaped by the professors who meant the most to me, even though one of them was smart enough to tell me, "Above all else, don't ever take career guidance from one of your teachers, because the only think he can give you guidance on is how to be a teacher and unless you really want to be a teacher, don't look at us as your role models." Well, even though that was very wise I'm not sure I followed it at the time. I knew I wanted to go to graduate school, into the international studies field. What I wasn't sure of was whether to do regional studies or simply international relations studies. So I applied to a bunch of different schools and, having done well out there, I got into all of them and then had the choice of where to go.

I selected Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies here in Washington over the others. One of the reasons I did is that it was connected to the world of policy, government, public service, as well as the academic world, and because SAIS then as it does now, had a PhD program. And it seemed to me that would keep my options open. I could do the sort of policy relevant international studies but I could also, if I chose to, go on for a PhD. I didn't want to make that decision necessarily at the beginning, whereas some school would probably want you to make an early decision: are you a PhD student or not?

Q: At SAIS and also at Ohio State, was there a growing body of academic interest in Africa because of the changes there or, were you aware of this and

CROCKER: Yes, indeed. Africa was coming into its own as a focus of regional studies, area studies. One shouldn't forget that we used to have the National Defense Education Act, which used to promote and sponsor study of exotic areas and the Africanist community, which was never huge but grew like Topsy in the Sixties and Seventies, took full advantage of that and built a whole series of African studies programs. One of the early ones was at SAIS Johns Hopkins but the more purely academic ones were at places like Wisconsin Madison, Boston University, Northwestern were some of the earliest ones but in terms of policy focus SAIS seemed to be a good one. Columbia also, I should mention.

Q: Did you have a feeling there was such a thing as policy, because so often policy seems to be pretty well removed from people get involved in academic world, it's more fun to sit there and create your doughnuts or whatever this is and not think about, okay, what do we do about it?

CROCKER: I'm not certain where this bug caught me. It may have caught me in part because there were always those nagging questions about what are you going to do for a living and what are you going to do for a career and while I admired faculty people I wasn't certain that was the only choice I should consider. I had been exposed at Ohio State and much more so of course at SAIS to a number of practitioners and I found them impressive, on the whole, people I could look up to. I suspect that my dad's influence may have been there in the background a little bit, too, the notion that there is something about public service which is valid and worthy. If I'd done all of the things that my father wanted me to I would have become an investment banker, having gone to Andover, then probably Princeton or Yale and wound up doing something in his footsteps. I never went that route but he always had another side to him, besides being an investment banker, which was the world of ideas, the world of concepts, the world of beliefs. That, no doubt, had some influence.

Q: You were at SAIS from when to when?

CROCKER: '63 I started, got my masters in '65 and got my PhD in '69, having taken a year off between the masters and the start of PhD studies.

Q: Well as you were getting your masters and on your way towards your PhD, were you having much of a chance to rub shoulders with the practitioners? Was SAIS set up for that?

CROCKER: SAIS was very much set for that. SAIS has some outstanding, I'd call them scholar-practitioners or scholar-diplomats, even. It also had some people who were pretty much top of the pops in their field at the time. People like Robert Osgood, whose writings on limited war were the number one authority in the country, along with Henry Kissinger, perhaps. I'm talking about the mid- and late Sixties, now. People like Arnold Wolfers, who was the Swiss-born, Yale-based and then SAIS-based scholar who probably did more than anything else to influence my thinking about international politics.

Wolfers was a marvelous man. He ran the Foreign Policy Institute at SAIS, which was like an in-house think tank and he collected people around him who were, like Osgood, like George Liska, like Charles Burton Marshall, the list went on. There was some pretty big name people who were, who taught courses and were very much what you'd call students of American foreign policy. And they brought an endless stream of practitioners to SAIS to speak to us about everything from economic development to intervention in Vietnam to limited war and counterinsurgency to the impact of decolonization on the international political system, that kind of thing.

Q: Was there the feeling that the United States, did you have it and maybe those around you, that the United States had a role to play in the world, rather than just sort of sit back, that we were a city on the hill, the missionary, something like that. Was this part of the zeitgeist of the period, would you say?

CROCKER: Yes, the Sixties are a decade that I guess are just doomed to be a subject of endless controversy and discussion. I'm always amazed to this day that when you go to college campuses you see history and political science professors who've never gotten out of the Sixties, teaching full courses on the Sixties. And of course it's their Sixties that you're learning about, not somebody else's Sixties. For me the Sixties were a turning point in every respect and probably a formative time, but formative in ways that might be a little bit out of the ordinary. Yes, I think to answer your question directly, I never had any doubt that the United States of America was the logical successor to the British Empire as the number one source of security, stability and order in international politics. I didn't have any doubt then. I don't have any doubt now. If the United States isn't doing a kind of modern version of the role that the Brits played in the 19th century and before, who on Earth would be doing it?

Q: I know somebody, a Foreign Service colleague, shuddered but one can't helpbut feel that the United States is sort of the indispensable country.

CROCKER: Yes, I certainly saw it as natural, inevitable. Of course the debates were over what kind of role were we to play.

Q: During this time, did SAIS represent a, as some of the think tanks did, was it a shadow government or was this more just plain practitioners, as opposed to people who were sort of teachers and all or people who were lecturers, waiting for the administration to change and they would step forth. Did you have that feeling?

CROCKER: A lot of our best courses at SAIS were taught, especially the more applied courses, were taught by adjunct people, who had day jobs - in the World Bank, day jobs in the CIA, day jobs with the State Department (including INR), day jobs in Congress. I learned European and to some degree American diplomatic history from a fellow named Seth Tillman at SAIS. No, I guess a number of the faculty went into the Nixon Administration, but not that many. The main example was Bob Osgood who went into the National Security Council, which is the reason that I followed him, shortly after he went in. Probably less common then than it is now.

Q: What about Vietnam. Was this a, you mentioned Seth Tillman, was our involvement, had to be a major cloud or whatever you want to call it over everything one did, or not?

CROCKER: You know, the time I was doing my course work at SAIS were the years '63-65, a little bit of '66, getting ready for the PhD comps and the debate hadn't become quite red hot in our country yet, although it was getting there and you could sense it. There were some student meetings, there were some protests, not too many. The real protests kicked up in '67, '68 and at that point I was actually overseas and doing PhD research. I remember coming back with my wife in '67 and being amazed at what had happened and what the atmosphere was like in this country over Vietnam, being amazed and being worried about the war and its impact on the U.S., and being pleased when President Lyndon Johnson made the decision (in 1968) to run again. Like so many others, I mourned Jack Kennedy's assassination. In the late 60's I sampled the anti-war protests, to see if they made me comfortable and if I was comfortable with the people who were protesting. I kind of decided that I wasn't all that comfortable with the mainstream of the protests, because it seemed to me that it was what Jeane Kirkpatrick would later call the "blame American first crowd" that was dominating the Vietnam debate, rather than people who were thinking through what we had done wrong there, what we had misanalyzed, what strategic errors we committed, and what we should do to get ourselves out without incurring all the negative consequences that might flow from an early withdrawal or disengagement from Vietnam. So I was not in the school that just said cut and run, but I was deeply troubled by the war and its impact at home and around the world..

Q: Well as you were pursuing your PhD, what decision had you made? Was this going to lead to teaching or what?

CROCKER: I don't think I made that decision about whether it would lead to an academic or a non-academic career. I was sending out letters to quite a few schools as an international relations PhD about to be minted and what I was getting back I found unimpressive. By then political science departments were either moving in the quantitative, heavily methodological directions (which did not interest me and which I was not trained for by SAIS) or they were deciding definitively not to; and I think Vietnam was probably part of it as well. Too many campuses were caught up in populist uproars. I just didn't find the market very interesting, but I was still writing my doctorate and then I happened to have the good fortune to be asked if I would like to try government for a while, so that started me on that road.

The PhD that I wrote I think is probably the most formative thing, if anything, in terms answering your question. I decided to write a comparison of the way the British and the French decolonized their empires, particularly in the security sphere. And for the rest of my career I've been interested in security relationships between the North and the South, between Europe and Africa, Europe and the Middle East and the legacies flowing from those experiences which formed much of the backdrop for America's rise to global power.

Q: When you talk about security relationships, what do you mean?

CROCKER: Defense relationships.

Q: Defense.

CROCKER: Defense in terms of military relationships. I'd worked on some ACDA contracts with my PhD mentor, Vernon McKay, which looked at things like arms transfers to the developing world and the significance of these arms transfers and what could be done to limit or channel arms transfers so that they became a force not for instability but for stability and all the rest. So to me the most interesting dynamic was, how will these newly emergent states become capable of being sovereign, especially in the security sphere? At the time of independence, many did not have the means for sovereignty; many of these countries, especially the African ones, had been colonies for such a short time that their national identity was very weak, the institutions were nowhere near as deeply imbedded as they were, let's say, in British India and what kind of security forces were they going to have? Where were they going to get their training from? How big were they going to be? What was their doctrine going to be? Would they have alliance relationships with former metropoles, the former colonial powers? Would they have alliance relations with the Russians, with the Chinese, with the Americans? Who was, in other words, going to take over the kind of imperial role, if you want to look at it in that way, in the security sphere or was no one going to take it over? Was it going to be run by Arabs in the Middle East and by Africans in Africa and by Asians in Southeast Asia? Those were the kind of questions that I was tangling with and found absolutely engrossing, and I've spent my career thinking about those sorts of things - the security linkages between regions.

Q: While you were working on your PhD and all, this is a time when both the French and British were inserting troops in from time to time. I think the British went into Kenya at one point, didn't they and Tanzania and also to Kuwait, I think and perhaps elsewhere. And the French, of course, were doing this all the time. Were you seeing that the metropoles were really withdrawing or were they stuck with the problem?

CROCKER: Yes, they were stuck with the problem and of course we were stuck with the implications of decisions they made about their problem. I think most Americans and even well informed Americans are not aware of the fact that the British and French armed forces were at war almost nonstop from 1945 'til about 1970, in one way or another. Now whether it was French Indo-China, whether it was French in Algeria, whether it was the British in Malaya or the Mau Mau campaign in Kenya or, as you mentioned, fire brigade operations in places like Kuwait and East Africa and, for the French, in west and central Africa. Right after they decolonized Kuwait, the then Iraqi government decided to have a bite of it, back in '62, I think it was. And the Brits sent in a heavy brigade back in again to reinforce Kuwait's independence.

So I was intrigued by these kinds of issues, not so much in an advocacy sense as in terms of, how is this going to work? These are new countries, trying to get on their feet, with every right to get on their feet, but they do not have the basis for sovereignty. And they're going to have to build the basis for sovereignty. You can't build that on the basis of clichï¿½s about the history of oppression and exploitation. You can't build a country on a clichï¿½. (This is a line that I learned from a particular SAIS instructor, I won't pin it on him but it struck me for years to follow.) Countries cannot be built on clichï¿½s, you actually have to have some substance. You have to have institutions that work, you have to have people who will follow orders. You have to have the skills and the competence to operate and maintain equipment, and sometimes it helps to know that there's somebody external who cares enough to strengthen your systems when they get challenged and get in difficulty.

Of course that line of thinking, which sounds neo-imperial in some ways, is what explains a lot of the debates that we saw in the relations between the advanced industrial societies and the developing world throughout the Sixties, Seventies, Eighties, even the Nineties.

Q: Looking at, particularly the Middle East and Africa, we're still stuck with the problem of tribalism. Iraq is a tribal problem. Do you feel that there was enough understanding that this tribalism is really going to screw things up, as far as building democracies?

CROCKER: I think the experience of writing my thesis and then early years in government, I lost my optimistic view of the ease of transitioning from empire to independence, in many of these countries, for the reason you indicate and also because it takes time to build indigenous institutions. I remember being so appalled at the lack of historical knowledge in the United States in 2002-3, the lead up to the Iraq War, that there wasn't a single prominent talking head who could make a literate reference to Britain's experience in Iraq between the two world wars. Not a single personality that I can think of made public reference, in a TV show or in an op-ed, to what I thought of as simply common knowledge but it wasn't common knowledge to most people my age or younger who were participating in this debate about whether to go to war in Iraq. Britain had a hideous experience in Iraq and a tough time coping with its intervention legacies throughout the Middle East, and I was familiar with the story because I had written my PhD about what Britain was doing in these areas.

Q: I think it was summed up in many ways by this movie about it, The Lost Patrol. A small patrol get stuck in the middle of the Iraq desert and gets slaughtered.

COCKER: I would have thought that the Seven Pillars of Wisdom was kind of common knowledge to people and people would have, in any event, the book that people all should have read before we got into Iraq was written by Elizabeth Monroe and it was called Britain's Moment in the Middle East, From 1914 to Suez. And anyone who is vaguely familiar with that history would have had the wisdom to ask themselves this question: "Okay, so we go into Baghdad and then what? What do you do then?"

Q: I was just talking to somebody who's husband has a rather significant role in Baghdad now and just in passing said that, reckoned that we had a thirty per cent chance of coming out all right on that.

CROCKER: Well, maybe. Maybe so. But these were the issues that were the formative ones for me as I was developing elements of a career and thinking about career choices, government or academia.

Q: While you were working on this, you're talking about clichï¿½s and all, there was a rather starry-eyed feeling about Africa, the winds of change and things are really going to be much greater. In the Middle East you had these military dictatorships that took over almost immediately and they were brutal and you didn't quite get that same feeling, but certainly in Africa. Nkrumah was the bright eyed boy, Nyerere and intellectuals sort of embraced these people who really weren't doing their country that much good, at least it's debatable. Did you find yourself engaged in this, or sitting to one side? How'd you find yourself? I'm talking about while you were in the academic world.

CROCKER: Yes and I should mention, during the late Sixties (much of '66, '67, and '68) I was a news editor, when I was in Washington, of a magazine called Africa Report, which had detailed monthly coverage based on some three or four hundred then hard copy news sources that we would receive by mail, in those old days and we would have a news section about every African country every month, a news bulletin of some sort or another. And I became more and more aware of what, in fact, African politics was likely to be. And so the bloom was off the rose, so to speak. It was clear we were talking about one variety or another of one party regimes, of regimes that one scholar called 'party states', if not outright military dictatorships. These were weak countries with weak governments that were scared of their own shadows and so what they did was to try to prevent any alternative power centers from arising. Which meant you didn't want an autonomous private sector, you didn't want opposition parties, you didn't want foreign investment, you didn't want a lot of things unless you carefully could control them.

Of course there was some variety in the African experience. Some countries, like Nyerere's Tanzania, were a more or less benign form of one-partyism. Not so benign for the people who were the victims of his Ujamaa village socialism but not bloody, it was simply backward, bad economics.

Q: Of course the five hundred pound gorilla was South Africa during this time and, again, from the academic side, what were you getting from your colleagues and your own set of thinking about whither South Africa?

CROCKER: I served in the Nixon, I like to call it the Nixon-Kissinger Administration from 1969 to 1972 and then came to the academic world. My first academic job that was fulltime was here in Georgetown University, where I was affiliated from '72 until 1980, when I went back into government again, that time in the State Department. I think my views were formed very heavily by the years of working for Henry Kissinger, whose photo I still has a place of pride in my office, right there. Henry Kissinger's form of realism I always thought of as congenial to my own thinking. I should add that the kind of attitudes and decisions that the U.S. took in the early Seventies towards Africa struck me as hyper realist in a way, in some ways waiting until things got hot before dealing with them, rather than acting proactively and preemptively.

And we faced some difficult choices here and there, to do with Portuguese speaking Africa and what kind of relationship we had with Portugal, a NATO ally, which was of course urging us to be their ally politically and militarily in Africa . And while we didn't want to be their ally in Africa, nor did we want to see the Soviets and the Cubans and others take over in those Portuguese colonies. So we had quite an interesting debate, as you'll recall, in the mid-Seventies, by which time I was out of government, about how to conduct ourselves in places like Mozambique and Angola.

Another insurgency which was getting underway as of '67 was the Rhodesian insurgency, which led ultimately to various British diplomatic interventions and ultimately Anglo-American plans for settlement and then the so-called Lancaster House talks leading to the independence of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe in 1980.

South Africa, as you mention, was the big looming question. And for most of the time period that we are talking about up to now, nobody doubted that South Africa would be able to defend itself and its racist system for the indefinite future. It had been around for a long time. It had started, really in the 1700's. In 1653 is when settlement began, not unlike when our own settlement began. So it's a long history there. The other milestones that were important in my mind was the Act of Union in 1910, which created the modern South Africa after the Boer War and then of course the election of 1948, which brought the Afrikaner Nationalists into power with a particularly virulent form of white nationalism inspired to some degree by doctrines from the Europe in the 1930's. A kind of institutionalized, racist nationalism, I guess you could call it. And it was ugly and I was very sensitive to its ugliness and very convinced that it would need to change, but the question was how, under what circumstances.

And this was an overwhelming question for everyone in the Africanist community. We all knew South Africa was not acceptable in its current form, but how do you go from here to there and what is there, anyway? What is the end point?

Q: Again, still working on the time you're working on your PhD, did you find that those looking at Africa from the academic point of view were for the most part looking at it through rose colored glasses or by this time, the Sixties and all, was the bloom off the rose?

CROCKER: The bloom was off the rose by the late Sixties, early Seventies. Those parts of the academic world that I was the closest to would have been in two camps. One campwas what I call the military sociologists, the people in comparative politics (as political scientists call it) who were studying the role of the African military, which was then, as you can imagine, a big emerging story with coup d'etat and coup d'etat. Were these uniformed people going to be emerging as they had in Turkey? There were scholars who had looked at the role of the military in Turkey's modernization and said, "Well, is there any potential here for a kind of African Atatï¿½rk, for real modernization, political modernization, to come from the officer corps of these kinds of societies or was the military simply an armed trade union movement, an urban-based trade union movement, out for its own interests, out for a bigger share of the budget and for the perks of office and never to leave?" Or was the military simply a guardian, doing a transitional role, until the next civilian leadership could be identified? What forms of governance would be likely to develop and what were its implications? So that was one group of academics and I had some interaction with them and wrote some journal articles in that company.

And of course the other were very, very different kinds of scholars. They were scholars of counterinsurgency, scholars of what you'd call global security, scholars wondering about what these disruptive parts of the world called the 'new nations' were going to mean for the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union.

So I was in two camps, here. One camp was sort of regionalist, looking at what kind of states and societies are emerging and the other camp very much globalist, how should be conduct ourselves as one of the two poles in a bipolar system, in order to make sure that ultimately the 'right side' prevails and we didn't misread the African tea leaves. I was very concerned that we might overreact and intervene in a mindless way, obviously a lesson of Vietnam. You don't just buy the local Kool-Aid, whatever some dictator is trying to sell you. On the other hand, if you leave an empty chair, in a competitive bipolar system somebody else will fill it. So you have to walk the line between the regionalist and the globalist perspectives, with case by case care and real due diligence.

And that's what I took from it and I will confess that most of the Africanist professoriate was not interested in that discussion. They assumed that Africa is for the Africans, that we shouldn't be involved as a Cold War player, that we shouldn't be concerned if countries professed Marxism, as many of them did. We shouldn't be concerned if the Soviets, Cubans, East Germans, Chinese, others developed what you might call inroads of influence in different African countries because, not to worry, Africans can defend themselves and they will do so and the outsiders will never have permanent influence. I found this debate to be kind of sterile, because to me the question was, all right, maybe eventually the Africans will throw them out, but what happens in the meantime and at what price?

So we have to watch carefully and not leave vacuums, but also not create stupid messes by inflating the Cold War dimension and applying only a Cold War lens.

Q: Well during your and again your PhD time, did you get a chance to, say, go to France and to the UK and to sample their thoughts and how they were going?

CROCKER: Yes, exactly, that's what I was doing. I spent a year in British and French libraries and British and French colonial and foreign offices and defense departments, interviewing officials and academics. And then another part of a year talking to officials of the newly created Organization of African Unity and doing some case studies related to some of the themes in my thesis. And what I was discovering is that the European taste for 'imperial' burdens was rapidly disappearing but they did feel a residual need to remain relevant and capable, if asked by their political masters. So you could sense there was a transition underway.

Q: The French seem to, what I gather, had more of a feeling that this is our preserve and they should absorb our culture. The French seem to take more of a proprietary interest, or not? You find that?

CROCKER: Yes, no question, there was a real and sharp distinction between the British and the French approaches, partly based on the way they decolonized their possessions. The British were retail, ad hoc decolonizers. Each country got independence at a different time period under a different set of internal political developments, constitutional conferences, negotiations and so on and it kind of spread over a period of time, starting with Ghana in '57 and all the way down to Swaziland in '68, I guess. So most of the sub-Saharan British territories got independence within that time frame.

Nearly all the French territories got independence in one year, 1960, as a result of negotiations that were led by the French system in Paris, by Charles de Gaulle negotiating with African leaders who were emerging and creating something called the French Community, which was all linked together with very detailed, elaborate defense agreements, internal security agreements, agreements on telecommunications, air traffic control, higher education, you name it. This was a highly structured system that you could call quasi-independence, in some ways. And then the French, also, their territories tended to be weaker economically and smaller in terms of size and population. So they were more dependent on France anyway. If you look at the map and look at Chad, Chad has seldom really been able to stand on its feet without the French being there, even to this day.

Q: Did you actually finish your PhD process before going to the NSC?

CROCKER: I got my PhD in '69 and went into government in '69.

Q: Did you come to any conclusion and what was your feeling about the African leadership that you were getting by the time you

CROCKER: I think the feeling I had come to by the end of this process of preparing myself in terms of education was that the African transition was going to be difficult, it was going to be disorderly, it was going to be a cockpit of East-West rivalry to some degree and that the continuing relevance of European influence in Africa was something that we should not discourage. Unless we wanted to pick up all the burdens or all the roles that they were playing ourselves, then it would be wise to encourage some continuity of European-African relationships. At the same time, I reached the conclusion that the OAU structure was a valid basis for an emerging African order and that we should respect the OAU charter and look at the OAU charter as a way of keeping the Russians on a tight rein, in a sense, because the OAU charter was an anti-intervention charter, it was a charter for weak new states protecting themselves from foreign interveners, both East and West and we should respect that.

The OAU charter, actually a resolution passed in '64, sanctified the inherited boundaries and we should respect that, because what's the alternative to Africa's ridiculous boundaries that have been created by the Europeans? These were the kind of bottom line conclusions one came away with, that if you don't have the boundaries you've got now, exactly what boundaries would you like?

Q: While you were doing all these studies, did Biafra come up? Did this engage the academic world who were interested in Africa?

CROCKER: Yes, it did. I'm glad you asked. There was a very hot example of exactly this question and of course it was also an example of something that always bemused me, which was French-American rivalry in Africa. There were so many French officials who looked at the Americans as the threat that they conducted themselves accordingly and if it wasn't the Americans who were the threat it was the British who were the threat. If you read French newspapers and French magazines, the overwhelming sense of adversariness was towards the Anglo-American expansionism, if you like, in what they looked at as their strategic hinterland, namely the French speaking parts of Africa, both in the north and in sub-Saharan Africa. So, yes, French support for self-determination in Biafra was a test case, and example of French frustration about the centrality and power of formerly British Nigeria in West Africa.

It was also a test case of humanitarian intervention. It was a test case of whether we believed African boundaries should be sanctified or could be rewritten. A lot of things came into play. I entered government just as that debate was hotting up, as a matter of fact, so it was for me an interesting case.

Q: Did you see Soviet influence in Africa as being sort of an oddity? In a way, looking at it, the Soviets weren't comfortable in Africa. They really didn't have any great interest. It was just sort of to mess things up, in a way, or something but it just didn't seem like it had much in the way of staying power, or was that the view that you had?

CROCKER: I think, at the period we're we talking about now, which is by the end of the Sixties, early Seventies, the Soviets were not a very credible adversary or rival or peer competitor in the African space. And there were several reasons for that, but one of them was that the Chinese were more creative than the Soviets, by far and they had a quite venturesome policy of their own. Secondly, that the Soviets were hopelessly inept at relating to Africans, as you have suggested. Hopelessly racist. Hopelessly condescending. And just not very comfortable, perhaps, is the word. Nor was it all that clear what they wanted. They didn't really back up their investment with anything very significant. One had the sense that they were shopping for UN votes, maybe and not much more.

And this gets ahead of us but it really wasn't until the Soviets discovered our own vulnerabilities in the Seventies and exploited the Cuban factor that the Soviet threat became a serious strategic issue, in my thinking. Before that it wasn't, because the Europeans were occupying many of the chairs. And the places where they weren't, where they fell apart, which was the Belgian Congo, the DRC as we call it today, we came and played a very strong role, backing up the UN intervention and that also limited the Soviet possibilities.

So I'd say by the end of the Sixties, early Seventies I didn't think the Soviets were going to have a free ride and lots of openings. I saw Africa as protected by the OAU charter, by continuing European influence, by African pragmatism and African leadership and by our own sort of hopefully skillful self restraint.

Let me just mention one thing, which to me was so interesting and that is the depth of the French fascination with and attraction to Africa. Goes back to their dilemma after the Franco-Prussian War. As we know, the Prussians won that war. One reason they won it was because they were better organized and had a better military. Another is because Germany was growing faster than France. France looked at Africa, from the 1880's on, as a manpower pool and a strategic reserve of geographic depth vis-ï¿½-vis German power. The French Army built an army in Africa which they called the Troupes Coloniales and it was an elaborate system, elaborate structure.

So one reason for their depth of resentment of Anglo-American influence, if you like, was always that Africa was a kind of strategic reservoir for them. That's where they fled to when the Vichy came in. That's where the Free French were. They were in Africa. So if you think about it strategically, from the parochial, very parochial French perspective, they didn't like the idea that the 1898 Fashoda crisis was going to come up again, in place after place and they wanted to hold on to their primacy in these different countries, like Gabon and Cï¿½te d'Ivoire and so on.

Q: 1970, how did the call from the NSC come about?

CROCKER: It's one of those situations that, I guess when you find a parking place outside your favorite restaurant you say to yourself, "Either I was very lucky or I was very skillful," but you were in the right place at the right time. A former professor of mine and a former head of the Washington Center of Foreign Policy Research, Robert Osgood, had been playing a role for Henry Kissinger on his staff of putting together a kind of planning shop within the NSC staff and Bob Osgood gave me a call and asked if I'd be interested in a position that would be opening within the kind of planning cell that was assembled within the Kissinger staff. So I thought about that for at least forty seconds but it seemed like an interesting opportunity. I talked to my wife and we were trying to figure out how this would all work but I accepted the position, basically because of a graduate school contact and being at a Washington area university. It's a classic example of how going to graduate school in Washington can make a difference for people. If you were doing this at Denver or in Boston or whatever you might get fewer phone calls like that, although that's changing today, I'm sure.

Q: You were with the NSC from when to when?

CROCKER: From June of '70, roughly, until about August of '72, just a couple of years, yeah.

Q: Could you talk a little about, when you got there, about how the NSC was perceived at the time and what it was doing.

CROCKER: The NSC was Henry Kissinger's power base for asserting and ultimately achieving mastery, or if you like domination, of the American foreign policy bureaucracy. Not everybody else in the different departments would necessarily agree with that characterization, but it's clear that he used the NSC system and process, the study process, the review process, as a way of both asserting a degree of coherence in the policy paper production process but also a degree of control, by tasking, by deadlines, by having NSC representatives on all of the different policy groups that were established in this fairly elaborate process that he set up and also by way of keeping the bureaucracy busy while he in fact was doing some of the key decision making and running some of the key policies. There was resistance and push back to some extent but there's no question that the series of NSSMs, study memoranda and decision memoranda that came out of the Kissinger NSC process was probably the most systematic and aggressive use of the NSC mechanism that anybody had ever attempted before. The staff grew from whatever it was when he came in, 18 or 20, to about 55. There have been subsequent uses of the NSC system by Kissinger's successors that have gone beyond what he did but he was the first person who used the NSC system as a power base to dominate the flow of advice and paper in quite that way into the Executive Office of the President and use it for his own, as a personal launching pad for himself. He became Secretary of State of course, a pattern that Condi Rice has followed.

Q: Was there the feeling, when you got there, that William Rogers, the Secretary of State, was sort of a weak member of the Nixon Administration and therefore we can run over

CROCKER: Well, I think there was a view that Bill Rogers was a gentleman and played by gentleman's rules and some of Rogers' lieutenants had to end up fighting the battles because Rogers wasn't looking for battles, necessarily. There was some of that. Rogers was a very decent guy and he wasn't used to the kind of sharp elbows of bureaucratic warfare that is typical in the modern White House. I might say it's not just Kissinger-Nixon. There's a bit of this that happened with Cy Vance and Zbig Brzezinski, a similar pattern happened one day with them. But there was some very, very capable and effective bureaucratic warriors, to use that term, within the State Department at that time, not only State Department but also Defense and they were able to assert their own institutional views. I'm thinking of people like U. Alexis Johnson and Joe Sisco and David Newsom and others at that time, who didn't roll over for this but it made it difficult if Rogers wasn't the kind of person who would go into the president personally every day and pound his fists on the table and say, "Your man Kissinger's getting out of line, here."

Q: Well, also, I've talked to people who worked with Rogers and he comes across as somebody who was not overly engaged in many of the issues.

CROCKER: That could also be.

Q: Fairly relaxed.

CROCKER: Very relaxed, yeah, that's probably right and not looking for fights.

Q: What was your particular piece of the action, when you got there?

CROCKER: I was asked to join a planning cell that had initially been headed up by Bob Osgood but as Bob went back to SAIS that role was taken over, more or less, by Al Haig and Dick Kennedy, two very accomplished military officers who became kind of the key inside apparat, I guess you'd call it, for Kissinger on the NSC staff. I've written extensively about the Kissinger NSC staff system, so I'll bore you if you keep asking me questions about this.

Q: Well you can bore me because, in a way, this is for a different medium, so I don't mind repetition on this.

CROCKER: But it was a kind of, it was called the Planning and Coordination Group or something like that, very bureaucratic sounding but what it really was was a kind of staff that intercepted everybody else's paper coming into Kissinger. So, in other words, if the Southeast Asia people had a memo or the European MBFR talks were going and they had a memo that was going to Kissinger, it went through Haig and Kennedy, Kennedy and Haig and I was working for Kennedy. I was working along with a then hot shot colonel named Bernard Lefky. I was working alongside a fellow named John Glancy, another fellow by the name of John Negroponte. There were four or five of us in that office, working for Kennedy and Haig and it was across the board. So I would be asked to do things on, let's say, arms supplies to the Middle East or implications of British withdrawal from east of Suez or military assistance policies or having another look it what's going to happen with the dry season offensive in Laos or what's going on in Africa and the Indian Ocean. My background was very much sort of Middle East, Africa, Indian Ocean geographically, so I naturally gravitated to them but I wasn't geographically assigned.

Q: You talk about these security memorandum.

CROCKER: Memoranda.

Q: It's all very good but a piece of paper but what, was it a feeling that if something went through the system, something happened? In other words, were these more just interesting or there's a lot of action that came from this process?

CROCKER: I think it varied. I think in some case they were ways of keeping the bureaucracy busy by studying issues and analyzing issues and coming up with predictable bureaucratic compromises and fudges over the way things were going. But in other cases they sorted out and they provided a kind of basis for establishing what the, if you like the policy or the ideological framework was for a subject. In some cases there was really a need for decisions, because you were talking about the military assistance budget or how much should be spent on civil defense. I spent about three quarters of a year on a massive interagency project on civil defense planning. Not a very high profile, sexy issue, but a very important issue. Either to bury it or to resuscitate it or do something with it but it was driven by budget issues and how much are we going to fund.

Q: One has heard, in sort of comparable time, I mean in a decade, that the Chinese were going underground, the Soviets were supposed to have built up a huge subterranean system and all that. In the long run, what were we doing on this sort of thing?

CROCKER: Well, not very much, as it turned out and what we were doing was always, as it is in our federal system, very indirect. We were seeding money for states to pickup on. We were trying to create some common doctrines but with fifty different states it makes it rather difficult to be doing it at the national level. But there were areas of spending that one could focus on and there were also questions of strategic intent and whether you spend money on these things and it becomes known publicly, as it will, that that's what you're doing you're sending a signal. If you have no civil defense it means you're holding your population as kind of a hostage. If you have a lot of civil defense, it means maybe you're thinking about a first strike strategy. So all those questions were thrashed around a lot as it related to a nuclear strategy.

Something else we would do periodically is dust off the contingency plans for potential U.S. military involvement in different parts of the world, depending on events. What happens if so and so is overthrown? What do we do if Chinese and the Soviets go to war over their tensions on the Ussuri River, another kind of live contingency that came up at the time.

I think the NSC management saw it as in the interests of the White House to get a little bit of control over the way the Defense Department was thinking about contingencies and to drive the process of thinking forward. I think some of these decision papers were quite real. Quite often what we on the staff would do would be to write parallel analyses of what was going on in the formal bureaucratic process. So there'd be an interagency paper and then we as junior staff and I was pretty young at the time, would be asked for another view and we would attach our view to the interagency paper and we'd send them both forward and Haig and Kissinger would do with them what they would. So that was the nature of the experience.

It was obviously exciting and interesting work. It was also, in the heat of the action there were some very dramatic times. There were also some times of great amusement, as we helped the staff to write the series of Nixon's foreign policy reports that were sent to the Congress each year, quite a comprehensive effort to sum up American foreign policy, as we now do with the so-called National Security Strategy Memoranda, which are only every four years. Back then we were doing it every years.

Q: I would have thought, particularly at that time, you had two people who were extremely competent in foreign affairs, the president and national security advisor, which is not always the case. Did you feel the hand of Nixon, at your level, did it sort of penetrate down, "No, no, no, let's try this" or that or something?

CROCKER: We did. We'd see memos that would come back, memos that had gone from Henry to the president that would come back with the president's marginal comment. We would see those occasionally, when we were dealing with directly operational paper: should we or shouldn't we receive the Portuguese leader who's coming to town for a lengthy discussion of the Azores and southern Africa, for example. So we would see those kinds of marginal comments and have a sense of the president's gut instinct.

Q: Was there a feeling, we were still, at that point, involved in Vietnam, that military intervention elsewhere, unless it were a small island problem or something, just was out of the question?

CROCKER: There was no question, this period that we're talking about, both of Nixon's terms in fact were as heavily influenced by Vietnam as today's president, Bush 43, is influenced by Iraq. You can't gainsay it. It's there. It was on the evening news every single night. We had a policy then, the so-called Nixon Doctrine, of trying to Vietnamize the war. Eventually, even after impeachment and Watergate and all the rest, the administration of Jerry Ford lost control of Congress on the Vietnam issue and Congress undercut Kissinger's ability to do what he would otherwise have done, probably.

The North Vietnamese read us like a book. They knew that we could be defeated at home, we didn't need to be defeated on the battlefield. That's the way they read us.

I think this overwhelmed a lot of things. It made it more difficult, for example, for us to deal with the Soviets with the strength we might otherwise have been able to on strategic arms or on their activity in other parts of the world. It made us somewhat more vulnerable.

It obviously created the framework and the environment in which we had an opening to China, which was an opening that we needed more than the Chinese did, arguably and was considered a great breakthrough, a great success but it was also one that we needed.

So when you read Kissinger's memoirs it becomes very clear that he felt he was dealing, as the advisor to the most powerful man in the world, as a person who had one hand tied behind his back. That's what Vietnam did to us.

Q: By the time you got to the NSC, how did you and maybe your junior colleagues view the Soviet Union? Was this a power on the move? How was the Cold War viewed at that time?

CROCKER: Interesting question. I would say that I believed then (and still believe now), that the Soviet Union was an ossified and even criminalized dictatorship of a small elite that was very conservative but also very, very determined. And it was interesting to watch as we tried to talk to them about different problems around the world but mainly about arms control and about Vietnam, you got a sense that they were reading us very carefully, reading our domestic politics very carefully, reading Vietnam very carefully. We saw them as a genuinely global adversary that would take advantage of vacuums, would fill vacuums if vacuums were created and would look for cheap opportunities to exploit vacuums.

The classic case in my experience and one that I worked on a lot subsequently of course was central and southern Africa, where the end of European staying power created a transition and the issue was would that transition be filled by African leadership or would it be filled by something else. In most cases, until the mid-Seventies, it was filled by African leadership and by residual European roles, as we were talking about and to some extent by the U.S. in the Congo, in that central part of Africa.

But '74, '75, with the Portuguese revolution, that all changed. The Portuguese just collapsed. They literally collapsed and they left behind an utter shambles. It was a worse shambles than the Belgians left behind in the Congo.

If you look at southern and central Africa as a kind of strategic balance sheet this is not insignificant and the concern of many of us was that the Soviets with their friends would seek to take advantage of this and change the entire chemistry of that region in a way that was not only hostile to our interests but hostile to the natural development of that region.

So, yes, I did see them as a global adversary, but a global adversary that was taking advantage of various conflicts and local issues. It wasn't that they were inventing conflicts. They were exploiting conflict.

Q: But did you see them as a staying power? There seem to have been certain things within the Russian psyche or something that don't make a very good colonialist or permit them to work in a foreign environment.

CROCKER: I think I know what you're getting at. It's hard to know to what extent one is imposing views based on hindsight but I'm sure that we knew enough by then to know that the Africans experienced a lot of racism and that the Russians weren't great at cross-cultural communications with Arabs and Africans.

Q: Lumumba University was not a great success.

CROCKER: It wasn't a brilliant success, no. I think that's right.

But it wasn't necessarily a question of them wanting to hold territory but rather to helpcreate weak and dependent proxy governments that would deny access to Western nations, including us, of course. By access I mean overflight, I mean staging, I mean port visits and I also mean investments and trade in raw materials. We're talking about energy, in the case of the Persian Gulf, which is one that I watched and worked on a lot, especially after the British decision to pull down the flag east of Suez. That was 1971, when I was on the NSC staff.

And then in '74-'75 in central and southern Africa, where the issue was not so much energy as non-fuel minerals, there were some who also argued that the Cape sea route was somehow a great strategic prize which the Soviets were determined to seize from Western naval power. I never took that very seriously but there were people who did.

Q: It is a little hard, but, again, in hindsight, to think, what are they going to do? Are they going to have frigates stationed off the Cape of Good Hope or something?

CROCKER: The argument would be that if the Suez Canal is closed by hostile Arab/Soviet power, then the routes that bring tankers and other things from the Gulf to Europe could be either interrupted or attacked, you could have raids on commerce on the high seas and if you had friendlies ashore in places like Mozambique, the Mozambique Channel is a bit of a choke point, then that might be awkward. And even more so if there were friendlies ashore in South Africa, where you have really rough weather down there, you sometimes need help to get around that cape.

That's the argument. As I say, I didn't ever buy it, because it struck me that this would expose the Soviet Navy to countermeasures that they would not be able to cope with. I didn't think the Soviet naval balance was such that they could take that risk so far away from their home bases. They were building a blue water navy, but they hadn't built it yet.

Q: I want to go back to one thing you were saying, when you were working on civil defense, as we know today, with the Department of Homeland Security, this is probably more a domestic political issue than almost anything else, allocation of funds. How did you all approach this, state by state? Were you getting political input, you have to make sure Wyoming gets its share and that sort of thing?

CROCKER: We didn't get that down into the weeds, because we were dealing more with questions of doctrine and broad spending authority for different categories of spending. As I recall, it's been a long time now, this was highly classified stuff, but as I recall we weren't talking about large numbers of funds to be transferred to the states. It was more a question of encouraging states to either build or not build, using their own money and it was a question of deciding what level of preparations we should be seen undertaking, because of strategic signaling that we're doing, on the SALT talks and things like that. So, did we want to be sending a message to the other side, namely the Soviets? We were talking more about the Soviets than we were about Congress or Wyoming.

Q: The various arms limitation talks, how optimistic were you all? Was this going to be a viable thing or was this a period of marking time?

CROCKER: I wasn't involved directly in the arms control talks, so I'm not well placed to comment. I guess my sense was that many of us who were more junior thought that Kissinger was fairly brilliant in the way he managed to negotiate us into a series of discussions with the Soviets and obviously the president led the way on this. That gave us a decent shot at doing something to limit the strategic competition in our interest, at a time when we had one hand tied behind our backs and we were obviously on the defensive. They were building without much evident constraint. We did face constraints. We faced guns and butter constraints. We faced war constraints. So I thought it was an impressive effort, but I watched it from a distance. I wasn't directly involved.

Q: How'd you view Alexander Haig as a taskmaster?

CROCKER: Well I got to know him pretty well from that experience and to see him in action often enough to know that he had a kind of locker room style of bureaucratic procedure. He was quite capable of speaking his mind and being very blunt. I think when Kissinger blew a gasket and Kissinger was known on occasion to lose his temper at his own staff, Haig's own instincts in that regard were probably influenced as well and he became somebody who would growl and erupt and not throw things at you but he got red in the face and that in turn led his underlings to yell. So we spent some long hours redoing memos and stuff when they didn't quite come up to snuff.

It was a very top down, centralized system. It was run by, a lot of skilled military officers were running this inside staff that I mentioned, but the overall atmosphere was on the whole collegial and we had some good colleagues there, some outstanding people worked on that staff and many of them became lifelong friends of mine. People like Peter Rodman, John Negroponte, and Hal Saunders, really good people.

Q: Dick Kennedy was sort of the bureaucratic mainstay, wasn't he, sort of the head of making sure the paper went to the right place and that sort of thing? I'm not denigrating, 'cause it's a very important

CROCKER: He was the coordinator of all coordinators and he made sure that things got internally cleared the way they were supposed to be. He also made sure that paper was intercepted if it hadn't been cleared properly. So he wasn't always very popular. He was seen as the consummate bureaucratic turf manager, if you like, for Haig and then of course for Kissinger. He played a fairly assertive game as well as within the staff. And he had some areas of his own expertise that he was quite accomplished in and particularly when it came to issues of nuclear enrichment and nuclear proliferation.

Q: He continued that until his death, dealing with that.

CROCKER: That's right.

Q: To get a little feel for the atmosphere, did you feel like you were a junior master of the universe, you and your colleagues, that you really were at the heart of the government?

CROCKER: Well, we knew we were at the heart of the government. There wasn't any doubt in our minds. All we had to do was view Marvin Kalb's pieces or read Murray Marder or Bernie Gwertzman or whoever it was was writing back then. We would just have to read their stuff to realize that Kissinger had figured out a way to become himself a kind of master of the foreign policy process. I think we saw some of the occasional downsides of a centralized approach, but the downside of a non-centralized or incoherent approach always stuck in my mind as well. I look back, sometimes fondly, from when I was in the Reagan Administration at the relative coherence of the Nixon approach, 'cause you had a president who was engaged, you had a president who knew the brief, a president who would work closely with a high powered NSC advisor. You compare that with Reagan, who tolerated a kind of open warfare between his cabinet secretaries and departments that I don't think Nixon would ever have tolerated for a minute.

I look back wringing my hands in despair, sometimes, about the lack of coherence, the lack of discipline, the lack of an NSC system that works. We saw in the Reagan period and we're getting ahead of ourselves here, time after time the NSC system simply collapsed, it didn't work. There was no imposed discipline on the players. My then boss George Shultz used to remark that when something gets decided in Washington it gets undecided five minutes later. That didn't happen with the Nixon-Kissinger apparat. Whether you liked it or not, that didn't happen then.

Q: Who was checking on it, to make sure

CROCKER The NSC was checking.

Q: This was part of your brief?

CROCKER: That was part of our brief. We would actually read the cable traffic to see if the agencies were loyally carrying out the president's policy and if they weren't, dammit, we're going to do something about it and we would call up a desk officer or call up a country director and say, "About this incoming cable from Ambassador Zilch out here in Tananarivo, does he realize what president he's working for?"

Q: Did you get involved in the perpetual fight between particularly the Defense Department and the State Department, or was this sort of I take it kept under control, or did the count?

CROCKER: Oh, they counted and that tension is always going to be there on areas that bring them into direct touch with each other. I think it's gotten completely out of hand today. Back then there was a greater degree of balance. Our ambassadors still had the authority in the field that they should have and you didn't have the Defense Department running around conducting intelligence policy and covert operations and the State Department and everyone else doing public diplomacy and everything else that you have now. But there were areas of tension. There were areas where you'd see a natural division of interest.

For example, to think of a case that would illustrate what I'm talking about, there was a policy review of what should be the future of our Persian Gulf fleet, which was tiny, back then.

Q: COMMIDEASTFOR. The Greenwich Bay, a seaplane tender. I was in Dhahran earlier on.

CROCKER: So you know better than I what it was. It was one sort of stationary ship and a couple of mobile ships.

So the issue was, now that Harold Wilson has decided what he had decided in terms of the future of Her Majesty's forces east of Suez, running them down to the point that there was very little left. They had the RAF at Masirah and Sharjah and you had Diego Garcia and you had a little bit of a presence, still, in Oman and Malaysia. But the Brits were leaving. They were leaving Aden. How big should MIDEASTFOR become? What should we do with Bahrain? How forward leaning should we be in asking for additional port visits, provision of rights to have ships stationed out there and get shore leave for our sailors and so on?

I think our view was more one that was closer to State's, probably, of trying to keep the British engaged and doing things that would be inclined to encourage them to stay engaged as best we could, as a source of training and advice and arms support and so on for Oman and other countries. Perhaps the navy was a little bit more inclined to see if we couldn't just sort of fill the British shoes and displace them. After all, they were leaving, so why not just go in there? We were a little more concerned about the sensibilities of the Arab states in the region, who may not have wanted to have such a visible U.S. naval presence. They may have wanted them more over the horizon and they still do, sometimes. So I think State and Defense have a natural, let's call it a dialogue over these kinds of issues and they're bound to see it a little bit based on their own relative priority.

Q: Something that's always bothered me about the NSC, particularly when they recruit from outside, when you're dealing with the Persian Gulf, the State Department has people who for the most part, who are dealing with it, have served in the Persian Gulf. They know the personalities, they know the geography and all and someone who comes in who may have a great academic background or have read a lot about it or just be a Washington operator and yet, there isn't that sort of feet on the ground experience, when you're working in the NSC. Did you feel that?

CROCKER: The NSC then was composed of people who were seconded over from the military, from State and from the Agency, as well as outside hires like myself who were from the academic world or think tanks who'd come in with Henry. People like Peter Rodman, for example. But if you look around the composition of the Kissinger staff, you will see quite a diverse range of people from different backgrounds, some of them from State. I think what's unique about the NSC is the complexity of the environment. When it's doing its job right, it is supposed to reflect up to the president a range of interagency views, not just the views of one agency. And secondly it's supposed to protect the interests of the White House and the president, as distinguished from the interests of cabinet secretaries, who may have different interests and different bureaucratic pressures, different institutional agendas, different congressional relationships and so on.

And you have to have a head for policy, you have to have an interest in policy and maybe even in strategy if you wanted to be effective in the NSC. I would argue to you that some people from the State Department have that interest and some people don't and the same is true for people from Defense. Some people from Defense are more interested in budgets and hardware and toys. They're not so interested, really, in high policy.

We were interested in high policy and how the pieces fit together in a strategic sense. That's the way I like to think we saw it.

The typical complaint that we would hear, that I would hear from colleagues about the State Department was, "All they're interested in is good relations with their client."

Q: There's a lot of validity to that. I speak as a consular officer who often was trying to get somebody out of jail and the ambassador would think, "I hate to go to the emir to talk about some guy who's in jail."

CROCKER: You're spending your capital.

It is a clichï¿½ and it's a clichï¿½ that has a basis, which is that some time the sum total of State Department input into a policy document is "our interest is in having improved relations with the president of X," you fill in the blank. It could be Gabon or it could be Saudi Arabia or it could be whatever. I've always been very scathing about that, because frankly I'm not interested in good relations as an end in itself. I'm interested in effective advancement of American national interests, which is a different thing.

Q: Absolutely. Was there an ability to develop a world view, or was Kissinger sort of laying down an outline of where we want to go and how we want to do this, or were you very much absorbed in the details and not seeing where it fit into that world view?

CROCKER: I think it was a mixture. There were times when I was down in the weeds pretty deep, I'm sure, at that time, being fairly junior on that staff. I was about to be promoted on the staff when I decided to accept an offer to come to Georgetown. You get into particular sets of issues and meetings and writing tasks and deadlines and it does tend to narrow your perspective, but if I had an overview it was a realpolitik overview and it's one that I felt more and more comfortable with going forward, a Kissingerian sense of realpolitik. I'm an unabashed realist and have stayed that way ever since and debates today over whether the Iraq War was a good idea or not, I'm thoroughly in the camp of Brent Scowcroft, who is thoroughly in the camp of what I'm talking about, which is a camp that understands the notion of limits and understands that there's upside as well as downside to being Wilsonian in our foreign policy. We are inevitably going to be somewhat Wilsonian because of who we are.

Q: Wilsonian meaning

CROCKER: Exporting our values, exporting our principles, liberal internationalism, the notion of democratic peace, the notion that it is our job in the world to start every day by figuring out what sermon we will deliver to the rest of mankind, because after all, we are a city on a hill. All you have to do is go to the noon briefing at the State Department. Just the tone of it, it doesn't matter whether it's Democrats or Republicans, the tone of it implies that basically we sit in judgment upon mankind.

Q: We institutionalize it for example with things like human rights and other things of this nature.

Were there any particular issues, during this two years you were at the NSC, that really come to mind, or personalities you got involved in, to give a feel for the operation during that time?

CROCKER: I have very vivid memories of a few of them, people like Marshall Wright, whom I worked with on some African issues, a very strong personality from whom I learned a lot about advocacy and about writing and things like that. Marshall was an able person. I'm still in touch with him a little bit from time to time.

Hal Saunders I learned a lot from and have an abiding respect for. A very interesting fellow and he had some people working for him whom I stayed in touch over the years. Win Lord and Peter Rodman, working as the gurus who would try to figure out how to make Kissinger humorous when he got in front of the camera or how to write good speeches for him or how to take the first whack at policy review papers that he was mulling over..

So there was a range of interesting characters there. I don't know if this is very common, but to this day there are from time to time reunions of the Kissinger NSC staff.

Q: I think it was a special time.

CROCKER: You had people like Bob Hormats, for example, who's now the vice chairman of Goldman Sachs and Dick Solomon who now heads up the U.S. Institute of Peace where I was chairman for 12 years, and so on. Some very interesting personalities that one wants to stay in touch with, because they were good friends and worthwhile people. People who've gone on to do interesting things with their lives.

Pete Vaky was another person I should mention, 'cause I worked a little bit on some Latin American issues under his guidance. And then he came up to Georgetown, after he took leave from the NSC. I think he was diplomat in residence. And the then dean of the Georgetown School of Foreign Service, Peter Krogh, asked Pete Vaky, I'm talking about Viron P. Vaky to have a look at our masters degree curriculum and Pete led an interdepartmental review up here at Georgetown and came up with some proposals for a new MSFS program. And then Pete came back to me on the NSC staff where'd he been and basically pitched me on coming up to run it.

So that's how that transition occurred. It occurred, Peter Krogh and Pete Vaky together approaching me and making me an offer which was attractive in academic terms and was something that I knew I wanted to do at some point. When I mentioned this internally on the staff there was a sense of shock. "Why? You're doing well here and we're going to bump you up one notch bureaucratically and give you some additional things to do. Why would you leave?"

I had a sense that maybe I'd experienced what I was going to experience for the time being and it was time for me to get back to the world that I had always intended to have as part of my life, which was the academic world. I didn't want to miss my chance to take an interesting position at a major Washington university, and the new initiatives being developed at the School were very attractive.

Q: How did you find the product or the input of the CIA at that time? What role would you say they played?

CROCKER: They tied us up in knots with all the paper they produced. Kissinger used to refer to them, in his guttural accent, as "those Talmudic scholars." Of course he was talking about the analysts. He wasn't talking about the operators. Things were very compartmented between the two sides of the house back then, as they still are.

There were a number of people who came from Agency backgrounds, typically from the analytical side, but not always, on the staff. I found them interesting to work with but I did have a sense that maybe some of them needed to spend a little more time in the field.

Q: I think this is one of the criticisms or comments that I get from people who talk about the difference between CIA and Intelligence and Research at the State Department, that State Department's INR is smaller and usually is closer to the policy people, so it's a little more action oriented, as opposed to a more Talmudic approach.

CROCKER: I think it's hard probably to generalize but in an ivory tower you're not allowed to come out into daylight very often. Back then you couldn't go to meetings that easily and you couldn't travel that easily, so it was hard, I think, for Agency people on the analytical side to be as in touch as they would often have liked to be. That's of course changed over the years since then, we're talking 35 years ago.

Q: Often I've gotten the reverse, people who've said they're in the academic world but they wanted to get where the action was. Obviously you were where the action was. Was this an offer you couldn't refuse?

CROCKER: Looking back on it, it's interesting and it's not the only time in my career that I've turned my back on the government and declined to take an opportunity. I guess deep down I'm a bit of a rebel, maybe, and I just don't like being dependent or having a feeling that I need to always consistently do what the bureaucracy would expect. Plus it was a very attractive opportunity. Not financially, heaven knows, but then nothing was attractive financially back in those days, either in government or in academe.

But in terms of career possibilities, this was a position that had the possibility of becoming a tenure track professorial position, a joint academic and administrative assignment to really build a graduate program up to a leading position among front rank International Relations programs. What had existed before was an 18-month, off-the-shelf masters, a stepchild of the social science departments. It had some good people, good faculty and good students, but it wasn't a full time program, free standing program with its own dedicated status and identity. It had no full time administration. It had no recruitment program, it had no placement program, it had no internship program and it didn't really have its own real curriculum tailored for professionally-oriented students. It had a scotch-taped curriculum.

What Vaky and others designed, which I developed further, was a full fledged curriculum with a specific mandate to train future professionals in the international relations field, both public and private and to do so knowing that the competition we were going to go head to head with was Fletcher and SAIS and Columbia and Princeton. We weren't going to mess around. So we had to really build up our recruitment program and get ourselves on the map and become better known and do a lot more for our students and with our students than had been done previously.

I saw that as an interesting institution building challenge and a rather exciting one. But I also saw it as a chance to write and to do something I hadn't been able to do before, which was to document through some sort of scholarly articles some of what I'd experienced and also some of my PhD work, 'cause I'd never published my PhD, either. So it was at Georgetown when I came back that I had the time and the ability to write a few articles that were in refereed journals, that sort of thing.

Q: We're talking about '72, when you're coming back to Georgetown. To get a feel for sort of the academic administrative environment, first place, are you breaking people's rice bowls, when you set up, one always hears about academic wars being very vicious and all that? Were there problems in setting up a program?

CROCKER: Well, it's a good question. Of course there are problems because there's lots of politics in academe. But I was fortunate, I was recruited to come to the School of Foreign Service to be the first fulltime director of its graduate program, which is called the Master of Science in Foreign Service program, MSFS for short, which had just been reviewed and assessed by a very impressive bunch of faculty and outsiders.

That exercise had been led by the new dean of the school, Peter Krogh, who had come to Georgetown two years previously and a visiting diplomat in residence by the name of Viron, otherwise known as Pete, Vaky. The goal was to create what you might call a professionally oriented, full time, four semester program of graduate study, which was aimed at being a terminal degree, not in the sense that it was life-threatening (!) but that it was meant for non-academic careers.

So it was a four semester interdisciplinary masters, which is a more demanding course of study in some ways than the kind of 'stepping stone' masters that people do if they're going on to get a PhD in history or something like that. It's got different requirements.

So I inherited this review process and was the first full time director. I was blessed that I had Pete coming ahead of me, I had Peter Krogh as dean, supplied a lot of air cover, made it somewhat simpler to work with some of the key departments that contained the faculty resources that we would need to run this program. And I had a good faculty committee and I worked to strengthen it as a dedicated curricular and institutional planning group and we met frequently to talk about how the new program was going. So I guess I had the wind at my back.

Q: Peter Krogh, I've heard from my colleagues in the Foreign Service, he was known as an operator, really knew how to get money, get things. This is often an extremely valuable ability.

CROCKER: No question about it. He still has that ability. He's a great people person. He knows how to shake the tree when it comes to fund raising. He was good at that, but he also was, more importantly, I think, a conceptualizer, an entrepreneur in the best sense, who had ideas and saw possibilities and created opportunities. Not every one of his ideas was always a winner but a very high percentage, he had a heck of a batting average. And he was dean here for some 25 years. He's now dean emeritus and he's still teaching here. But I worked with him throughout the period I was MSFS program director and I came in as assistant professor and, thanks to some good fortune, I managed to get myself into the tenure system and I got bumped up to associate professor before I joined the State Department in 1981. So that was about eight, eight and a half years of my life and it was a very interesting period, lot of challenges, a lot of retail time spent advising students, their careers, advising students on what courses to take, which faculty to avoid, which faculty to run for or run from, doing a lot of work on things like admissions and outreach and alumni relations and curriculum development, all these different parts of the job of running a graduate program.

Q: These masters students, who did you see them as being?

CROCKER: It's interesting that you ask that. The School of Foreign Service had the name before the U.S. Foreign Service had the name "foreign service."

Q: 1924, we got it.

CROCKER: We got it in 1919, when the School of Foreign Service was created by Father Edmund Walsh. He always meant by that term service in the broadest sense, in various internationally-oriented careers. Today it's a different situation. Today the program is forty per cent, 35-40 per cent, foreign students. Back in the 1970s when I ran it, the program was probably more like 15 or 20 % international students.

Q: Did you, given your background and interests, tuck away in your mind you wanted to get African representation, to train Africans in foreign service?

CROCKER: Yes and we had a few from time to time. Money factors were always central in that regard, but we had a few and we reached out when we could. We're doing a lot better today than we did back then, but, sure, I would always have a particular soft spot if I saw a great application coming in from Africa, I would try to figure out how we could make this work.

At the same time I was doing that, I was also becoming a research scholar. So I had to do my own teaching, I had to do my own writing and research and try to get qualified for tenure. So that was a dual responsibility.

Q: What fields were you researching in?

CROCKER: I did work in several fields, some relating to my doctoral work. Writing on the African military and military development, the emergence of African military institutions, security relations between major Western powers, major communist powers and African countries, the role of the U.S. in African conflict issues, which is of course still an interest of mine today. So that was one set of interests.

Another, which came directly out of my experience in the NSC, was the way the foreign policy process works and what it means to have a coherent foreign policy. We used to joke that

Q: I'm not quite sure what you mean.

CROCKER: Right, exactly. We liked to think during the heyday of the Nixon-Kissinger period, before Watergate and so forth, that this really was coherence, that the NSC system as designed by Kissinger and Nixon was not only a conspiracy to control power in the White House and to marginalize other actors but it was actually a coherent way to make foreign policy and sometimes we made good foreign policy as a result. Now people used to joke that the real practitioner of coherent foreign policy was Genghis Khan. But leaving that aside, I wrote a fair amount about issues of foreign policy management and bureaucratic politics. I did some work with the Murphy Commission on the organization of the government for foreign policy, which was interesting. So those were two areas I worked in.

Q: You mentioned that you had counseled students who were coming into the masters program, what courses to take, what courses to avoid. I have to state my prejudice, over the years and people I've interviewed, including a man I was interviewing yesterday, who was ambassador to Malaysia, Asian hand, basically a Japanese expert, he was talking about he majored at Northwestern in the Sixties in political science and found it almost useless, it was very quantitative, even in the early days. I'd like your take on political science, which seems to have turned into, I won't call it a pseudoscience but a science of quantitative measurements of things and all that. How did you find this?

CROCKER: One does not come to Georgetown University to do quantitative political science, let me start there. Georgetown's political science department, which is called the government department, very consciously and that has not changed, I doubt if it will, is not a quantitatively oriented place. It is a qualitatively oriented place that does a lot of work that you might call normative or theoretical. As you know, the field of political science has four subfields, as a rule, in most departments: American government, political theory, comparative politics and international relations. The MSFSprogram that I was involved with would draw mostly from comparative politics and international relations but in neither case did we have a lot of emphasis on pure quantitative political science.

We did have some emphasis on what I'd call theoretical international relations, the Theory and Practice of International Relations is the title of one of our courses. That meant that you're looking at different paradigms of how you think about the way power is distributed and should be distributed in the international system. Are you a realist or neorealist, are you a liberal or a neo-liberal or a functionalist, are you a constructivist, in today's terminology, or neo-Marxian, which is another paradigm, of course. So we thought it was important and we still do that students be very sensitive to and aware of the basic assumptions you take into a review of what's going on in the world, that at least you have a critical self-awareness of what your assumptions are - for example about what causes war, what causes conflict.

I spent six years teaching a course during the Seventies called The Use of Force in Foreign Policy. We started out by trying to understand where does war come from, what are the origins of war? Is it innate, is it learned behavior or is it innate genetic behavior? Is it based on misperception? Is it based on structural relationships between countries and security dilemmas? Is it based on arms races? What causes war?

It was important (and still is) for people entering the international field to be very sensitive to these conceptual frameworks. It doesn't meant it has to be quantitative conceptual frameworks and my sense of it, what you can measure quantitatively may or may not be interesting in conceptual terms. Sometimes what's most easily measured is least relevant. So that's my view of quantitative political science and we don't have a lot of it here at Georgetown.

Q: It's just that, looking at the field, one of the things I've been struck with is how little connect there is in talking to people who've been involved as worker bees in the foreign policy apparatus, how little contact or interest there is in what's being written about it and certainly at the political science level, those ones which are quantitative, it's almost completely dismissed.

CROCKER: There is, however, I think some interesting work that can be done to either debunk or to validate common theories that we walk around with, that we may have learned at our grandmother's knee or whatever.

Q: Or other low joints, as Dean Acheson used to say.

CROCKER: Yes, right, exactly. So, for example, I saw some research recently that was in this field, using highly quantitative statistical manipulations to try to understand why is it that in the post-1945 period more and more wars are ending in a tie, ending in a draw or a truce, rather than ending in a victory for one side. One can try to explain that in lots of ways and some of those ways, given the databases that political scientists have assembled, some of those ways can be empirically tested. They can be tested statistically. Some of them are much harder to test that way. But at least it's an interesting exercise to try to figure out what are the correlations or what are the factors that might explain the growing number of ties or draws. Now, I'm not trying to sell you quantitative political science. What I'm saying is that some of it is more relevant than others.

Q: I completely buy that. The fact that somebody would take a look at this and say, "Hey, wait a minute, we notice that you're not having lots of victors and defeated, but you're having a lot of people sort of ending up in a tie and then having to live with themselves." Bosnia, something I know something about

CROCKER: Lots of cases like that. One of the answers one might come to is that there's more balancing going on, or that the relationships between parties are more equalized or that maybe today's wars are between weaker entities and they can't fight for so long.

Q: I know when I was in Athens in the Seventies and there was the usual flare-up between Greece and Turkey and our military attachï¿½ said, "On both sides, they can probably fight for about six days and then they'll run out of ammunition."

CROCKER: "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition."

Q: During this time, were we able to get, in the studies, a good view of the Soviet Union, did you run across sort of the Marxist approach versus other approaches or how did we look at the Soviet Union, would you say?

CROCKER: Well, when you say "we," I presume you're directing it towards me.

Q: I am directing it towards you.

CROCKER: Georgetown is a place very close to power. It's always been very close to power because of its location. People like to joke about Georgetown, that 'it was founded by the Society of Jesus on a bluff overlooking the Potomac and has been run that way ever since!'. We don't, in fact, overlook the Potomac. We are very close to the Potomac.

I think that my own views were very shaped by the kind of scholars I worked with and the kind of public servants that I worked with, in that era. I thought that we did have a global adversary and that global adversary was not only a traditional geopolitical adversary, it had some really nasty qualities, too. It was kind of a criminal enterprise, the Soviet Union. The Communist Party was a highly corrupt criminal enterprise that fed like parasites off the people and the resource base. The Soviet economy was the only economy ever known to man that actually reduced the value when it manufactured something. It took natural resources and reduced their value with the output of whatever it was, machine tools or shoes or whatever, with only, the exception being, of course, the military and aerospace, which was very advanced.

But in any case, without overdoing the Evil Empire discourse, I did feel that Soviet-U.S. rivalry was one that we had to prevail in and we had to prevail in it in particular parts of the world. We had stabilized Europe. We'd made fools of ourselves in Southeast Asia. The Soviets enjoyed watching us bleed in Southeast Asia and they probably drew excessively bullish conclusions from that, including that they could build themselves a world empire, a blue water navy and expand to wherever we were in some way hamstrung. So to me the Middle East and Africa were two areas where the U.S.-Soviet competition needed to be handled with great skill and care and not necessarily in military terms but in diplomatic terms, in many cases. So I felt that Brezhnev and his colleagues were not really all that enlightened and didn't mean well, either for us or for our friends in Africa and the Middle East.

So that's the way I looked at it. I recognized the notion of a military competition in these third areas was probably not the ideal way to play the game and I also recognized that we'd have to get deeply involved in the politics of those areas if we wanted to be effective in competing with them. We couldn't just resort to platitudes and clichï¿½s.

Q: With your masters program, you are on the Potomac, rather than overlooking the Potomac, but obviously Washington, D.C. is rather a small city, compares probably to Cleveland or something like that in size, but it's loaded with both talent and experience. How it's played out is another matter, but how did you draw on this?

CROCKER: It's a good point. First of all, I had just come from government and a number of others who were connected to this program had also had some experience in government. Our dean, Peter Krogh, had created, shortly after I got here, something called the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, which Martin Herz helped to create and many distinguished people from the diplomatic career have been there ever since, as visiting associates and what have you. So that was kind of a window on academe for the Foreign Service as well as the Georgetown University window on the world of diplomacy and it was a good interface there. A number of associates that we would recruit would teach courses for our undergraduate or graduate students. In addition, we had a little bit of what you might call walking around money and we would supplement the course offerings of the full time faculty by reaching out to adjunct faculty, which is a famous tradition of Washington area universities.

Adjunct faculty in fact sustain most of the universities in the Washington area and some of the adjunct faculty you find available make a huge contribution, because they bring the world of practice to the classroom and they can convey a little bit before students actually get into the job market, a little bit about what the job environment is like and what kinds of skills are required, in terms of the way you think, the way you prepare, the way you brief, the way you speak, the way you write, these kinds of things, which are very important. 45 page footnoted term papers are not what gets you ahead in a career in government, so thinking in that kind of operational way, it gave a kind of professional cast to what we were doing. We would reach out as the need arose for coverage of particular areas, both to think tank scholars and to visiting diplomats and retired diplomats and intelligence officers and military, as well, to teach certain courses.

I'd say we took advantage of being in Washington, to answer your question. We'd be crazy not to and of course it's great value, because what you pay an adjunct professor is chump change, basically.

Q: During this time, we're talking about basically the Seventies, how did you view developments in Africa during this period, from on the bluff here?

CROCKER: Well, it was a critical decade, in terms of two things: in terms of Africa's emergence, after all this was really the second decade of Africa's independence. Some of the territories and colonies in the southern part of Africa were not yet under majority rule or independent, so the Seventies was the penultimate decade of that struggle. You saw the wars over Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe and the wars in the former Portuguese territories of Angola and Mozambique and then the war that was getting started in the Seventies in Namibia.

So this was Africa's second decade of independence. There was a lot of, you might call it turmoil, a lot of lessons being learned, a lot of political experiments by different kinds of African leaders, a good deal of forum shopping by African leaders to see where they got a better deal, in Europe or in the U.S. or with Moscow and the Soviets' clients, or with the Chinese, for that matter.

I like to equate Africa in the Seventies and Eighties to the environment of a singles bar, where African countries would come to the bar and see what kind of relationships were available. African leaders knew how to play the game and they played it and we felt we knew how to play the game and we played it.

Q: Also, there was the thing, I think they call it today, "hooking up." This is a short-term relationship that comes out of a singles bar. I think a lot of these countries were able to play the short-term relationship card.

CROCKER: Yes and even when they weren't they often threatened to, so that conversations with African leaders in the Seventies and Eighties were often about what have you done for me lately and why did he get so much more than I got and I look next door and I see the way the other side treats their friends. A lot of that kind of behavior in client-patron relations.

Q: Looking at that time, as somebody who really cared about the areas, where did you see sort of the bright spots and the dark spots?

CROCKER: I'll come to that in a second, but I was saying that there were two things in the Seventies that were very important. One was Africa's second decade of independence and some of the unresolved issues that still had to be fought out.

The other was that this was a particular period of learning, and of competition and confrontation between the U.S. and our global adversaries. So the Seventies were the time, obviously, of Cambodia, of Vietnam, of the Horn of Africa (the Ogaden wars), the Cuban intervention in Angola, the overthrow of the Shah, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. And all of this shaped very much the way folks like me though about the U.S. role in the world and what we should or shouldn't be doing. This was the incubator of the Committee on the Present Danger and such efforts to try to figure out how we could compete more effectively.

So on the one hand you have an African shakeout process, African leaders and African countries experimenting and struggling in some ways. On the other hand you have the global geopolitical confrontation in a pretty active phase. Those two things converged in the Seventies.

Now where were the bright spots in Africa? There were not a whole lot of bright spots. It depends how you define "bright." In that era bright meant stable. Bright could also mean reliably friendly. But if it was just basically a corrupt dictatorship, obviously that was a pretty thin basis of relationship but you recognized that you had to work with some of your friends who might not be very good at leadership and governance except in the sense of top-down imposed stability, in places like Zaire, for example.

So we would look at countries, some of which were not really all that close to us, they were closer to the French, in some cases, a country like Senegal or Cï¿½te d'Ivoire, they were important bastions of French influence. They also were relatively stable, not least because there were French troops there and the civilian elites knew how to keep the inheritance from being destroyed. Unlike today, they did not tend to mess on the carpet, let's put it that way.

Some other leaders didn't have quite that same experience. Chaotic developments in parts of East Africa, like Uganda, for example, just a disaster.

But if you asked me where the really bright spots were in Africa at that time, there really weren't too many and there were issues of struggle to be worked out. South Africa was moving along okay economically, but it was obvious that South Africa had big internal issues to work through, and the question was one of sequence. In any case, I think you'd be accurate to say that Africa was looked at back at that time as a region full of challenge, of possibility of real troubles and just barely getting on its feet, in terms of politically defining its identity in world politics.

One more point I guess I should make: the international system decolonized Africa very late, after very brief colonial experience, for the most part, sixty-seventy years, a very short colonial experience. Then Africa was decolonized in a great rush between roughly 1957 and 1968, a huge rush. The international system, including the UN and the Cold War bipolar political structure, more or less created this new state system by recognizing all these new elites and their flags, postage stamps, and their armies and their anthems and their national days and their UN votes and all the rest but, frankly, it was pretty artificial. The African state system was created by the international system and it was a shallow and fragile and superficial state system and you knew that it was going to have to become, over time, indigenous but it wasn't really indigenous yet.

So what would it become was kind of unclear, but the sense of nationhood was very, very shallow indeed and what it meant for Africa's people, as well as its governments, was that Africans were placed in the charge of new elites who often used all that they'd inherited for personal benefit: for power, for enrichment. There were very few checks and balances and there was very little inclination on the part of East or West or former colonial powers to intervene, to force a change in the political life of these countries. They basically were propped up by the Cold War international system.

Q: I've been listening to a series of lectures on CD called From Lucy to Mandela, but it's a series of lectures on the history of Africa and unlike my knowledge of European history, I know when the Battle of Hastings took place, there's a very little discussion of archaeology and all of a sudden it's all colonial history and now what's happened since. Now, obviously, things were happening in Africa, but there doesn't seem to be much carryover from what happened during the sixteenth century, other than colonial times, at least that we know of, that helped make a society cohesive.

CROCKER: There is a whole lot of African history that's pre-colonial, but your point is that there doesn't seem to be much carryover of that history and of course it's largely an unrecorded or undocumented history, which makes it much harder to access, excepting through oral traditions and through archaeology and through artifact. And what's happened, in a way, is that the scale of African politics was transformed by the colonial experience. The pre-colonial experience of African politics tended to be what we would call today microstates. The units were small. So if you were to follow the ethnic pre-colonial map you might have 800 African states today, not 53. And that probably would not be better for Africa, but it would certainly be different. So what happens within these new, artificially created, European imposed boundaries of the new African states, what happens within them, is that the pre-colonial politics of subunits, ethnicities, if you like, tend to have a very important life of their own that continues and often shapes in major ways what goes on within the modern African state system.

So we think, well, there's an African state called Niger or Chad and therefore Nigï¿½riens and Chadians ought to be thinking in a certain way or probably would respond in a certain way, but of course it depends on whether they in fact identify themselves at all as Chadians or they identify themselves as Arabs or as Sara or as Zaghawa or some other ethnic group. Not easy to run a country that is full of micro-polities and that's really what it is, in many cases, in Africa.

Q: Here you came out of the Nixon Administration and then during this period you were here at Georgetown, you have the Carter Administration. How did you feel Carter and his administration handled Africa?

CROCKER: In a nutshell, I thought there was a great deal of showboating, talking the talk, identifying with a kind human rightsy approach to Africa without recognizing the need to see the realpolitik of Africa, as I would call them. So I was fairly critical, fairly outspoken on the way the Carter people handled, for example, Central Africa. There were two occasions in which there was gross intervention in the internal affairs of Zaire, Congo as it is today, the DRC, by elements that were intervening from neighboring Angola and elsewhere.

Q: This was Shaba I and II?

CROCKER: Shaba I and II, yes, '77 and '78. I thought we were a little slow to get the point that basically this was being inspired by people who did not have good intentions towards us, nor was it good for the African state system or African stability. The issue wasn't, in those days, whether or not Zaire was well governed. Of course it wasn't well governed. Neither was Angola well governed. Neither was the Republic of Congo next door well governed. Neither was Zambia well governed.

That wasn't the issue. The issue wasn't governance, transparency, democracy or human rights. The issue was stability in the African state system, the avoidance of vacuums and chaos creating opening for external mischief-making. I thought we were a little bit slow to see the point on that.

On the other hand, we reacted very, what is the word, mechanistically and maybe you could say ideologically during the Ogaden wars in the Horn of Africa in '77-'78. We wound up switching alliances, winding up I think on the short end of the stick, as the Ethiopians became the Soviets' friend and we would up with the Somalis. Now I happen to like the Somalis, I think they're great, they're lovely people and they, heaven knows, deserve a better fate than they've had in the past thirty, forty years but that wasn't a great trade and somehow we managed to take it.

Q: Back in the early Sixties, for about 18 months, I was Intelligence and Research officer for the Horn of Africa. My feeling was Somalia's up for bids, but do you want it? At that time everything was based on Kagnew

CROCKER: The Kagnew Station [a former U.S. intelligence-gathering installation in Ethiopia, the part that is now Eritrea], right. Anyway, we were unable to ride the tiger of the Ethiopian revolution very effectively in the mid-Seventies and that, of course, pre-dated Carter. So it was difficult and you could tell that the new dergue, as it became known, in Ethiopia was going to be a hard customer to manage. Meanwhile, the Soviets had been well placed in Somalia. When the Somalis decided to invade Ethiopia we mishandled that, I think, pretty badly.

So those were, the different strains within the Carter Administration that helped to account for differences of emphasis in that record. I'm talking about Brzezinski and Vance and so forth.

And then of course there was the handling of the independence negotiations for majority rule in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. I was fairly outspoken and critical of the way we were handling that. I thought the British had some good ideas. I felt that we were inclined to be overly rigid in the way we defined legitimacy in the struggle for majority rule in Zimbabwe.

I felt the same way in Namibia, to some extent, that we were led somewhat blindly into recognizing and working with one liberation group that was self-appointed, self-anointed, not elected by anybody but as it happened very close either to the Chinese or to the Russians and that we weren't really thinking about whether there might be any alternative between continued white minority rule and what you might call Marxist-oriented liberation groups. I tried to explore what that middle ground might look like. Frankly it sometimes existed and sometimes it was a mirage. There may not have been a genuine middle ground, in some cases.

But in any event, what I felt most strongly about was that the Soviets had no business shaping the transitions in African politics militarily. They had no business doing that. They had no national interests that were legitimate in that part of the world and if they were going to play that game, we had to counter them by offering an alternative.

Q: Did you see, looking at the Soviets in Africa, it always seemed that this was sort of a misplaced entity. The Soviets, more than any other group, just didn't fit very well there. I've talked to people when I was in Belgrade who were coming out of Bulgaria or Africans out of Lumumba University in Moscow and all and obviously the Russians and Bulgarians didn't like blacks at all and I guess when they sent

CROCKER: If you look at the literature of this period, '76 to '80, there's a huge number of working groups and study groups that were sponsored by all the major universities, like Fletcher and SAIS and Columbia, as well as the Council on Foreign Relations and other places, various research centers and so on, focused on the debate between regionalists and globalists and the regionalists were closer to the Carter people, who said, "African solutions for African problems" and "We shouldn't get involved" and "We shouldn't compete." The globalists said, "The entire world is structured by the Cold War and wherever they go we've gotta go." And I was right smack in the middle of that debate and managed to make enemies in both camps.

Q: Let's talk about this. My initial question was, did you see a fit for the Soviets in Africa? They just didn't seem to be a very good post-colonial power.

CROCKER: No, I think it was artificial for them. They found it hard to compete. They didn't have much to compete with. There are all the famous stories of their equipment sitting on docks in Africa, never getting unloaded. Great shiploads of concrete that just turned into solid blocks and never got used for anything. Equipment that was not suitable for tropical conditions and would break down before it even got unpacked.

In cultural terms, as you say, I think there was a very kind of rigid, racist view of Africa and Africans. I think that's probably a fair statement. They got better over time, but there certainly was some of that. You could sense that what they were doing was figuring out how to get people kind of on their side for UN purposes or for Middle East purposes or for European purposes, whatever. They were playing a combination of an opportunistic game of acquiring influence, expanding influence, getting basing rights and getting people to come and have "friendly" bilateral relations.

It was opportunistic in the sense that they were looking to block us. So wherever we had something going, wherever there was an American or a Western plan or presence, their role was to do the opposite. A lot of Soviet diplomats would tell you today that they spent their entire career trying to block us from doing what we were trying to do. They weren't trying to do anything themselves, they were just trying to stop us from doing what we were trying to do. Of course some of us were doing the reverse.

But it was an interesting and you could say, in a way, why, why would they care? One way of looking at it, if you're really a geostrategic thinker, is that while the Middle East was the repository of the world's major share of energy reserves, Africa was the Saudi Arabia of non-fuel minerals, or the Persian Gulf of non-fuel minerals. By non-fuel minerals I'm not just talking gold and diamonds. I'm talking platinum, manganese, chromium, and copper.

Q: Now there's something that has to do with cell phones.

CROCKER: Coltan, yes. Colombium tantalum, coltan, they call it for short, which is used in handheld devices.

But the interesting thing geostrategically is that if the Soviets, or Russians and the southern Africans were in one bloc they would completely dominate the world manganese, chromium and platinum markets. Those are important markets. So, there were those who felt that this was the Soviet intention, that it wasn't just an artificial search for UN votes, that they had in mind the Cape sea route and they had in mind dominating mineral resources.

I found that was an interesting argument. I did not completely dismiss it, but I personally felt that the Soviets were not just thinking in those very tangible, material terms, but they were also thinking like the traditional nineteenth century big power players that they were. They were thinking about influence. They were thinking about votes.

And they were thinking about the kind of things that pro-Soviet regimes specialized in, which was voting against us on every issue in the UN. They liked that sort of thing. They liked bollixing up the machinery of the international system by acquiring a following that would do their bidding.

Q: Did you find yourself at odds, in editorials or just in contact, or was there much contact with the Carter African people on your part?

CROCKER: I knew some of them and some of them I know to this day, wonderful people and very able people, in terms of the career people. I also knew Tony Lake. I'd worked in the NSC staff with him. He used to be part of Kissinger's apparat. Don McHenry was someone I came to know through the scholar diplomat program. I knew some of these guys pretty well. The channels remained open, let's put it that way. We would talk from time to time.

By '78 I was not only here at Georgetown, I was down at CSIS as director of African studies and from that platform I ran a program of meetings and events focused on African issues, like the war in Angola, the Rhodesian struggle and so forth. I published some monographs and some editorials and was quite critical of certain aspects of the Carter policy.

At the same time, I did not fall into the mindset of what you might call the conservative or right wing side of the Republican view of Africa, which was that it was all about the Cape sea route and minerals and the only friends we really had were the white South Africans and the Rhodesians. That, to me, was very thin and very artificial logic and dangerous logic.

So to me it was a question of walking the line. Yes, it was true that one had to address African conflict issues on their merits, in terms of what made sense locally and regionally. It was also true that our global adversary was seeking to opportunistically take advantage of African conflict to stimulate and to militarize African conflict and we had to recognize the global dimension of African problems, just as we had to recognize the regional dimension.

In a sense that made me the skunk at the party with both the conservative security studies constituencies in places like Fletcher or Columbia or even Georgetown. On the other hand, it made me the skunk when it came to the African Studies Association, because they thought I was bringing too much of the Cold War into African problems. I didn't bring the Cold War. It wasn't I. The Cold War came into Africa. So the issue was how do we conduct our side of the Cold War in Africa in a way that would be in our interests as well as in the interest of our friends in Africa and our friends in Europe and elsewhere.

A couple of final points in that regard I should probably make. I have always felt that the Europeans have a very important role to play in Africa. They're still playing it today. One of the naive things about some of the more liberal voices on African issues was to imagine that somehow we could replace the Europeans, or that the Europeans were bad for Africa or that they represented nothing but colonial histories and nothing that was future oriented.

To me, that's rubbish. Africa is Europe's hinterland. Europe is one of Africa's zones of opportunity and a very important continuing relationship partner. The two are just as connected as we are with Mexico in many ways and that ought to be appreciated and understood. It ought to enable us to have a more realistic policy. So I've never seen our European allies as enemies, when it comes to Africa. I didn't then and I don't now.

Second point is and when the history is written may lead to endless controversy, I don't think the United States and American officials or former officials should be apologetic about the way we conducted ourselves during the Cold War in Africa and some other areas.

Now, properly defined, American interests are compatible with African interests. I felt that way and I don't think it's really changed. Our interests are best served when there is stability, when is there is legitimacy; stability can't just be at gunpoint, it's gotta be legitimacy; and when there is enough security for people to be able to start building civil orders and build a civil polity and build a framework of law that permits economic development.

So that's the sequence but it seemed to me at the time that our global adversary wanted the opposite of those things: it wanted military politics, it wanted to use the instrument of the gun to destabilize and undercut pro-Western positions and it sought not negotiated solutions to African problems but, if you like, dictated solutions to African problems.

So my view of all this was that we did not have to be apologetic, but we had to be smart.

Q: Let's talk intellectual. I'll leave it to you, as a professor.

CROCKER: Oh, dear, where to start? I guess one place to start is to make the point that regional specialists in the different major regions, in the U.S., anyway and I think it's maybe true in some European countries, came to embrace their regions with an uncritical passion that sometimes makes them more interested in the interests of their region than the interests of their home country. It's inevitable.

Q: We call it, in the State Department, "localitis." I served in the Balkans for nine years and, boy, did I get a belly full of localitis.

CROCKER: Yes, I'm sure it's true for most every region. When it gets to the academy and the professoriate, it can get really, really on the edge, in the sense that some of the regional studies programs are outposts of a particular slant of thinking that is not reflective of the national interest particularly, but reflective of a kind of ideological battle. And Latin Americanists in the academy have a longstanding reputation for being, shall we say, fashionable to ultralefty. Africanists are often typed in a similar way. Arabists are not typed necessarily that way, but they're typed in terms of their view of the Israel-Arab conflict and US relations with Israel.

So, quite frankly, the Africanist community found itself in debates in the 1970's with mainstream geopolitical or strategic thinking that was going on at that time. This was the era, after all, of Brezhnev. It was the era of the Soviet Union feeling their oats after the American humiliation in Vietnam, pushing towards creating a blue water navy, using proxy forces like Cubans and others, East Germans, in places like the Ogaden and of course Angola.

So what you had setting up here was a classic, fairly ideological, debate between what you might call regionalist interpretations and globalist interpretations. For the globalists or the geopolitical school, everything was determined by the U.S.-Soviet rivalry and Africans, African leaders, African states, were merely pawns on the chessboard. The regionalists saw many of the conflicts that occurred in Africa as having local origins and moreover requiring African solutions to African problems.

So you had that kind of a debate going on a lot. We had it in the think tanks. We had it in the academy.

And I found myself in the middle of that and doing whatever I could when I wrote to try to marry those two points of view, rather than take one side. In other words, maybe local origins, but requiring that we recognize that we live in a competitive world.

Q: Well now, did the Marxist bent of many teachers in this era, this is throughout academia, Marxism's last stand was sort of in the academic world. You can correct me if I'm wrong, but it seemed to me, at least of a mild form, seemed to permeate international studies. Did that spill over into Africa? I can't see that it would make much headway there, but

CROCKER: Well, it did when it came to interpreting what was going on in terms of the international relations of Africa, yes. You found it was very fashionable to write about African states as being phony creations of the departing imperial powers who intended to manipulate and control them from a distance, formal decolonization but real control being retained in the metropoles.

Latin American studies was diffused with dependency theory, dependencia, dependency theory meaning that, as you know, the core controls the periphery. Well, similar things were said a lot in African studies and when it came to the U.S. and the Soviet Union, a lot of people were very critical of any American effort to stem what was seen by the globalists as Soviet advances: "we shouldn't bring the Cold War into Africa."

Well, of course, my response to that line of thinking was, "Who brought the Cold War into Africa?" Africa had traditionally been a zone of Western influence and the Soviets were the ones bringing in a competition. They were actually trying to establish their own interests.

Q: Looking back on it, it's easy, in hindsight, to see at least one factor and that was that the Soviets really just didn't have the psychological makeup to get into Africa, particularly. They were real racists and they just didn't have their empathy, plus the fact they probably didn't have the technical know-how to really make much of a dent in Africa. Were you seeing that at the time, or was that a factor? Maybe it wasn't.

CROCKER: Selectively, the Soviets knew how the game could be played and they knew how to manipulate the nonaligned movement in some ways. They had extremely good lawyers who knew the OAU charter and how it related to the UN charter and doctrines of nonintervention in state sovereignty and so forth and they were very good in New York at playing that game. So we had to be equally adept at playing that game, sort of a normative legal game. That's where the Soviets excelled and the East Germans excelled and you could see their hand on lots of things that took place in different caucuses. So they were skillful at that sort of thing.

Of course the one instrument that they really did have was arms supplies and the potential, with the Cubans, to have a direct coercive impact on specific situations, by providing arms or training or intelligence or actually flying troops in on occasion.

You're right that they didn't have the functional entity. They have a long history of being fairly racist towards lots of people, not only black Africans, lots of other people. But they could swallow that and get beyond it and build relationships based on power, essentially. And that's what they wound up doing in a place like Angola or Ethiopia.

And so the notion that we should not compete or that we should wait for African solutions, always struck me as a little bit like pretending Africa wasn't part of this planet. It was actually a competitive world.

So for me the issue was how to enable African solutions, or negotiated solutions. And you don't do that by turning a blind eye from what the Soviets were doing.

Q: The people who were talking about our not competing, were they saying, "Well, let the Soviets have their day, they'll fade out." Or were they saying, "Well, maybe the communist solution's the real solution for Africa." Where were they coming from?

CROCKER: I think they felt that the Africans could resist, they were kind of inoculated against imperialism and they would probably resist any overly heavy-handed Soviet thrust. And they may also have been inclined to just downplay the military factor and not understand the military factor.

A third element of course and this is where people like Jeane Kirkpatrick made her career was by the fact that they would often say "Our friends are the problem and therefore we shouldn't have the friends we have and if the Soviets are undercutting an American friend, maybe that American friend is worthy of being undercut." Of course they'd point to Mobutu always when that conversation came up and say, "Zaire, what kind of a friend is that?"

Of course the issue was that if the Soviets wound up overthrowing that regime and putting one of their friends in power in a place like that, that would have a big strategic consequence for central and southern Africa.

So we had these debates. If you watched the congressional hearings of the late Seventies, they would focus on, when the Democrats, particularly, had control of the committees, you'd see hearings that were designed to go after Morocco and Zaire, those were the enemies of the liberals, if you like. And the more conservative voices were saying, "Wait a minute, this is a competitive world. Who are we saying we support, Algeria and Congo-Brazzaville? Come on!"

Q: Morocco, it's one of those funny things, that Morocco, the Polisario, really the glitterati sort of focused on them, in a way, as they had with the Biafrans before. It's this "What's the flavor of the month?" thing.

CROCKER: Well, the Polisario was seen in some quarters as a legitimate liberation group, never mind it was created by a combination of Algerian cash and sometimes Libyan arms and other things and that you might ask the question: does Africa need another ministate? You might ask that question, are these really indigenous liberation groups, or not?

Q: How did you find sort of your place in the academic world and not just with your peers but also did you find yourself having students who were coming from various areas? Where do the students come from?

CROCKER: Well, I was teaching here at Georgetown, which is not really a hotbed of sort of fashionable intellectual leftism and I didn't find students were all that inclined to be in a different place from where I was. To be very blunt about it, I was wrestling with two paradigms. I understood the importance of understanding Africa as Africa and understanding the region, but I insisted that it was part of the world and that we had a global relationship of rivalry and we had to relate these two things somehow. And what the West had to offer and this was the important point, was statecraft and political solutions, negotiations as an alternative to simply militarizing the conflicts of Africa.

Obviously what I'm leading up to was the liberation struggles that hadn't yet been finished in southern Africa: the Portuguese colonies, Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa.

Q: The time we're talking about, the Seventies, there was still a Democratic majority in Congress and all, but was there a growing sort of Republican, more conservative, or of a different cast, that you would find yourself joined up to?

CROCKER: That's the point. There certainly was. There was the Committee on the Present Danger. There were what you might call the Scoop Jackson Democrats, who were walking away from the party because they did not see themselves as that kind of Democrat. They were not part of what Kirkpatrick called the "blame America first" crowd.

So you had that movement among former Democrats. You had more Republican conservatives coming together and coalescing around the 1979-80 electoral campaign plans of the different candidates. And I found myself in the middle of that.

And a lot of the more conservative voices, to answer your question, were arguing that everything in Africa was about East-West, it was about the Soviets were pursuing an aggressive and coherent denial strategy, they were going to cut off the Cape sea route, they were going to block the Suez Canal, they were going to deny non-fuel minerals, manganese and chromium and platinum, they were going to deny those. So you had a kind of very hard line geopolitical counterargument to the left's argument.

And I thought they were both wrong. They were both wrong. The Soviets were not that clever. They were not that coherent. And the idea of blocking the Cape sea route always struck me as a rather exotic strategic objective.

Q: How about Jeane Kirkpatrick? Where did she fit, from your perspective

CROCKER: Well, I had great respect for the late Jeane Kirkpatrick. She was a great lady. She could be superglobalist in her orientation on occasion. She would always draw the distinction between their proxies and our proxies. Our proxies were always better. That was the end of the discussion, is he on our side, we should support them.

Q: The Portuguese and the sort of people like that?

CROCKER: Well and Mobutu. When she and I would tangle, once we were both in the administration, it would be over what kind of conversation we should be having through our diplomats with Mobutu in Zaire on aid conditionality and rescheduling of debt and things like that. And she'd point out that the voting record of Zaire in the UN was better than that of Kenya or Zambia, so why don't we do more for Zaire?

So we had our differences, to be frank, we had our differences, but she stirred things up in different ways sometimes.

Q: We're moving towards the Reagan election in 1980. Was there a sort of a shadow foreign policy group to which you belonged forming?

CROCKER: Well, by '78 I had affiliated myself, in fact before '78, with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, which as you know is one of the leading think tanks in town. At that time it was affiliated with Georgetown University. They de-affiliated in the Eighties for a variety of reasons, but I joined my friend and colleague Michael Samuels, who created the Third World studies program at CSIS and I took on the job of carving out of that an African studies program.

And I would describe CSIS at that time as a centrist to conservative organization and that's where I was comfortable. But as I was saying a minute ago, the leading, loudest voices were hard line, or else they were very, very liberal. And so quite often we found ourselves kind of a little lonely there in the middle, because we were arguing a centrist message, both Mike Samuels and myself and a lot of other people around David Abshire, who really created the Center. They were not way over on one side or the other.

So that's where I was comfortable. I was very active at the Council of Foreign Relations. I was active up at the Fletcher School, with its think tank and SAIS had its think tank as well as Georgetown and we would go to meetings and working groups and participate and express our views. I was an active participant in all this back then.

I think a lot of folks were a little worried about where was this kind of pragmatism going to lead when it came to the issues of Rhodesia and Namibia and South Africa. And as you know, during this period there were controversial debates about South Africa. This was at the time, post-Sharpeville and post-Soweto riots and the Carter Administration, which took a view towards a lot of these issues which was quite different from where I was coming from. So I was outspoken.

Q: How would you describe the Carter Africa policy, as you saw it?

CROCKER: Africa for the Africans, don't bring the Cold War into Africa, get on the right side, which means both rhetorically and diplomatically isolate and put pressure on the South Africans and also press hard on Rhodesia for independence and majority rule.

Of course, everyone supported independence and majority rule for Rhodesia. The issue really was, how do you get there, who do you negotiate with, who sits at the table, what are the terms of reference in the negotiation?

I was a fairly active participant in those debates. It seemed to me quite often that we Americans were a little more catholic than the pope on this transition process , and I was quite happy to see the British in the lead on Rhodesia and ultimately it was the British at Lancaster House that brought about a negotiated independence, ironically under the Thatcher government.

So it came out okay in the end, but some of the diplomacy along the way I participated in debates about and felt that we were leaning so heavily on the side of one liberation group, namely the one that wound up prevailing, that it was distorting things politically and not giving other nationalists and related moderates a fair hearing.

Q: Was this just better PR, or was this saying, "Well, they look like the winner, so let's get on their bandwagon?" What was the factor, would you say, to cause our support?

CROCKER: Partly a political intelligence assessment that would argue that ZANU, as it became, was the group with the largest social base being the Shona people, who are the largest language group in Zimbabwe. And there were discussions about whether we should be more aligned with that group or with ZAPU, as it was then called, which was Joshua Nkomo's party, or should we pay more attention to the internal, nonmilitary, parties, such as Bishop Muzorewa and Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole's party. These were political armies that didn't have military armies and therefore were not aligned with either Moscow or Beijing, whereas the other two that I mentioned did have armies, they were based in neighboring countries, they were guerilla liberation movements. Part of the debate was a classic Western debate about 'do you support the guys with the guns and if so which guys with guns, or do you try to give some competition to the guys with the guns by giving some air time to non-militarized movements.'

Q: Well, how did things play out for you, as far as moving up to the election of 1980?

CROCKER: I was fortunate that CSIS was in its own way a congenial home for writing and research and outreach. We ran discussion groups. I ran meetings, a very active meetings programs that brought together visiting Africans and invited participants from the policy Washington community.

It gave me a little bit of visibility, and I was recruited by the George Herbert Walker Bush presidential campaign, during the primary season, to join his foreign policy brain trust, and I said yes, I would do that and went up to Kennebunkport and got to know George Bush from that time forward and considered myself comfortable with his brand of Republicanism.

Of course, George Bush didn't win those primaries and then when it became clear that Reagan was the candidate a different set of people were recruiting advisory task forces to shape policies for the transition and I was recruited to that. So it was just like a direct handoff.

And I was kind of the lead Africa person, both with Bush and then with Reagan. Why that happened is partly good luck, maybe, or bad luck, depending on how you look at it. Partly the fact that CSIS I think was a pretty good launching pad if one was ambitious.

Q: I would have thought that George Herbert Walker Bush would have a much sounder idea of African realities, coming from the UN, than most of the people in political campaigns. Did you find this, or do you have a different view?

CROCKER: You're right. He had had some experience up there. He knew some African leaders, some African UN permreps and so forth and so he had some working knowledge of what it was like to have diplomatic ties and discussions with Africans. Whereas Candidate Reagan's view of Africa was much more derivative, based on op-eds that he'd read or based on things that he'd read or heard about who was a good guy or who wasn't, that sort of thing; much less involved in the actual working diplomacy and how the diplomatic policy machinery actually works.

My sense was that candidate Bush knew where the trouble spots were. Of course, during the primary season he was watching his right flank all the time, because he didn't want to be typed as somebody who could be dismissed as "Oh, you're another one of them." He didn't want to be seen as just like Jimmy Carter, nor was he. He understood it's a competitive world. So he got the point that we needed to be active and to compete. And he wanted to know what our diplomatic options were in southern Africa or the Horn of Africa.

Q: Well, during the campaign of 1980, here you're the Africa person, I can't imagine that Africa played any role at all in the campaign.

CROCKER: Not much. I think it was referred to once or twice in a couple of debates, but, no, there were obviously a lot of other issues, the primary issue having to do with how do you respond to what was seen as Soviet adventurism. And it was in that context that a Candidate Reagan might point out that we need to block Soviet adventurism, whether it's in Afghanistan or Iran or Africa.

Q: Did you find yourself in a competitive position within the campaign staff, trying to get the candidate to say something about your area, or were you sort of there, if he wanted something you had it?

CROCKER: We wrote the Q's and A's. We wrote the briefing books and we submitted position papers, as you would expect, during the campaign, but we were not in as much demand, probably, because that's the way American foreign policy is structured, as the people working on missile throw weights and Soviet policies and that kind of thing. But we did prepare the obvious position papers on things like Libya, the southern African struggles I've referred to, the Horn of Africa, Soviet presence and Soviet adventurism, probably a few points on private enterprise and then the role of the private sector in development, a few things of that sort.

Q: Did you get any feel for President Reagan as Reagan the candidate? Looking back, he was never obviously a great intellectual, but at the same time, in retrospect, he had the right mind set on a lot of things.

CROCKER: Yes, he had a terrific personal presence and you knew when you looked at him and heard him perform in a debate or in a press conference that this was a person who was comfortable in his skin. And maybe that's not always a good thing, but this was a man who was very comfortable in his skin. He wasn't trying to be something that he wasn't. So he was a reassuring person. A lot of people liked that personal manner about him, he made the broad populace often feel comfortable rather than challenged..I recall when Jimmy Carter in the presidential debates talked about how his daughter, Amy, had been so worried about nuclear proliferation that he as president wanted to make sure that there wasn't more nuclear proliferation. Reagan responded, "There you go again!" It was the riposte of a populist candidate running against a more intellectualizing and analytical type of candidate.

Q: Well, I would have thought that Reagan would have been much more, you might say, sympathetic to the white South Africans and their side in South Africa, just because of sort of the way the stars were aligned I think in the political world.

CROCKER: Yes, to get to the substance, there's no question that he came into the presidency with a view of the Soviets and a view of who our friends might be that was very, very specific and very clear and he made utterances about our friends on occasion that would indicate that he didn't suffer any doubts about it.

And of course the list included the white South African government of the time; he said things like "They fought with us in every war we've been in." I don't think he was going back to 1776; he was talking twentieth century wars. And of course, historically he was accurate, but he would word it wrong. He would say "the government of South Africa" or the "South African republic" had been with us in every war, forgetting that, in fact, in the South African forces there had been South Africans of color, not just whites. Of course the forces were white-led back then, but during World War II there were very substantial numbers of black Africans in the allied forces, under the command of British and South African and Indian and other generals. The president wasn't making any reference to that.

So his message came across as support for white South Africa. That was the rhetoric and that's the way it was read, that's the way it was read in Africa and the way it was read here, to some extent. That obviously created a certain backdrop or an image which was a continuous concern for me, because it was a racially one-sided message.

Q: Were there others who shared your concern, who said, "Okay, once we get past the campaign, we can put things together"?

CROCKER: Oh, yes. I knew this was going to be a challenge. I knew that the Republican Party was not unified on these issues and I knew that I was going to be working, if I went into the administration, we hadn't got there yet, but if I went in I would be working in an administration that had some pretty hardline voices in it who were not interested in the complex realities of the region I'd be working in, they didn't want to hear about the complexities. They were quite happy with the "What side are you on, anyway?" kind of message.

There were other people around the advising networks during the transition, who had a range of views, but I think most people who knew the region well realized we had to be more sophisticated than saying we're on one side in each case. Anyway, I think that a lot of folks who were watching this transition realized that this would be a baptism of fire for someone like myself, who saw the region on its merits and not just based on a few op-eds. President-elect Reagan had been fairly outspoken on Namibia, in some comments he'd made and also on Rhodesia, which had just become Zimbabwe.

So there were some challenges there from the very beginning. Al Haig, who was the Secretary of State-designate, and I would meet from time to time about how we were going to conduct a policy that reflected our need for a strong arm and a strong relationship with South Africa and other close, pro-West partners but also an effective diplomacy with the bulk of the black African states. Otherwise, we're nowhere. You can't have an African policy based on one country under the control of a white minority.

Q: What was your sort of initial reaction to the Lancaster House agreement, the creation of Zimbabwe?

CROCKER: I would say that the Thatcher government seized victory from the jaws of defeat, in a way, because the diplomacy leading up to it, before Lancaster House, had left a bit of shambles and I think the Brits did the best they could, in terms of negotiating a deal that would provide a democratic opportunity for the people of Zimbabwe. They couldn't prevent the history, they weren't going to occupy the country with vast numbers of troops and stop the guerilla insurgency, so the reality was that while the government of Rhodesia was still in control in the daytime, the guerillas were in control of Zimbabwe at night.

And when the Brits sent in Governor Soames and so forth to run the transition with limited numbers of police observers and so forth and limited numbers of troops from the Commonwealth, everybody knew that there's a substantial insurgent presence inside the country and those guys weren't going away.

So it was quite likely that the message coming from the ZANU-PF was that "You don't vote for us, we're going to win anyway." And of course they surprised people by winning. A lot of people thought they wouldn't win, but they won.

Q: How did you get your job as assistant secretary? Was this sort of a done deal or what?

CROCKER: I've never really pursued that question in detail, but I was the candidate of choice for Al Haig and he put my name forward and that was agreed. The president had written me several handwritten notes on op-eds that I'd written, saying, "I like this line of thinking." So the president was aware of the name and he realized that I'd said some things that were critical about the way the Carter policies had played out , so the president liked that kind of thing and he was in the mode of writing notes. So he'd heard the name, Haig wanted me to be his candidate and I think Dick Allen knew me from the previous

Q: Who was the national security advisor.

CROCKER: The national security advisor, Dick knew me and what he really thought about me at the time I don't know, I suspect he had a somewhat more conservative take on a lot of these African issues than I did, but Dick said "Fine, Crocker would be okay in AF in the State Department and we can keep an eye on him" and that sort of thing.

The people who were not happy about my appointment were the people who were on the hard right side and that's primarily people in the Congress, more than inside the administration. I think Jeane Kirkpatrick, bless her, I don't want to speak ill of the departed, probably also had a few suspicions that maybe I was too well informed about Africa or too much into the details and not enough in the Big Picture. And there were some future neocons like Elliot Abrams and Paul Wolfowitz who were in that team that Haig assembled and we had occasional differences, but I worked okay with them. In the end we cooperated in developing a strategy that made sense, but the real problems were on the Hill and among some of the lobby groups.

There were Hill conservatives led by Jesse Helms who were very anxious to prevent my confirmation or to condition my confirmation by imposing on Haig some additional appointments around me.

Q: Did that happen? Did you have Hill cohorts as deputy assistant secretaries or that sort of thing?

CROCKER: Stuart, no, that did not happen, but it took me over six months to win that fight and get confirmed. So I was an acting assistant secretary and trying to conduct an ambitious round of launch diplomacy on southern Africa while being 'acting' for six months.

Q: How did you deal with this? I mean, first place, was it the Helms crew and all, what were they doing, were they just

CROCKER: They were doing everything they could to undercut or harass me, trying to figure out how to get me to ether resign or to accept a deputy that they would nominate. They had in mind an individual in particular who had been associated with them in some way and who I think had been associated with the South African government. In fact, I became absolutely certain that this individual that they wanted me to accept as the deputy had done work for the South African government, if not being on retainer to the South African government.

At one point, I can remember, which tells you maybe something about my Scorpio qualities, this must have been April or May of 1981, Al Haig called me up to his office and said, "You know, Chet, if you really want this job, you may have to get rid of one of your inherited deputies," someone I had high regard for and was learning a lot from and had no intention of getting rid of, "and you may have to accept somebody that has some support up on the Hill". I said, "Al, if that's the terms for my becoming your assistant secretary for African affairs, I don't want the job." He just shook his head.

And so we went on for two more months, three more months, of battles. I was tied up in the same process as Tom Enders and Larry Eagleburger and a bunch of others, who also were not confirmable at that stage. So eventually what had to take place was that the more moderate or responsible Republicans had to confront those with the holds on these nominations and eventually the holds went away.

Q: Were you just left in limbo, or were you being called up and questioned in detail and that sort of thing?

CROCKER: No, I went up for my confirmation hearing. The hearing went okay, but it was very amusing and I'll never forget it, if you could image, I only had the one day of hearings but then this was followed up with 108 questions from the Helms staff that were sent to the Africa bureau, 108 questions! And just the wording of the questions told you where the question was coming from. Things like, "Do you believe that the South African government should ever have to negotiate its future with black opposition groups that are wedded to violence?" or language like that. Or "Do you think that the Soviet Union is seeking to control the Cape sea route?" Very leading questions like this and some of them could only have been written in Pretoria. You knew that they were plants, in effect.

So here we were, the American government at work and at play being manipulated by foreign interests who knew how to insinuate themselves into our system and exploit our readily apparent differences. What else is new? It happens in other parts of the world. It certainly happened in this part of the world.

But during my day of hearings I was welcomed by Senator Helms. Chuck Percy was the chair, wasn't he, at that point?

Q: I think Percy was.

CROCKER: So Percy was very, very diplomatic and polite and congenial, welcomed me and then when it came Helms' turn, he said, "Now Mr. Crocker, I'm sure your dog wags his tail when you go home at night. That's not my question. My question is, are you going to support the president's policies?"

And then Paul Tsongas and Chris Dodd and a couple of others spoke, and Tsongas joked "Mr. Crocker, I kind of like some of your writings, but would it help you if I voted for you or against you?" So already I was being typed as someone that some Democrats could support but some conservative Republicans had issues with me.

Q: Did you find, back in your home camp, the fact that you were aligned with the Reagan Administration, did you find that in the academic world there was a group that was sort of shunning you?

CROCKER: Yes. It took a while, but by the time we had fully launched our policies, which were typed as constructive engagement and constructive engagement was typed in a distorted and erroneous way, with the wrong definitions, from early on in the administration. So, yes, there was some bridge burning and there were some former professional colleagues who became sworn adversaries of the policy and became very articulate critics of it and were writing critical articles and op-eds and this led to a parting of the ways of some relationships in a few cases.

My job was to come into an African bureau that was overwhelmingly peopled by folks who'd had a regional focus on Africa for much of their career, many of them suspicious, of where the Republicans were going on Africa and unsure whether or not they would be comfortable working with and for me;, I had the grand total of two political appointments I could make in the entire bureau - a special assistant and maybe a political deputy.

So it was my job to figure out how to make this complex State Department machinery actually work on a nonpartisan basis, or on a basis that was effective in support of U.S. policy under the president of the day. I wasn't trying to push Republicanism down into the ranks so much as to push an effective strategy down into the ranks.

I guess the point I'm making is I wanted the best people I could get around me in the African bureau and we worked very hard throughout the 1980's to have a first class recruitment and placement program in terms of personnel. The African bureau, by the end of the Eighties, was a place people wanted to go to.

Q: It has a reputation of caring for its people, too. This is very important.

CROCKER: Very important. But I inherited some damned good people from the previous administration. I kept some of them on. I couldn't keep others of them on, but I kept a couple of them on for quite a considerable time and I recruited other people into the bureau who had worked with the Carter people. So this wasn't a highly political operation.

I remember having long discussions with my friend and colleague Paul Hare, who I inherited as the director of the Southern African office in the State Department, about where we were going and I learned a lot from Paul Hare. Another was my senior deputy, Lannon Walker, who I inherited and I kept him on for the better part of the first year, before I recruited Frank Wisner to join me as senior deputy. And we recruited Jim Bishop ,(James K. Bishop), just a world class all around deputy and

Q: Renowned for being evacuated from more posts under fire than any

CROCKER: Absolutely, but if there's one guy you'd ever want to have in the command post or in the sit room when the balloon goes up, got a mind like a steel trap, it's Jim Bishop. And Princeton Lyman, as my economic and foreign assistance deputy, ultimately, took a while to get him in place, but he made major contributions to our policies both during the Reagan years and since. We established a first class team. I tried not to apply ideological, partisan litmus tests here. I was looking for the best people. We got some.

Q: I would imagine, knowing Al Haig's interests and all, that his instructions to you would be almost, "Just don't make Africa something that comes to my attention," or not?

CROCKER: I would have thought that was the case, but he surprised some people. We had the choice when we came into office, we Reaganites, of continuing the Carter policies, creating our own strategic framework, or basically taking a walk and not having a policy toward this troubled region of southern Africa. And I wasn't the kind of person who was going to have that last approach, of not having a policy. There is that option usually, of a "no policy policy," but that didn't interest me. We had things we should be doing and I was determined to try and get them done and to sell that approach internally with the administration.

Obviously I couldn't, we couldn't, continue the Carter policies. We had sharp differences on some issues and we were determined to take a step back and reassess.

So those were the three choices and Al Haig had just come from his post at NATO, that was his most recent public service position. He brought a very European-oriented focus to his job as Secretary of State and he understood that central and southern Africa were of great concern to our NATO allies and that if we wanted to do anything in that region we could not do it without the allies. So he was an ally for me, in the sense that he understood right off the bat, from day one, that we had to have a policy that you could sell, particularly to Thatcher and to Kohl and to Mitterrand. Not just Kohl, but to Kohl and Genscher, of course.

Q: Genscher being the German foreign minister.

CROCKER: The German foreign minister, who came from the FDPand had a different view from Kohl on a lot of issues.

Q: Had his own foreign policy.

CROCKER: Had his own foreign policy and his own people and so forth.

So Haig got the point, that if we're going to do anything active and serious in Africa we're not going to do it by ourselves. And that was a terrific assist for me, because if we'd tried to do it unilaterally we could go off in any number of half-assed directions and we'd be on our own and everybody'd know we were. But if we're doing it in an allied context, it would mean a lot of close-in work, in terms of coordination with allies, who would help on that.

Q: The Lancaster House agreement had in a way set a pattern, hadn't it? We were involved with

CROCKER: Yeah, we were. We supported it. It was a British lead, but we supported it.

Q: It was something one could build on, say, as far as a multinational approach, wasn't it?

CROCKER: We could definitely build on it and it set a precedent for working hand in glove with the Brits. There was, of course, the history of the special relationship in all kinds of issues around the world, globally. There was the fact of very close intel sharing and cooperation with the Brits. There was the fact that in southern Africa the British knew the region better than anybody, including ourselves. They had the long history there and they used to run the place.

And so it made sense to do things with the Brits. The question was, would we do it with the Europeans? Would we do it with a broader group?

Now, I have to do a little sidebar here. We inherited from the Carter Administration an initiative on Namibia specifically, for Namibian independence, which had been launched by something called the Western Contact Group, which consisted of the Western members of the Security Council in 1978, namely Britain, France, Germany, Canada and the United States. Two of those, of course, are permanent members of the Council and the other two are not.

So we inherited from the Vance period, from Don McHenry, particularly, who had worked this problem, that structure of the Western Contact Group. So one of the early issues that we assessed was are we going to continue to work with the Western Contact Group on Namibia, are we going to press forward with something called "the Western plan," otherwise known as UN Security Council Resolution 435 for Namibian independence, or are we going to abandon it and go in some very different direction?

The point I'm making, though, is that Haig understood from the get-go the importance of having allied support for whatever it was we chose to do, so the question then became: what is it we will choose to do? Will we just continue with that Resolution 435 approach, or will we change it? And so we had a ten-week policy review in early 1981 over that precise question.

Q: How does a policy review work? What happened?

CROCKER: Well, what happened in this case is that Haig told me to write a policy paper laying out my view of how we should pursue the inherited but stalled diplomacy over southern Africa. I suspect that he asked two or three other people to write a memo and that he got input as well from Policy Planning Staff and from the International Organizations bureau and perhaps from Jeane Kirkpatrick and perhaps from one of his special assistants.

So he was getting multiple inputs and this led to a series of face-to-face meetings and we finally hammered out a strategy at the end of ten weeks, which Al Haig then took to the president, to sell to the president. It wasn't so much an interagency review as it was a State Department review, that then was taken over to the president by Al Haig.

Q: I take it you weren't infected with what during the present Bush Administration is known as "ABC," Anything But Clinton, anything that Clinton had done was immediately bad. But you didn't have this feeling anything Carter had done was bad, you have to go counter to it? You could use what was done as something to build on?

CROCKER: I think the politics more broadly were probably one of distancing from Carter and we don't want to do what Carter did and we didn't agree with a lot of what Carter did. In reality, when you inherit a complicated diplomatic initiative you have a decision to make. Do you just scrub it, in which case the allies are going to go catatonic, because they're committed to it, too. They have domestic constituents, they have their own UN record and public commitments, and all of this. So if we were to simply scrap everything that we inherited, I think the British would have been very, very uneasy and they would have had a lot of their African equities on the line and the Germans, too and the French, not to mention the Canadians. So we had to consider that.

My personal view was, precisely as you said, we could use the inherited diplomacy as a point of departure, rather than scrap it. But there were others who wanted a cleaner break, who wanted us to be seen differing from the predecessors, visibly seen differing.

Q: Well, was there, in Congress, a very strong support of the white government and all its ramifications in South Africa, but also its effect on Namibia and all this?

CROCKER: Yes, there was.

Q: This is Helms and

CROCKER: Helms and I'd say eight to ten others in the Senate. It wasn't that they had any kind of majority, but they were very, very focused and they had very capable staff and they would try to influence the administration.

Q: I don't want to be pejorative, but was this racial, or were there other factors?

CROCKER: I think it's a mixture of a lack of interest in (and sensitivity to) racial politics and to hell with it, if the guys that are our friends are white and they're in the minority and they're running the place, so what? Not unlike the way the South used to be run in some respects. But of course in the South it was mostly white majority rule, not white minority rule.

I don't want to throw the label around any more than you do, but there was a racist insensitivity that was just impossible to work with. You can't, as an American diplomat, American statesman, you can't stand up and say that you only care about the views of a white minority in a continent that's 900 million people, overwhelmingly who are not white. It's just dumb, is what it is. Leave aside the ethical or moral dimension, it's just dumb.

Q: Well, out of this policy review, exercise of everybody looking at the matter and Namibia, what did you come out with?

CROCKER: Well, of course Namibia is a pretty small place in the broader scheme of things, but it was the litmus test issue and the hot issue, the pregnant issue, throughout southern Africa and to some degree in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. Rhodesia had just become Zimbabwe. Mozambique and Angola were both Marxist ex-Portuguese territories that were in the hands of governments at the time that we viewed as aligned to Moscow. In the case of Angola, very aligned to Moscow.

South Africa was obviously the regional superpower, but it also was a deeply troubled society with a racist system of government. Legislated apartheid was not only evil but it was failing, visibly failing. And therefore the question was, how will South Africa change, what will be the process for achieving change in South Africa?

So this was part of a bigger scheme of things. Our approach was, you don't start with South Africa. You start with the issue that's hot and that's Namibia, because that's the one that everyone's expecting you to address and the one you kind of have to address because of the inherited diplomatic groundwork, the expectations of the diplomatic process. It's a sequential thing.

And so what we said was, we will try to work with the new government of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, we'll try to work with the African Front Line States (FLS - Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe), we'll try to work with South Africa, to get a negotiated solution in Namibia. But there's got to be something in it for South Africa. It's not going to work if it's just decolonizing the last African colony.

After all, the liberation group in Namibia had not liberated any of Namibia. It was sitting next door in Angola and in Zambia and it was rather feckless, militarily .. So if we want the South Africans to cooperate on a diplomatic approach, there's got to be something in it for South Africa. And by the way, there's got to be something in it for us.

As we look across that region at that time, 1980-81, what do we see that might be a positive incentive, a worthy goal, for us? Well, getting the Cubans out of Africa would be a big prize, because they were the only conventional threat that could lead to imposed military solutions next door in Namibia. The Cubans were the only organized conventional force that you could say was in some way going to be able to challenge the South African conventional forces, or to impose their own solutions in neighboring countries of the southern African region when there might be political issues of interest to them. They were a strategic wild card - both for the Castro regime and in a larger sense for the Soviet global enterprise.

So our view was that what had to be done was link a Namibian settlement to an Angolan settlement, in which Cubans would depart from southern Africa on a time phased negotiated calendar of withdrawal. So we said, "We're not scrapping Resolution 435, we are adding a pragmatic reality to 435, which is that there will have to be parallel movement on the Angolan track."

And we set up this construct and then had to try to sell it, first to the allies, then to South Africa, then to the African front line states, including Angola. So it was a very, very ambitious departure. We were saying, "Yes, Namibian independence, linked to Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola and this will transform the strategic environment of southern Africa."

That was what we came up with in our policy review. Once we revealed it, which took place a little later, the press would ask Al Haig questions like: "Well, have you abandoned UN Security Council Resolution 435?"

"No."

"Well, haven't you added a new condition?"

And Haig would say, "It's not a condition, but we think there'll have to be some empirical simultaneity." This was classic Haig-speak. So we had a policy of empirical simultaneity, in other words linkage.

Q: As you were going through this, what was the role of the contact group, the other four Western powers?

CROCKER: They were concerned.

Q: Yeah, how did they feel? First place, they must have been sort of suspicious when your crew came in, weren't they?

CROCKER: Very and some of them were inclined to write us off and others were inclined to do the opposite, which is to try to work with us and influence us as best they could. And of course our cousins in the UK were the best at that. They were very familiar with the process of trying to educate the Americans. "Toilet training" was what we called it. They always reminded us of the Churchillian phrase about how the Americans usually do the right thing, after exhausting all alternatives.

They came over on weekly missions to test the pulse. And they would reach out to me and then when I wasn't in the room, reach out to my colleagues: "How's Crocker doing? Is he going to make it? How's the internal review going? Is Haig listening to Crocker, or is he listening to the other people, or listening to Kirkpatrick?" The Brits were really connected here and they always have been. So they were watching and

Q: This is, of course, before the great love affair between Reagan and Thatcher came.

CROCKER: He admired her from the get-go, but, yes, you're right, it was before it really got intense.

So the British embassy here and the FCO in London was working us, as they're good at doing, to find out exactly where the ball was and when the next meetings were and whispering a word in different ears, to try and work for the right outcome. So we talked to the Brits a lot. I think they played by far the most aggressive and, in terms of trying to persuade Washington to move in the right direction, effective diplomatic hand.

This took, as I say, ten weeks, maybe it was twelve. And then one bright day Al Haig went over to the White House with the policy paper and the recommended strategy in southern Africa. We were doing other things, too. We were working the Liberian crisis, the Libyan crisis, the Chadian crisis, a few other things. But this was the number one issue on the plate. Haig went over to the White House and had his conversation with the president.

And I'll never forget, he came back at the end of the day and you could tell he'd had a long conversation, interesting conversation. He called me upstairs. Just me, he didn't call in my colleagues who were part of this review: Elliott Abrams, Paul Wolfowitz, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Harvey Sicherman, others. He may have talked to them separately, but he called me up, sat me down, said, "Well, Chet, the president's on board. We're going to get out a policy document that will confirm that this is our policy and it will have a number and so forth. I'm going to tell you, Chet, the president's not too steeped on these issues, but he's on board."

I don't know what took place in that room. I suppose history books will tell us, but they went back and forth at it and I guess the Secretary was persuasive and the President may have said, "Well, give it a shot."

I can't emphasize enough how ambitious this was, to take an inherited diplomacy that was UN-based, that was supported by all the Africans, which the South Africans were very skeptical of and had refused to go along with and then link it to a wholly new factor, namely a strategic shift in Angola, that the Soviets could block, Castro could block, the Angolans could block and then we say, "We're going to launch this new thing in an allied context."

Q: Yeah, and trying to look at it, at the time, it would have sounded like a strong no-policy policy. In other words, if you're throwing in the Cubans, what was in it for the Cubans to get out, or for the Soviets and all of that. So, in other words, by linking it, it meant that it would sound like, "Okay, we're all for you, but you have to do this," which was an unacceptable thing. At the time, did you see any real possibility of getting the Cubans out?

CROCKER: Oh, yeah, we did and of course we were bullish and hopeful and optimistic, as younger people often are and we were off by a few years in thinking we could get this done in 18 months!

But there was something in it for the Angolan regime and for the Cubans and others on that side, namely the removal of South Africa from the borders of Angola, a fundamental strategic shift. Namibia's bigger than Texas. When you talk about decolonizing a place bigger than Texas, you are changing the strategic balance of southern Africa in a very fundamental way that's actually got something in it for Luanda, for the Angolan regime and therefore for the Cubans, who were their safety blanket. So, yes, there was something.

It wasn't just the South African forces and their own cross-border activities into Angola. It was also the South African connection to UNITA and Savimbi that would be changed by the decolonization of Namibia.

Q: Namibia was really, for a sparsely settled area, big, but sparsely settled, it was sort of a keystone for this whole

CROCKER: Absolutely, absolutely. The first time I did consultations in the Front line states, I'll never forget it, my meeting with Julius Nyerere, who was at that point the president of Tanzania but also the chairman of the Front line states and he sat me down and gave me a few history lessons, which was his style. He was called Mwalimu for a reason, Swahili for "teacher."

He didn't like this new approach, was skeptical that we could pull it off, but he also said, "Namibia is the key. Namibia comes first. We've dealt with the Rhodesia-Zimbabwe problem. The next issue on the African agenda is Namibia. Focus your attention on Namibia. If you can get it done, you have my support."

That was the nature of the message and the sequencing was so clear. Nyerere understood the geopolitical reality and confirmed our own analysis. We often tried to explain during the middle Eighties, when we got into deep controversies over apartheid, to explain to people here that the only logical sequence was Nyerere's - Namibia had to be decolonized first. You're not going to change apartheid in South Africa until you've dealt with Namibia. That was the sequence. He understood that. I understood it. It was essential to wind down and end the cross-border, internationalized warfare first, before the internal conflicts could be addressed.

So, you're right. It was the keystone.

Q: I can see how hard this would be to explain. Africa, for most Americans, was apartheid. Why are you mucking around in this sandpile over there? Why is this important?

CROCKER: I don't think that was the view of Americans in 1981, but it became the view of Americans by 1985-86, when you had all these incredible stories coming out, what with the township unrest and the actions of the South African police and the resistance that was going on in the urban areas and the necklacing and all that. By the mid-Eighties, that's exactly the way people saw it.

Q: Were the South Africans, the white South Africans, sniffing around or trying to do anything? What was their attitude?

CROCKER: I already mentioned to you that Senator Helms tried to impose an appointment on my team that would have been a direct pipeline into the South African military intelligence directorate, had it happened. I have no doubt about it.

Yes, they were definitely sniffing around and of course in the South African scheme of things they had their differences, as well. There were the uniformed military. There were the line military. There were the intelligence military, kind of like the Pakistani situation, sometimes. They had different voices inside the military. They had civilian intelligence and they had the Department of Foreign Affairs. And we were dealing with all four of them and they all four had their own policies and they all four wanted to be figuring out how to work Washington and how to influence Washington. So we'd have a conversation with one South African voice without knowing if in fact that was getting back to the other ones and were they reporting honestly and so forth.

They were trying to influence us to do what they could to undo Resolution 435, or to so encumber it with one-sided conditions that it would never happen.

Q: I would have thought they would have been delighted adding Cuba, thinking that this might be a killer.

CROCKER: Yeah, there was no question that for some, for those who never wanted to see any solution, they saw this as possibly guaranteeing there'd never be one. And for others, they saw it as very ambitious and it'd be great if it ever happened, because they could see the upside. A Namibian settlement that they could say brought about the departure of communist forces from neighboring countries would be much more attractive. But that was the foreign affairs people and a few in the ground forces who mainly saw it that way.

Q: But were the South Africans particularly interested in Namibia? It doesn't strike me as being a garden spot. I don't think any South Africans live there, do they, white South Africans?

CROCKER: There were some, at the time, there might have been a 100,000 white South Africans, but they were divided into different categories: Germans and Afrikaners and others. Probably not that many, actually, but there was a very active and vociferous wing of the National Party, which was affiliated with the South African National Party. So that became an echo chamber for them and they were very sensitive to the views of the local white minority there; "Are you going to sell us out?" kind of thing.

Q: The Canadians being in this contact group, was this just the Canadians wanting a say in something or having a foreign policy, or was there more to it than that?

CROCKER: Well, as I said, the contact group was the Western members of the Security Council at a particular moment and they hung together throughout the Carter years. The question was, would they continue once Reagan came into office and would they be willing, all four of them, to work with us and continue the group in existence?

The Canadians were probably the most skeptical, along with the French, very skeptical of being joined at the hip with an American conservative approach, as they would see it, to this region.

So the dynamic inside the group was interesting to watch. The British were very close, cooperating partners, but continuously trying to steer us in what they saw as more sensible directions. The Germans, depending on which Germans you talked to, if it was Chancellor Kohl's people they were with us but Genscher and his Foreign Ministry people were somewhat skeptical.

The French were a thorn in our flesh and were often critical, but they also had some very good ideas and they would occasionally come up with excellent initiatives. But if they didn't like what they heard from us they'd be very outspoken. And the Canadians loved to watch the French in action sticking it to us, and tried to copy them.

Q: You referred to the "launch." What were you talking about?

CROCKER: The launch was, once you've had a policy review how do you present it to the parties, how do you present it to the world, how do you begin to get momentum, how do you begin to put the ball in the parties' court, because that's really what a mediation initiative is.

And so we probably had the policy review completed and some ground under our feet by March-April of '81.

Q: When you say "we," this is

CROCKER: I mean my team and I and there were a couple of other colleagues that were at my level that had worked on the review, including Paul Wolfowitz, Elliott Abrams, Nick Platt and George Moose, who was up in New York, working with Ambassador Kirkpatrick.

Q: Which George Moose was this?

CROCKER: George Moose who was my second successor, after Hank Cohen. George is now at George Washington University. Not Dick Moose.

Q: Actually, I supervised George Moose, very vaguely. I was consul general in Saigon and he was up in Da Nang as a vice consul up there and technically Da Nang came under my rule, very, very vaguely.

CROCKER: George went on to do different things and was ambassador in Benin and went to become our ambassador to the Geneva-based UN agencies.

When I say "we," we had to find a way to relate the outcome of this policy review to our key partners and there were two dimensions to it, of course.

One was the contact group, that's the Brits, the French, Germans and Canadians, but starting of course with the Brits (and they with us because their role in life in modern times is to do the advanced toilet training of Americans; and they always saw their role as reflecting a special need to both interpret us to the others and to coach us, so we didn't break too much of the china that they knew we were about to break.

I think we really got them very anxious, because they had, at the time and still do, very serious African equities and they wanted to make sure we didn't trash all of them.

So we would meet first with the Brits, which got the others in the contact group very uneasy, because they thought we were colluding, which of course we were. That's called "pre-cooking," essential to any diplomatic launch, you've got to pre-cook with the right people.

And we did a fair amount of contact group work and then we agreed to take a contact group mission around the Frontline states and South Africa, but not until I'd made a separate trip around the region and had gone to the allies with my team. So there was a staged launch.

Q: We're talking about the launch and we haven't really talked about constructive engagement.

CROCKER: Yes, where'd it come from? That's obviously a doctrine that's now enshrined and it's mainstreamed everywhere. People say, "We've got to have some constructive engagement with Iran."

Q: I actually coined a phrase, too. When Larry Eagleburger and I served together in Yugoslavia, we were both involved in the aftermath of the Skopje earthquake and I began to refer to him as "Lawrence of Macedonia." I've since seen references in print to this nickname for Eagleburger.

Q: Back here in Washington, you were under a conservative Republican administration. Was there anyone in the Republican power structure who was opposed to doing anything, they liked things just the way they were and didn't want to upset the white South Africans and that rule there?

CROCKER: Well, within the administration there was more than one view and the policy review came out right, from my perspective.

We chose that middle option, which was to take that inherited policy and the inherited construct of the UN resolution for Namibia's transition and link it to Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola.

That was the middle course and there were people who came along with that I'd say grudgingly and would have probably been happier if we could have just sort of not had a policy towards this part of the world, or had one that was basically just for show.

I think Jeane Kirkpatrick was somewhat reluctant to see us engaging with the frontline states in order "to bring SWAPO into power." That might have been the way she would have spoken if I weren't in the room. But she went along, provided we made rigorous and tough conditionality on the Angolan-Cuban side of the agenda, which of course we intended to do, anyway, but she wanted reassurance on that. In her view, our real friends in Africa were South Africa and Mobutu in Zaire, people that you could "count on."

In that regard she was probably pretty close to some of the president's thinking. Richard Allen over in the NSC probably had a somewhat skeptical view of what we were doing.

Al Haig took this policy construct that we developed, took it to the President and in effect got his blessing. So we had the support that we needed at that level.

Up in Congress, of course, there was a klatch of, I'd say, nine or ten conservative Republican senators who were not particularly enchanted with any of this, led by Jesse Helms, who held up my nomination for six months.

So some of what I was doing during this launch I was doing without confirmation. I was going out there and that caused some grumbling from the ranks up in the Senate: "What's Crocker doing? He's the acting assistant secretary. What's he doing telling the South Africans this or the Tanzanians that, when he's not even assistant secretary yet?"

I wasn't the only one held up. There were a number of others: Tom Enders was held up for some period of time. I think Eagleburger was held up and there were I think at least two others.

So, yes, there was some pushback, some blowback and one of the more interesting dimensions, Helms tried to cut a deal with the State Department, with Haig, basically: "All right, I'll give you Crocker, but I want to give him a senior deputy that I can count on" and the senior deputy would have come off Helms' staff.

And we subsequently found out and I'm quite happy to put this in the history books, in light of the passage of time, that the guy he wanted to put on my staff as my senior deputy was actually on the South African payroll.

Q: Helms just died and we're still going through the period of "Don't talk ill of the dead" and all that, but when you look at it, he was not a benign influence.

CROCKER: Well, there was a naï¿½vetï¿½ there which was astonishing, but, basically, you have people in our political system and you always have had, on both sides of the aisle, who think that their job is to make alliances with foreign governments, at the expense of the policy of their own government.

And whether they do it in ink, in blood, or with a handshake or with money changing hands or whatever, it is an outrage.

Q: The China lobby, the Israeli lobby, almost the IRA lobby

CROCKER: Oh, for sure, IRA lobby, big time.

Q: This is nasty stuff.

CROCKER: I occasionally would use the word treason when I was talking about these things with my colleagues, but of course I'm not an attorney and I doubt very much that this view would prevail in a court of law, but the point is that when people are out there actively subverting what the established policy of our government is, when that policy's been blessed by the president

Q: And they're on the payroll.

CROCKER: Well, in some cases. I don't know how that occurs.

Q: Well, I'm talking about they're on the American payroll. In other words, you can try to subvert any policy if you're a private citizen, to a certain extent, legally, but certainly if you're working for the government

CROCKER: You mean in the Congress?

Q: Yes, they're on the payroll.

CROCKER: Anyone who's gone to see Charlie Wilson's War will understand that there's lots of ways to be on the payroll.

Q: This is a movie about Congressman Wilson getting money for the mujahideen in Pakistan and support for them, a very interesting movie.

CROCKER: So there was some pushback on the policy at home, that's true. Yes, there was.

One of the reasons why we had such strong support from the Brits is that they understood that what we represented, "we" being my colleagues and I in the African bureau and those who supported the policy within the Department of State were the best they were going to get and so they didn't want us to fail, they wanted to help.

Q: Well, in a way, when Nixon used to say about Vietnam, "Well, I might do anything," which meant that people should be more anxious to negotiate with you before something happened.

And in a way, when Reagan came in, he was considered to be so far to the right that a moderate, practical approach on African problems was really almost surprising for many foreign observers.

CROCKER: I think that there definitely were those in the British and German governments, particularly, perhaps the French, who understood that point exactly and rather enjoyed thinking that they were saving their equities from something far 'worse' by supporting our new policy and trying to make it work.

I think also their initial reaction was that it was hugely ambitious, this linkage of Namibia to Angola and working with South Africa and all the frontline states, trying to peel these Marxist regimes in Angola and Mozambique away from Moscow, all of that was seen to be very ambitious and somewhat polarizing.

But I had very, very strong support in the first year or so from Haig, who would take this issue forward with the allies and the Africans, and Haig was quite a guy.

We all know Haig's many attributes, but one of them, for sure, was to take issues like this, like the African dossier or the Central American dossier and others and I've seen him do it repeatedly and 'mainstream' them, as we say in today's world.

He would take them to the allies and initiate an African discussion in the NATO context or the quad context (France, UK and West Germany) and the allies weren't used to this. They were used to being the ones themselves who would raise an African regional issue and the Americans normally would be on receive mode.

But Haig would take this contact group initiative right to the European allies, in groups and individually, making it clear that it had his strong backing and the President's backing, which was very helpful to me, gave me some air cover.

And I got a different kind of air cover once Haig left office. George Shultz gave me also fabulous air cover, both in Washington and with allies, continuing to reinforce the message.

Q: Well, then, were you able to accomplish much prior to being confirmed? I imagine you would have to kind of watch your step, that you weren't making commitments or getting too far out.

CROCKER: Yes, there were some tricky patches there. At one stage and this was before confirmation I was in South Africa and in Mozambique and in both cases the media kind of set me up and there was one meeting I didn't get in South Africa and that became page one in the Washington Times.

They were playing it back to Helms and making a little echo chamber and feedback loop out of it from the South African press to the American conservative press.

In another case, we had a bad meeting in Mozambique where I kind of stood up after the foreign minister stood up and we walked out of the meeting and it was very abrupt and it was not a successful meeting. Mozambicans had not yet drunk the Kool-Aid of constructive engagement and that became page one.

So there were some moments like that which seemed like, "Gosh, is Crocker really in trouble," that kind of stuff, would be the buzz back here in Washington.

And then came the leaks. There were a series of leaks, which led to much speculation that came out I think in April, maybe May, of '81 that were leaked documents that came out of the African bureau and they had to do with meetings that we were having with the South African foreign minister, who was visiting Washington in May of '81.

These were the kind of scene setter briefing memos prepared for Secretary for this visit and included the regional negotiations on Angola-Namibia, it included the bilateral relationship and what would constructive engagement mean bilaterally and it included the nuclear relationship with South Africa and whether we could find a way to get them into a deal for constructive delivery of some reprocessed material from their reactors, in exchange for them signing up to the NPT and IAEA safeguards and so forth.

In any event, those leaks were obviously orchestrated and the question in my mind particularly was who was doing this, because you would not have thought of the Southern African office of the Bureau of African Affairs as a hotbed of right wingers and therefore was it a hotbed of left wingers? The leaks came out of TransAfrica, which is obviously an activist, left-oriented lobby movement which was somewhat hostile to our policies.

But it seemed like an unholy alliance, because the leaks were used to try and undercut me and they were used by the conservatives to undercut me, but the leaks were published by TransAfrica, so I had to ask myself who was helping whom in this whole process here?

Q: Did you ever find out who was leaking?

CROCKER: Well my sense is it probably came from some low-level disgruntled persons in the Bureau who were in touch with TransAfrica, but it was exploited very skillfully by the right; in fact, it could just as easily have come from skeptical adversaries in other bureaus who were privy to those briefing papers.

Q: Anybody who leaks, it's not much fun to have them around at meetings and all that. Did you find yourself holding back? I'm just trying to get a feel for the office.

CROCKER: It led to a degree of sensitivity, of concern, even of paranoia. We had some locks changed in the safes in certain offices, because I was at one point thinking that this might have been a break-in, so to speak, orchestrated by folks on the conservative side, because they were the ones who were having the most fun with the results, they were the ones who were trying to block my confirmation and undercut our policies.

But I guess it's just a bit of stretch, looking back on it, to actually believe that there'd be a Watergate-style break-in into the safes of the Southern African office and then that these conservative activists would have handed the documents to TransAfrica is also a bit of a stretch.

But sometimes you have a coalition of forces that are on opposite poles who exploit things for their own domestic purposes, so to speak and it serves each of their interests. We were not popular on the left or the right.

Q: How you were seeing yourself being portrayed in sort of the general press, the New York Times, the Washington Post and the columnists? Were you considered to be a right wing ideologue or a compromiser or something?

CROCKER: You'd have to go back and look at the coverage of people who were writing at the time. I think I was looked at towards the end of '81 as a ambitious and perhaps somewhat naive but very pragmatic person who was a realist Kissinger tradition, 'cause I was and I am.

I think they saw that and they understood the pressures that I was under. They understood that the kind of engagement we were proposing, which would include South Africa, but not only South Africa, was going to be anathema on the hard left. And they understood that the hard decisions we were putting in front of South Africa would be anathema to the hard right. So they eventually came to see it as an ambitious, centrist policy.

Q: When you were coming up with the launch of your policy, was it spelled out to sort of the general public or to the people you were negotiating with or was this something that you were dealing one card at a time and keeping the rest of the cards hidden?

CROCKER: We gave a lot of speeches in '81 and '82 at various fora and we testified a lot, so the record was pretty clear about the general approach, namely, that we were going to offer a comprehensive diplomatic alternative to military solutions in Southern Africa and that meant seeking political accommodation between South Africa and its neighbors over Namibia and Angola and, for that matter, within South Africa, because the alternative was revolution, the alternative was armed violence and we represented a constructive alternative to the Soviet approach that favored armed struggle, confrontation and so forth.

We laid all that out in speeches. I spoke to the American Legion annual meeting in Hawaii, I testified umpteen times in Congress on this. So that record was clear and so was the point of how we were going to continue on Namibia, but in practice there was going to have to be a relationship, a link, between getting Cubans out of Angola and getting South Africans out of Namibia.

We did not spell out, to answer your question, we did not spell out the terms of that linkage, because we couldn't. We hadn't negotiated it yet and we certainly didn't want to negotiate it in public.

That was the key thing that took years: what was the relationship here. Does South Africa go first and then Angola, Cuba, Russia and so on look and see what South Africa has done, what it has to do, so maybe we can do something? Or it is that the communist powers have to go first, as the South Africans would say and then we South Africans will look and see if they're serious and then maybe we'll do something on Namibia.

The media had fun with this, as you can imagine. What exactly is linkage - is it legal? Is linkage doctrinal? Is it theological?

I remember Al Haig at one point was asked at a press briefing to be a little more specific about what kind of link there would have to be between Cuban troop withdrawal and Resolution 435 on Namibia and he said, in a classic Haigian phrase, "There'll have to be some degree of empirical simultaneity." And that was translated into lots of languages, I'm sure.

Q: What was your reading, as you made these initial tours, about, well, first, the situation on the ground? Was this just the right time to begin this, do you think? Had governments reached essentially a stalemate, would you say? Were they ready for something?

CROCKER: When you say "they,"

Q: Talking about the various countries involved and the ANC and other groups.

CROCKER: Well, first, the allies were ready for it, because they were desperate for a continued peace process in Southern Africa. This is classic European diplomacy here. It isn't that they were desperate for an outcome. They were desperate for a process.

They wanted to be able to say, every time they met each other and their own publics and their parliaments and so on, "We are involved in a peace process that is ongoing and we had meetings and we're going to have more meetings."

So in that sense it was timely. As far as individual countries in Southern Africa are concerned, it would depend on which country.

I think in the case of Mozambique they were beginning to understand that the Soviet embrace and the hostility of South Africa were putting them between a rock and a hard place. They were beginning to understand that they needed to figure a way to escape the box they were in.

But they didn't trust us at all and they were unfortunately inclined to believe that what South Africa's radio said about us was true, that we were in bed with South Africa.

So we had to demonstrate time and time again that that was not the case. But Mozambique was getting ready.

I think we probably exaggerated the extent to which South Africa was ready. There were some people in the South African structure who were ready and who saw this as an interesting approach, this linkage on Namibia-Angola. And the broader construct, too, which is that if you do well on Namibia-Angola, we'll cooperate with you more broadly, they understood that.

There were others and this gets a little bit complicated, who thought that they could outmaneuver and outlast Crocker and his team in the State Department and that they could work through White House channels and CIA channels to outmaneuver the State Department. And they would prefer to speak directly to Bill Casey or directly to Ronald Reagan.

And so we've spent years, actually, putting out that fire and dealing with that threat to policy coherence.

Q: With Reagan, could they get to him?

CROCKER: Well it would depend on the specific time. At one stage, for example, Judge Clark, who had been deputy secretary, went over and became NSC advisor. That was not a brilliant success.

But the South Africans thought that they had a friend in Judge Clark. They thought he was a friend and that he represented Ronald Reagan.

So for a while they would try to go to him and go around us, but it depends pretty much on the month, which device they might use. Obviously we had a liaison relationship with the South African intelligence services and so the Agency had the potential for its own freelancing and its own channels.

Q: Were you able to monitor it, or were you able to speak frankly to the Agency here in Washington and say, "Don't undercut me, this is policy," or were you concerned about this?

CROCKER: I was concerned about it throughout the period of Bill Casey's tenure, because we had pretty regular evidence that there were conversations being held and things being said and analyses being prepared that represented an effort by US officials in other places to undercut and change our policy.

Q: Where were they coming from and sort of what was in it for them, was this ideological or was this perceived interests of the U.S., or what?

CROCKER: Well, you have to read Persico's book on Casey, which has a wonderful quote in the early chapters about the recruitment of Bill Casey to the Reagan Administration. At a certain point Casey got a phone call from Reagan offering him the Agency and Casey's reply was, "Well, Mr. President, if I can't have the State Department, I guess I could do it."

So you knew what that implied. What Bill wanted was, he wanted to destroy the Evil Empire by bleeding it.

Q: Keep jabbing at it, all over the world.

CROCKER: Yes, in a sense, he wanted to go after Marxist clients of Moscow's and have a war in which we subverted them in every region and maybe in some regions several wars.

The main case in point being Nicaragua and Afghanistan, but he got very involved in the UNITA account and his people did, very involved, because they were in touch with UNITA courtesy of the South African Defense Forces and South African military intelligence.

So there was a kind of a network there that we had to contend with that was talking to each other all the time, we knew they were talking to each other.

Q: Did this mean that as you were reforming your policy, as time goes on and it changes, that reports coming out of the Agency were not viewed as being overly accurate and viewed with some suspicion?

CROCKER: By us?

Q: Yeah.

CROCKER: That was certainly true. It would depend on, again, precise circumstances, but there would be a tendency to describe Jonas Savimbi and UNITA and their frame of mind in ways that suggested they lacked confidence in the diplomacy of the Department of State. You can sort of see where that was heading, right - reports implying Savimbi is suspicious of the regional diplomacy.

And over in Mozambique there would be a tendency always to say that RENAMO, the anti-regime movement that had been created by Rhodesian intelligence and funded by South African military intelligence, was in fact anti-communist freedom fighters who were going to bring Jesus to Mozambique.

Well, there was a tendency to paint that war, the military balance there, as leading to the inevitable victory of the insurgents and the defeat of the incumbent government. So we had to deal with that kind of reporting all the time. The punch was spiked.

Q: This gives a feel for diplomacy as it really is. Three fourths of the battles are probably fought in Washington and one fourth with the countries abroad. And particularly if it's a controversial issue] and I can't think of a harder one. And this is in a way fought in the full light of day, as these things go, with the media and all, all the powers that be in Washington.

CROCKER: Well, the first four years of this effort were under a lower profile. It began to blow up in our faces around late '84 and early '85, into '86, because of events within South Africa, but also because as South Africa began to experience serious domestic urban unrest there was a leftwing, liberal backlash against the Administration and our African efforts,, and then there developed a conservative backlash against us as well.

So we were being told on the one side "You shouldn't be dealing with those evil racists Boers in Pretoria" and on the other side we were being told "You shouldn't deal with those Marxist slimeballs in Luanda and Maputo."

So we were being in a sense attacked from both flanks. It was difficult to keep the ship moving on its course. And, as you say, it was very much an intramural scrum.

Q: Quite recently I've been interviewing somebody who was saying that he'd never been on a stronger team than when he was working in the African bureau with you.

It sounds like although you had some of your people maybe leaking, but basically you had a pretty strong team, didn't you, in the African bureau?

CROCKER: We had a very strong team. I was fortunate to inherit a couple of very able deputies and to be able to bring on a couple more.

And one of the things I learned was that if you don't play the personnel game in the State Department then you're not going to be an effective assistant secretary, and you've got to play the personnel game proactively, especially if you're dealing with Africa, because not everybody necessarily is thinking that's where they want to serve.

But in practice you can get good people to come and work in the African terrain, because there's lots of opportunities. Provided they perceive that we have a serious policy approach and are not just serving time.

Q: Careerwise, it's very good.

CROCKER: So we recruited a hell of a lot of good people this way and we did it because I had good people working with me who could do the recruitment and communication side during the bid process.

It wasn't that I could do it personally. They didn't know me, necessarily, but the fact that I had people of the caliber of Jim Bishop and Princeton Lyman and Lannon Walker and Frank Wisner and Roy Stacy and so on working with me throughout this period and Ken Brown, who came in after Jim Bishop moved on. These are world-class officers.

The word spread and so we got office directors of that caliber and we were able to get outstanding people like the late Bob Frasure to come and be the Namibia desk officer and be my right hand person on the negotiations for the first two or three years and then we placed him as our political counselor in London, working the Brits on behalf of the policy.

That kind of assignment process became extremely important.

Q: One of the things that I note is that in so many cases people I've talked to who served in Africa as ambassadors there have felt that they weren't getting much support, not getting much initiative or something from their European colleagues. But here, I take it, in this you really had the Europeans, the major powers, engaged?

CROCKER: We had to. We had in effect to borrow leverage and we had to mobilize an allied network. It was a very 24/7 kind of a thing.

For those eight years, I was in the office, with a bunch of people, every Saturday and many of us never got home before eight o'clock on weekday nights and those who got involved with this policy worked those kinds of hours.

And if you don't take it from me, ask them. They'll tell you we worked those kinds of hours.

So what we were doing during all that time was not just sitting there reading cables. It was actually thinking up ideas and trying to launch trial balloons - e.g., and trying to mobilize someone in Brazil to weigh in with the Portuguese about the way they were profiled in Africa.

Or trying to figure out some side channel that would get us to a better interlocutor in Luanda or writing cables that in effect were asking the British Embassy in Angola to go in and make a demarche on our behalf, because we had no official relations and no presence there.

We conducted our policy, in many ways, with and through allies. We had a kind of full court, man-to-man coverage out there.

Q: Did you find that the African embassies here in Washington were effective, or not, or did you pretty well have to go to the governments themselves?

CROCKER: You can't generalize. There were at that time a handful of African ambassadors in town who were very, very, well chosen, very capable people, who did report back to their home base.

But in other cases there were people who just were timeservers, I guess you'd say, they were involved in the diplomatic circuit, doing whatever people do on the diplomatic circuit in Washington, going to events and representing their country on the Hill or whatever, or maybe playing the real estate market, who knows?

There certainly was quite a range and in general we worked in capitals and at pretty high levels. Governments in Africa make decisions at high levels.

Q: Often when I talk to people who served in Africa, they say "If you want to get something done you really have to see the president."

CROCKER: Or the national security advisor, if there is one. Or the defense minister, the interior minister, foreign minister, whatever.

Again, you know your personalities country by country, but it's pretty high level stuff. And when I would go on missions, which I would do a lot and so did my colleagues, with or without me, we would get received at high levels.

Q: Essentially how would you describe constructive engagement, when you started? I assume it changed as circumstances and time went on?

CROCKER: It morphed in several ways. When I first wrote about it, in a piece in Foreign Affairs, it was in the context of describing the possibility for an alternative relationship with South Africa.

In that piece, as I said, part of that relationship would have to be based on the regional dynamics of Southern Africa. In other words, we couldn't isolate South African from Southern Africa. It was the regional hegemon and one of the terms for our engagement would have to be their cooperation on regional issues.

But I talked a lot in that article about how there was a possibility that the current South African government of the day could be nudged to becoming a piecemeal reformist, in which reform measures would be taken that would gradually develop some momentum and gradually lead to perhaps unintended consequences of open ended change. "Negotiated change away from apartheid" was the terminology I used.

Now that's the article and of course having written that article it's been hung around my neck ever sense and was while I was in office.

And that's the way it is. If you're stupid enough to write articles and then go into public life, you live with them!

Once in office and we had all these policy reviews, it became very clear to everyone and especially to me that the focus of energy was going to be to get the regional conflicts wound down first, before one could directly address and expect major moves away from apartheid to a system of one man one vote in South Africa.

And I began to push that line and to believe it and it was not difficult to believe. Logically, you can't ask, for example, Angola to settle with UNITA while there are South African forces intervening inside Angola and Cuban forces protecting the regime in Angola. You can't ask the government of Mozambique the same question about RENAMO while there are South Africans running across their own countryside providing clandestine support to their enemies.

And in the South African case, you couldn't really expect the South Africans to negotiate with the ANC when the ANC is sitting in communist-supplied military training camps in neighboring countries such as Angola.

What you're doing when you do that is asking people to negotiate highly sensitive matters - as one Angolan put it to m'with foreigners in their kitchen'. And so the logic of the policy was, "Let's deal with the regional challenges and get them under control," which means negotiated solutions: Angola, Namibia, Mozambique and that will create the conditions in which all these countries, including South Africa, are able to deal with their fundamental domestic challenges.

So that's how it evolved.

Q: Well what about the Soviets at this time? Were they beginning to pull in their horns? They would obviously be opposed and would be trying to have their boys win the wars.

CROCKER: And their clients to survive. And they were trying very hard. This became interesting, because in the case of Zimbabwe's new leadership, which had been, if anything, China-oriented, not Russian-oriented and the Russians were very anxious to make up for that lost ground. So our job in Zimbabwe was to fill the chairs by supporting this new government, even though it was rather radical, in order to keep the Soviets out.

Q: But how about the Chinese?

CROCKER: They were okay.

Q: They were okay?

CROCKER: They weren't going to challenge our global position, particularly, at that stage.

Q: So they could build the TanZam Railway and they could do other things

CROCKER: And they could tweak the Soviet nose and they could outmaneuver the Soviets in certain areas.

So Robert Mugabe, back then, this is going back a long time ago, was somebody that wound up with many offers from Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, the Chinese and lots of other people, in order to keep the Russians out and to keep the South Africans from trying to destabilize this new Zimbabwe government.

So in every country we had this kind of dynamic to think about. In the case of Mozambique it was a little different.

Q: The Soviets were

CROCKER: Not happy.

Q: But they were an active player. This wasn't a matter of saying, "Well, Africa isn't worth it" and getting out?

CROCKER: No, but what was interesting was that they were playing a very active diplomatic hand and trying to bedevil us in the UN Security Council and trying to destroy the Cuban linkage by having resolutions passed or helpful ones defeated in New York that made our job awkward.

And they were very good at that. They had a lot of well trained lawyers and drafters, both East Germans and Russians, who would be busy working the corridors and the delegates' lounge in New York and buying people lunch and whatever they were doing, lots of money I'm sure changed hands, in order to try and keep the African frontline states from working with us. We had a problem with the Soviets on that.

Q: What about Jeane Kirkpatrick, who you say wasn't quite wild about what you were up to, but she was our UN ambassador and obviously violently opposed to the Soviets. Was she able to protect that UN flank or not?

CROCKER: Yeah, as she could and she would often do it by trying to mobilize other Africans whom we weren't working with as much, the Francophones, particularly, because the Francophones weren't part of the frontline states. But we could use all the help we could get, so having help from Senegal and Cï¿½te d'Ivoire and Zaire and other places was useful.

But you can't challenge, under African diplomatic theology, you couldn't challenge the specific role of the frontline states. That was an OAU doctrine.

So we had to work with the frontline states and some of them were extremely competent and they saw that the Soviets were playing a spoiler's game. They understood it, most of them.

Q: There wasn't much in it for them with the Soviets.

CROCKER: No, all they could get from the Soviets was military aid. And the only ones who really wanted to stay close to the Soviets and were scared of their shadows was the MPLA regime in Angola and they were very, very much in the Soviets' clutches and it took us a lot of work to break them free from that. We didn't really break them free, probably, until the late Eighties.

Q: Were the Cubans a puppet of the Soviets, or were they pretty much playing their own game?

CROCKER: I don't think Castro ever was comfortable being anyone's puppet. He certainly wasn't going to be our puppet.

But he didn't like having Big Brother push him around and dictate the policy and as time went on we could sense that the Cuban view of Angola was somewhat nuanced and different from the Russian view of Angola. Towards the end of the Eighties, I'm getting way ahead of myself here, we figured out how to play that and how to exploit that difference and how to mobilize Cuban interest in a deal, which the Soviets really didn't come to appreciate.

At the very end of our process, the Soviets had to get onto a moving train. The Cubans were already on that train, before the Soviets were.

But in the early Eighties, at the launch phase we're talking about, I had no way to talk to the Cubans. We didn't have much conversation with the Cubans, excepting about Nicaragua. We did have Vernon Walters going down and telling to Castro to stop it in Central America, but we weren't talking with him about Africa.

Now looking back, I could say to you, with hindsight, today, it might have been worth our while to reach out to the Cubans much earlier.

But whether it would have worked, whether the Soviets would have permitted it to work, is another question, because the Soviets were actively countering us and doing a lot of things to try and sow distrust against our policies in different African capitals.

Q: Was there any effort on the part, say, of the European bureau or the Soviet desk or something to try to do anything with the Soviets?

CROCKER: Directly?

Q: Yeah.

CROCKER: Yes, there were a few. I think Haig started this idea. He would sit down with Gromyko on the margins of the UNGA in the fall of the year, I guess Haig was only there for one UNGA, but I remember he did have one meeting in which there was some discussion of the Southern African issue, but it was very much signal sending about how America is back and you're not going to get a free ride and exploit these troubled African countries and we have alternatives that the Africans are listening to.

And then the Soviets would come back with their scripture and their theology and so it wasn't very productive.

In succeeding years, with of course the cooperation of the European bureau, we would from time to time have U.S.-Soviet exchanges about African issues, with an interlocutor that I came to know, several, actually, pretty well and these exchanges were fairly sterile.

They were exchanges of positions, with lots of references to UN texts and lots of references to international law and to the charter of the OAU and to the history of the negotiations and so forth. It was doctrinal stuff.

Q: Once you get into that particular aspect of diplomacy it means that nothing's going to happen, when you're quoting references to each other.

CROCKER: Yeah, you're reading your talking points and you're actually talking for the note takers, so they can take it home again: "And then I told him ...."

The one part of the constructive engagement story that I haven't touched on is that the South African government, for domestic as well as international reasons, chose to take constructive engagement and redefine it their way - in their favor - and then get South African Broadcasting Corporation on the airwaves 24/7 asserting "We have a new policy. We have a new president in Washington. He understands the problem and we have an ally in the fight against communist aggression in Africa and we're defining this new relations ship and Crocker is coming" and creating an aura which was very difficult for us to contend with, framing things to look like we jumped into bed with one country's government, which was not the policy at all.

So the words constructive engagement were hammered into the minds and the ears of many, many Africans for eight years by South African Broadcasting Corporation, which we didn't have an equivalent channel to correct the record.

So that was part of the imagery of constructive engagement.

Q: That's still there, too. Looking back, for most people constructive engagement is seen in a very positive light, but I've heard other people say, "That disastrous constructive engagement policy." I think they're referring to the conception that this represents the Reagan Administration coming in and supporting white rule.

CROCKER: Which is absolute rubbish. First of all, constructive engagement worked. Secondly, by the time P.W. Botha and I stopped talking to each other, he was saying to me that he would rather deal with Jimmy Carter, because at least he knew where Carter was coming from. "You seem to have your own agenda," he said. So we were obviously upsetting the South African establishment in lots of ways, destabilizing them.

Q: But looking at sort of the diplomacy of this, we didn't have a good tool to counter the South African broadcasts?

CROCKER: Well, we used what we could use and we kept on saying, "Look, this is not an engagement with South Africa. It's an engagement with all of the countries and parties in Southern Africa who want to engage with us to create negotiated political solutions to the region's problems."

That was the one sentence answer, but people would rather believe devil theory, much rather believe it, because it's so simple and clear and of course it made for a good bumper sticker, once the sanctions movement got mobilized in the mid-Eighties.

Q: Well then, let's talk about confirmation. How'd the process work for you?

CROCKER: Well, I had my hearing several months after I started doing the job. Chuck Percy was there, Jesse Helms was there, Chris Dodd was there, Paul Tsongas. Quite a few of my staff were there, my family, my wife and several daughters were there. They were fairly young at the time but they were in middle school, so they wanted to see Dad getting confirmed.

It was pretty congenial, but Helms, in his typical fashion, when he got the floor, when he got the floor, he said, "Now, Mr. Crocker, I'm sure when you go home at night that your wife and children are glad to see you and your dog wags its tail but I have some questions about whether you are the man carry out the president's policies" and then the questions proceeded: "What do you think about the ANC?" and "Why should the government of South Africa have to negotiate with people who are allies of the Soviet Union?" and "What do you mean in your Foreign Affairs article about open-ended change? Towards what, Mr. Crocker?" Those kinds of questions.

And that was followed by I think 103 written questions that came to the bureau that we had to answer.

Q: Which has always been typical of his staff, hasn't it and often followed by another set of questions?

CROCKER: That's right, so it takes a little time and then there may be some follow-up questions and so on. But the basic technique, back then, as it is now, was to put a hold on the nomination. And he got several other of his colleagues to put holds, so that you couldn't just lift one hold, you had to negotiate and so forth.

That's when the Seventh Floor began trying to free up these holds on various people and trying to figure out what the terms would be for lifting the holds. It's almost like a negotiation that takes place.

I got a call from Al Haig saying, "Senator Helms is really kind of concerned about your senior deputy," who was a carryover from when Dick Moose was Assistant Secretary for Carter, "And he's got just the guy" and he gave me the name.

So I thought for a minute, I called him and I said, "Al, you know, in my view Lannon Walker is a very, very distinguished and accomplished and well qualified Foreign Service Officer. He's not going to stay forever, because he is a carryover and we're going to recruit for a successor for Lannon. But if that's the terms for a deal - that we have to take this guy that's on Helms' staff to be my senior deputy, I don't want this job, Al. Not on those terms. "

Haig was quite taken aback by that. "Boy, you are stubborn, Crocker, you are stubborn."

Q: Did you know the staff member? Was he a known figure?

CROCKER: I knew the name, but it was a little bit later that I became aware of the fact that we had information in other channels that he had been a contractor with a South African agency.

But at that point it wasn't that specific issue that made me resist. It was that I wasn't going to be put in the position of trying to work with somebody who'd be a spoiler, a wrecking ball, within my own ranks.

I was building a team. I was going to work with my team.

Q: This is Helms' technique. John Bolton was put in. And these people really were spoilers when they got to a place, they would carry on their own policy.

CROCKER: Indeed, it could happen. I'm not familiar with the precise circumstances of when and how Bolton went in initially, 'cause he came into the Baker-Bush administration after I'd left.

Q: His general reputation, he sort of carried on his own policy.

CROCKER: But I think you've seen that in lots of situations, or at least some situations, where people who are distrustful or where you have a real chaotic situation at the interagency level, people will use that chaos to conduct independent policies.

And these days, with Blackberries, you can just sit there in your office in some executive agency and conduct your own diplomacy with foreign counterparts and nobody knows what the hell you're doing.

Q: A Blackberry being a form of telephone communication, you can write and all that with it.

CROCKER: Yeah, you can text message the foreign minister of a country that you are in touch with in order to say, "Oh, by the way, so and so is coming to visit you, but don't pay any attention to him, because he doesn't speak for the president, I do."

Q: Oh, boy! But eventually you were confirmed. Had Haig or your team given on anything, particularly?

CROCKER: No. I think the process served to put in place in the consciousness of everybody concerned what some of the redlines or what some of the concerns were of the conservative elements. I guess the only price that was paid was that we became a little more sensitized to where we might expect pushback and blowback in the future.

And we also, I think, became much more aware of the intimate relationship between the South African military intelligence operation in Pretoria and the office of Senator Jesse Helms and others in Washington.

And it soon became clear that those others included the Agency (CIA). And whether they were all talking together in a great big round robin I don't know, but I do know that DMI, as we called it, was playing it own diplomacy in Washington that was distinct from that of the South African foreign minister.

Q: I was going to say, sometimes, say with Pakistan today, the Pakistani military intelligence service to be carrying out its own foreign policy.

We haven't talked much about, as you took over, how did you see the South African establishment, according to the issues that you were concerned with?

CROCKER: You had the security ministries, the power ministries or departments, would be of course foreign affairs and the civilian NIS, the National Intelligence Service, which was headed by a young academic by the name of Neil Barnard, who had actually at one stage applied for doctoral studies at Georgetown in order to study non-proliferation issues and whether there was anything that could be done to stop additional countries from going nuclear, which, of course, the South Africans were in the process of doing at the time, which was very amusing.

Anyway, you had the National Intelligence Service; you had the office of the president itself, the state president's office and there were a number of personalities in that office; and then there was the military.

Within the military, there were probably three voices of note: there was military intelligence, which was the kind of ideological hardliners who prepared the briefing papers for the state president of South Africa and therefore played the role that Bill Casey would like to have played with Ronald Reagan, monopolizing the inputs to him.

Then you had the line military, the people who actually ran military commands, like they ran the joint forces command on the border between Namibia and Angola, people like the chief of army staff.

And then you had the special forces people, who were doing a lot of the special ops in places like Mozambique and you had the defense minister. Those are at least four different military voices with different views.

We made it our purpose to try and understand those relationships and try to figure out how to play them. They of course were trying to play us, but we tried to be as good at least, if not better, at playing them.

Q: Well, were you able, as time progressed, to get the CIA to start working on their counterparts to promote our policy?

CROCKER: It's a good question. We learned and it became came clear to us that speaking to a foreign government of a significant regional power exclusively as the African bureau in the State Department had its limits and that it would serve our purposes from time to time to broaden our base bureaucratically and to bring in additional voices, you might say some pinch hitters, some heavy hitters from other parts of our bureaucracy.

So we would bring in NSC people. At one point Bud Macfarlane played a critical role in helping us to reach out to the Angolans, hosted a dinner and things of that kind.

Q: Bud Macfarlane at that time was national security advisor?

CROCKER: He was, at that time. We worked with the OSD civilian people and with the CIA analytical people to put together briefings for visiting South African delegations on what the Russians were doing in the Third World generally, in order to give the South Africans a little bit of ground truth.

It was on the one hand like a gesture of confidence building, because we were doing in effect an intelligence exchange and they had intel people with them and we had ours.

So it could be looked at as a gesture, if you like, but our purpose was to reduce their provincial isolation when it came to who was going to prevail in the wars of the region and whether there would in fact be any winners.

We made clear that there was really no limit to the amount of military junk the Soviets would sell for almost nothing to the Angolans and their factories were not running out of anything.

And the purpose there was to point out that they were basically, the South Africans, in a strategic stalemate. They were dealing on the other side with both a failing African government, but also with the other superpower and they'd better be aware of that.

Q: What about the ANC? Were they part of the equation?

CROCKER: Well, it depends what time period we're talking about. They were not part of the equation for the first half of the Eighties, no. We obviously were aware of who they were and where they we were, but we began a very low profile process of reaching out to them through our embassy in Zambia in '83-'84.

When I would go on a tour of the frontline states I had somebody with me, a very trusted officer who was in fact kind of my intelligence guy on my own team and he would, with the help of our embassy, including our station and the British station, make contact with the ANC locally.

And we were doing this basically on our own bat. We were not instructed. We thought it was probably useful for the ANC to hear from us and not from SABC what our policy was.

Q: In a way, was the calculation that if you did it on your own and sort of a briefing, somebody who was not you could peel off and go over and have a talk and all, this makes sense, because Washington being sort of the fishbowl it is, if this got into the hands of the press or the wrong hands, it'd be played up. We had these restrictions on not talking to the PLO and obviously at times we did.

CROCKER: But we were determined to prevent there being a parallel to that Middle Eastern example. So we started at a very low level, so we could then say, three years later, to Secretary Shultz, "By the ways, Mr. Secretary, we've kept in touch with these guys over the years. We know who they are. In fact, we have a dialogue with them. We haven't had it at your level, but what about if I went and talked with them?"

So, by the time we got to '86, '87 he said, "Yeah, why don't you?" So then we went up to my level and I saw them, Oliver Tambo and Thabo Mbeki, in London and that was okay. So we proceeded incrementally.

Q: Again, what's coming through is, to operate in Washington, you have to be able to play three dimensional chess. It's a complicated business.

Again, we're talking about the early years, were you having problems with sort of the influential media? There's the Washington Times and all, they're kind of, let's say, Jesse Helms' instrument or something. But what about the New York Times and the Post and maybe a couple of other papers? Were they giving you support, or were they questioning? How did you find them?

CROCKER: I would say for the first two or three years of this policy we did a fair amount of briefing after various missions and we'd go down to the press room and do a briefing.

The press spokesman would say, "Now I'm very pleased to present Assistant Secretary Crocker, just returned from an important trip to Africa and he wants to tell you all about it" and we would have those. And we got fairly straight coverage, I would say.

And the Washington Times as well as anyone who was accredited could be there, including of course foreign media.

But from the mainstream establishment liberal press, as they're called today, the kind of pushback that we'd get mainly is, "Crocker, we've heard this briefing now about six times. Are you really making any progress? Do you really believe that South Africans are serious, or do you really think the Soviets will let the Angolans get rid of the Cuban troops? What is the evidence that we're making headway towards a linkage-based Namibia settlement? You've told us this can be done within a couple of years. How many more missions will this take?"

We'd get that kind of a hearing. But once we got into much choppier seas in '84, '85, '86 and so on, we made a regular practice of having sundowners, as we called them, that's a Southern African expression, having drinks in my office with 15 or 18 journalists and a couple of my people and just saying, "I'm happy to tell you where I think things are. There's some controversial issues out there, so have at me and we'll talk" and we'd go for an hour and a half.

That was probably a good thing to do, because we would include the Washington Times and so on and they would feel like they were not being isolated.

Q: As you were doing this, making the rounds and all, did you feel that there was progress, or was this a matter of really chipping away and hoping a crack will appear, or what?

CROCKER: Well, we phased it and again, I don't know how detailed we are going to be in this interview! This is an eight year process.

Q: Let's talk about the early period in general.

CROCKER: Put it into three periods, maybe, early, middle and late.

We phased the rollout of the new initiative, let's call it the linkage-based Namibia-Angola settlement process. The first phase was to get some agreement on things that would need to be fixed or changed or modified at the edges concerning the inherited Resolution 435, the UN settlement plan for Namibia.

You could say it was chipping away, because what it was doing was adding a couple of ingredients related to such issues as the monitoring of SWAPO bases in Angola, the question of whether there would be some constitutional principles that would guide the first Namibian Assembly once elected, some parameters so that there'd be some chance for a power sharing constitution to emerge, some issues related to the so-called impartiality or partiality of the UN system, because the UN was going to supervise the transition in Namibia once it started.

So how to assure the South Africans that the UN-led process would be "impartial," as between the local, internal Namibian parties and SWAPO, which was the armed insurgency or liberation group.

Anyway, the first phase of the negotiation was to deal with those issues and we did make some headway and we were working what I'd call finer points of diplomatic amelioration or emendation of an existing agreement.

And it was a way of demonstrating to everybody that this elaborate machinery, the Western Contact Group, the African Frontline States, could work under our leadership, we could actually move from one thing to the next and we could have meetings and we could produce outcomes that everybody had signed onto.

By the summer of '82 we'd kind of finished with that and we had some significant degree of engagement with very good people in the Frontline States, from Mozambique, Botswana and Tanzania particularly, actually, it was very interesting.

So that was progress, but it was very detailed material. One of my colleagues called it "diplomatic needlepoint," very fine grained stuff.

Q: As you were doing this, did you have somebody back there stitching away? Could you see a pattern emerge, was this going the way you saw it would, or was it just, "Okay, let's go out and try this and try that" and watching it being put together?

CROCKER: We were working two sides of the street, two sets of agendas. The Namibian agenda I've just been talking about was more of a needlepoint variety, it was very, very detailed and legal drafting stuff, stuff that had a lot of UN dimensions to it.

Q: Because it was a UN

CROCKER: Plan.

Q: But it also was technically a UN trust territory, wasn't it?

CROCKER: Well, it was, in the eyes of many, yes, it was supposed to be a UN trust territory. Not in the eyes of South Africa, of course which was in complete control of the place and had been since it was given a mandate to administer it after World War I.

Q: When you bring the UN in, you have to

CROCKER: And they'd be the ones implementing the settlement, so it had a number of UN dimensions and we had to work hard on that.

Yes, I think that we had a sense that progress was being made and we had a team of people who were working on those issues in considerable detail with great skill and working with contact group counterparts who were also down in the weeds detailing with this stuff and were good at it.

And when we found African frontline people who were also good at it and a few South Africans who were good at it we were able to make some progress.

I will confess to you this progress was hard to describe for a New York Times journalist, because it was "eyes glaze over" kind of detail..

But at the same time on a separate track we were working to open up channels with the Angola government and to get them to agree to the principle of Cuban troop withdrawal and we spent probably sixty, seventy per cent of our time trying to do that, trying to get a breakthrough - a workable channel of communication - with the right Angolans, trying to figure out what kind of a formula they could buy onto, some sort of a "Yes, in principle, provided that" or "Yes, if" formulation. It took a long time to get that.

Q: The Angolan government, was their feeling, as we saw it, that without the Cuban troops they would go down, or did they feel they could take care of the situation?

CROCKER: Well, they didn't put it this way of course, but the Cuban troops were the safety blanket for the MPLA regime.

They depended on them very heavily for dealing with UNITA and this is part of the story that in hindsight becomes clearer and clearer, UNITA was becoming more and more capable of challenging the MPLA during this time period.

So the military pressure was increasing. It wasn't American military pressure. It was UNITA with the benefit of substantial South African-support.

So the Cubans became more indispensable, up to a certain point, from the standpoint of this very weak regime.

Q: I think this would be very tricky. From the South African point of view, would they want essentially a neutralized, benign Namibia, it's a stretch of desert and they don't really need it, or were there aspirations for certain parts of the South African government?

CROCKER: There was a significant minority of Afrikaans-speaking Namibians, both white and colored, who voted in local elections and who were members of the National Party, which was the governing party of South Africa at the time and it became sort of a hot issue in the National Party caucus: "Are you going to sell out to those American negotiators who are trying to make peace?"

It was that kind of thing, more than it was that they had a huge stake. Namibia was obviously heavily subsidized by the South African treasury, it didn't have a strong tax base. There was a mining industry, but not much else and there was an ostrich farming industry, not much else besides that. And a lot of bureaucrats and a lot of railway subsidies and military bases and that kind of thing.

However, it was obviously geopolitical space and depth and it was what separated "communism" from South Africa, and Namibia's was a huge buffer. It's bigger than Texas.

If you lost that, it meant that if SWAPO came into office or if somebody else promoted by the Angolans comes into office, you've got the "communists" right on your border.

We tried to break constructive engagement down into phases that would develop a kind of inexorable momentum, because we knew that all the other parties would want to talk to us about the Namibia process linked to Resolution 435.

They would be much more reluctant, much more twitchy, when it came to talking about the Cuban-Angolan track.

So our theory was that we would try and make this inexorable momentum on phases one and two, which dealt with first the constitutional principles for a Namibian constituent assembly, which would take place during the UN-supervised transition.

And then secondly to clean up, under phase two, some of the issues that had not been resolved in the previous diplomacy from the Carter Administration, specifically things to do with the composition and size of UNTAG, the UN force, when it would come in and things to do with the role of the UN special representative, who had already been designated at that time as Martti Ahtisaari and the question of UN impartiality, an issue which the South Africans had made a big deal about. They claimed that the UN as an institution was all on one side against them.

So these were issues we addressed in phase two and primarily in 1981-82. By the time we got to '82 and into '83 we were really spending the overwhelming bulk of our time on the Cuban track, which was phase three, getting the Cuban track to move. Now that we had shown, if you like, our capacity to move the South Africans, this presumably would give us leverage to move the Angolans and therefore the Cuban track.

That was the theory and that's the way we proceeded. It was that kind of a sequence.

So now in our story we're up to '83 and we can perhaps leave it there and go to some other African issues for a moment and then come back again.

Q: It's a question I want to ask, at the time was anybody saying, "The Soviet Union's going to collapse within five years or so," while you were doing this?

CROCKER: No, I don't think anyone was thinking that. What we did see and this begins to address your question, we did see that the Mozambicans were getting told, "Nyet" quite often, when it came to rolling over debt or getting more credits or whatever. So Mozambique's leadership was in the uncomfortable position of having a superpower patron that was a reluctant participant in subsidizing a totally statist, feckless government.

And so they were getting pushback on that side and then on the South African side the Frelimo government was getting beaten up, because South Africa was building up RENAMO as a sword over their heads and destabilizing the country, large parts of the country.

So Mozambique was uncomfortable. We watched the Mozambique thing pretty closely and we were interested in why it was that the Russians weren't handing out more support to the Mozambique government.

Were they making a choice? Were they encouraging the Mozambicans to come over? We were actively wooing the Mozambicans to come over.

Mozambique, I should say, is a very strategic place. It's got a coastline longer than California's and three of the best deepwater ports in Africa. It's the major place from which the Copper Belt's copper and cobalt is exported.

This is a serious strategic stake and the Soviets seemed to be saying, "Do we really care that much?" So it opened the door for us and for our European friends to play a more aggressive hand in Mozambique.

Angola was much more closed. In fact, by the mid-Eighties we had creative Mozambican help to open the doors in Angola. Fascinating!

Q: Did we have relations with Mozambique?

CROCKER: Yes, we did, although they were strained in the early years of the Eighties and at one stage we didn't have an ambassador anymore and we had a chargï¿½ only and they didn't have anybody much here.

It was a cool period, but eventually we built it back up again and assigned really first rate people.

Q: As an active duty Foreign Service Officer and now retired, this is normal diplomatic practice, when the going gets tough we yank out our ambassador as a sign of disapproval, just when we really should almost add more resources to deal with a problem, we cut and run. This is diplomatic practice, which has always struck me as being wrong headed.

CROCKER: I'm not as well briefed as I ought to be on the specifics of this, but there was an intelligence incident of some sort here, which led to a reciprocal expulsion and I think it was in that context that we downgraded relations and then we built them back up again.

But this was an intelligence screw-up that we found out about and had to deal with the results of and that wasn't the only one that took place, by the way, where somebody's trying to recruit somebody or

Q: Well my understanding is that the Agency, this is well known, was using Africa mainly as a place to recruit Soviet and other diplomats, not so much for finding out what was happening in the country itself.

CROCKER: That's right. It was Cold War game playing that went on and a lot of it was completely without reference to the local equities.

But having said that, there were some places where the Agency helped us a lot, the clandestine side of the Agency, in terms of getting us briefed up for meetings at the top level and knowing a hell of a lot about what the host government was going to say to us and what was on its mind.

We had human resources that were directly pertinent to the local situation that were damned good, in some cases.

Q: Africa is not Angola. It's a whole continent out there. What was going on that was of particular interest to the United States in Africa, up to the end of the '83 period?

CROCKER: Well, there were at least four or five key themes and dynamics at that time that were challenges for us, or maybe opportunities for us.

One was that the Soviet Union was having some difficulties affording its empire and did not really have answers for many of its clients' needs and questions.

And so we saw an opportunity there to do what we called "the weaning of Marxists," the weaning of them from Moscow and there were a number of candidates for that.

Some of them were real Marxists, some of them were "Yves Saint Laurent" Marxists or they were phony Marxists or whatever. I'm talking about such governments as Ethiopia; Mozambique; Angola, of course; Congo-Brazzaville would be another case; to some extent, the Ghana of Jerry Rawlings; Benin, back at that time; the government of Cape Verde, another Marxist state that came out of the Portuguese revolution.

So, one thrust of policy was to make an effort systematically to build bridges to these so-called Marxist regimes and test them.

That was the policy, to test them to see if they in fact were interested in looking at an alternative and what a Western alternative would consist of and what they would need to do to have a Western option and what we could offer to encourage them to look at a Western option. So it was a reciprocal process. I call it engagement.

We engaged in that kind of dialogue with a half dozen other states in Africa as I've indicated and there were probably more on that list at the time.

And then secondly we faced the challenge of what to do about Gaddafi. Gaddafi at a minimum had to be kept in his box. He was nothing but trouble.

He had a skillful diplomacy of subversion and corruption and buying influence and building mosques in places where there was limited local enthusiasm for them. Lots of brown envelopes were passed.

And he wanted to take over the OAU, as it then was. He wanted to destabilize longstanding friends of the United States. He probably was active in as many as a dozen neighboring countries in the Sahel region of West Africa, Central Africa.

Very active in Chad, seeking to bolster his claim to what was called the Aouzou Strip, which is a northern band of territory that touches the Chadian-Libyan border.

So Gaddafi was active across the board and this represented for us a significant policy challenge and also a thrust of our policy in terms of response.

That response consisted of bolstering friends, providing significant foreign assistance, both economic and military. And if you look at the pattern of U.S. assistance in the Eighties, it is explained in part by supporting governments that actually worked, where we could find them. Secondly, supporting governments that we saw as moving away from Moscow. Obviously, supporting longstanding friends that faced, as we saw it, threats from Soviet clients or from Libyan clients, or from Libya itself. So that is somewhat the pattern of U.S. assistance.

Q: With Libya, what was motivating Gaddafi, as we saw it at the time? Was it ego, creating an empire, just being a bad boy, or what, as we saw it?

CROCKER: As we saw it and probably still do see it, to some extent, because some things don't ever change.

Well, first of all, we saw him as having somewhat of a free hand, because a little money goes a long way in sub-Saharan Africa. And here was a guy with a big ego and a big wallet playing in a very small pond, if you like. And for him I think it was irresistible as a way of accumulating people who would be supporters, or people who would be at least somewhat responsive to his influence.

We did not see him as a Soviet cats paw, but we saw him as falling sometimes into exactly the same game of destabilization. So our game was to try to stabilize fragile places that risked falling into the wrong hands. That was the way we defined our efforts.

So I think we saw him as somewhat of a Castro-like figure, an African caudillo, or an Arab caudillo, very nationalistic, very ambitious, eager to stand up to the US

He would have loved to have taken over a whole band of other states, been a Nasser-like figure, if you like.

Q: Well did we find that these other states, granted a little money goes a long way in that particular area, but at the same time I would think that the leaders, Marxist or what have you, would be somewhat dubious about getting too close to a guy like Gaddafi.

I'm told by people who dealt with him, they thought he was a little bit nuts and I'm sure this came across to others. This wasn't somebody you wanted to give the family jewels to.

CROCKER: That's absolutely right and as soon as we made clear our interest in being a helpful partner and also using our eyes and ears to warn people, warn our friends in African countries, what he was up to, using our intelligence, they were quite responsive.

They saw exactly the point that you're making, that you want to sup with a long spoon when you sup with the devil, so to speak.

But he often brought a lot of resources with him, so that people were tempted. This was not just an East-West arena. It was Gaddafi trolling for influence with his neighbors.

Q: I have a wonderful description from an interview I did with Tony Quainton, who was at that time our ambassador to the Central African Empire, where Gaddafi came and distributed gifts and they all turned Muslim, the whole leadership turned Muslim, until it was cocktail time and then they converted again.

But what about on the Marxist side? There was sort of the "London School of Economics" Marxists. I put Nyerere and all in there. And then you had other ones who at least were giving lip service to Marxism. How did you deal with them?

CROCKER: Well, you're right that we had to distinguish among these different varieties and there were quite different types.

For those who came out of a revolutionary tradition of violent change, they were parties that were committed to struggle and they lived by such slogans as "A Luta Continua" and so they had a kind of struggle tradition which was very much like that of Che Guevara, they were true believers. They were struggle politicians.

Others had received what you might call regime support and money from an early stage and had built fraternal relationships between their governing parties and the governing parties of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. So that would be more the case in a place like Brazzaville or Benin, back in the time I'm talking about.

And then there's a third category of regimes which were very deeply dependent for their very survival, in terms of military assistance, in terms of intelligence support on Moscow and Moscow's agents in Eastern Europe and Cuba.

And I'm thinking here of Angola and Ethiopia. Those governments did not have, in my view, real sovereignty. They did not have the capacity at that time to make independent decisions on critical security issues. There was such a heavy input of influence and arm twisting and what have you from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the CPSU International Department was actually a party at the table in their cabinets, in some cases and you could sense it.

So you have these different varieties of Marxists. I like to describe some of them as "Yves Saint Laurent" Marxists because their formal, ideological stance was fashionable. It got them some foreign aid money. It was like being in a singles bar. They could say, "Look what these guys are doing for us. What are you going to do for us?"

Q: Did you find yourself, with some of the softer Marxists, getting almost at cross purposes with the German socialists, the Scandinavians, who had their left wing which was somewhat ideological and all. Was this a problem?

CROCKER: It could occasionally be a thorn, let's put it that way. It took a long while for the Scandinavians to recognize the bankruptcy of Tanzania's ujamaa socialism.

Julius Nyerere was a wonderful man and a founding father of his country and he built a kind of national unity that held up through the years and he understood about multiethnic coalition building, in a country with many, many ethnicities and languages.

I give him credit for a lot of things he did. He was also a regional statesman of some considerable talent and vision. He worked hard to keep the superpowers out of Africa by balancing them off and so forth.

But when it came to domestic economic governance, he was an unmitigated disaster for his country and his people and lost them decades. But it took a long time for the Swedes, particularly, to recognize that.

And so we would occasionally get visitations from our Swedish friends who'd come to town, I think they had to figure out how to prepare themselves each time they descended into Ronald Reagan's Washington: "How do we get along with the heathen?" would be kind of what they'd ask themselves.

But they would try to persuade us that we should be more forthcoming towards Tanzania and towards Mozambique. I've got bookshelves of works by Swedish scholars on the FRELIMO experiment in Mozambique and why it should be worthy of support, without conditions, because of what had happened there during Portuguese rule.

So, we had a little friction, I would say, primarily with the Swedes and then occasionally with the Dutch, over these sort of issues.

Q: With the Swedes, was the feeling that this was a carry over, we had gone through a very difficult time during the Vietnam War with the Swedes. They were being very high principled, at a great distance, in dealing with the problem. In a way their media was having a wonderful time beating us up.

Now, Vietnam was over, but did you feel this almost a carry over, sort of this was the thing to do in intellectual society in Sweden?

CROCKER: I think it was the thing to do in terms of Nordic foreign policy, to some extent. A bit of it was posturing and you saw some of this with the German Social Democrats, as well, distinguishing and differentiating themselves from the United States and looking at the United States as a kind of new empire.

Of course the Swedes have a long history of being a big power themselves and they conducted themselves a bit more in your face than the other Nordics tended to do.

Don't get me wrong, I have a lot of respect for Sweden, Swedish diplomacy and their diplomats. When we're working together we can get things done, but we were not working together in the Eighties in East and Southern Africa.

Q: Was there concern on your part, that, okay, we're trying to do these things in Africa and we're trying to bring a solution. Another side of that is as I do these oral histories I can't help but come to the conclusion that we are sort of the essential power, the only one that really in a way tries to do things, rightly or wrongly, in many of the world's situations, trying not to be too heavy handed or arouse anti-colonial feelings and all this. Did you find yourself having to kind of watch this?

CROCKER: Well, for sure and of course we're talking about a part of the world, Africa, where the political culture and the media environment does not lend itself to transparency or lend itself, at least it didn't in the Eighties, to any kind of accountability for things that were said or not said.

So it was easy to plant devil theory and we were operating in an environment where we'd have a press conference, whenever I traveled I'd always try to have some access, in different capitals, with the local media.

And it would be startling, the kind of questions you'd get and the extraordinary lack of information that was carried in the minds of people working in the media world and the gullibility, I guess you would put it that way, of people who were being fed stuff by their government or by our global adversaries and their various allies and our own western critics.

So it was an interesting environment to work in. But we didn't try to go it alone. I don't want to create at all that impression. I think we worked very hard with key allies and others to have partners and to have them out in front of us on some things.

Some obvious cases in point: we probably did as much as any administration since Jack Kennedy to work with the French. The French are not easy to work with, but they're essential to work with in a region where they have substantial influence and we spent a lot of time trying to figure out exactly who's on first, who's on second, who's on third in the complex French African policy apparatus, whether it was in the ï¿½lysï¿½e or the Quai or in the intelligence work or the military or the cooperation ministry.

So there are at least five power centers in Paris. We really worked that hard and it got to the point we were exchanging detailed analyses of the balance of payments in Senegal and how we could work in the World Bank and the IMF to provide joint messages that would support a decent government trying to do the right things in a place like Senegal.

The French in fact welcomed this in many ways and I think they were somewhat responsive. So that's an example.

We worked with the French extremely closely in the case of Chad, of course. It was a French-American-Chadian military campaign that defeated Gaddafi's armored corps in the northern Chadian desert. That couldn't have happened if we weren't working very, very closely with our French partners.

Q: It's interesting, because if you sort of look at the newspapers and all of almost any period, things are often cast that the French are the burr under the saddle and a problem, yet, I know, particularly around this period, I remember when I was consul general in Naples and would talk to Admiral Crowe, who was CINCSOUTH, based in Naples and he would say that the French were really sort of the best of allies, in naval terms and I get this from others, saying that both militarily and in intelligence the French have been pretty consistently very close us. It's not just they're close to us, we're to them, too.

Whereas often, maybe it's the Quai d'Orsay or maybe it's the ï¿½lysï¿½e, which for political purposes or something is somewhat distant.

CROCKER: That's right and a lot depends on the relations between ministers and you have quite a few involved. You have a defense minister, a cooperation minister, a foreign affairs minister and then you have the policy apparatus inside the ï¿½lysï¿½e. It's not unlike Washington, in that sense.

So it was a fulltime job. But, yeah, picking up on your point, it was always easier for us to get cooperation either between intelligence services or military to military. But the job of getting the diplomats to actually sit down and talk very frankly about a common plan, that took some doing. But we did our best. It didn't always work.

The other example, of course, is the British, who are the other major power in Africa, were then and are now, in terms of a cooperating partner.

If you want to do something jointly and have some impact beyond your own impact in a place like Nairobi or Kampala or Lusaka or Accra, you'd be nuts not to be working very, very closely with the Brits, who are much easier to work with and we had very intimate bilateral exchanges.

Once, sometimes twice a year we'd sit down and spend three days together going over the accounts country by country by country, military, security, intelligence, development, issues of the opposition, issues of regime stability, how to try and make the trains run again in Southern Africa, what to do to support troubled friends or block troublesome adventurers - that sort of thing.

So it was a very close partnership and we invested a lot of our time and effort in it, as we did with the Japanese, to some extent, with the Portuguese, I could go on.

Q: What about the Horn of Africa? This was still Mengistu and the Derg and all that?

CROCKER: It sure was.

Q: Did we just see that as a hopeless cause, or what could we do there?

CROCKER: The Horn of Africa was one of the more sensitive and important strategic zones of Africa at that time, in part because Sudan had been a key friend on the CampDavid process, had provided rare support from another Arab country for what the Egyptians had done.

And so we had a sense this was, if you like, part of Middle East policy, but we felt it very important to bolster Sudan, also to bolster it vis-ï¿½-vis Gaddafi.

So that was part of our situation. We also became aware in '83-'84-'85, of course, of the fact that Gaafar Nimeiry was losing his way and was starting to imbibe more of this Islamist Kool-aid

Q: We're talking about the leader of Sudan.

CROCKER: Nimeiry was beginning to imbibe, if you like, this religious zeal and raised into question the whole North-South agreement that had been negotiated in the early 70s to end the first phase of the Sudanese civil war.

And Nimeiry reopened that and started the war again in '83-'84 and caused us a terrific amount of pain. So that was a case of a country, Sudan, which was an important partner that became self-destructive to the point that it didn't offer us much in the way of help.

What it offered us was a big headache and we had to figure out how to deal with that, what to do when Nimeiry was replaced, I believe, in '85, how to deal with successor governments, recognizing of course that right next door to Sudan was Soviet-backed Ethiopia, which was actively destabilizing Sudan.

So we looked at Sudan through many different optics: as a troubled friend, as a threatened friend, as a key partner of the Camp David process and as a country that we wanted to keep hopefully in one piece and better health.

That was part of our Horn of Africa policy. Another part was what to do specifically with Ethiopia, which is the big guy on the block in the Horn of Africa, and a very troubled place as well.

Mengistu was, throughout his days, pretty much of a thug. He ruled by the gun. My best imagery for understanding Mengistu Haile Mariam was to remember back to the photographs that were put out in Ethiopian media that would show a cabinet meeting which had a long table and showed you all the ministers. At the very end of the table was Mengistu, but his figure would be blown up five times bigger than life.

It sort of made your eyes pop, to look at this picture of a cabinet and here's this great big guy at the end, who is farthest away and should be smallest, but he's five times bigger.

So Mengistu, a man who arguably came from the underprivileged communities of Ethiopia and had been treated in a way that made him paranoid, with a chip on his shoulder and treated most of the ethnic groups of the country badly, caused hundreds of thousands of death of his own soldiers and the soldiers of Tigray and Eritrea and basically lived on that civil war, because the civil war assured him of Soviet support.

As long as there was a civil war, the Soviets would be there, because the Soviet currency for Africa policy was military aid.

The American currency for Africa policy was our brains, our diplomacy and our foreign assistance, but not that much military aid.

The Soviets accounted in this time period for between 60 and 75 per cent of the military aid going into Africa. We were behind the French. So that puts it in perspective.

Q: The Soviets didn't seem to be very good at relations with other countries. It's one thing to hand over a lot of battle tanks and all that, that assures the military has toys and keeps them in power, but it doesn't build up any long term relationship/

Were we looking at the Soviets as being a sometime thing in Africa?

CROCKER: We drank a lot of our Kool-aid and they drank a lot of their Kool-aid. Our view was and we saw it in action, that they were not really very good or very quick or very smooth with Africans. They gave them a lot of support in selective cases for selective purposes.

They brought a lot of students to Moscow, but the innate racism of the Russian people I think was very evident to Africans from day one. Africans could figure out that in the United States there were whites who were racists and there were whites who were not. They didn't meet too many of the latter type in Russia.

Q: I recall when I was in Belgrade, dealing with an exodus of African students, including Ethiopians, from Sofia, who had gone to sort of Lumumba junior college there and they were all claiming they were called "Black monkeys." It was not a very welcoming society.

CROCKER: I think that's fair to say, but it's also fair to say that some African elites and leaders became very ideologically committed to what they were doing and the ideology was sincere, in the sense that they were battling some adversary, whether it was white minority rule, colonial rule, or whether it was some opponent locally and they found that the Soviet support was steadfast and therefore that the Soviets or the Russians were political allies.

And to this day, if you look at the people who have emerged at the top of the ANC structure in South Africa, you'll find a number of people who spent years in the Soviet Union and also in other places, but significantly in the Soviet Union and who therefore, when they go to Moscow, they look up old friends. Friends who may have been their handlers, or advisors or

Q: And true friendship, too.

CROCKER: It becomes personal at some stage, no doubt, as it does with us. But I don't think that it was very effective people to people diplomacy.

Q: Was there anything, while you were there, that you could do about the Horn of Africa?

CROCKER: That's the important question and you put your finger on it. I should mention that we also had another troubled friend in Siad Barre in Somalia, who had come out on top of the wars for control of his country back in the late Seventies, but he also made a mess of things by overdoing it and attacking Ethiopia and then getting his clock cleaned by Soviet-, Cuban-backed Ethiopia.

So there was a standoff there and Siad Barre would always look at us and say, "What are you doing for me today, compared to all that they're doing for those awful people next door?" So it was that kind of Cold War-linked polarization.

We found that the Horn was a very, very difficult operating arena. We did the right thing where we could on a humanitarian level. We saved hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Ethiopian lives during the famines of '84 and '85. We did more for the Ethiopians than their government did.

Some will argue that we were slow to get started doing that. I think once we realized what we were dealing with we addressed that challenge, the challenge of the famine. It was a hideous situation, where the government was really starving its own people.

Q: Was this on purpose, or just ineptitude?

CROCKER: In some cases they wanted to use the famine to force people to move from one part of the country to another, into collectivized villages, that sort of thing. So it was a technique of rural control, as they saw it.

So we could respond on a humanitarian level, as we did. Secondly, we responded quite skillfully to bring out of Ethiopia a huge number of Ethiopia's Jewish population, via Sudan into Israel, the Falashas.

So that was a success, but that's against the backdrop where, quite frankly, I think we were unsuccessful in moving Ethiopia.

Ethiopia didn't get moved until the Tigrayans of the TPLF got their act together (with some non-lethal cross-border support from Sudan) as the Soviet Union was collapsing in 1990-91.

Q: Were we considering, I don't want to get into intelligence activities, but on the State Department side were we considering support to the Eritreans or the Tigrayans?

CROCKER: We were considering it and we decided not to do it in clandestine, military terms. What we did do was crossborder feeding programs, run out of OFDA in AID, which the Ethiopian government and its friends saw as direct intervention in their internal affairs, because we were helping people go across borders and we were helping food to move across borders and we were feeding an army, in effect. We were feeding insurgencies, in effect.

But we were feeding them with foodstuffs and with tents. We were not doing what you would call a covert military program. Nothing covert about it, except that we didn't go into detail in public testimony in order to protect our Sudanese channel.

Q: Was there a thought process behind not doing a covert action? Again, I'm treading on difficult ground, but the point being there has to be an intellectual process, do we do this, or don't we?

CROCKER: Yes, there does and if he had had a completely free hand in running the American government, as he sometimes dreamed, I think Bill Casey at CIA might very well have wanted to have a few more pins on the global map, a few more anti-Soviet insurgencies to run.

Bill Casey wanted to basically have a war in every region that he was running. He had one in Afghanistan, he had one in Nicaragua. He wanted ardently to have one in Angola and eventually there was one in Angola which involved clandestine support for UNITA.

He and his people pushed very hard to get such an approach to Mozambique and we fought very hard to prevent it, and we succeeded in preventing it.

This never became such a big issue in the case of the Horn of Africa and there were two reasons. One was that there was a terrific humanitarian need and we could do a lot by a feeding program both inside Ethiopia and the cross-border program, so we did and it helped.

The second thing is that the TPLF and the EPLF were more Marxist than Marx. They were Trotskyite. They were pretty far over, not ideal CIA bedmates.

Today, of course, it's a little different, but it's a little bit hard for the Heritage Foundation to hold up Meles Zenawi or Isaias Afewerki as paragons of freedom fighters.

Q: We're talking about the Heritage Foundation, which at the time and maybe even today represents the fairly far right of the American political spectrum.

CROCKER: I do have, however, cartoons from the Washington Times that I've framed that portray me holding would-be captive African slaves in bondage because we wouldn't engage in supporting them in their struggle for freedom and of course the Africans were the peoples of Mozambique, the peoples of Ethiopia and so forth.

And we were "holding them in bondage" because we didn't get on "their side," The side of the "freedom fighters". Anyway, it was interesting.

Q: Well, we get now to, what, about '85 and phase 3?

CROCKER: Well, phase 3 starts really in late '82 and '83, but phase 3 is trying to mobilize the Cuban withdrawal process in Angola.

Q: Did we see anything for the Cubans in getting the hell out? Were they feeling they were stuck in a swamp?

CROCKER: I think our view was that the Cubans would eventually realize that they were in a quagmire and we witnessed year after year in central and southern Angola dry season offensives by the government of Angola with active Cuban support and Soviet support.

In '83 we saw a big dustup. We saw a big dustup in '81. It was like every other year. I guess it took them a year to restock. '85, there were big confrontations and in '87. So it was like every odd year.

And the price tag for Cubans was hard for us to assess. Not easy to know how many casualties they were taking, not easy to know how much of the Cubans' costs was being subsidized by the Angolans and by the Russians.

By the time we did engage with the Cubans, which didn't come 'til the end of the whole process, we knew that the shoe was pinching badly, because Cubans would confide in us that their boys were coming home with diseases which even the Cuban medical service could not deal with and the Cuban medical service is very advanced. And they were really not happy with what was being brought back home to the island from their experience in Angola.

They probably also realized that this was not going to be ever a great victory, so they began to think at some stage, but we don't know exactly when to this day, that peace with honor might be worth looking at.

We were constrained in the Bureau of African Affairs, at least I was constrained, from any thoughts about directly engaging the Cubans, so we did not have that possibility in '83-'84-'85, back at that time.

Q: Could you explain a bit why you were constrained? Put somebody in the picture who is looking at this.

CROCKER: Well, we had no relations with Castro and talking to him would be an awfully big deal and it would not be approved or supported by probably anybody in our political process, in the absence of some new factor or new ingredient that would enable you so to fend off the predictable questions: "Well, why would you do that? Aren't you giving him a gift? Aren't you rewarding them by talking to them? Aren't you dignifying their adventure by talking to them, when we're trying to get them out of their adventure?"

The language we used and the language I still use to this day is that the Cubans were engaged in an ideological adventure in Africa of global socialist solidarity, in part because they were blocked in their own hemisphere, so they were displaced into Africa.

But let's not forget also that Cuba is a multiracial society and they're very proud of it and they have therefore a natural affinity and are good at relating to their African brothers and sisters. And many Angolans had training in Cuba. So that was a relationship that was in some ways more of equals than with the Russians.

In any event, I would not have gotten approval for talking directly with the Cubans, had I proposed it. The only times we talked to the Cubans in the first half of the 1980's was over issues to do with immigration and with their role in the conflict in Nicaragua.

We did send Vernon Walters to Cuba at several stages to warn them to "cut it out" in Nicaragua, but we never did that about Angola and I think, perhaps, hindsight's always perfect, I remember talking to Al Haig about this in '81. He said, "We'll talk to the Russians about getting the Cubans under control."

This kind of assumes that the Russians have the Cubans under control. I've never been totally persuaded of that myself. It takes two to tango, or maybe more.

Q: Were you feeling, as you did this, looking over your shoulder, the Miami Cuban political machine, was this a factor in dealing with the Cubans, or was this a minor problem?

CROCKER: Well, since we weren't dealing with the Cubans on African policy, it wasn't a factor. But it became a factor when we started dealing with the Cubans.

And it also became a factor when the Miami Cubans got mobilized on the UNITA issue in '85 and '86, which we have to talk about, because the political parameters changed around that time, both vis-ï¿½-vis South Africa and Angola.

And at that point the Miami Cubans joined the fray as kind of right wing allies and fellow travelers of UNITA. So we did hear their voice.

But just to finish the point on the Cubans, we couldn't negotiate with them. We knew they were in the room, virtually, along with the Russians, every time we talked to the Angolans. We were confident that our meetings in Angola were being taped.

Our hotel rooms were being taped. We went to Angola frequently and we'd wake up the next morning and realize that we probably shouldn't have even had that one little conversation, because it would be played back to us by show-offs who'd say, "Oh, I hear you're turning forty next week" or something, just to prove that they'd really done their homework.

So we often had the sense that the people we were talking to were not the people that we had to talk to and that was very frustrating.

I would say by the latter part of 1983 the contact group and the Namibian issues were pretty much sewed up.

Our contact group allies and, for that matter, our frontline state partners did not want to be formally part of our diplomacy over Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola.

So we were dealing much more solo from that point on, with a lot of help from Great Britain. The British supported our diplomatic efforts with the Angolans.

But we used every channel and technique we could find: friends we developed in Mozambique, friends we developed in Europe, in France and all sorts of places, to reach into the MPLA, that's the Angolan government, to reach into the MPLA structure, to disassemble it, to understand it, to do the Kremlinology on the MPLA that was necessary to figure out who to talk to.

And by the middle of '83 and well into '84 we were talking, finally, to some of the right people and we were beginning to get to the point that one could envisage them giving us a Cuban troop withdrawal proposal of some sort.

They would accept the need to talk about it and they would agree in principle that there would have to be one. What we were looking for was to get such a proposal from them. We were trying to get the Angolans to make a bid, to give us their opening bid, and we tried not to use that term, because that implied that there would have to be a lot of other bids. But it was a long, arduous process, of coaching, coaxing and getting to know each other, with the right people.

Q: Let's talk a bit about how one gets to know the right people. If anybody reading goes back, we spent years developing this Kremlinological technique: who stood where on Lenin's Tomb and all that.

But, okay, you've got this new African country and I take it the structure was opaque, who was running what. It hadn't developed into real solid ministries and rank order and all that.

CROCKER: You got it.

Q: How'd you work on that?

CROCKER: You work on it by talking to partners who do have diplomatic representation in Luanda. Secondly, you work on it through intelligence sources, if you have them and they weren't very good, frankly, on the MPLA, because we didn't have a station there and it was not so easy to penetrate.

The Portuguese were very helpful, but the Portuguese also come with a lot of baggage and some of the MPLA, in fact, were white Portuguese communists. So one had be to very aware of the baggage of our Portuguese friends as we tried to analyze the MPLA.

There was a handful of academics, two, three, at the outside, in this country who really, really knew Angola well and we tried to stay close to them.

Q: Were they able to visit Angola?

CROCKER: Yeah, they could visit and they had friends and they had connections and they could shed light on some aspects of the Angolan regime's puzzles.

So eventually we figured out that there were probably four or five types of Angolan officials and that we had to maneuver through them and to get to the right ones.

There were the totally committed ideologues in the foreign ministry, who were hopeless, absolutely hopeless. They were great at drafting UN resolutions condemning linkage and the evils of constructive engagement. They were hopeless interlocutors, who saw it as their job to prevent us from getting through to any of their fellow countrymen.

There were some interesting generals, senior generals and once we got them at the table we began to get a sense that perhaps they were an autonomous, distinct voice with a point of view of their own.

There was a key guy who was the minister of interior, Kito Rodriques by name, whom we cultivated as we believed him to be very close to the president.

There was the president himself, who was a young man when we started this process, he's my age today! He's been in office since 1979 without a break, Jose Eduardo dos Santos, a Soviet-trained petroleum engineer who became president of a country when his predecessor suddenly got ill and died on a Soviet operating table. People have often speculated about that, but that's another story.

Anyway, dos Santos was a young, technocratic guy who wasn't really fully in charge and not really a free agent. But gradually, over the Eighties, he became more of "the decider," he got more into the saddle.

There were young soldiers, there were older soldiers and their were party ideologues who were keepers of the communist flame. There were a variety of people to deal with.

We had to penetrate that and figure out how do we get an authoritative Angolan proposal as to the timing under which they could see Cubans leaving their country as it was linked to a withdrawal schedule for South Africans from Namibia. That was the goal.

By the end of '84 we had accomplished two major things in this effort. One, we had negotiated a disengagement agreement that didn't last very long, but while it lasted it showed what could be done between South African forces and Angolan and Cuban forces inside Angola.

We negotiated a stand down and a disengagement agreement and set up a joint military commission between them. It gave them a taste of what this kind of diplomacy could look like when the time was right, but they were never serious about fully implementing it. They used it as a breather, rather than using it to create momentum for the ultimate peace. I learned an important lesson from that process and have often reflected on the futility of partial or interim ceasefires that are not related organically to the broader political issues of a settlement.

But at the time it seemed to us like a significant accomplishment and I think it was, because it introduced them to each other. You had South African defense ministers sitting down with Angolan defense ministers and talking turkey. So that was important and setting up real time military-to-military radio links for a while in southern Angola, which was a real breakthrough.

Secondly, on the diplomatic track, we got a commitment, a public commitment from the Angolan leadership, signed by the president, to something which was called in Portuguese a plataforma, which I think we would call a declaration of principle, which basically said the Cubans will leave, in the context of a peace settlement in Namibia and the Cubans will leave by the sovereign decision of the government of Angola and that there will be an appropriate, I think the term they used was calendario, which we would call a withdrawal schedule.

So the magic words were uttered by this public, unilateral declaration coming out of Luanda. It was not something we could begin to sell to the South Africans (or accept ourselves). But the point was, if I can put it this way, it may sound a little crude, they had lost their virginity. They had begun to deal. They had begun to see the point of using the words we were wanting them to use, in order to keep open the idea of a package deal. And that's what we were driving for, a package deal of reciprocal binding commitments.

Q: Were you getting any reactions from the Cubans themselves? Here we are talking about their withdrawal, we're going through this right now in Iraq with our troops. Were we getting much from the Cubans in this period?

CROCKER: No, not directly. They did their game at the UN. And they did, in fact, at the same time that dos Santos issued his plataforma, there was in New York an effort to condemn linkage. We assumed the Angolans and Cubans were working hand in glove on both fronts.

So here you have these two sets of if you like alien theologies rubbing up against each other. Our theology was linkage and parallelism and we'll make a package deal out of it. Their theology was there's no linkage, down with linkage, we're not going to do linkage.

But it was confusing to people. On the one hand there's dos Santos saying "Our plataforma admits the principle of a calendario in the right context" and then we have the Cubans and Soviets working for a resolution in New York condemning linkage, which passed.

Q: Why would they condemn linkage?

CROCKER: Because it was the core of an American plan and this was the Cold War; never mind that they were in fact at the beginning stages of negotiating on a linkage-based settlement! Perhaps this was the way the covered their own tracks.

Q: In any negotiation there's linkage, unless it's a Carthaginian peace or something like that.

CROCKER: The Soviet game at this stage was to delegitimize every thing that we were doing by means of ideological warfare and verbal battling over terminology. The fact that we had an initiative in Southern Africa meant that they were determined to kill it.

It wasn't on the merits, is what I'm saying. It had nothing to do with the merits. We met with the Soviets several times a year in '82-'83-'84 and we had rather sterile exchanges, where they'd read their talking points to us and we'd read ours back to them.

Q: Well now, was Gorbachev coming into power at this time?

CROCKER: Not yet.

Q: Not yet. So we're still talking about basically

CROCKER: Andropov.

Q: The dying breed.

CROCKER: One dying Soviet leader after another, yeah. So it was not a period of much creativity on the Soviet side.

And when Gorbachev came into office, which was in '85, the first thing he turned his attention to was not Angola. So it took a while for any glimmers to come through.

Their game was the diplomacy of polarization at the UN and then, on the ground, military assistance.

Q: As you were working with this and trying to find the right people to talk to in the MPLA, were you avoiding the foreign minister and his cohorts or something, did you feel that they were hopeless?

CROCKER: Yeah, we just went around them with the active cooperation of Angolans who outranked them politically and everybody knew it. There was a deputy foreign minister, or vice foreign minister, who would join talks that were led by the interior minister and often by a senior general as well. And these talks would take place sometimes in Luanda, sometimes in Cape Verde, sometimes in Mozambique, sometimes in Europe.

This fellow I mentioned, Kito Rodrigues, came to Washington I believe in early to mid-'84 and was received by George Bush and received by Bud Macfarlane and various people who were major players in our political establishment.

So it was part of a process of building links. But we just sidelined the unhelpful elements.

Q: Now, was Mozambique a player in this process?

CROCKER: Very directly, yes.

Q: How so?

CROCKER: Well, Mozambique and Angola of course are brother lusophone countries. They came out of the same colonial experience. They came out of the same revolutionary experience. They knew each other very well.

There were people in the Mozambican structure that we were working with. I mentioned earlier that we were 'weaning' Marxists. We were trying to create a roadmap with Mozambique that would lead to a much stronger direct relationship between Mozambique and Washington.

So we developed allies there and they helped us develop allies in Angola. That was the sequence.

My senior deputy, Frank Wisner, at the time spent half his life running that process. We ran it together, but he was in the lead with the Mozambicans in many cases and spent many, many man-hours working with Samora Machel and Jacinto Veloso and various other Mozambican officials, who eventually led us to Kito Rodrigues and other allies in the Angolan structure.

So Mozambique was, in a sense, if I may use the terminology of conflict resolution here for a minute, Mozambique was an 'insider partial' in this diplomacy. It was an insider in the sense that it was on Angola's side, it was a brother to the Angolans, but it was advising us, the big superpower, the Western capitalist superpower, on how to basically do our homework and how to play our cards.

And sometimes the Angolans would invite the Mozambicans to join meetings with us, so that they'd have someone else at the table. It was quite extraordinary how that worked.

Q: Really a fascinating period of diplomacy, because this is where worked.

CROCKER: Well, diplomacy, it worked in terms of building relationships, in terms of building a sense, if you like, of trust. I'm not sure if trust is even the right word. It's familiarity and it's a sense and that you'll do what you say you'll do and that you'll be there tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. It is a mix of respect for competence, acquaintance, and predictability.

In some of these cultures it's an investment of time, it's an investment of building relationships, it's also an investment of just plain listening and coming to grips with the world and the history that they live in, rather than expecting that they will just come to grips with the one you live in. It's gotta be both.

Q: I was talking to a man who was an administrative officer in Africa and found that relations with Foreign Service Nationals in this country were poor. He hired some outfit to do a survey and discovered that the nationals did not feel that our officers cared for them: "They don't ask 'How's the family?' when they come in in the morning and talk a little about family matters."

Americans don't do that, building up that almost personal regard and interest.

CROCKER: You've absolutely got to do it and it may even lead to a kind of collusion, if you like, at a certain point. But what you're trying to do is to get people to the point where they can tell you a little bit of the truth and as they do you can tell them a little bit of the truth about what it's going to take to get to the bottom line.

And events like this, the negotiation of the Lusaka Accord of February '84

Q: This is in the book High Noon in Southern Africa by Chester A. Crocker.

CROCKER: And there's a picture here of the South African and Angolan military and diplomatic chiefs, with the American mediators in the background, just posing for a photograph as they finished three days of intensive talks and so on. That kind of relationship building is what made things move.

Q: You must have been concerned about that other great power that we haven't talked about, the far right, or whatever it is, in the United States. It's you and your team working on this and the whole thing could be screwed up by posturing on the part of the right wing in the American political process by stopping you from doing something.

CROCKER: I like to use boating analogies and fishing analogies and what happened to us by the end of '84 was that instead of being at the oars in a rowboat, rowing across a lake, we were suddenly like a sailboat with no wind and at the same time in the distance we could see a waterfall and we were heading over that waterfall.

It got really rough. It got rough simultaneously for two reasons. It wasn't just the right. We and our diplomatic effort got a one-two punch.

It was a combination of the left going after Ronald Reagan after his great victory in the fall of 1984, going after him on South Africa and mobilizing a nationwide campaign to stop constructive engagement and impose sanctions on South Africa on the one hand and the retaliation, if you like, from the right, saying, "Well, that diplomacy is putting much too much pressure on our friends in South Africa, anyway and the real problem is the Soviets and the Cubans and the communists in Angola and we need to support the freedom fighters of UNITA and not worry about a negotiated settlement. Let's just go for victory. That's what we're doing in Afghanistan. That's what we're doing in Nicaragua. It's what we should do in Africa."

So, to finish the analogy, we went over the waterfall, we were in fast moving water and we had to figure out how to survive, how to go with the flow.

We faced very major attacks on our policy of regional negotiations, both because of the upheaval in South Africa and the American reaction to it and American reaction, as I've said, to Reagan's victory and to the increasingly negative imagery coming out of the township violence in South Africa.

Q: You're talking about election victory.

CROCKER: His election victory, yeah.

Q: Of '84, which he won big.

CROCKER: Yeah, I need to clarify that a little bit more. It was right after the election victory, it was on Thanksgiving Day of 1984 that the anti-apartheid protests started at the South African embassy here.

So this was immediately post-election, but it was triggered by the unrest in the South African townships, the internal African ferment and disorder and determination to take over the townships from the white security forces, all of that being shown on American TV.

That created a dynamic of direct frontal attack on the administration inside this country over South Africa policy, at the same time that the right, as you're suggesting, was mobilizing to attack the State Department particularly for its diplomacy of constructive engagement vis-ï¿½-vis Angola and Mozambique and the rest of them.

So we didn't have any wind behind us. We had gales in front of us, if you like. There are all kinds of nautical terms that come to mind, like battening down the hatches and shipping the oars and figuring out how to deal with fast moving waters. We lost our own momentum and were for a period a sitting duck for domestic ideologues and activists who went to work on Congress.

Q: Within sort of the government complex, in the State Department, did you find that the congressional relations was helpful, or was this pretty much something you had to do yourself, you and your own people, to meet the questioning from right, left and center on what you were up to?

CROCKER: We had some counsel and some help and some company from the congressional relations bureau, but they could not begin to master or carry the argument by themselves.

Our policy was a very sophisticated policy. It required an understanding of a very nuanced diplomatic background. One had to understand why in fact in this part of the world we had to carry water on both shoulders.

We were not on one side or the other. We were on the side of a regional peace process. And that's always a tricky message to carry, even if you're a State Department official in the H Bureau going up to talk to people on the Hill.

So I would say that in terms of the domestic public diplomacy the overwhelming public affairs burden was on us to articulate constructive engagement as it related to South Africa and change inside South Africa.

That took a great deal of our time and we had to develop a particular task force within the African Bureau to get out the word on why we were working with such focus on the regional diplomacy at a time of apparent instability and possible change in South Africa.

Q: Were you concerned that constructive engagement, today, even, with some people, I get sort of negative, others very positive.

Were you concerned that, all right, you had a term which had never been used before, so far as I know, it's a very specific term for a specific process at a specific time, that maybe it's not a good idea to have a term, because all of a sudden this is something that rallies opposing forces, or not?

CROCKER: There's no question that you're right about that. I've thought about it a lot, I've written about it and I've said the only thing wrong with the policy was it had a name! But we do constructive engagement in other parts of the world and we've been doing it both before and since this African process.

Q: And this served as a rallying cry for various groups.

CROCKER: It became a bumper sticker, and the problem with it was not only that it became itself a lightning rod, but that different people gave it different definitions.

And I would wake up in the morning and I would get really pissed off because somebody else had defined my policy, given it a meaning which I never intended.

"Your policy of constructive engagement with the white racist government of South Africa." That wasn't the policy! It was never the policy!

The policy was one of engagement with the region, moving with all those governments and parties who wanted to work towards peaceful alternatives to militarized conflict. But that's harder to put on a bumper sticker.

Q: Did you find the head of CIA, William Casey, playing dog in the manger or screwing things up or was he not a real problem?

CROCKER: Oh, he was a real problem. He was a real problem for everyone who had to work with him in every region where he was engaged. He saw himself as an alternative secretary of state.

And so there were things that he did and things that he encouraged that often poisoned the well for us and gave false signals to some of our negotiating partners.

I think the South Africans were always confused as to whether or not he really had the ear of Ronald Reagan, or whether George Shultz did. And that obviously influenced what I could do.

Casey pushed hard to get the Clark Amendment repealed in July of 1985, but then so did we, because we all agreed. The Clark Amendment was an amendment passed at the initiative of former Senator Dick Clark which prohibited direct American assistance and involvement in Angola after the Angolan civil war. It was passed in the mid-1970s, and what it did was to make it impossible for the CIA or for any U.S. agency to provide assistance to any Angolan party.

We tried, actually, in '81 to get the Clark Amendment repealed, because it would be a Reaganite signal that, to use the phrase, "America is back," we don't have both hands tied behind our backs, we're capable of competing with our global adversary, that kind of thing.

We failed in '81. We succeeded in '85. But of course Casey saw that as the opening of the door for him to take over our Angolan relationship and so we had a tussle about that, and I remember Casey coming down from Shultz's office to my office to ask if he could have a word with me, this is the CIA director, cabinet rank and he didn't have an appointment but I didn't know he was coming.

Anyway, he sits down on my couch and says to me, "Chet, what about Stingers?"

Q: We're talking about missiles that were quite effective in Afghanistan.

CROCKER: He didn't beat around the bush. Anyway, so we had what I'd call a long, drawn out arm wrestling match, once the Clark Amendment was repealed and to get the chronology right, July of '85, what kind of a new Angolan policy do we have and is it really new, or is it just reinforced and what do we tell UNITA and what do we tell the MPLA with whom we are trying to negotiate Cuban troop withdrawal?

I'd been meeting with UNITA all along in the process, to keep them briefed, try to keep them with us, try to keep them sweet, inform them and get input from them. But what the Agency folks wanted to do was to jump into bed with these Maoist freedom fighters under the mistaken assumption that this would constitute a 'policy toward Angola'.

Q: There wasn't really an American military factor in there, a disagreement between Weinberger and Shultz, who didn't get along at all, but I would assume that wasn't much of a problem for you?

CROCKER: The Agency was a bigger problem, because they had an alternative diplomatic service and an operational arm, and after the Clark Amendment repeal they had tangible resources and they could say one thing to us and say something else to UNITA or to the South African Defense Forces or anybody they wanted.

They could say one thing to Shultz and then say the opposite to the French DGSE or the British MI6. And so this required me to develop and I did by the mid-Eighties, my own intelligence service and my own intelligence service was staffed by people who were totally part of my team and were supportive of my process and whom I saw six times a day.

Q: This is within

CROCKER: Within the African Bureau. I just had to do that. I had no other option.

A lot of it was just good diplomats but supplemented by what you might call lateral liaisons that were not necessarily approved by anybody.

We just had to do it, because we knew that there was an alternative game being played and we had to bring it under control.

There were four areas of policy that I want to touch on we focused on during the Eighties, in addition to Southern Africa.

The first had to do with the structural adjustment and the economic agenda that African countries were going through because of the high debt levels, because of the low commodity prices and so forth.

More and more countries basically were in arrears on their sovereign debt and the question was do we keep on throwing money at countries that are further and further in arrears and do we keep doing negotiated reschedulings of debt in the Paris Club, London Club?

Do we keep coming up with IMF and World Bank gap-filling exercises to try and keep countries afloat, when nothing was changing that would give you the slightest confidence that they wouldn't be underwater next year?

So we had to deal with that problem and one of the issues that we faced in the State Department, as you can appreciate, was since we don't control the IMF or the World Bank, we don't have those votes in the State Department, nor does the African Bureau of State necessarily control what USAID does, it was an very intricate set of bureaucratic and political issues for us.

And we did have at that point 47 countries to deal with, most of which were underwater, in terms of debt.

Q: And no real hope, was there, at that time, anyway?

CROCKER: Well, the only real hope was structural adjustment, which developed over the time since the Eighties a mixed reputation.

What we were basically saying was unless the liberalization of these economies takes place and there's freedom of capital flows and there is more interregional trade, most African countries have very high trade barriers between each other back then and still do, unless you in a sense open up your economies there's not a whole lot of hope. And even if you do open them up there may not be much hope.

So it was a message of tough love. It was also a message of conditionality, in which we said to African partners we can put more on the table if you do more things, in terms of policy reform.

So it was a difficult and protracted dialogue. I think if you look back on it from today people would say there was no choice but structural adjustment.

But it wasn't done in as politically savvy a way as it might have been, with the net result that there was pushback, governments felt insecure about structural adjustment, there was a nationalistic reflex.

In some cases the Bank and the Fund were insensitive to the political requirements of making those reforms and so governments felt very weak and fragile in facing up to the necessary.

But if you asked anybody who had ever read a basic text in economics whether there was any alternative but structural adjustment, they would have probably said, "Well, not really."

Q: I wonder if you could explain, in the African context, what you meant by structural adjustment?

CROCKER: Well, essentially, policy reforms in the way of liberalization, getting government out of the business of running the entire economy, opening up the banking system so that there could be international involvement in the banking sector , reforming the banks so that there was some sense that local investors could participate and get credit.

If you were an African business man or woman in the Eighties or Nineties, you couldn't get credit from your banks. The only people who got much credit were the government and the parastatals. So in effect you're reducing the parastatal sector, providing openings for commercial enterprise and opening up trade flows between African countries and between them and the rest of the world, so that Africa could participate in the world economy.

The basic point I'm making is that I'd say the African Bureau probably spent thirty, forty per cent of its time in these policy dialogues with African friends and partners, because they were difficult dialogues.

Sometimes they were less than successful. Other times they worked. But we were dealing with a mixed bag of friends, some of whom thought and said to us, "Look, you're the other superpower. If we're going to work with you and not the Russians, you've gotta help us. Where's your checkbook?"

And our answer to that was, "Well, you're right at one level, but we can't keep throwing American taxpayers' dollars down a rat hole." So there was a conditionality to things.

Q: Well, were the Soviets doing anything? Were they basically giving an alternative or not?

CROCKER: To their select few, they would give considerable alternatives, in the form of unconditional military loans and sometimes civilian loans, but just to their select few. So they didn't have a long list.

We would up having to have these dialogues with thirty or more countries. Their long list consisted of a bunch of failed Soviet clients, or failing Soviet clients, like Congo-Brazzaville, Benin, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Angola, Ethiopia, not a long list. They were going down, basically, at that point.

And the Soviets, of course, the cost of empire for them was going up. They were in the position of propping up failing governments, not only in Africa but in Central America and Afghanistan and so forth.

So from their perspective they were pulling back a little bit in the mid-Eighties. And once Gorbachev came in, which was April or May of '85, once Gorbachev came in you saw a different Soviet message.

Q: Still at this point a good number of these countries were one party, president for life, type governments. This restructuring must have threatened them.

CROCKER: Well, yes, because these kinds of regimes maintained themselves by steering money to their patronage networks, which may have been, in some cases a thousand people, in other cases a couple of hundred people and also steering resources to the urban elites who could threaten the regime.

Basically these are urban-based regimes. You had the military, the police, you had the students, you had the trade unions, nearly always in the capital city. And so what they did was to screw the farmers, give nothing to the farmers and give whatever they had to their own power base, which was in the cities.

I'm generalizing here, of course, about a whole lot of different countries. But that was the basic picture.

All I'm getting at is that our entire diplomacy was impacted by this difficult burden, their burden and our burden, of how do we get along together as cooperating partners. It was complicated.

Q: As assistant secretary, how do you deal with this, these fifty-off countries or so? You have this massive problem with

CROCKER: Arrearages and financing gaps.

Q: You obviously had to delegate this, but did you devote much time or did you give it to somebody else to figure out the nuances of dealing with this?

CROCKER: It's a good question. If affected all of us in the bureau and affected all of our missions overseas. I had four deputies, one of whom spent full time on this and did nothing else. Others spent part of their time. And on the big accounts, the big country relationships, or the major ones, sensitive ones, I would get involved.

And quite often getting involved means taking an issue upstairs to the under secretary or the secretary of state and saying, "I need your help with Treasury" or "I need your helpwith AID," "We've gotta do better with OMB in terms of the aid program for the coming fiscal year," that kind of thing.

So that's one thing we were doing apart from southern Africa.

Q: In sort of the rest of Africa were there any wars or regimes causing particular trouble at that time?

CROCKER: It's always your good friends that cause you the most trouble, isn't it? We spent a great deal of time trying to make something out of the government of Liberia, which was then headed by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe.

I really wouldn't know where to start in estimating the amount of time that was invested in trying to work with him, by my deputies, by myself, by Peter McPherson, the AID Administrator at that time, who spent days trying to work with Doe and a few of his colleagues to get them to understand what policy reform meant and how it could be good for them.

So, Liberia, yeah.

Q: On Liberia, was it just Doe really came from nowhere, very little education. Was this the problem, or was it a mental attitude?

CROCKER: It was a mixture of almost no formal education, a need to provide some goodies for his boys, fear of what would happen if he didn't and an inability to understand what we were talking about, when it came to these fairly intricate mechanisms, like, for example, the Paris Club.

I had a tough time understanding the Paris Club for the first two years in the job! But this was a young man who was terrified of Americans, terrified of his responsibilities, terrified of his colleagues and eventually he wound up with a lot to be terrified about, because he was slaughtered and literally butchered by some of his fellow countrymen.

But that's an extreme example perhaps of a troubled relationship. We never got it right. It was always a difficult account. I went to Monrovia more times than I ever imagined I would, trying to dig out of some of the problems, but it was just very, very complicated because of our historical role there, the assumption that Washington had a lot at stake, the reality of our commercial, intelligence and other interests in the country.

Other countries that we spent a lot of time on because they were important relationships would be Sudan, Somalia, Zaire, as it then was, Congo today.

But we also spent a lot of time with a number of the key francophone countries, many of which were looking to diversify their relationships away from simply relying on their French friends.

So that was also very interesting and sometimes they would try to play us as an alternative and play us against the French. We made it clear that we weren't in that business. We weren't going to be played against the French.

I'm thinking of Senegal and Cï¿½te d'Ivoire, Gabon and eventually Congo-Brazzaville, as well as smaller countries which we worked with trying to bring them into a better dialogue with us, like Mali, for example.

I remember going to Mali with then Vice President George Herbert Walker Bush and we had a great visit there and the Malians were eager to engage with us.

Let me relate this to another policy front that we had and that was trying to bring countries that had been, as you said, one party, but one party Marxist states towards a less Marxist orientation.

And there were a number of African countries by the mid-Eighties who were very open to this and very interested and we worked hard, how can I put it, to "wean" Marxists towards a more liberal economic model: Tanzania, Mozambique, Congo-Brazzaville I've mentioned, Benin, Angola.

So we worked wherever we found countries that were at all open to having a dialogue. I liked to say at the time that we would have good relations with any African country that wanted to have good relations with us. By the mid-Eighties most African countries really did want good relations with us. We had very few totally poisoned relationships.

Q: Was it apparent by the mid-Eighties that the Soviet star was fading rapidly, back in the home country and all and its influence?

CROCKER: George Herbert Walker Bush had to go to Moscow repeatedly to help bury Soviet leaders. I saw him bury Brezhnev and then I saw him bury Andropov and then he had to bury Chernenko. When we finally got to Gorbachev it was a breath of fresh air.

But he was the one who made your point most eloquently, because Gorbachev was really stunningly eloquent about the need for, initially, perestroika, which is of course the same thing, it's structural adjustment.

And so I think a number of the African partners of Moscow were a little bit worried about where this was going and what this meant for their relationship with the Russians.

The place we saw it most clearly was in the Mozambique dialogue, which was for us very intensive and we were trying to bring our Mozambican friends into a close relationship with us and other Western countries.

Margaret Thatcher in the UK was doing a lot of that, working closely with Samora Machel and then with Joaquim Chissano, his successor.

And we saw very clearly that the Russians were not providing the kind of patron-client support that the Mozambicans had relied on. So the Mozambicans, they would have been open to almost anyone I think at that point.

So, they saw the writing on the wall, but none of us, really, understood the full extent of what became the Soviet collapse, not in '85.

Q: Up to the time it collapsed, this wasn't in the cards for any of us.

CROCKER: No, including Gorbachev.

Q: Back to what you've mentioned about the French, interviews I've done over the years, so many of our ambassadors up through the early Eighties and all to the francophone countries say the French were highly suspicious of the Americans, because they didn't want us to poach on their hunting reserve, as they termed it and our people spent a great deal of time trying to assure the French that we didn't want to do anything in their patch. But by the time you got there, we were.

CROCKER: Oh, yes we were, but we were not doing something that was aimed at undercutting France. We were pursuing our own interests and burden sharing, in some cases.

But it's a good point you raise. Look, I think the French political elite, policy elite, never got over Suez, never got over Algeria, never got over the loss of empire, in one sense, until very recently.

There was a great sort of nostalgia for the kind of continuity of relationships in Africa that they had had in the past. The best evidence of that is these cooperation agreements, some of which still exist to this day, which give remarkably tight linkages between Paris and the ex-colony, in all sectors: telecommunications, defense, police, you name it, access to higher education opportunities, access to uranium mining, just an amazing set of agreements.

These were all signed in 1960 and the French were jealous of their chasse gardï¿½e, as they called it. They especially didn't want Anglo-Americans messing around in their chasse gardï¿½e.

That was the initial reflex. By the time we got to the Eighties, which is the period we're talking about, French officials, especially in the foreign ministry and the aid ministry, or the cooperation ministry, as they call it, realized how expensive Africa was for France and they realized that there could be benefits in burden sharing.

They didn't necessarily want the exclusive right to bail out French-speaking Africa and they would be delighted if Uncle Sam would help them to sustain their lead role in expensive countries like Senegal, as I've mentioned, or Cameroon. They were always after us to try and help them in Cameroon or the Central African Republic, which was the last thing we wanted to do. So there was a little bit more sobriety by the mid-1980's.

On the American side, to get back to your question, I often found American diplomats, career or non-career, inclined to think that part of their job was to push the French out of places where they had the lead role but I didn't accept that, not for a minute.

I've never understood why we would want to displace Europeans in Africa, because why would we want to be number one? For what? Do we really want to own African problems?

Q: Doesn't that come with the job? If you're an ambassador in a place, Americans kind of like to take charge

CROCKER: I know.

Q: You're dealing with a cultural problem, there.

CROCKER: You're dealing with a cultural problem on both sides. When you go to a place like Gabon, you realize you're not number one, because the French have that locked up.

Q: Still on this subject, though, did you find our ambassadors and, well, our missions there were pushing human rights, which the French tended, in fact most of the Europeans took sort of not as interested a role as we did.

We sort of had the human rights hunting license, at least we thought we did and did this sort of foul things up for normal relations with these countries?

CROCKER: Perhaps in a few cases. We weren't leading with human rights as our number one agenda, either. I'm trying to think of a good example.

Perhaps Togo, under Eyadï¿½ma, might be a example of what you're talking about, where we would say, "My heavens, this doesn't pass the smell test and do we really want to be printing money for the Eyadï¿½ma regime? Why don't we let you handle that one, Franï¿½ois?"

But it would depend very much on the bilateral relationship I think as to whether we led with human rights or not. You're right that the French didn't lead with human rights anywhere.

Anyway, I think an example that's quite interesting on all this, which leads to the third dimension of our non-Southern African policies would be in Chad.

Chad was a major front in the relationship between Black Africa and North Africa, because of Libyan adventurism and expansionism.

We saw Libyan activity in as many as twenty different African countries that I would describe as subversive: Libyans renting, buying or suborning African governments or political elites that were generally speaking quite weak and in some cases open to Libyan diplomacy, unless we were pretty active.

So we had a task there of trying to counter what we saw as unhelpful Libyan behavior. I want to emphasize we did not equate Libya in any way with Soviet activity. We never thought the Libyans were doing Soviet bidding or vice versa.

The Libyans had their own games, but they were playing games. They'd arrive in countries that were in need to foreign exchange with brown envelopes full of hundred dollar bills and try to insinuate themselves with the ministry of fisheries or the ministry of culture and talk about building fancy mosques and what they were really trying to do was to buy influence and sometimes to subvert pro-Western governments.

We saw it in Mali, we saw it in Niger, we saw it in Chad, of course, where they were attacking and moving their forces into Chad. We saw it in Liberia, Senegal, in lots of countries, Sudan as well.

But the place where we dealt with it most dramatically, I guess you could say, was probably in Chad. Going back to 1960, when Chad got its independence, there really was never a time when there weren't some French forces in Chad. But a whole series of small wars took place in the Seventies and the Eighties over Libya's effort to claim part of northern Chad as their territory.

Part of that claim was something called the Aouzou Strip, but it went beyond that. They actually thought that a good part of northern Chad by rights ought to be Libyan and they came up with their own version of colonial era maps and tried to make the case.

On a couple of occasions, in '85, '86 and early '87, they sent as many as seven or eight thousand men into Chad, with three hundred tanks. This got serious, in other words.

Why I go into all this is because this was a challenge both to French interests and to American interests and it's not a well documented story, but we worked very closely, hand in glove, with the Chadians services, the Chadian military and with the French services and the French military, through our Defense Department and our services.

I won't elaborate on that, but we used every tool we had in the toolkit to reverse Libyan pressure and Libyan aggression, is what it really was, against Chad and it was successful.

The final phase of this was something called the "Toyota War," which took place in the early months of '87, I believe and the latter part of '86, in which tough Chadian desert warriors, using Toyota Land Cruisers with rocket propelled grenades, shoulder-launched missiles, got up into that northern area and destroyed the Libyan armored forces, they just destroyed them.

They circled them, they surrounded them, they cut them off from their supply lines, they lost access to water and you saw a major defeat of Libyan armored forces in the Chadian deserts of the north.

This was an example of something I like to point to, not just because it's interesting in the Chadian context but it's interesting in the U.S.-French context: when you get away from the rhetoric that diplomats sometimes issued towards each other, French and American and talk about practical military cooperation, we worked very well with the French. And they were delighted, we were delighted. It was a success story. One of my deputies, Jim Bishop, ought to have earned several stars for our role in this campaign.

Q: I know in the late Seventies I was in Naples and I remember talking to CINCSOUTH, Admiral Crowe, who got on splendidly with the French Navy. I think the French and American military and intelligence work very well together. The adults took care of things.

CROCKER: Well, we saw some of that. Occasionally it worked. There are always exceptions, but occasionally it worked very well and we were pleased when it could work, because, as I've tried to indicate, we were not looking to be solo out there.

Africa's a big place. There's plenty of burdens to be shared.

Q: What about President Mitterrand's son, who kind of had the African portfolio? Did you have much to do with him?

CROCKER: We did, indeed. My deputies and I would stop in at his office in the ï¿½lysï¿½e. It was always an amazing experience to us.

He was known in Africa as "Papamadit," because he would always go in to African heads of state and begin his conversations by saying, "Mon pere m'a dit" and then he would repeat what his dad had said. You'd hear a little speech from Jean Christophe Mitterrand.

He had the job of hand holding with regimes. He had a switchboard on his desk and the lights kept going on and off and on and off and occasionally it would be one that was green that he had to answer. And it was usually the minister of education of some God-forsaken country, Central African Republic or whatever, saying, "I need a bourse for my eldest son. Can you arrange?" That was the kind of hand holding that I'm talking about.

We thanked our stars that we didn't have those kinds of relationships across the entire continent. But, anyway, we spent time with him, with the Quai d'Orsay, with the cooperation ministry, with defense and with the DGSE, the intelligence people, too.

Q: On the francophone countries and the Congo, Zaire at that time, the Congo had been known as the CIA's country and you had Bill Casey at CIA. How did the Congo fit in your work?

CROCKER: Well, Congo or Zaire was very central to everything we were trying to accomplish, because we didn't want instability. The last thing you want when you're trying to conduct ambitious policies is a destabilization of an entire region or sub-region.

And clearly from our perspective the source of instability was economic weakness, but it was also Russian meddling, or Russian-Cuban meddling, and sometimes Libyan meddling.

So Zaire was a firm ally or friend, if you like, in that context, but it was also a very troubled government with a very corrupt leadership group.

So we were caught in the horns of a dilemma there, between dealing with an unattractive, one might say smelly, regime which had a poor human rights record and poor economic management on the one hand, but which was an important partner and an important source of regional stability.

Zaire helped itself but helped us in a number of situations, vis-ï¿½-vis southern Sudan, vis-ï¿½-vis Chad, there were Zairian troops sent up to Chad on a couple of occasions, vis-ï¿½-vis Angola, particularly.

And once we went back into the business of clandestine support for an opposition movement in Angola, UNITA, Zaire was the way we did it, for the most part. Not exclusively, but for the most part.

So Zaire was a very, very complex and demanding relationship.

Q: Were you able to keep that relationship, in a Washington context, in your hands?

CROCKER: It was never that easy, because the clandestine relationship with their services was under the hand of our clandestine service. And that kind of thing can work if the principals are on the same page. But with Bill Casey they were very seldom on the same page.

Bill Casey saw himself as an alternative secretary of state in a number of respects and had an independent policy, had his own policy and didn't necessarily agree with the State Department's policy or for that matter with the president's policy.

So it was very difficult and I think you could say that Zaire was the place, along with South Africa and one or two other places, where we had the biggest problems with our friends and partners in the Agency.

We relied on them very much, because they had information channels that we were dependent on. They also had some interesting analysis and intel. But they were also an operating agency, with their own dollars and sometimes with their own policy.

We worked with them well in Chad. In Zaire it was more complicated.

We would use the green phone to talk these things through and try to figure out who was doing what with whom.

But when I would go to Zaire, which I did more times than I care to remember, there'd always be meetings with the head of state, with Mobutu, of course, there'd be meetings with the foreign minister, meetings with the defense minister, there'd be meetings with the head of Mobutu's services.

And I would go into those meetings with people from the Agency as well as from the embassy, from State, holding onto my wallet and making sure that notes were taken that would be read my way. But it was interesting.

One other relationship I should touch on, I think, because it absorbed a great deal of our time, was Sudan, a country which bridges between sub-Saharan and North Africa, between Africa and the Arab world.

Because of Sudan's support for the Camp David peace process and because President Nimeiri, as he then was, was doing some of the right things domestically, we tried to work with him.

He was a major aid recipient. But, frankly, he lost his way and he began in 1983 imposing an Islamist vision on his country, which caused him and us increasing problems.

So by the time he was overthrown, he was actually, I think, here, getting medical treatment when he was overthrown in a bloodless coup d'etat, in 1985, from then on that relationship began to sink and it still is sinking. It's been sinking from '85 until today.

Initially his successor was a moderate military officer who was not really very Islamist oriented, but he was weak and he was succeeded by Sadiq al- Mahdi, who was not above playing with Islamists when it served his interests, and then by Omar Bashir, the current head of state, in another coup that took place in 1989.

But I mention this because we spent a lot of time on that relationship. We tried to get the Sudanese regime in Khartoum to avoid this self-destructive policy in the southern Sudan area which they pursued, of trying to break up the south with a divide and rule policy and then to dominate it politically and to exploit the oil resources of the south.

We did what we could, but moving Sudan has always been a real challenge for American policy. I never felt satisfied with what we were able to do. We would open up humanitarian corridors to feed people in the south, but the government would keep trying to close them down again. We tried to get the different presidents of the country to see the point about political Islam being a dangerous game.

But I don't think we ever were able to accomplish everything we wanted. We got some things done. We managed to use our relationship there to extricate tens of thousand of Ethiopian Jews into Israel.

Q: The Falasha.

CROCKER: The Falasha community, as it was then called and that was a success, but it was a rifle shot success. It was a humanitarian success, but it was not a strategic success, in the broader sense of the relationship with Sudan and the broad trendlines of Sudan's politics.

One of the reasons we had such a tough time was that Ethiopia was so firmly in the clutches of the Soviets at that time and we were unable to bring any influence to bear from Sudan's neighbors.

So the Sudanese regime in Khartoum would say to us, "Why are you pressing us? The problem is over there."

And we would say, "We know there's a problem over there, but you've got to also stop being self-destructive right here at home."

I mention this because I think Sudan has been a difficult challenge for assistant secretaries of state for African affairs and for their colleagues in different parts of our government for a long, long time and it still is today.

Q: Now, back to Zaire for a minute, did we see any alternative to Mobutu? We're seeing now a horrendous civil war, sort of warlords killing people and looting the country, but was this what we saw if Mobutu wasn't there, or did we have hopes that something could develop that would be more rational?

CROCKER: Zaire or Congo was a deeply troubling dilemma. There were times when we wished to bring greater pressure on Mobutu in order to steer him toward more acceptable and cooperative behavior. But there were limits. We're talking about an era in which the first question any assistant secretary would be asked by superiors if he or she proposed thinking of alternative leadership in such places was "What are you going to replace him with?" You can't replace something with nothing. So you better have an answer to that question.

Q: And that's the question I'm asking. Did there seem to be anything? I'm told that Mobutu really knew at least how to pay off the various elements and keep them more or less under control.

CROCKER: He kept a form of stability in place while he was there, until he began to lose his health in the Nineties, but he did it in destructive ways, by misappropriating public funds, by steering resources to the elite that were around him, by cutting off the country from international connections in many ways, by cutting off the capital from the regional capitals. It was misrule, pure and simple.

So in a sense the only way he could communicate, or anyone else could communicate, is by telephone or by airplane. So internal commerce was constantly declining and what you had was local patronage systems in different parts of this vast country, which is, as is often said, bigger than the U.S. east of the Mississippi. It's a big place and getting around in it is very, very taxing and time consuming.

His way of governing Zaire perhaps probably had more to do with the era of Eleanor of Aquitaine in France than it did with anything that we think of as kind of twentieth century.

We've seen how the European states were born and created and evolved from principalities into larger units and really the business of the state was the extraction of resources and the raising of armies. That's what European history is all about, until modern times and this was the very beginning of a process of state building.

The alternative to trying to work with people like Mobutu was not self-evident. There were some well meaning and fairly attractive politicians who said, "Well, just support us in the elections and you'll see what good governance looks like." They didn't really add up to much, in our experience.

So what we did not want to see was an empty chair in Zaire. And will say without a moment's self-conscious reflection that we have no regrets about not leaving an empty chair in Zaire during the Cold War period because I never figured out an answer to that question.

And still, to this day, as you're seeing, Kabila, Junior, Joseph Kabila, is a well meaning, presentable, articulate and remarkably adept survivor but he's surrounded by men who he's scared of. He's not really fully in control of his country. He has no control in the eastern provinces that are in turmoil today, in the Kivus and Oriental and in Ituri.

He has no control. He has an army out there whose only raison d'etre is the control of the payroll of their own forces. That's what they do, they control the payroll and they live off of that. They don't have a force that is worthy of the name.

In that kind of situation, you look desperately for some points of strength to latch onto. Mobutu was a very difficult character, he caused us a lot of problems, caused his countrymen a lot of problems, but it was hard to see how we would get from here to there, to a better political system.

I'm not really answering your question because I never had an answer.

Q: You are answering my question. And as we're talking in 2008, the answer seems to be there is not answer.

CROCKER: Well, the answer may be that we have to find a way to let nature take its course in some of these situations. Either that, or we have to intervene big time. Right now there's 17,000 UN blue helmets in the force called MONUC and they've just added another three thousand by Security Council action last week. And I don't think that's enough.

I think there needs to be about five thousand European troops added alongside the UN troops and then engage in what I would call coercive disarmament of some of these factions you just referred to and that's very robust foreign policy. I don't know if we're up to it, or if Europe's up to it.

Q: Well then, let's move back to late '84 and you were saying, rough times on constructive engagement.

CROCKER: Well, yes, the beginning of 1985 saw developments of several kinds, saw the breakdown of our diplomacy with Mozambique and South Africa, which was a very important diplomatic opening that we had made leading to a kind of demilitarization of the border and a de-escalation of tensions between Mozambique and South Africa.

That breakthrough took place in early '84 and by early '85 it had broken down. It broke down because elements within the South African government destroyed it.

They escalated the support they were providing to RENAMO, the rebel movement in Mozambique and they began basically not cooperating with the government of Mozambique any more and we found ourselves unable to change their behavior, partly because the left hand and the right hand weren't talking to each other within the South African government.

I remember going to one meeting with the South Africans, and in a sidebar we had a quite lengthy discussion about Mozambique and how to get it back on track.

And at the end of that meeting the head of South African military intelligence who had not been in the meeting pulled on my sleeve and said, "Crocker, why are you talking to them about Mozambique?," 'them' being the foreign affairs department. He said, "I run Mozambique."

So we were running into that problem a lot and we didn't have our own troops on the ground anywhere in this region, I should emphasize. Our entire diplomacy in Africa at this time was a diplomacy of using smart power, political tools, negotiations, foreign assistance and very limited coercive power.

So we weren't in a position to force the South Africans to behave if they were determined not to behave and on Mozambique they appeared to be determined not to behave.

Then, of course, at the same time, we're talking about the period between roughly November of '84 and March of '85, the urban unrest in South African began to grow by the day and the South Africans were handling it very poorly.

The Western media were having a field day and were reporting on the daily brutalities in South Africa's urban areas. This was not a war. This was people power challenging a government and the government cracking down on people power. But it was well-organized people power and then you saw a lot of things that were very unattractive.

People who cooperated with the regime were burned to death ('necklaced' in burning tires) in the black urban areas by activists and then the activists were beaten up, killed, jailed and maimed and tortured by the regime. And this was all being televised in prime time.

So increasingly my job was to explain to the American people on American television what the hell was going on in South Africa's urban areas and why did we still have this policy of constructive engagement and why didn't we support sanctions and so forth.

So then the focus of discussion and debate in the U.S. increasingly focused on the U.S.-South African bilateral relationship, with little discussion or knowledge of our regional diplomatic efforts with Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

A major movement had gotten underway in this country, led by a number of church and labor and other organizations, to mount protest campaigns on American campuses, as activists arranged media coverage of getting arrested outside the South African embassy on Massachusetts Avenue.

So I spent a good bit of my time explaining Ronald Reagan's policy of constructive engagement, which was typically shorthanded as "constructive engagement with apartheid South Africa," which was not at all what the policy was, but that's the way it was shorthanded.

So I'd spend the first five minutes saying, "That's not the policy. The policy is something different." So it was a huge distraction, I guess is the right word and we were placed somewhat on the defensive politically in this country, while trying to sustain our regional efforts in Africa.

Q: Ronald Reagan, did he weigh in at all?

CROCKER: Yeah, he weighed in from time to time at press conferences. He provided me with firm backstopping in both '85 and '86. He used language that I would not have used sometimes in describing the situation there. And I think it's fair to say that his graspof the brief was such that it didn't necessarily advance the cause of defending our position.

He viewed the South African regime as people who had been our allies in World War One and World War Two and would talk that way, rather than talking about how we sympathize with and we support the aspirations of the majority for a rightful share of opportunity and power in their country.

These were all very difficult code words which we had to work and clearly we supported movement away from apartheid, but the way he would say it sometimes did not necessarily make my job a lot easier.

There were many, many public occasions for these discussions and debates. Let me just say that in the first half of '85 we put in place some of our own additional restrictive measures, sanctions, that were unilateral, imposed by the Executive Branch, on the South Africans.

Q: What type of sanctions were these?

CROCKER: Well, these sanctions had to do with the travel of people to this country, they had to do with investment guidelines. We talked a lot about the importance of the Sullivan Principles and urged our companies to adhere to the Sullivan Principles.

But we firmly resisted mandatory disinvestment, argued against divestment by institution investors, and we resisted trade sanctions, because trade sanctions, of course, are an attack on the South African economy and on South African workers. They're very indiscriminate. So we remained firmly opposed to them.

But we had some restrictive measures that we put in place in '85. It didn't solve the political problem here. This debate over South Africa continued right up until around October of '86.

There were different phases of the debate. In early 1986 Congress developed a mandatory sanctions package, which was much more dramatic and included trade sanctions and also sanctions against new investment. We were adamantly opposed to those measures and President Reagan vetoed that legislation in the summer of '86 and by the fall of '86 his veto had been overridden by the Congress.

What I'm describing here is a two year struggle over South African policy. The sanctions lobby won the sanctions debate and sanctions became one element of American policy. We won our debate, in the sense that we never changed constructive engagement for the simple reason that Congress could not dictate the content of US diplomacy.

So by '86 we were conducting a dual policy, the legislative one that was imposed by Congress and one that was conducted by the administration, by the Executive Branch. It was messy.

Q: During this war, were you using your ground troops and sending them out to be slaughtered, to go to universities, people from the bureau, to talk to really kind of hostile crowds?

CROCKER: We did a fair amount of public diplomacy, yes. It was only hostile in a few parts of the country. God bless them, the citizens of northern California, I remember dodging crowds out there on more than one occasion, but for the most part we had a civil hearing.

But there were protests in a lot of places. A lot of campuses, you had protests which pressured the administration of universities to divest shares in companies that were invested in South Africa.

So it was like an investment portfolio sanction. Had no impact, really, on South Africa. It had a big impact on American companies.

Q: Well, by the time you got this dual policy, what reaction were you getting from the South Africans? Were they saying, "Well, you talk one way and act another?"

CROCKER: It was very complex for us. The South Africans didn't realize on some occasions how deep a hole they were actually in. I remember one occasion, this would have been in probably August of '85, I had a call from the South African foreign minister saying, "Chase is pulling its credit lines." They were not rolling over the South African sovereign debt that they held. "You've gotta do something."

I said, "Mr. Minister, I don't do sovereign credit lines. You have to talk to your bankers about that one."

But from then on down South Africa basically lost its access to Western capital markets and the best it could hope for was tightly restricted debt rollovers. It got some revolvers from European markets. It didn't get much from American banks.

But the South African reaction was a combination of petulance, silliness, ignorance and hand wringing. The last meeting I had with then State President P.W. Botha took place in early '86. To give you a feel for the way he conducted his conversations, he didn't cross the room to shake my hand and welcome me. He stood across on his side of the room and waited for me to approach him and then reluctantly shook my hand and said to me and I'm not making this up, "Why are you here? I had a better relationship with the Carter Administration. At least I understood where I stood with those people. With you I never know where I stand."

And then he said to me, "Don't come and talk to me about sanctions and how you need ammunition from me to fight your sanctions battles. Sanctions are your problem. They're not my problem."

So that's the way he saw the issue. That was his understanding of reality.

But basically the relationship was severely damaged by the combination of things coming together at that time: sanctions, protest movement, the unrest inside South Africa, Botha's inability to articulate a vision for the future.

He gave a famous speech in the summer of '85 which was called the "Rubicon speech," but instead of crossing the Rubicon he fell into it. He gave a speech with a vision for the future that led no where and the markets collapsed after that. They lost their credit lines. They undercut those in western governments trying to sustain the arguments on sanctions.

But I think we should also explain what we contributed to this mess. We tried very hard to deal with the Congress and with the American policy debate on sanctions. Secretary Shultz gave speeches, Deputy Secretary Whitehead, a lot of other people, gave testimony. I testified and spoke on television nonstop.

But the time came in the summer of '86 for President Reagan to give a major speech on South Africa in order to be able to sustain his veto of the most recent sanctions bill. We went through about probably eleven drafts of that speech and every time a draft went to the White House it came back rewritten and it was rewritten by three people: by Pat Buchanan in the Communications Office; by Bill Casey, the director of CIA; and by their friends in the South African government.

Q: These two you've named are well known as coming out of the right wing and fairly far to the right.

CROCKER: Fairly far to the right, the nativist right, or whatever you want to call it.

Q: What was the third?

CROCKER: People that they were working with inside the South African government, one assumes in the state president's office or in military intelligence, who were given our text by U.S. officials and then were rewriting it, using language which, in some cases, looked like it had been translated directly out of Afrikaans. It wasn't American English.

So we realized what we were dealing with here was a loss of control inside the White House of foreign policy and so Secretary Shultz and I had a battle on our hands over the shape of a presidential speech defending our policies in Africa and we lost that battle. The president gave a speech which lost the sanctions debate.

Q: Did you have any friend in the White House, I'm thinking the vice president or somebody at the NSC or anything like that or they weren't effective, or what?

CROCKER: They were not effective. We did have some friends in the NSC. We worked with Bud Macfarlane and we worked with, I think, Poindexter. And we worked of course with our Africa level staffers on the NSC. We also worked with the vice president's office, but they didn't assert themselves on this issue.

This was a speech drafting tug of war between the White House and the State Department and the White House communications office won.

The speech that the president gave in the summer of '86, it was mid-July, I think, lost the sanctions debate. It lost the Senate Republicans. They got no political cover with that speech. This was not a speech that gave the necessary message to the American people..

And so the veto was overridden and that drama played out until around October of '86. It was a painful time and it undercut our diplomacy to some extent.

Clearly the Angolans would look at all this and wonder what the hell is going on in Washington? Are the Americans and South Africans going to be having a divorce? Is this a great opportunity for us? Do we have to listen to the Americans anymore, with all this going on?

And meanwhile the South Africans were saying, "If that's your bloody policy, don't bother to come and talk to us about regional diplomacy on Angola or Namibia. We don't need to talk to you. And sanctions are your problem."

So I guess you could say '86 was the roughest year I had.

Q: Could you get much support from anywhere within the great American media or the whole policy was a little too subtle?

CROCKER: The policy was too subtle, when you had bumper stickers saying "Sanctions Against Apartheid!" Constructive engagement wasn't about that. It was about getting South Africa out of Namibia and Cubans out of Angola and keeping South Africans out of Mozambique, by the way and keeping the Russians out of the whole place. That's what it was about.

We always understood that the sequence would be regional diplomacy first and then South African change away from apartheid towards one man, one vote. That of course is what eventually happened.

Q: That's awfully hard to sell to people who want simple answers.

CROCKER: If people want simple answers, they'll get simple answers and what they got was disinvestment, to some extent. They got the sanctions bill. They did not change our policy.

We continued to pursue our regional diplomacy and it ultimately prevailed. And only after it had prevailed did you see the release of Mandela, the negotiations for one man, one vote in South Africa.

Q: Well, in a way, did the sanctions give you an added clout? Even though you didn't want it, was this weakening the South Africans, or stiffening their spines, or what was happening?

CROCKER: I think you really have to pick that apart, in terms of different time periods. The initial reaction was, as you might expect, a nationalistic reflex amongst white South Africans and especially Afrikaners, who ran the place.

Of course it stiffened them. It made them angry.

They felt let down. They couldn't believe that Ronald Reagan, their great friend, would not be able to prevent this, or Margaret Thatcher, who also had to deal with her sanctioneers at home and in the Commonwealth and Helmut Kohl in Germany, who had to deal with his church groups.

And they just couldn't believe that these Western leaders didn't have more backbone. They didn't realize that whatever backbone we had was being severely weakened by what South African security forces were doing in the black townships.

But in terms of finding people who understood the message, there were some in the elite media who understood what we were trying to do, but it was hard even for them and there were moderates among the Republican Party in the Senate who came to us, like Senator Nancy Kassebaum of Kansas and Richard Lugar of Indiana, who said to George Shultz, "You gotta do something" and we lost them on the sanctions debate.

And there is an Angolan side to the story that parallels the South African saga. The point is there were developments on the Angola track at the same time that led to the repeal of the Clark Amendment as we've discussed earlier, the decision to provide covert aid to Savimbi and what that did to our Angolan connections while we were having difficulty with our South African connections.

The American political right reacted to the sanctions movement against South African by saying, "Let's have a sanctions movement against Angola! If they're going to beat up on our friends, who helped us in World War One and Two and who are staunch anticommunists, the white government of South Africa, if that's what the Democrats are going to do, let's beat up on Marxist Angola and let's wage war on them!"

And so we saw a major movement amongst Republican conservatives to repeal the Clark Amendment. The Clark Amendment banned any U.S. covert involvement in Angola and it had been passed during the mid 1970's

Q: The Carter Administration.

CROCKER: I think, in the final phase of the Ford Administration that it was put in place, but, anyway, it had been there for some time.

I never liked the Clark Amendment because it tied my hands. I always felt it was better for us to be able to say to the Angolan leadership, "We do have options," wink, wink. But, anyway, our hands were tied.

The Clark Amendment is repealed and within weeks Bill Casey comes over to the State Department and says, "All right, time to go to war!", literally and of course we faced a lot of pressure from like-minded people inside the administration to basically scrap the negotiations, or at least put them on ice and begin developing a program of direct military support, clandestine support, to Jonas Savimbi and UNITA, to bring pressure to bear against the government of Angola, since they weren't moving as rapidly as we wanted towards a deal on Cuban troop withdrawal.

So we had a policy review. It was actually led by Bob Gates, who was Casey's deputy, sitting in an NSC office, with NSC people, Defense people and State people and we had that discussion and basically the outcome of that was that we would indeed use the authorities that Congress had now granted us to develop a modest program of covert support for UNITA.

I'm not supposed to go into detail about this on the record, so I will not do so, but I will just say that it was indeed a modest program. We tried to keep it carefully focused on support of our diplomacy.

What Casey and company wanted and by "and company" I mean like-minded officials in Defense, in the White House, what they wanted was not to support our diplomacy with power, but to replace our diplomacy with force.

Some of these people never understood that diplomacy and power can be integrated. They said, "It's either diplomacy or it's force and since diplomacy failed, let's try force!"

We'd ask them the question, "Do you really think that Jonas Savimbi's going to ride into Luanda on tank columns, with South African support and American clandestine support? I don't think so! Not as long as the Soviets are around."

But they would argue back, "We'll bleed them!"

And we would say back, "Why don't we try bleeding a few pilots, a few Cuban pilots and Angolan pilots, rather than trying to bleed the Soviet Union, which is a rather large target?"

Anyway, eventually this rather modest program took shape and I think it probably did make a difference at the margins, in sending signals. But we tried to keep it under our own control throughout this period, sending signals to Luanda, to Havana and to Moscow that, as Reagan liked to put it, America is back and if you don't cooperate, we have alternatives. I believe it probably did play a role.

Q: And also, when you think about it, it was somewhat the equivalent to the contra effort in Nicaragua. "If you start a guerilla war, we'll start a guerilla war."

CROCKER: Well, yes and we had another reason for being supportive, to some extent, of this program and that was to reduce Savimbi's dependence on South Africa.

The South Africans wanted to control Savimbi. In fact, in many ways they did and we felt that it was healthy for UNITA to have another pair of eyes and a window on the world through us.

Q: How did you view Savimbi the person and where he was coming from, at that time?

CROCKER: This is a long conversation. I would say in summary he was an acquired taste.

By the time we get to the middle of '86, we have military pressure against one of our negotiating partners and economic sanctions against the other.

And the question really is, did this strengthen our diplomacy, which you asked me and I haven't fully answered, or did it undercut our diplomacy and what led to the ultimate breakthroughs?

Q: It was a three dimensional chess game, really and yet Congress and everybody was looking at it on the basis of "What are you doing about apartheid in South Africa?", which really was not the main focus of our policy at the time. We were trying to clear the field, I guess and get the Cubans and Soviets out.

CROCKER: Yes, it is a complex matrix sort of negotiation. I would say that the issue of apartheid and how to end it was a fundamental part of the background of the policy. In other words, it was part of the regional arena. It was part of the geopolitical context.

But, as we've said in these discussions, the key issue for us was sequencing and getting some traction. The way we started to get that traction was on the regional diplomacy and ending the regional wars, the assumption being that you would not see the end of apartheid until the regional wars were concluded.

That was our premise going in and yet, by the time we got into these heavy seas, with lots of domestic and international debate, in '85-'86, as you just said, a lot of people were saying, "Well, you're talking about Namibia and Angola and Cubans and SWAPO and so forth, but what about the big kahuna?"

The big kahuna is apartheid and to explain to people that you have to walk before you run and that you have to clear away the underbrush before you can lay the groundwork for dealing with the major issue, that was a complicated message.

It didn't fit on a bumper sticker. What fit on a bumper sticker was "Sanctions Now" or "Disinvest Now" or "Down With Constructive Engagement" or whatever you like.

So I spent a lot of time in those years we're talking about on the TV, including the Sunday shows and so forth, explaining the president's policy and trying to give the viewers some sense of the nuance. We had eventually let facts speak for themselves and we had the debate and the rest was history.

Q: You said "the president's policy." How much did you feel the president understood this, or you were given your head, or how did you feel about this, sort of from the president's point of view?

CROCKER: The president supported his lieutenants in supporting his policy, which was, as he defined it, by '86, it was to prevent sanctions. So he had a very simple approach to this.

He saw South Africa as a country that had been an ally in World War Two and in Korea and so forth. He did not think that Marxist terrorists should take over South Africa and I'm sure that there were people around him telling him that's what the ANC represented, Marxist terrorists. His good friend Maggie Thatcher often described them that way, too, as Marxist terrorists.

So when people talked about the importance of the internal political dialogue in South Africa, he would say, "Yes, but with whom?"

So what I doing was trying to defend our negotiation, for all the reasons that I understood to be necessary. Secretary Shultz certainly understood it that way.

But once you get into this kind of debate in Washington, it's a little bit of "us versus them." It's a little bit of the Executive keeping control of policy or losing control of policy and the Congress saying, "You're not giving us enough cover" or "We don't agree. You're not sending enough signals that your heart beats for the victims of apartheid."

So that debate was not an easy one to prevail in. We prevailed the first time around, in '85. We lost the debate in '86.

And of course this was the time when we resumed our relationship of providing support to UNITA and to Jonas Savimbi in Angola.

In many ways if you look at all the so-called Reagan Doctrine conflicts or Reagan Doctrine wars, I'm referring to Nicaragua, of course and Afghanistan and some would add to that list, even though it's inaccurate, the Horn of Africa or Cambodia, even, it was

Angola that had a rebel with a major personality and major identity as a historical figure. Why? Because he had been in the anti-Portuguese struggle from the very beginning. He was one of the founding fathers of Angolan nationalism.

They got their story of struggle started in the 1960's. The MPLA, of course, operated primarily out of Brazzaville and to some extent was seen as a communist-oriented movement during the years before independence.

Savimbi had gotten support in the early years from both Zaire and Zambia, to some extent South Africa. His popular base was the Ovimbundu people, who represented 35, 40 per cent of the country, largely rural, largely uneducated, or less educated, whereas the MPLA ruling elite liked to think of themselves as representing the more advanced urban dwellers, the mestico or mixed race community and those who were near to the coast.

Savimbi had all kind of credentials. He was very well spoken. He was a good public speaker. He was a good rabble rouser.

There's excellent footage in the archives of him addressing audiences of think tanks in Washington, in Germany and London, as well as addressing his own troops in the field in southern and central Angola.

He was not bashful in front of microphones. He liked to hold the stage. He was charismatic, in the real sense of the word.

He was capable of holding an audience, in at least four languages, probably more, although I don't think I ever learned all of them: several African languages, as well as French and Portuguese, English and some German, did his studies in German-speaking Switzerland.

So this is a fellow who had been around the world and in that sense was quite worldly. He cultivated relationships with all kinds of leaders around the world, including all over Africa. He had quite an active diplomacy and he received support from places that wouldn't surprise you: more conservatively oriented or anti-communist oriented like Morocco and Togo and Cï¿½te d'Ivoire and at various times Kenya and Zambia and so forth, the list went on.

And of course Zaire, today's DRC. I say "of course" because without the DRC I don't think that Savimbi would have been geopolitically able to sustain his effort over those many years.

What was he like as a person? I'm not sure I ever got that close to him. I wouldn't presume to think I got that close to him.

We did take a number of walks in the woods, so to speak, outside of conference sites and meeting facilities, because wherever we met, except in Washington, we were subject to electronic surveillance, we knew it. If we were being hosted by the South Africans, we knew we were being bugged and intercepted or wired.

If we were meeting in Zaire, we knew that Mobutu was wiring us and of course that had its own complications, because Mobutu's wiring services were connected to his intelligence apparatus, which in turn was connected to our intelligence apparatus. Therefore if I was talking to Savimbi I was talking to Langley and I was aware of that.

But we occasionally met each other in other places, like Washington, where we presumably were not being wired.

In any event, we had these man-to-man chats about things from time to time. I had the sense of somebody who would have liked to be able to return to normal politics and to have his family be able to live in normal conditions and he had children. But normal life would have to come on his terms and his terms were pretty severe.

He saw himself, as I've indicated, as one of the George Washingtons of Angola and by the time we're talking about, the mid-Eighties, the other George Washingtons were either dead or marginalized.

And he found it very difficult to imagine sharing power with the kind of people who were then in power in Luanda, because he saw them as lesser personalities or as fronts for somebody else. He didn't take them very seriously and he didn't trust them.

He assumed that if he came back home to Luanda and tried to live a normal life there that he'd be killed and he was quite possibly right. And he assumed that, I think, because that's what he would do if he were in the MPLA's shoes.

This man was a charismatic figure, a rebel, an insurgent. He came out of a pro-Chinese background in the Cold War years. The Chinese had given him support when he was fighting the Portuguese, whereas the Soviets had supported the MPLA.

But by the time we're talking about he was a self-declared pro-Western freedom fighter and he understood the art form of being a chameleon about as well as anybody I've every met. He felt very at home in Ronald Reagan's White House, which he visited on several occasions. He presented wooden mockups of captured AK-47's to various senior officials. So he was a man for all seasons, you'd say.

But he was also a warlord and a quite effective battlefield commander and strategist, in the conventional sense of a military commander.

Beyond that, he was also a worried man and sometimes I think a very paranoid man, who tended to surround himself with yes men and he listened to those who were around him. That's what people tend to do.

When he was surrounded by good people, he often made good decisions. When he was surrounded by bad people, or no outside voices at all, he tended to make very bad decisions.

And of course I think the record will show that he was, among his many other attributes, a killer. He was responsible personally for the deaths of a number of his own senior colleagues who did something at one stage or another that led him to be distrustful and he wiped them out.

So this is a man with many aspects to his history. I would not have wanted to live under Jonas Savimbi. And whenever my people were in his company, on his territory, I didn't sleep well.

But I would quickly add I wouldn't want to have lived under any of the Angolan leadership I was dealing with.

Q: What about the MPLA leadership at this point?

CROCKER: It was more collegial, whereas Savimbi was very much of a "big man". Josï¿½ Eduardo dos Santos came into power in 1979 as a somewhat unproven and young consensus candidate that I think other factions in the MPLA party thought could control him.

But over the course of years, including right up to today, he has outlasted and outsmarted and outmaneuvered quite a number of people. He's very bright, very quick, well spoken, smooth.

If you had to define him as a Marxist, you would say he was a Yves Saint Laurent Marxist. He liked good things and his family has come to enjoy good things in life and there's terrific amounts of wealth in the hands of the dos Santos family today. We're talking about the aristocracy of an oil producing country that has done very well for itself.

But an engaging conversation partner and somebody with a sense of humor. You could have low key conversation and I often did with Josï¿½ Eduardo dos Santos. He was personable. He had some charm and he spoke in a conversational tone.

When you spoke with Savimbi, you thought you were speaking to a warlord, as indeed you were, quite a different atmosphere.

Surrounding dos Santos there were elements that were close to him from the military. There were various people who were his close military advisors who had been with him in the struggle at one stage or another, or had been commanders of certain parts of the armed forces. This was a military-based regime and whether the person was the defense minister, Kito Rodriques, as we called him, or the chief of the defense staff, General Ndalu, these were people who were among his closest advisors.

But there were many other advisors, including people more on the party, political side and the intelligence side and people in the foreign ministry. But I never thought, after the first year or so, the foreign ministry was an important place of power in the Angolan spectrum.

I think I should add here that as you get to know a regime or a country you begin to start differentiating all of the people you meet there and you begin to realize that you're not dealing with an abstraction or a stereotype or a clichï¿½, you're dealing with individuals and you begin to assert that what matters is not that you met with a title, but that you met with a person and that personality made all the difference.

If we had good meetings, they were with the right people and if we had unsuccessful meetings, they were usually with the wrong people.

As you know, we had no relations with Angola, so setting up meetings with the Angolans was complicated. On the UNITA side, we had to set them up through Zaire or through South Africa, unless they were traveling to some third country like Cï¿½te d'Ivoire or occasionally to Washington.

In the case of the MPLA, we would meet them often in Angola, or equally often in Cape Verde or sometimes in Mozambique. The fellow Portuguese-speaking countries were very close sister countries, if you like, to Angola, so we would often meet the Angolans under the hospitality of the Cape Verdeans, who were wonderful hosts and did everything they could to facilitate this process.

But I just would make the point that individuals make a difference. I wouldn't attribute our eventual success with the Angolans to any one of them, because I don't think any one of them was in a position to assert himself to become completely the counterpart of the South Africans in this three-cornered decision-making process. They were at that time very, very dependent on their socialist brothers, especially their Cuban socialist brothers, but also their Russian partners.

Q: Did you get any feel for the Cuban attitude towards these negotiations? Were they trying to screw things up, or what was happening?

CROCKER: There was no question that the Cubans were listening in on all of our conversations with the Angolans. They were in the next room, so to speak and they had the ability to do that and one of our key negotiating partners in the Angolan government, I have no doubt, was working for the Cubans, and I think he saw that in fact as a genuine alliance.

So the Cubans, we didn't talk to directly during the years that we're talking about. We didn't have direct contact with them over these negotiations, really, until 1987.

But there had been some other contacts. General Vernon Walters had been to Havana in the early Eighties to put down some markers and to make a few points about worldwide issues and he did touch upon Southern Africa during those contacts.

We would sometimes hear the argument that we really should be talking to the Cubans or that we should be allowing them to join the talks, if they wanted to. We were given to believe that might make a difference from some of our Angolan interlocutors and from third parties, the French or Mozambicans or whatever.

In the years we're talking about, which is the mid-Eighties, our position, for good or not, was "What kind of an African country are you if you can't negotiate for yourself? Would you really want us to sit down, we the United States and negotiate over your head with your Cuban allies, or with your Soviet allies?"

And we would say to them, in order to see if we couldn't trigger a nationalist reflex, we would say to them very bluntly, "Do you really want us to take this to Moscow and Havana and you'll read about the results in the newspaper, or do you want to behave like an independent African country, which some people think you are?"

On occasion we would find a diplomatic way to say pretty blunt stuff like that, to see if we couldn't get them to move forward.

Q: It also makes sense, looking at it long range, for our dealing with a situation. Who knows what the third parties will do and all that?

CROCKER: Right, they bring their own agenda in, of course.

Q: What sort of reaction would you get?

CROCKER: Well, we got the right reaction, but it didn't necessarily mean that it was real. They said what they felt they had to say.

This process did not get into high gear until the Cubans did join the talks, which has often led people to ask the question, "Well, would it have made a difference if you'd been able to have a Cuban dialogue alongside, in parallel, or something?"

Q: Were we excluding the Cubans at the early stages by reason that we didn't think it was a good idea, that we wanted to deal with the real people who were involved, who were going to be concerned over the years, or was this dictated by the Cuban lobby, or whatever you want to call it?

CROCKER: Dealing with the Cubans is a very controversial issue. Certainly it was then. Still is. And I would have needed presidential air cover if I was going to be talking to the Cubans and there would need to be a reason why.

So we occasionally, within my own team, would talk about that factor and how to play it, but we didn't think that we would succeed if we raised the issue to the secretary of state or the president, in getting approval to do it, in the absence of some evidence that the Cubans were interested in peace and might make a positive contribution.

Well, you get into that kind of a game, where people were saying, "They've got to demonstrate that they are serious" or "We need a precondition. Something has to change."

I've always been a believer that these things are basically reciprocal processes. Preconditions don't work very well.

And mind you the Cubans, in the years we're talking about, had not come to us directly and said, "Invite us to join your talks." They never did that. Anything we ever heard was through interpreters, by third and fourth parties. It wasn't direct. Havana wasn't sending us a specific message.

Nor were the Angolans. They would hint about it and they would say that the Cubans have pride and that they need to be consulted, but they never said, "We won't talk to you on this subject again unless the Cubans are in the room." They never said that kind of thing.

So it would have required us to initiate that opening to the Cubans on this question, at a time we were fighting Cuban proxies in Central America and, as you said, there was a Cuban lobby.

Q: And at least for the short term it would have allowed Castro to make a wonderful speech or something like that. When you open these things up, we discovered with the Iranians, they never miss a chance to sort of stick their thumb in our eye, even if it's to their disadvantage in the long run.

CROCKER: That's right, so we didn't develop that Cuban track in the years that we are now talking about, '85,'86.

If we had a Cuban track, it was to channel clandestine support to UNITA, including surface to air missiles. That was something of a Cuban track, because the main pilots who would feel the impact of that would be Cuban pilots. The Angolan pilots tended to be members of the elite from the MPLA and the Cuban pilots were some of Castro's best.

But they were aware of the fact, by the end of '86 and early '87, that we were in fact supplying UNITA with Stingers. That's in the public record, so I'm not violating the rules here.

Q: And the people at whom we were firing the missiles were quite aware this was not something developed out in the bush of Angola. They realized technology was a little more sophisticated.

In Afghanistan the Stingers did appear to have made considerable difference. How about in Angola?

CROCKER: It's sort of asymmetric warfare, if you like. Our program of assistance to UNITA was tiny. It never became anything bigger than tiny.

It was miniscule compared to what South Africa was providing for UNITA and what UNITA was providing for itself by capturing MPLA equipment by the shipload, unbelievable amounts of Soviet-supplied hardware fell into UNITA's hands, because UNITA was a very effective insurgency movement at that time and ran circles around the MPLA, or FAPLA, the army of Angola.

And of course the Soviet supplies directly to Angola were between one and two billion dollars a year and our own effort was minor.

But I think it sent a signal, in the asymmetric sense that as Ronald Reagan himself would have liked to have put it and did, "America is back." It sent a signal that this conflict is not going to be settled on terms that we don't agree with and it raised the price at the margins.

Q: What was happening politically during this time?

CROCKER: Politically, in the negotiations?

Q: And in Congress.

CROCKER: Well, some of the key dates: Congress lifted the Clark Amendment in the summer of '85 and by February of '86 the internal administration discussions had concluded and we had begun providing covert support of a modest type to UNITA.

This whole debate, of course, was not very quiet. When the president was doing one of his walk-bys to his helicopter and the press was staked out, one journalist yelled to him, I think it may have been November or December of '85, probably Sam Donaldson, "Mr. President, I thought you supported UNITA. What are you going to do to support UNITA against the communist regime in Angola?"

And the president said, "Oh, yes, but we're going to do it covertly!"

So this was pretty well known. The Angolan leadership, the MPLA leadership, assumed that we were doing so even before we were and criticized and attacked us for doing it even before we were, and they had a lot of support from other African governments and there were UN resolutions and a lot of hoopla.

The Soviets mobilized their global propaganda apparatus, attacking the Reagan Administration for pretending to negotiate peace in Southern Africa while fueling the war, which of course anyone who knew their facts knew that that was a bit of a joke, since this was a Soviet militarized region by this point.

The Angolan leadership , by the middle of '86, was saying that it probably could no longer negotiate with us, it would have to suspend the talks, it needed to know what America's intentions were and so forth. So this had a chilling effect on the diplomatic track with the Angolans at that immediate time.

And I should mention that in 1985 the South Africans had put forward a conditional proposal on Cuban troop withdrawal which they wanted us to convey to the Angolan side, which we did and we did it in late '85.

By the middle of '86 the Angolans had still refused to answer that mail. They simply were not prepared to dignify the South African bid, as we called it. So we were not in a position to push very hard on the Angolans at this point.

Meanwhile, by May of '86, the Congress, in its wisdom and looking at what's going on on the ground in South Africa, had begun another series of hearings and writing up a new sanctions bill to basically have pretty comprehensive economic sanctions against South Africa, both trade and investment.

That sanctions bill was developed and marked up in the Senate and there were parallel bills in the House. When the legislation finally came to the president's desk, in the summer of '86, he was unhappy, to put it mildly.

As I mentioned in a previous interview, what we had tried to do was to preempt that sanctions legislation with our initiatives that would include sanctions of our choosing, rather than the comprehensive, full scope, as we called them indiscriminate, trade war kind of sanctions that were in that bill.

That bill was really, in some ways, a maximal effort to declare economic war on a country and put a lot of people out of work, most of them black, of course.

It had elements of protectionism in it, by banning imports of things that the United States itself was a producer of; basically it was a measure which any believer in good trade policy would not have supported.

There were parts of the bill that we could support, so we tried to, if you like, we tried to cherry pick the bill and put forward another sanctions initiative of our own.

We had had a round of limited sanctions, executive order sanctions, in '85 but things had moved on, we would have to do more in '86 to provide any hope of preempting the congressional legislation.

But this led to a serious interagency battle and the State Department was probably the only voice in that battle that thought we'd have to make a major down payment of sanctions to be able to forestall the congressional initiative.

This is a very intricate and complicated story. It's been documented in various places, including my own memoir, but the simple point I would make is that by this time, by May, June, July of '86, the sanctions debate had become a struggle between two branches of government over the definition of our South African policy.

The Congress wanted more cover, in terms of leadership, on the issue of apartheid than Ronald Reagan was capable or willing to provide. So the president's effort to sustain his view of the situation was ultimately unsuccessful. He vetoed the congressional legislation and then the Congress came back after the August recess and overrode his veto, which was I think the first time that happened in his presidency.

So it was a big deal. It was a setback and a huge distraction, from what we were trying to do, which was to negotiate regional peace.

It was focused all on the internal South African situation and on Ronald Reagan's perceived failure to identify himself, his administration and the United States with the victims of apartheid. That's the story.

Q: Who were the leaders in Congress, or outside of Congress, opinion molders and all that you were sort of up against?

CROCKER: Well, it changed over time. I think there were people in what we would have called the anti-apartheid lobby group within Congress who'd been there for many years, like Congressman Bill Grey, for example, of Pennsylvania.

Q: Who was the head of the Black Caucus.

CROCKER: Yes and another would have been Congressman Ron Dellums from California. On the Senate side, the Senate was Republican-controlled at that time, but we kind of faced a situation, we in the State Department, where our friends in the Senate, namely Nancy Kassebaum of Kansas, who was the Senate African subcommittee chair and Richard Lugar, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, they were looking for more cover, if you want to put it that way, than we were capable of getting out of the White House.

This would not have happened if we had been able to move the White House closer to the position that George Shultz and I were advocating. We didn't succeed as I've described above.

Q: Now, when you say "the White House," does this mean the president, does this mean the national security advisor? Are there powers within the White House, or what are you talking about?

CROCKER: I'm talking about the voices around the president and there were varied voices around the president. Bill Casey, of course, was one of those voices and he had an office in the White House and spent time there and could influence things and often did.

Bill Casey was a true soul brother of Ronald Reagan on this issue and was determined to oppose any measures, what you might call partial measures, of the kind that we're talking about, more targeted sanctions, for example, on banking or on new investment and that kind of thing.

And of course Bill Casey and the Agency were running the liaison relationship with the South African services, which they saw as allies in a Cold War context and they used their sources and relations to oppose or discredit the steps that we put forward.

They didn't do so to our faces. They did it behind our backs.

He had a very agile and active ally in Pat Buchanan, the president's communications director, who saw the world in the same terms, as black and white.

Q: We're talking about '86

CROCKER: The summer of '86.

Q: And we're talking about a Soviet Union that's in its last five years of existence and within a couple of years of complete disinterest in Africa. But was any of that reflected in what was going on?

CROCKER: There was really no evidence of a Soviet shift or a Soviet rethink on this situation at that time. But if there had been one, we may find from the Soviet archives that there had been one, but if so I didn't see it.

And when you think about events like the Reykjavik summit of October '86, which was going on right after the Congressional sanctions bill passed and you imagine that the two leaders, Reagan and Gorbachev, are talking about a lot of different but mostly they were talking about was nuclear weapons and Star Wars and all the rest, which were very, very important bilateral strategic issues. They were not talking about Afghanistan. They were not talking about Angola.

But there had been an earlier conversation, I think it was Reagan's first real meeting with Gorbachev, in November 1985, in which they touched on a variety of issues and they had an exchange on what was called "the regional conflict agenda."

They didn't solve anything, there was no real progress, but there was a recognition that this was a basket of issues that would be worth talking about at some point.

So you had arms control, human rights, and issues of regional conflict. But even within the regional conflict agenda, the number one issue, far and away, would have been Afghanistan, because that was Soviet bleeding wound, not Angola.

Q: Speaking of your problem with William Casey, the head of the CIA, during this period here that we're dealing with, did you feel that you were getting good or was it tainted information from the CIA, regarding what was happening, because you're negotiating, you want to find out where the people you're negotiating with, what are their stands and all that?

Were you getting anything?

CROCKER: As you know, the CIA has two elements to it: it has an analytical house and it has an operations house and we were in touch with both parts of the house.

They often had some differences, some nuances. But where it came out and became visible to us was on issues that were highly contentious between the two buildings, State and CIA. Angola was one of those. Mozambique was another one.

We would have very extensive back and forth over reporting by the Agency on Mozambique, particularly. I remember being in Shultz's office, he would meet weekly with Bill Casey, and he called me up for one of these meetings and Casey brought one of his people.

Shultz said, "I've had enough of this back and forth. What are the facts here?"

We just had a real difference of analysis. The South Africans were basically spreading the story and arguing that the RENAMO rebel movement was the proper government for Mozambique and that we should get on the side of RENAMO and help it overthrow FRELIMO. This would have been 1980s style regime change.

We, along with the British, were diametrically opposed to that and fought successfully to prevent the United States from aligning itself with RENAMO and staying with a gradually warming relationship with the FRELIMO government of Mozambique.

So, we knew we had a problem on some of these accounts. I think also we knew we were being manipulated when it came to our diplomacy in Zaire, because Zaire was one of the major CIA stations in Africa at that time.

Q: Zaire was known in the Foreign Service as a "CIA country."

CROCKER: It was very definitely a CIA country. But that didn't mean that we were prepared to let that go unchallenged.

We at the State Department faced an eight-year struggle for the control of American foreign policy on these issues. We prevailed, but we lost some battles along the way.

People often say, "Well, did you know about that? Did you know that Casey was going down and having these secret meetings with people in Africa and so forth?"

We often knew that he was there. We were never in the room. We were not consulted. We didn't get readouts or memcons. But we knew they were going on, and we could guess what was being said. It was a standing office joke that Casey had told an aide he thought former Sudanese vice president Omar al-Tayib was 'the sweetest guy in Africa'; it didn't hurt that he was a liaison counterpart.

So we saw things through a glass darkly, often. But the agency operators were also somewhat in the dark about what we were doing. They were not in a position to prevent what we were doing.

While they took their battles to the president and they may have won a few, we won the war. And one of the reasons was we had people on the team dedicated to winning it and to fighting it seven days a week, 24 hours a day. There was a real sense of intense commitment to making our diplomacy work.

So even though, let's say, Zaire was a CIA country, that didn't mean we didn't go to Zaire and push our message. Our negotiating team, my incredibly able deputies, our ambassadors and Africa watchers in the field fought that battle and we had allies in fighting it.I don't mean to imply that this was just State all by itself, or the African bureau of State all by itself. I wonder if we could have managed this diplomacy without the British. They were with us. They understood what we were doing from day one.

Q: Was any of this conflict that was going on, CIA-State, were the counterpart agencies in the British government involved?

CROCKER: The British have less slack in their system and they don't, as a rule, tend to tolerate that kind of intramural indiscipline.

In fact I had to set up, in effect, my own intelligence contact staff , with a couple of people who would talk to individuals in our own intel structure to triangulate what they knew, and talk offline with British intelligence and we'd talk to other intelligence services offline: German, French, whatever.

We'd do what we had to do to get the information we had to get. So I don't know whether others were aware of that at the time. We felt that we were getting good input from both MI6 and the Foreign Office.

Q: I would have thought that within the CIA, particularly on the analytical side, these came from sort of the same sources you came from, sort of with an academic background, looking at this thing with sort of the same outlook. They might have had a cold, hard, Cold Warrior in Bill Casey, but I would have thought there would have been allies within the Evil Empire.

CROCKER: I hope I haven't conveyed the impression that the Agency was monolithic or that it was all on one side. As I said earlier, we talked with a wide range of individuals in the intel community to get the best information, the least polluted stuff, the insights of the brightest people. I'm really talking about those folks who were in a position to politicize intelligence, fairly senior people and those folks in some of the stations who were doing their bidding, they were doing the bidding of the senior ranks among the operational side of the Agency.

But we had a lot of daily interaction with the analytical people and with some of the operational people who were willing to deal with us.

We had weekly meetings with my operational counterpart. We'd talk about the entire region. We'd also talk about some of this Southern African stuff and where we'd disagree we disagreed.

But your point is well taken. We had important allies on the analytical side and they would often support the State view, or their view, vis-ï¿½-vis folks in DIA, who might have a more one-dimensional alternative.

Q: One expects the military, they kind of add up tanks and things of that nature. They have a different outlook.

CROCKER: Well, they also had a drop box called the Washington Times and whenever they had an unfinished intelligence product that they were proud of it would wind up in the in-box of some editor or journalist working in the Washington Times.

Q: How did you see the relationship between Casey and Shultz?

CROCKER: Well, I really can't speak for Secretary Shultz on this, but my sense was that Shultz realized and if you read him memoir there's whole sections of the memoir about this very issue, that there was a struggle going on here that was not being resolved in the White House, a struggle over who is the president's voice on different issues.

And that was partly Weinberger and it was partly Casey and it wasn't resolved until Iran-Contra, until the death of Bill Casey. It wasn't resolved 'til the administration's Augean stables got cleaned.

Q: These were big players.

CROCKER: Big players and somebody had to win in the end and somebody did.

Q: How stood Mozambique? Was this part of the situation, or could this be dealt with separately?

CROCKER: I think, looking back, the worst month of my tenure was October of 1986, which was the month right after the override of the president's sanctions bill, which made it look, in the eyes of many, that our policy was going to change dramatically, even though we knew it wasn't. The administration was not going to drop the policy of negotiation in Southern Africa, we were going to continue doing exactly what we had been doing, but we're going to do it against the backdrop of having lost a major debate.It somewhat hamstrung us. I made it look to various people that our policy had been either defeated or fundamentally changed.

So there was that backdrop. The South Africans had gone into kind of a retreat, politically speaking and diplomatically speaking. They didn't want to talk to us. They in fact said at one point that there'd be no more meetings to discuss these negotiations.

And in fact it became such that I think it was difficult for the "good guys" in the South African government to be seen talking to the State Department right after that.

Q: Was it the feeling that we were seen as weak?

CROCKER: Partly that. They knew all about the controversy on the speech drafts back in July of '86. Some of them were writing it.

They knew all about the interim sanctions that we had tried to put forward to preempt the legislative package called the "Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act," the "CAAA" as it became known.

So they knew what we had tried to do and they knew that we had not succeeded and they knew why we had not succeeded and they just didn't want to have anything much to do with us.

So October of '86 was gloomy. It didn't stop us from doing some things we were determined to do, which was to work with like-minded allies to prevent a complete shutdown of the South African economy. We worked very quietly behind the scenes to make sure that South Africa did not lose all of its access to bank credit rollovers and that kind of thing.

But the other reason why October was pretty grim was that on October 19th of 1986 Samora Michel, the president of Mozambique, went down in a plane crash. His plane went into mountains along the South African-Mozambique border, under stormy weather condition. He was in a Soviet plane flown by, Soviet pilots.

And so we had lost a major partner and a figure who had a lot of credibility in Africa and certainly a lot of credibility in that region as well as in Washington and Whitehall.

And this at the time seemed like a pretty major blow. It was a gloomy month, October of '86. The MPLA regime in Angola was saying that there wasn't much to talk about if we were waging war against them (aid to UNITA) and so forth. So this was a time for hunkering down, for doing everything possible to sustain the framework that we had built up.

Don't forget we had opening bids from the two sides on a schedule for Cuban withdrawal but they were quite far apart. The Angolan proposal was sort of open ended as to when the final Cubans would ever leave at all, linked to conditions that the South Africans would giggle over. The South African proposal was a very front-loaded proposal for Cubans all leaving in the first six months, I think it was, or seven months, of the process and the Angolans would laugh at that. We don't know what Castro said about it, but I'm sure he didn't like it.

But we did have some elements of a framework here, where people understood where we were coming from: a linked package in which South Africa leaves the cross-border war, South Africa gets out of Angola, gets out of Namibia, Namibia becomes independent and the Cubans leave Angola in a parallel package.

That was on the table. We were determined to hang on to it and to protect it, maybe that's the best word, to protect it from these hostile forces, political forces, in the Congress, in public opinion, the international fora and frankly from within the parties themselves.

The parties themselves were shooting themselves in the foot by the way they were behaving. So we said, "All right, when you're ready, you have our phone number. We're not pressing for anything. But you know where we are. And in the meantime, we will communicate with you through whatever channels you like."

In the case of South Africa, it was British channels. We used British channels to communicate at a very authoritative level with the South African government in the final three months of '86.

We used UN channels and British channels to communicate with the MPLA regime in Angola. When I say "UN channels," I'm referring to a partner and an ally and a friend who has subsequently distinguished himself as a Nobel Peace Prize-winning diplomat, Martti Ahtisaari, who undertook on behalf of Secretary General Perez de Cuellar a visit or two to Angola on behalf of the SG, Perez de Cuellar, but, in a sense, also on behalf of this peace process, although he wouldn't have put it that way.

He was definitely fishing for good information, to find out what were they thinking, when will the ice break, when will we be able to warm this up again and under what circumstances and with whom and where and that sort of thing.

Martti is a very skillful person and he could say things to the Angolans that almost no one else probably could have at that time; I wasn't in the room, obviously, but my instinct tells me he spoke along the lines of, "If you think you're going to get better negotiating partners or a better deal than talking and negotiating with Chester Crocker and George Shultz, forget it, because the rest of Washington basically thinks that you people are hopeless pawns of the Soviet Union." And he would find some diplomatic way to say that and somebody to say it to. It's not quite something that I could say.

And so I think he helped in several contexts and of course he did it in New York, too, because Ahtisaari was based at the UN in New York at that time.

So we used indirect channels to try and protect this peace process, but it was pretty quiet, pretty becalmed.

Q: Did you have problems with your team, buck up their spirits and all? Were there lots of night sessions of sitting around and figuring out where do we go from here, or what?

CROCKER: What an assistant secretary can do at a regional bureau is to try and recruit and retain the best people. That's one of his or her most important jobs.

I wish I could write that in concrete and put it in front of some part of the State Department, because I don't think it's often done that way.

I had people around me who understood the importance of personnel and we were able to hold onto most of the good people that we had.

There's always a lot of turnover in the Foreign Service. People go on to new jobs every two-three years.

These were not easy times and I'm sure when I was not in the room that a lot of my career officer colleagues were wondering when I would resign during this time period.

It was not a good time. At one point in 1986 SFRC chairman Dick Lugar was quoted in the press as saying that he thought that maybe Shultz should think about a new assistant secretary, because of the way the debate was framing on sanctions and so forth.

Q: You were the guy put up, on the sanctions vote, up against the wall. Congressional rifles were pointed at you. Did you at any point think about, "Oh, screw this! Let's go home, get out this" or not?

CROCKER: There was kind of a rallying around, I think is the better way to put it. It might have been different if I had felt I was losing my people, the rats were leaving the ship, but I didn't have that experience.

On the contrary, I had colleagues, actually one colleague, who came back from the field and agreed to take on a kind of public diplomacy role on behalf of the bureau, a chap named David Miller, who was our ambassador in Zimbabwe, non-career guy. He spent a big chunk of a year trying to help sustain our side in this debate and work with

Q: I've interviewed David.

CROCKER: Have you? So you know his story. I don't know how much you went into this, but

Q: I'm not sure, either.

CROCKER: That's an example. There were a lot of long days and a lot of difficult times and some difficult meetings with senior people in the interagency process who would look at you as though you were already pretty damaged goods. "Crocker's on the way out" sort of thing. "We can outlast him." There was some of that.

I said to myself when I heard about things like that that there were other people, one doesn't want to get too personal here, but there were other people, like Under Secretary of Defense Richard Armitage who sent me a message during one of the most difficult weeks, I've forgotten which week it was, that said, "Just remember, Chet, they always go for the tallest trees in the forest first." And I took that to heart. That was very helpful to me, that kind of a message.

If you look at yourself in the mirror and you feel, "Gee, this is not worth it" maybe you don't continue. But I'm a Scorpio. So maybe it brought out the stubborn streak in me or something.

Q: I don't think we've talked an awful lot about Mozambique. What was happening in Mozambique, up to the death of the president?

CROCKER: You're absolutely right, we haven't talked enough about it, but it was a parallel peace process and the high point of it had been the Nkomati Accords that was signed in, if memory serves, the spring of 1984, which was kind of a detente agreement between Samora Machel's Mozambique and P.W. Botha's South Africa.

It was a strange scenario, very strange bedfellows. Here was this former hospital orderly, Samora Machel, who was a kind of a street talker, he talked in your face and he was very charismatic and very spontaneous kind of guy, who always had some off-the-cuff wisecrack. He and Reagan got on like a house afire. Reagan was very moved when Machel died, because he liked Machel.

He didn't like his policies. He saw him as a Marxist. But Maggie Thatcher had convinced Reagan that Machel was someone that we could deal with.

Machel came to Washington and had one of the best visits that we had the entire time that I was assistant secretary (and we had a lot of African visits). Reagan got to him by telling jokes, some of them off-color jokes, some of them anti-Soviet jokes and Machel began reciprocating with his own anti-Soviet jokes and they had a good time together.

Q: I saw on a television program, we had officers in Moscow who were designated to collect these jokes and pass them on to Ronald Reagan.

CROCKER: No question, and some of the Soviet empire heard about them.

Despite this, the warming up process between Mozambique and South Africa (1983-84) became victim of the dirty tricks departments within the South African government, specifically the Department of Military Intelligence within the armed forces, which was running the war.

They really were running the RENAMO war and they were determined, whatever P.W. Botha had agreed with Michel about at Nkomati in '84, by '85 we knew and in '86 even more so, that the civil war was hotting up, and that the Mozambicans' backs were against the wall.

I concluded at the time that P.W. Botha was playing a double game and was telling his foreign affairs department that he was living up to his commitments and telling military intelligence to do what they were doing, which was to torment the Mozambican regime and weaken it to the point that it was like a ripe fruit ready to fall into your hands.

What they intended to do with that fruit if it did fall into their hands one never knew for sure, but Mozambique was a disaster, it was a mess and Machel was a good guy working to try and reach out and broaden his relationships with Britain and the United States and so on, but he didn't have the strategy, or the smarts, maybe, to figure out what to do, given the fact that he was facing a tough-minded South African campaign to destabilize the country and perhaps seduce the US into joining in the effort.

So when Machel went down in that 1986 plane crash, we'd been doing things for him, we'd been providing some access to assistance and helping open doors for him with the World Bank and the IMF, debt relief, that kind of thing.

When he went down, we worried that maybe Mozambique itself would go down and would become in a sense nothing but a battleground between a dying Soviet-aligned regime on the one side and a South African-sponsored insurgency on the other side.

That did not happen. It not happen because the Soviets were disengaging a little bit from providing a blank check to places like Mozambique and because Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan were determined that it not happen.

The new leader who came in to succeed Samora Michel, Joachim Chissano, did a good job, was very impressive and although a totally different personality from Machel he managed to appeal to the Brits and the Americans and began putting some things right, in terms of Mozambican internal policy, that made a bit of a difference.

So we didn't lose Mozambique, but we thought, when I said, October 19th of '86, that we might lose Mozambique as a successful front in our effort to rewrite the map of Southern Africa.

Chissano turned out to be a very remarkable guy. He just stepped down as president a couple of years ago, had a long tenure and quite a successful tenure. A very, very shrewd, thoughtful person, with many skills.

So people make all the difference. I don't know if all this could have happened if it hadn't been for Margaret Thatcher. Which was interesting, because on some other issues she wasn't necessarily very farsighted.

But on dealing with Gorbachev and dealing with the Mozambique account and figuring out how to advance a joint cause in Southern Africa generally she could be very helpful.

Q: Then, after the sanctions vote and the veto, was there sort of a regrouping and then what?

CROCKER: Well, I said that October of '86 was the worst month. Maybe November of '86 was the beginning of the sunshine returning, because that's when Iran-Contra blew up which in a sense was equivalent to the blowing up a counterproductive internecine struggle between NSC, State, Defense and the Agency.

And it wasn't too long after that that Bill Casey became terminally ill and a whole lot of personalities changed. Frank Carlucci came into the NSC with Colin Powell and then took over DOD.

Q: Did you find, with the advent of Carlucci, after all, if nothing else he had given blood, in the Congo, way back and he had been in Portugal already, so he was familiar with the issues. You had somebody who'd sort of been on the ground.

CROCKER: You had a world-class diplomat in Frank Carlucci, who understood the nuance of how to feed poisoned carrots to Marxists, how to bring them across, how to bring them in from the cold.

He understood that game. He understood the nuance of it. He'd been there, as you said, in Portugal in '74.

Q: He was really, of all our professional diplomats, I think his role in Portugal was really a major, major turning point in sort of the defusing of Eurocommunism.

CROCKER: Well, certainly in the Iberian peninsula, yes, no question about it and of course he'd won his spurs in the DRC, in the Congo and he knew what it was like to think of that place as a "CIA country."

So Frank was a sophisticated operator. He assembled an excellent team of people that included Colin Powell and Bob Oakley and Hank Cohen and others, who became part of a more literate, a more sophisticated, a more deft apparatus that also put discipline in the system, ultimately, so that there were proper consultations at the interagency level and not just endless a turf war and arm wrestling. That made a difference.

So I think there were a number of factors that came right. By the early months of '87 the sun was starting to shine again.

Q: Today is May 13, 2009. Once the Iran-Contra affair came out, it had an effect of in a way limiting the CIA from its activities. I assume that this meant sort of a diminished role, as far as its ties to white South African intelligence and so on.

CROCKER: Well, picking up on that, there were a number of key personnel changes. American foreign policy is often a function of appointments and key people. So between November of '86 and let's say May of '87 the following things took place: we saw the resignation of Casper Weinberger, we saw yet another national security advisor team bite the dust over Ollie North and Iran-Contra, we saw the appointment of Frank Carlucci and Colin Powell as the new NSC team and at a certain point in that chronology Powell takes over the NSC and Carlucci goes to Defense, we saw the demise of Bill Casey.

All of these things served to give the final 18 months plus of the Reagan Administration a degree of strategic coherence, discipline and good order that it had lacked for a previous six and a half years.

Q: Sometimes historically one gets involved in these things and you can't see where you were until we're sitting back in your office in Georgetown and looking at it. But did you have this feeling that, gee, this isn't a very coherent group before?

CROCKER: Oh, my heavens, yes and we've talked about this.

Q: I know we have, but at the time, how about the president, was he just sort of considered so far aloof and above this, or

CROCKER: At the time we were very much aware of the fact that we had had a succession of national security advisors who had not added up to all that one might want, in terms of establishing discipline in the system and making for a coherent decision making process so there might be disciplined interactions between the president and his principal lieutenants, rather than constant end runs.

My boss has written his own memoir and he can speak for himself, but he used to remark that, "We have decisions in Washington, but nothing ever gets decided in Washington, because you get a decision, you leave the room and somebody comes in and undecides what was just decided."

And so you can be certain that he had a whole lot more to feel frustrated about than I did, because it related to US policy on virtually everything: Southeast Asia, Central America, Southern Africa, relations with Moscow, arms control and so forth.

The first four NSC advisors I think for Reagan did not establish that kind of coherence. But it did, as a result of the Tower Commission on Iran-Contra and the new appointments of Howard Baker, I didn't mention that name earlier, but Howard Baker made a huge difference and Carlucci and Powell, you saw a very different constellation of big players which made it possible for those of us who were trying to do the nation's business to actually have a sense we had solid ground under our feet and not just a constantly shifting kaleidoscope of backstabbing and end runs and games and subversion.

That was my view at the time: that I was being subverted very regularly and had to keep on fighting battles to keep control of policy coherence.

Q: When you say you were being subverted, was this especially the CIA, or other elements, too?

CROCKER: Well, parts of the CIA were very, very helpful and very important colleagues and partners in what we were doing, because they were analysts who were calling it straight. But there were the rogue elements who basically disagreed with our policy and sought to sideline it or marginalize it and saw the beginning of support for Savimbi as somehow the thin edge of a wedge for making our entire Angola-Namibia policy military, rather than diplomatic and opening up another military front in Mozambique and possibly Ethiopia.

Q: In a way, for people looking at this from outside, at the time at least there were certainly attempts to tar you with the brush of being a Reagan creature of the right and all that and here you are, the people who were basically trying to subvert you weren't sort of the wishy-washy liberals, it was the hardline right, would you say?

CROCKER: Well, it was both, at certain points and '86 was the toughest year politically from that standpoint but it began to turn positive in '87, for some of the reasons that I've indicated.

The subversion came from a combination of appointees inside the administration, a couple at Defense, a couple in the White House. Pat Buchanan I've mentioned before. People in DIA, some people in the Agency, and also folks on Capitol Hill, congressional staffs and disaffected Senate offices, let's put it that way and then some of the political activists and that right wing media.

And we would regularly read critical stuff about how State was doing x, y and z, that was giving away the candy store to Marxists. So we were being attacked from the right. I've got a cartoon framed at home that has a picture of Chet Crocker selling off African states to Marxist slavery and they're being auctioned off like at a slave auction: Namibia and Angola and South Africa and Mozambique and all these slaves with names on them and there's Crocker with the whip, doing the auction. This was the Washington Times view of our African policy. But there was also subversion from the more slick and sophisticated liberal and left side that would have loved to see a change away from the sort of coherent strategy we were trying to conduct.

Q: Where we they coming from?

CROCKER: What they wanted was much more ardent support for the sanctions, which of course were imposed over the president's veto in October of '86. They always sensed that we weren't fully with that program and of course they were right. We applied the law, we obeyed the law, the sanctions law, but we did not change constructive engagement, we did not stop talking about it, we did not stop doing it.

They were much more focused on the agenda within South Africa. They were also inclined to think that our negotiation on Namibia and Angola was a fool's errand that would not succeed. They were at times even disappointed when there was evidence that it was succeeding.

Q: This happens. Were you getting any signs of disapproval from your colleagues in the academic world, particularly at Georgetown, but elsewhere?

CROCKER: Oh, well, sure. And that would be of course from the more liberal side. I made it a point for a number of years to go to the African Studies Association annual meetings and stand up and give my remarks and take the abuse from these regional specialists, most of whom were somewhere off in the left field bleachers when it came to foreign policy, very disaffected, very skeptical, very inclined to buy into whatever line the East German and Soviet legal departments were cranking out in terms of their UN speeches, especially when it came to the "legalities" of constructive engagement.

The Russians and the East Germans used to love to debate fine points of law when it came to our negotiations and of course academics picked up on that.

But this set of administration personnel changes created a changed environment and I think also the intervention of the British, to some extent the West Germans and the United Nations, in the form of Perez de Cuellar and Martti Ahtisaari, it made a big difference in keeping South Africans more sober about the importance of this regional negotiating framework and also advising the MPLA and Angolans that they needed to not walk away from this negotiation, because it might actually produce something.

The first evidence of that was the reestablishment of direct talks, after quite a long hiatus, it must have been a six month hiatus, perhaps, maybe eight, until April of '87, when we had our next major meeting with the Angolans. We met them in Brazzaville in what is the Republic of Congo and we met them for a day or two of meetings, sponsored by President Sassou Nguesso of the Congo.

That's significant only in that that location is a friendly location to the MPLA, so the gesture, this is the way sometimes Marxists negotiated, the gesture of the American delegation being willing to go to Brazzaville to meet with them, first of all it's next door; secondly, it's the place where they used to have their headquarters in exile; thirdly, it was a quasi-Marxist government, of an Yves Saint Laurent variety.

So that was a gesture which made it possible for the MPLA to come and meet with us and we had a renewal of direct talks.

Q: Did we have relations with Brazzaville at that time?

CROCKER: We did have relations and they were steadily improving at this point and in fact a lot of the final end game of negotiations took place in Brazzaville, meeting after meeting after meeting took place in Brazzaville after that, but April of '87 was the beginning of that phase, if you like.

And we made clear to the Angolans that in a sense they really had some decisions to take. The South Africans had partially accepted (very partially) a 1985 proposal. The ball was still in the Angolan court, that kind of a conversation.

I wouldn't say we made a lot of progress. We reopened direct talks, is the basic point. So one could no longer say and at my nadir what people were saying was the State Department's process has collapsed. They could no longer say that, as the process was back in motion, we were having substantive meetings with the parties and we were also briefing third parties and the South African side about what was taking place. So there was a beginning of reenergizing of the process.

Q: When you're having talks of this nature, did you, sort of after a session get together with your fellows who were doing this and say, what does this all mean? In other words, talk is talk. How do you handle this sort of thing?

CROCKER: Well, there always is going to be that kind of a post mortem, then somebody is the lead drafting officer, who tries to recapture what it meant, both in terms of what it really meant and also in terms of what you're going to report that it meant, because those are two different decisions.

Q: Could you explain this process? I know what you mean, but I think you should explain it.

CROCKER: Well, a lot depends on the channels that you're using for reporting and we would have multiple audiences, but my most important channel of course was directly to the Secretary and that would be a restricted channel, NO DIS cable and so on, as we called it. NO DIS meant lots of distribution, in fact, at very high levels.

Q: I have to say I interviewed Ann Swift, who ended up as an Iranian hostage and she said that as a very junior officer she was waiting her assignment with a bunch of other brand new officers and they'd sit around at lunchtime and read the NO DIS cables. They had no idea what they really meant.

CROCKER: So there's a lesson in all this. If you really want only one person to read your stuff, you might beat the leaks and unauthorized viewing by sending it "Limited Official Use," the lowest category.

So we would report to the boss and it would get circulated to all the Seventh Floor and probably the White House and perhaps beyond. Kind of an official report but also it would be a report that aimed at giving folks the big picture.

We would also report more operational messages laterally to our posts in Africa and to our listening posts in London, Paris and elsewhere, Moscow, where it was important for people to be aware of what was going on, so they could sustain conversations with counterparts on a regular basis, to give them ammunition for conducting those conversations, in effect.

So what we'd be doing quite often is creating cable traffic laterally that contained the appropriate combination of fact, interpretation and spin, so that we could arm our troops. This is a war we're talking about.

I came to the conviction that diplomacy and making peace have a relationship to conflict and war. What you were doing is trying to fight and win vis-ï¿½-vis the parties that are on the other side of the table from you. They're not your enemies, but they have their own interests and you have your interests.

So inevitably what you're trying to do when writing and informing people is to get across your side of the story. And it's got to be credible. It's got to be factually based. But it's also got to support the cause. If you don't believe in your cause, who the hell will believe in your cause? That was the way I approached this.

And so in reporting to everybody, including the Secretary of State, I would try to find whatever ammunition there was to support a constructive interpretation of the process - accurate but balanced - even if, in my heart of hearts, I was disappointed after a meeting, or not persuaded that we made much headway.

But we would have an internal round robin after a major meeting to review what it meant and what were the interesting things that were said, if anything. What was the significance that one person had done the speaking for the other side and not another, that kind of thing.

Q: Were the British in this, or was this strictly Americans?

CROCKER: Well, they wouldn't be in the room, but we were in touch with them every step of the way and they would be amongst the most avid readers of what we were writing and we would give them a particular brief, not least because they were our channel to the MPLA in Luanda and so their people in Angola needed to know and did know, thanks to what we did, did know very regularly, I would report laterally to my counterpart in the FCO in London.

That person would immediately flash it down to Luanda, so that our friends in the British establishment there would be aware of what was going on.

I don't mean to imply that I was reporting stuff directly to British posts in the field. We were using our channels to London and assuming that they would forward stuff on, which indeed they did.

This was a real partnership and an invaluable one, in many respects and they gave us advice and feedback and they could help us interpret things that we didn't understand.

So, again, this was April of 1987. We had another meeting with the Angolans in July of that year, which was led by a rather unimpressive senior official on the Angolan side and I was frankly fed up with that exchange; and, at the end of it we put out press guidance which actually was rather interesting and said that the talks had been a waste of time.

Since we didn't say that all the time, the fact that we said it got the attention of everybody. Our phones were ringing off the hook. "What do they mean? What is State saying? This is their process. They're saying the talks are a waste of time?"

And within 24 hours the Angolans put out a statement saying, "No they weren't. They were very useful and productive and constructive talks." So what that began to show is that the Angolans were under some pressure to keep this process on the tracks and to support the impression that progress was happening.

Q: Newborn Marxists often learn that communist cant and all but really, one, didn't understand it and, two, didn't use it well.

CROCKER: There's something to that. And we would try to cut through it, of course, because it was so obviously an acquired garment that they were wearing.

But by July of '87, we now know, we didn't know at the time, but we now know there were important things taking place, there were plans for another major FAPLA dry season offensive against UNITA within Angola.

We knew that there were conversations taking place with the Cubans and in fact the Angolans said to us that they could imagine dealing with a partial Cuban withdrawal calendar, but the way they would frame it was that troops would redeploy out of the south of Angola to the north, within Angola.

Well, Angola's a big place and the terminology was so vague and the notion of withdrawal was so unspecific that to grasp Angolan thinking was like trying to nail jello to a tree, you're thinking of this redeployment of X,000, or whatever number of Cubans it was to some unspecified place also in Angola, when we were trying to get them out of the country.

They said, "Well, we'll redeploy them to the north, progressively, as conditions improve during the implementation of the Namibia plan." In a sense, what I'm telling you is that they were half pregnant. They were accepting the notion of Cuban withdrawal, but they wanted it all their way.

And we said, "Look, let's get serious here. We need a plan that has finality to it, has dates, has benchmarks, milestones and so forth. Why? Because the South Africans have finality on their commitments on Resolution 435 and they're not going to buy what you're trying to sell me. They're just not going to buy it." So that's when the waste of time phrase was used.

And the next thing that happened in this process that I shall share with you that was really very interesting was an unofficial intervention of sorts . I was sitting in my office, it was early August of '87, when the Deputy Secretary of State, John Whitehead, a man for whom I have enormous regard, called me and said, "Chet, I've just met with the daughter of David Rockefeller and she has something to say that you might find interesting. Do you want to come up and hear it?"

So I went up and there was John sitting down with Peggy Dulany. I've not said this on the record before, so it's not in my memoir. Peggy is an interesting person. She runs her own foundation. She supports a lot of very progressive causes around the world and serves on a number of foundation boards and so on.

She had just spent a week or ten days, whatever it was, in Cuba and what she was telling us was that Castro was interested in joining our talks and that he was in effect using a Rockefeller channel to send a message to the United States government.

Q: Only in America!

CROCKER: One might say a left wing Rockefeller channel to send a message to America. Well, this could be a trap, it could be a snake pit, it could be any number of things, but it looked like it might a bid that was worth testing.

So we debated it internally, we talked about it, we wrote analyses of it and went back upstairs to the Seventh Floor and said, essentially, "We gotta test this, because for all these years we've been doing this without having the benefit of a direct channel to Havana and we have to test it, but we have to test it in a way that gives us something in return, if we're going to consider doing it."

We spent the next four or five months figuring out how best to test the apparent Cuban bid and to define what would we expect if the Cubans joined the talks, what would be the quid pro quo for giving them that standing. And of course it wasn't for us to do it, to give them that standing, it was the Angolans who would be giving them that standing. So we went immediately to the Angolans, after we had made our decision and said, "Look, friends, the Cubans seem to think that they should be part of that process. Is that what you want? Are you a sovereign government, or do you feel the need to have your fraternal Marxist allies at your side during these negotiations? Would you be more comfortable with them in the room?"

Q: In a way it does sound like you're saying, "Do you really want to give up a certain amount of your sovereignty?" Sort of a challenge to them, isn't it?

CROCKER: It was. It was intended to complicate their minds, but also to get them to make a decision.

Q: Did we want the Cubans in, at this point?

CROCKER: We wanted to find out if getting the Cubans in would bring something. So what we said to the Angolans was, "First of all, do you want them? Do you think it will reflect well on your sovereignty and your control of your own affairs? If you want them in, we have to be assured that it will produce something."

Q: No more waste of time.

CROCKER: So we had three or four rounds with different elements of the Angolan leadership at quite senior levels, asking this question - "How do we know that this will produce something more than a photo opportunity for Fidel Castro? In U.S.-Cuban terms, Ronald Reagan and George Shultz and Chet Crocker cannot afford an engagement with Cuba that does nothing except give Cuba a photo opportunity. We're not prepared to do that. We've got to be assured that something is going to result from this."

So then the Angolans said, "What do you need?"

"What we need is a commitment in principle to total Cuban troop withdrawal within a defined time frame, in conjunction with South African commitments on Namibia." And then we got back a lot of throat clearing and a lot of preambular stuff about, "We need a gesture from the American side, if we're to get something from the Cuban side, like you agree on cutting off aid to Savimbi."

So, again, for those four, five months we had a back and forth with them about what would the Cubans be prepared to do and what would an American gesture be? Are we prepared to even consider the card of suspending or cutting off aid to UNITA? Well, I had no interest in that idea, not least because it would have been the end of my career in the Department of State had I said anything positive about that proposition.

Q: Was there a military action going on during this time?

CROCKER: Oh, yes, big time.

Q: And was that changing the field?

CROCKER: It was and I will get to that in just one second, but I just want to make the point that what we were demanding is something from them and what they were demanding is something from us, in order to get to the point that we might actually have the Cubans join the process.

We understood that for the past years we had been negotiating with the MPLA regime but that they have been keeping their Cuban allies very fully briefed and that in fact the rooms we met in often probably bugged by Cuban intelligence. We kind of assumed that. But it's very different to have them in the room, to meet them face to face, for one thing.

Q: Sure, sure. They have to participate, which means something.

CROCKER: Absolutely. They've got to come up with some words. They've got to indicate their view of the process. They've got to say something about what the goal is and what their priorities are and so forth. So it was a very important set of internal discussions.

Our real answer to the MPLA demand that we suspend or cut off UNITA was simply this: the facts on the ground during the implementation of a Cuban withdrawal schedule and a South African withdrawal schedule will transform the strategic environment in your country.

So don't ask us, at this stage, to say things about what we are going to have as our relationship to UNITA. UNITA is going to lose its South African connection when South Africa leaves Namibia. By definition, they're going to lose it. Just look at the map. They're going to lose it, just as you're going to lose your Cuban connection under the withdrawal schedule that we come up with eventually.

So we're talking about letting Angola be Angola. This is going to create conditions in which you'll have to decide at what stage you negotiate with UNITA and what the deal is.

So we did not accept that demand. We rejected the demand, but we put it in a different context. We said events on the ground will produce a UNITA that has less external support, just as it will produce an MPLA which had less external support.

I want to come back, now, to your question. While we were having these discussions in the fall of 1987 the Soviet command structure was organizing a final and in some ways least successful dry season offensive in a long history of dry season offensives against South Africa and U.S.-backed UNITA in southern Angola. It produced a fiasco for the FAPLA forces, the MPLA forces. They lost several brigades worth of armor and other units and it created such a reverse that the South African special forces and UNITA captured just tons and tons of Soviet equipment, enough to keep them going for quite some time.

And there was a lot of crowing by certain elements of the South African structure which was stupid and unhelpful. At one stage the South African defense minister took a helicopter ride into Jamba, which was UNITA's headquarters and gave press statements about how this was the beginning of the end of the Soviet empire and so forth, just exactly the wrong thing to do at a time like that, in our own view, but they were trying to rub MPLA noses in their defeat and they pushed pretty hard.

This led to a series of follow up operations, which are still debated today amongst military historians, as to what really happened, but between October of '87 and January of '88 there were a series of South African operations, there've been books written about them, which culminated in a standoff at a town called Cuito Cuanavale in southern Angola, which to this day the Angolans claim was a great Angolan victory over South Africa, which the Cubans claim was the beginning of the end of apartheid and they've written their own books about it and Castro gave speeches about it. Cuito Cuanavale is the subject of socialist anniversaries and so on in Cuban circles. The South Africans basically, in their follow up operations, pushed up towards this town, engaged in weeks of protracted artillery engagements with Cuban and FAPLA units but decided not to take it. They deliberated and recognized the downsides of seizing, holding and having to defend a major town.

But the point I'm really getting at was that the Soviet-fueled offensive was unsuccessful and it was in that context that Fidel Castro went to Moscow in November of '87 for the sixtieth anniversary of the Soviet revolution. While there he had conversations, we heard this from Cubans once we got talking to them, we didn't know it at the time, but the Cubans were saying to the Soviets, "You don't know how to fight a counterinsurgency war. We Cubans know a lot more about this. We know Angola and Angolans. We will raise the ante, put more troops in, but we insist on taking over the direction of this war."

And of course the Angolans were in these meetings, too, they were trilateral meetings, in which basically the Cubans said, "This is so important, to Angola and to all of us, that we are prepared to raise the ante, put in more troops, but we want a bigger seat at the table, both in the war and the peace."

So while they were bidding for a role in our peace process, they were bidding in Moscow for a role in the war process. In hindsight, November 1987 was a very important watershed,

We didn't know all that at the time, but we began to see by December '87 growing numbers of Cuban troops arriving in Angola and we were also planning our first meeting in which the Cubans would join the talks. So that kind of changed my talking points when I got to Luanda for the first US-Angola-Cuba trilateral in January of 1988.

We were welcomed by our Angolan hosts at the presidential compound in Luanda. Dos Santos is right there, the president and his top team introduced us to the Cubans, who were all smoking big cigars, big smiles. And they sat down at the table and we first asked, "Are you one delegation, or two delegations?"

And they said, "We'll be one delegations, with two leaders, a joint delegation."

That's fine, weren't going to argue with that, but we had to obviously ask them several questions like, "What is your view of a total Cuban withdrawal commitment, in the context of a South African departure and complete cutting of links in the south?"

And we also had to ask them, "What are you doing, bringing more forces in?"

So the beginning of that conversation was pretty direct, but it produced what we needed. It produced a degree of coherence and direct statements, that would enable us to say that it was worth bringing them to the table, that they were prepared in principle to talk about a schedule of total withdrawal. They weren't giving us dates.

Q: Were you getting the feeling that they were tired of this thing?

CROCKER: We learned that later. We didn't have the feeling then, necessarily. There is always a risk of too much hindsight, it's really hard to say.

I'll make two points here. The first point is that dealing with the Angolans, for all these years, we understood that they were in somewhat of a bind, they were in a tough position. They were negotiating not only their own fate but also the equities of their socialist brothers behind their backs. The Cubans and Soviets were not in the room. We were in the room, the other superpower.

Secondly, they were a weak and still at that point somewhat a divided government facing a regional hegemon named South Africa, which was attacking them, both directly or indirectly.

And thirdly they didn't really know quite how to negotiate in an asymmetric situation with the United States of America. So having a capable negotiating partner with a degree of coherence and decisiveness was a good thing and we sensed that it might be an asset, although we didn't know in January of '88 that it would produce success. We had no way of knowing that.

We were a little frustrated, let's put it that way, with the indecisiveness of our Angolan interactions and having the Cubans say something, even though very general and very caveated, about the principle of total Cuban troop withdrawal was meaningful.

We didn't get a paper, we didn't have a schedule, and we didn't have a withdrawal plan. What we had was an oral acceptance of a principle and I can't emphasize strongly enough how "principled" sometimes these negotiations can be.

When people talk about their principles, they're talking about things that are political requirements for them, almost their sacred tenets and for them to accept the principle of leaving Angola with all combat forces out of Angola, even if it's an undefined number of years, was an important advance for us.

Q: Well, in hindsight it's easy to think of this, but at the time, were you getting any feeling for this sort of overarching thing, the beginning of the collapse of the Soviet empire? This is Gorbachev with his perestroika and glasnost and beginning to make the decision, "We can't keep up with the West and we have to cut our commitments." But was that at all apparent and were the Cubans understanding this? Or do you think it was a factor at all?

CROCKER: It's an extremely important question and we'll get into it for the bulk of the 1988 events. We had eleven meetings over twelve months, so it was very intense and the Soviets were part of it.

Q: At the beginning of this, you didn't

CROCKER: For one thing, we didn't know that Castro had basically told the Russian high command that he was prepared to raise the ante militarily, but he wanted to run the war. We didn't know that. We know it now, we didn't know it then.

No, I think what we sensed was that the regional conflicts were a topic Moscow wished to discuss and so did we, and we were having discussions at the U.S.-Soviet level about regional conflicts. But the conflict that was the real thorn for Gorbachev was Afghanistan, not Angola. There were not that many Russians exposed. There were Russian credits exposed, a lot of hardware exposed, a lot of political capital and so forth, but it was Cubans who were really exposed on the ground, and of course the Angolans.

So it was quite unlike Afghanistan in that sense. In January of '88, we didn't sense that Soviet 'new thinking' was changing the calculations of Cubans and Angolans. Gorbachev's calculations may have been changing, but that's a different point.

One needs to look back very carefully at a series of speeches that Gorbachev gave when he referred to Afghanistan as a "bleeding wound." A lot of people began to say, "Okay, we understand that, where this is going." And I believe that he gave a speech in '87 when he made that reference to Afghanistan.

Anyway, so we had crossed this threshold of having accepted the idea of a joint Angolan-Cuban delegation and it produced agreements to meet again shortly and we met again shortly in Geneva - I don't have all the dates and places memorized.

But it was January of '88 when Cuba joins the talks and categorically accepts the principle of total Cuban troop withdrawal. In March of '88 we met with the Cubans and Angolans jointly and then immediately afterwards with the South Africans in Geneva, so we had back to back sessions.

The South Africans had begun to pick up signals that there was something going on (and remember they had been estranged ever since the sanctions vote and so forth), but they were clearly beginning to pick up signals of (a) we were doing something pretty intense with the Angolans, (b) that the Cubans had joined the process, (c) that there were more Cubans coming into Angola and what's the hell is that all about, Crocker, is this the result of your diplomacy, more Cubans having arrived and how do we read Gorbachev, anyway and what do you think about Mikhail Gorbachev and Shevardnadze and so forth? Are they really running things, or is this the military and so forth. So we had lots of South African questions.

I have to come back again to the role of our allies. Margaret Thatcher was the interpreter of Mikhail Gorbachev to her principal Western allies, Ronald Reagan and Helmut Kohl. She was never all that close with Helmut Kohl, but they talked a lot about what is Gorbachev all about, what is perestroika, what is glasnost, where is all this heading?

The British intelligence apparatus and the Foreign Office and other elements of the British structure played a critical role in advising Thatcher how she should advise her allies and they listened to her.

She also spoke with Franz Josef Strauss who was the Bavarian premier and a linchpin of the CDU-CSU alliance that ran the German government of the day, a very important player in interpreting Gorbachev; he had been to Moscow, had his own direct discussions with the Soviets in late '87, early '88.

And I am certain that at several points Franz Josef Strauss was telling the South Africans, who he was very close to, what he thought about Gorbachev, which gets back to your question. And of course the Brits were telling the South Africans what they thought about Gorbachev.

So when the South Africans came and asked us what we thought about Gorbachev, they were triangulating, that is finding out what are all these different characters think and what does it add up to?

Q: Were you getting any feel for what the Cubans thought about what was happening? Did we have any good intelligence or at least interpretation of the Cubans' state of mind?

CROCKER: The Cubans are so much propaganda that it's really hard to get a candid view of what the Cubans thought. I don't think the Cubans recognized the full extent of what Gorbachev was doing until much later, and they had no idea that he could completely lose control of the domestic reform process, so that by the end of '89 the Wall would come down. I don't think they could see all that coming. They didn't see their own abandonment by the Russians, which is what happened in the early Nineties, with devastating effects for their economy.

But I think they had limited respect for Soviet officials. They saw them as drunk, culturally inept, sometimes racists, unfamiliar with the African environment, not having a clue what to do in the vastnesses of rural Angola. Angola's bigger than Western Europe, for God's sake. You don't seize hills and think that you're going to win a counterinsurgency war by seizing hills.

Q: And wait for winter! The Cubans were right about this.

CROCKER: Absolutely right and they rubbed it in a bit. I think the Soviets found this a little difficult, because their Cuban "younger brothers" were running circles around them in terms of battlefield savvy.

The Cubans reinforced Cuito Cuanavale. They brought in additional air power and armor and they stiffened the Angolan positions in Cuito Cuanavale such that it was a harder target for the big South African artillery and air power..

So eventually the South Africans said, "We don't want to take Cuito Cuanavale. We never did want to take Cuito Cuanavale. What we wanted to do was to pin the other guys down and bleed them. But if bleeding them becomes a situation where we get bled, too, we don't need that.

South Africa's big artillery (G5s and G6s) were the best long range artillery in the world, but they didn't have the best air power or the air defenses, so there was an asymmetry. The South Africans were good on the ground with their artillery, the Cubans and Angolans had a lot of armor and they had more and more modern aircraft than the South Africans had.

The South Africans said to themselves, "We don't need to get bloodied over this. It's really not worth it. We proved our point and have no long term interest in holding an Angolan town that becomes a target. We beat them last dry season. So we'll gradually thin out our forces" and they did pull back, they pulled back from Cuito, which was why the Angolans and Cubans, until the end of the communist era, are going to claim that Cuito Cuanavale was a Cuban victory.

It was actually a stalemate. But the Cubans had reinforced and when you reinforce and the other guys pull back it looks like you won. So you can read different accounts of this battle, but by end of January of '88 the Cubans had put additional forces there.

Now this is in the southeastern part of Angola. But the more important thing they were doing is putting more forces in the southwestern part of Angola. So by the time we got to March, April of 1988, the Cubans had doubled their forces deployed in Angola. They put in an extra 25,000 troops, plus air cover and their best generals and so forth. This was becoming a pretty big deal.

At one point I went upstairs to talk to my boss, Secretary Shultz, we were heading to another round of discussion, it was probably May of '88 and he said, "Chet, interpret this intelligence to me. The Cubans, who said they're going to join the talks to make peace, have now doubled their forces. They have 50,000 troops in Angola. Aren't the South Africans going to go after them and really bleed them now and take them out, and what does this tell us about Cuban intentions?"

Well, it was a very interesting challenge of interpretation, but what I said at the time was, "If the South Africans go after the Cubans they're going to get hurt, but if the Cubans go after the South Africans they'll get hurt." Each side had built up to the point that they could hurt each other on their turf, but they couldn't go after the other guy's turf, but it was that kind of a standoff.

Castro didn't double his forces in order to invade and occupy Namibia. That wasn't his purpose. We now know what his purpose was, but I'm jumping ahead of the story. We shouldn't do that.

Q: All right, go at your own pace.

CROCKER: I've described a little bit the Geneva talks in March of '88, which were with two delegations, but separately, that is to say the joint Angolan-Cuban delegation, followed by the South African delegation.

And what this was all about was, are we at the stage now where we could look at direct talks? Remember, I've been doing this peace process since January of '81. We have never had direct talks, apart from the Lusaka talks of March of '84, which were for a brief period. We have never gotten the Angolans and South Africans and certainly not the Cubans all in one room for a structured plenary session.

So the weeks between mid-March and early May of '88 we were debating and discussing with the parties, "Are we ready yet? Where should we do it? Who would come? How many people would come? What level of delegations and what's the agenda?"

And we talked to everybody we could think of as to where's the right venue. This sounds like minor stuff. In planning mediation and negotiation, venue is very important. We discussed many options. Washington, though, we can't have the Cubans in Washington. Probably not the South Africans, either. Where should we do this?

We floated a number of ideas, but what came to us eventually was "What about the British?" The British are connected to this process, they're very important to this process. South Africans are very comfortable in Britain, they know Britain well. Angolans were not uncomfortable with that idea.

The Cubans were very excited. Cubans don't often get to London. But Cubans also are very special travelers. When they come, they come with video cameras and with security, they all pack iron. It was interesting, the Brits had a heck of a job figuring out what to do with Cuban security.

But, anyway, we agreed on London and we also agreed to welcome the presence of a senior Russian observer, not at the table, but we asked the Russians if they would like to send a senior person and they did send a senior person to meet with us on the side, not in the room, but on the side, so that they would not be seen to be excluded from this, and could follow developments by proximity.

That senior person was not the one I had negotiated with and talked to for many, many years, Vladilen Vasev by name, who was a fine diplomat. It was the deputy foreign minister, Anatoly Adamishin, who came to London. And actually I met him before we started the first round of the trilateral talks. We had a good discussion.

We got to know each other and it became a habit, from then on, until the end of the process, that we would invite, or encourage, because it was not for us to invite, we would encourage a senior Russian to come and be present in the city chosen as the venue, but not formally part of the process. They didn't want to be formally part of the process. We weren't saying "You could co-chair it." They were 'observers'. That enabled them to distance themselves from whatever went wrong while keeping a close eye on the talks by talking with us and with their socialist allies.

So we would see them in their hotel or in our hotel or in some other place, the Soviet mission and we talked about all of this.

That's a separate chapter that we should go into, the U.S.-Russian discussion about this. It was a very important discussion, but I want to underscore the point that the Russians were not negotiating with us the outcome of Cuba-Angola. They were not negotiating with us. They were feeling us out, so they would know where our state of mind was and we were feeling them out, for exactly the same reason: we might say "Couldn't you encourage your friends to do this?"

So a lot of things changed in '88

Q: Today is September 24, 2009. Chet please continue.

CROCKER: The Soviet role is an interesting chapter in this story. And there's also a chapter or two on the role of everybody else.

Maybe one starting place is to emphasize that as I think we talked about, 1987 was a decisive year in relations between the communist allies: Cuba, Angola and the Soviet Union.

And the offensives of the fall of '87, which were very, very unsuccessful, led to a change of strategy and a change of leadership, really, in both the war and the diplomacy and introduced a situation in which the Cubans became a formal negotiating partner at the table, joining the Angolan team, forming a joint delegation and at the same time the Cubans asserted military leadership on the battlefield; and it was really they who first of all raised the ante by increasing their number of troops up to about 50,000.

By May of '88, where we are now picking up the story, they had about 50,000 troops on the ground, including some of their best people and some of their best air force units, pilots and air defense and so forth and significant amounts of armor and what not, first of all in southeastern Angola, then in southwestern Angola.

Q: What was our analysis of why they were doing this? Was this to get a better position for final negotiations, or were they going all out to win or what?

CROCKER: Well, our analysis depended on who you spoke to on our team. There were those, particularly senior people, who saw this as demonstrated evidence of communist bad faith and who thought the Cubans were being reckless and irresponsible and would in fact would provoke major South African countermoves, at their expense.

Those of us a little closer to the situation I think began to understand that there was a psychology of wanting to negotiate from a position of strength and to be seen as a winner even as one prepared to consider alternatives, such as a mutual disengagement and a negotiated solution.

But there was no outcome until there was an outcome. The debate continued and those who were determined to sort of discredit our negotiation would write stories in the various newspapers and congressional comments and so forth saying, "Do you realize what the State Department is doing while the Cubans increase their forces?"

Q: Were the South Africans responding?

CROCKER: The South Africans were feeling out the other side through us. The May '88 London meeting was really was the first time the South Africans in our presence had a chance to interact with the Cubans and to figure out what each was doing to the other and who was serious about peace and who was serious about war.

I'm laying the background here for a little discussion about the Soviet track, because the Soviets had been distinctly unhelpful for much of the 1980's and whenever we met with them, which we did, from time to time.

Starting way back when Al Haig was Secretary and throughout the Shultz years we had periodic bilaterals with the Russians on regional issues. This went into higher gear once President Reagan met with General Secretary Gorbachev in Geneva in 1985 and from then on these regional encounters became somewhat more regularized.

So there was a pattern and I got to know my Soviet interlocutors pretty well and they got to know me and my team and we'd meet maybe twice a year. By the time we got to 1988 this was more frequent and it was more interesting. And the interlocutors changed and the Soviets increased their level at the table to the deputy foreign minister level, with Anatoly Adamishin being their representative.

Adamishin was one of two or three deputy foreign ministers in the Soviet structure and he had responsibility for things related to CSCE, to some of the baskets within the Helsinki process, including issues related to human rights in the Soviet Union itself and our dialogue with Moscow on that.

He had responsibility for Africa. He had been their ambassador in London, so he was an experienced watcher of conflicts in what they called "third areas," like Africa and Latin America.

Q: When he appeared on the scene, this was a real signal that this was serious by the Soviets? They weren't marking time.

CROCKER: Yeah, it was an interesting signal, no question they were deploying somebody who was of higher rank and who was a much more, shall we say, sophisticated, Western-exposed and oriented. He'd been there ambassador in London, he'd been their ambassador in Italy. So Adamishin dealt with Westerners.

Q: Understood these peculiar people.

CROCKER: Understood these kinds of people and understood the way they think and the restaurants that they like and the clothes they wear and he had a taste for that stuff himself, much better dressed than the typical Soviet bureaucrat.

But he always brought with him a very crusty and seasoned foreign affairs section chief named Vladilen Vasev who was probably twenty years older than he was and he and Vasev between them were kind of good cop, bad cop but they were an able team.

And when it was agreed that we were going to meet in London, a place that Adamishin knew very well, because he had recently been ambassador there, it was also decided that we would open up a channel with him on the side of the tripartite talks in May of '88 that took place in London.

So from day one it was agreed (a) that we would talk in that channel; (b) that they would not be at the table and (c) that they were not negotiating and they were not physically observing, but they did like the terminology of "observer" and we thought it might not be a bad idea to throw that little bouquet, by saying in our public statements as we briefed the press that there was a senior Soviet official who was in proximity to this process, but not in the process and that we were keeping this person informed and briefed and we were asking them to use their best efforts to encourage the process, we didn't get more specific than that.

But the Russians at that point, (May of '88), were still wondering what is the shape of this deal, what is the likely outcome here, and how far are the South Africans prepared to go to be reasonable and what demands are they making.

And by the same token, how far are the Americans prepared to go and do they recognize that the Angolans actually have a difficult situation, because they have a civil war on their hands and they have an adversary in UNITA whom we were aiding and the South Africans were aiding.

So they were trying to see if they could encourage us to make gestures at the conference table as well, in terms of the UNITA factor, the Savimbi factor, in the whole process. So we had to fend them off on that and make clear that we saw this as a sequential dynamic, in which the regional issues would get solved first and then the internal issues could fall into place secondly.

Anyway, we got to know each other pretty well. If I can go fast forward here, after the May meetings, which were a decisive turning point, I then met Adamishin again in early to mid-June in Lisbon. We arranged that meeting, that was just a U.S.-Russian meeting, but of course we also talked to the Portuguese, who had a lot of interest in this subject and who were very well briefed on it.

So I was visiting Portugal as part of my regular rounds, dealing with all interested countries, but arranged to meet Adamishin in Lisbon. We had the better part of a day, just the two of us, no note takers, nothing. It was really quite a "get to know you" opportunity.

Q: All right, you two were together for almost a day. What do you do? Give a little feel for what this means.

CROCKER: Well, what it means is you start with sort of factual updates of what's going on and exchange impressions of what's going on and the state of mind of the different players.

And since I'm running the negotiation and the Russians don't disagree with that, they're quite happy to have us be the party in the middle of this, the third party, the Russians are quite happy to have us speak first and then they ask questions and they also respond and they give their impressions of where things are.

It's fairly relaxed. We're sitting outdoors in the Portuguese sun, having coffee and whatever else we're drinking, I don't know. But it lasted a fair length of time.

I don't have the exact memory of how many hours it was, but it was long enough and since his English was good, Vasev's English, by the way, the other senior Russian that we dealt with, Vasev's English was excellent, also.

So the only time we had interpretation with the Russians was when we had some old dinosaur like Gromyko or someone, or for that matter Shevardnadze. Senior ministers tend to speak in their own language more than maybe the next level down.

But it was a fairly fluid interchange, because Adamishin was a quick study and he understood what questions to ask and he could be capable of very sarcastic questions about where we were headed on this process.

I remember at one stage in Lisbon he looked at me with a bit of twinkle in his eye and said, "Now, tell me, Mr. Crocker" and by that time we were actually moving towards being on a first name basis, "You're asking me, you're asking the Soviet Union, you're asking Russia, to be what, exactly? To be a wet nurse? To be a midwife? You're not asking me to have paternity or maternity in this process. But you are giving birth to something and you want me to help you give birth to something," he had a nice way of putting things.

And he said, "Before I agree if I want to be a midwife or a wet nurse, what is the shape of the baby we're going to give birth to? Is this going to lead of the strengthened independence of all the countries in the region? Will South Africa behave itself? Would it in fact withdraw from Angola and from Namibia? Will it enforce and implement the UN plan," which means confining the local South African controlled police to bases in Namibia during the UN-led transition, and that kind of thing.

"Will the SADF, the South African Defense Forces, be under effective supervision of the UN contingents of UNTAG," which was to be the blue helmeted force.

"And what about the issue of continuing links between South Africa and UNITA and between the U.S. and UNITA?"

So those were the kind of questions that we had to deal with. I had to impress him with the conceptual and analytical validity of our grasp of the geopolitical situation in Southern Africa including the constraints on all the main partieas well as with the idea that we had a golden opportunity here because of the chemistry that had developed between his leadership, Gorbachev and Thatcher and Gorbachev and Reagan and that that chemistry needed to be exploited while the iron was hot, so to speak, because Reagan was going to be leaving office.

Q: And this was a significant area of both confrontation and cooperation between the Soviet Union and the United States at this time, wasn't it?

CROCKER: I guess there were four baskets of issues with the Soviets, at least four: there was arms control and there were baskets of bilateral issues such as trade and human rights and freedom of emigration from the Soviet Union for Soviet Jews and a lot of issues of that kind and then there were the so-called regional issues and each of those had its own channel.

There were the Africa regional issues, there were the Central American regional issues, there was some dialogue about Southeast Asia, including Cambodia and Viet Nam.

And then of course the number one regional issue for both sides was Afghanistan. And you could argue that it was the breakthroughs in the dialogue about Afghanistan that set the stage for Adamishin reaching out and getting engaged with us on Africa.

I don't recall exactly what the sequence was there, but I suspect that the Russians looked at Africa as less significant for them, but still a significant investment. They had poured billions into the Angolan civil war, as they had into the Ethiopian civil war. Their regional role and prestige was on the line.

Q: Was Ethiopia in your discussions, or did you confine yourself to Angola?

CROCKER: When we talked generally we would mention the other conflict cases. But there wasn't any ongoing negotiation in Ethiopia, so it was basically point scoring, where we would point out that the Russians had been unhelpful in opening a channel or encouraging the Ethiopians to engage with us, even though we had sought to engage with the Ethiopians.

And by engage I mean actually have a serious discussion about a path forward in Ethiopian-U.S. relations. That had been vetoed and we know it was vetoed by the Russians. It was vetoed in fact by certain people in the Communist Party, which had a very important role in this process.

We haven't talked about that yet, but in dealing with the Russian bureaucracy, you had the foreign affairs ministry, of course, which is Adamishin and Vasev. You also had the International Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union which was very important on anything to do with "fraternal" relations with socialist allies, of which Angola was one and then you had the military.

So there were different parts of the bureaucracy here and we knew that the CPSU had been very hard line on Ethiopia, so that dialogue never went anywhere. So really the only practical African case was Angola. They were perhaps too embarrassed to talk much about Mozambique.

But I'm glad you asked the question, because there was kind of a hierarchy of regional issues, from the standpoint I guess you'd say of both sides, but particularly the Russian side.

They had at one point 140,000 troops in Afghanistan. They never had any combat troops, to my knowledge, in Angola. They had lots of advisors, thousands of advisors, in fact and probably on occasion some seconded officers in command roles, but not a lot of that and not formed combat units on the ground that we knew about. Whereas the Cubans of course had the combat units.

But the Russians had a lot at stake in Angola, in terms of pride, face, military debts and all the rest. I'm certain that one of the reasons that they had reached out to us, in this period of May, June, July of '88 and wanted to be involved on the margins of the formal talks is to keep and eye on the Cubans and of course on the Angolans. They never trusted the Angolans and they didn't have much confidence in the Angolans. But they also weren't quite sure what Castro was doing. And this gave them a window on all the parties: on us, on South Africa, on Cuba and on Angola.

I think diplomacy of this type has something in common with a singles bar: you're talking to one side, but you're keeping your eye on a bunch of other players at the same time.

Anyway, so we had that discussion in Lisbon and when I reported that back to Shultz he found it very interesting.

Q: Was there any feeling at the time, we're talking about spring, summer of '88. We're within a year of when the Soviet Union started a rather precipitous slide, which ended up with no more Soviet Union.

Was the feeling, when you were talking to them the Soviet Union was in full flower, as far as we were concerned?

CROCKER: Well, we knew by then something of their economic woes, but we certainly did not foresee the accelerated collapse of late'89. It really wasn't until the middle and latter part of '89 that you began to fully appreciate what was going on.

So what we were seeing was a lot of, I would say, baiting the hook by Gorbachev and Shevardnadze and their colleagues to build new relationships with the West and to build different relationships with each Western country.

They were very adept at looking at the Germans and which Germans do you speak with and looking at the Italians, the Russians have always been clever at playing European politics.

Still are, as a matter of fact, which is why you have the auto plant in Russia named after the former head of the Italian Communist Party, Togliatti. Togliatti and Berlusconi probably have a lot more in common than we know.

Q: All I know is, I was consul general in Naples at one point in the late Seventies and I used to go to masses and I'd often be right next to the guy holding the red banner of the Communist Party. We all went together to these things and they crossed themselves like everybody else.

CROCKER: All in the same club.

But I don't think we really had a sense of imminent collapse. But we did, by then, have some sense of the degree to which the Soviets in their military diplomacy, had failed in Angola and had raised the ante with lots and lots of hardware which just got either captured or destroyed in every offensive, which is why the Cubans came to us rolling their shoulders and with very erect posture and very determined expressions on their faces and they'd glower at us and at the South Africans.

The Cubans were the ones who were asserting their macho in our faces, as if to say, "You mess with me and we're going to escalate some more, buddy." That was what we were hearing from the Cubans, "We've resisted Yankee imperialism in our hemisphere and we'll resist it here and if those Boer aggressors think that they're going to get away with something, we will teach them lessons they will not soon forget."

That was their style and body language. The Russians weren't like that, because the Russians were kind of in the back seat. It was an interesting dynamic.

Q: Well then I guess we'll go back to May of '88 and what was going on sort of in the main arena.

CROCKER: Yeah, we should, but I just want to complete the point about the Russians: from this point on they always had, at all of our major rounds of meetings, they had somebody deployed in the city that we were meeting in.

So we met in Cairo in late June of '88 and we met in New York at Governors Island in late July of '88 and then we met in Geneva once or twice in August of '88. It goes on like that, almost monthly, more than monthly, in some cases and there was always a senior Russian there, often Adamishin, if not Adamishin then Vasev, one of the two of them and they would be maybe not in the same hotel, sometimes in the same hotel.And so it was convenient to have these debriefing sessions, with whiskey and so forth.

Q: Governors Island, you can't get to Governors Island unless you're sort of invited. You just don't happen, have a senior Soviet official happen to be saying, "Gee, I always wanted to go to Governors Island."

CROCKER: Right. He stayed in Manhattan. We briefed him, we would talk to him before and after, but they were there and it wasn't just sending some uninstructed junior embassy official, it was always somebody who was really in the policy loop and would know what to make of the different messages and the different information.

Q: Did you find that in talking to Adamishin and his deputy that you were really sometimes puzzling sort of jointly over the same problem, "What's happening here?" because you had all these other forces there and were you two sort of European type people trying to talk about what the hell is happening down in this African land or not?

CROCKER: We were groping to interpret sometimes, but of course our interpretations had a point behind them always, because we were trying to influence them or persuade them or sell them something and they knew it, so they were trying to sell us something back.

Q: But did you find that sometimes you both were sort of puzzled about

CROCKER: When that would happen and it did happen occasionally, was in trying to interpret the performance and the motives of individuals: "Why did the Cuban senior official behave that way?" "Why did the South Africans announce that they were leaving the talks before they'd hardly begun," which was a typical South African stunt, they'd come and they'd have a meeting and they'd say, "We don't like the way this is playing out, so we're outta here!"

So we would talk about interpreting behavior, but it tended to be quite personal behavior: "Was so and so instructed to do that?" "Couldn't we get somebody else to come from Luanda who might be better informed," that kind of thing, rather than the joint problem solving.

But there was a time, I'm trying to remember the exact moment, it may have been as late as November, I was sitting in my hotel and Vasev was sitting in my room, nursing probably his third Scotch, maybe more, he could hold his whiskey and a chain smoker, as I was at that point, and he looked at me and he said, "Mr. Crocker, I have spent my entire career trying to block everything that you people have been trying to do, in every region of the world. This is the first time I've ever worked on a cooperative basis with an American official."

Maybe it was the third Scotch that led him to say that, but I've never forgotten it.

Q: It really is. The world was turning at that point. One looks at the calendar and in hindsight you realize that things were changing, for all of us.

CROCKER: They were changing much more for them than for us in some ways. They had persuaded themselves, if you look at the history of Shevardnadze and the foreign ministry, we've all read about that period, he was trying to do a real mentality change within the foreign ministry and not only inside but also outside the foreign ministry, trying to convert the mindset of generations of Soviet officials to be thinking about the possibility that you can give in order to get, that you can have a win-win, that you can have cooperative security, all these verbal niceties that he developed.

And it began to have an impact on people like my crusty old friend here whom I was talking about, who I think began to see the upside for the Soviet Union of being an observer and being a participant in a process, even if it was our process, because it would give them a window on it, they'd learn, they could influence it at the margins.So it was a time of transition for sure. But the fundamental decision that made for the breakthrough and I have to go back, now, was Castro's decision to double the ante in Angola as a stage setter for exploring a way to get out with 'honor'. And if he hadn't been prepared to do that, I don't know if the South Africans could have done it without him.

Q: But at the time, when he doubled the ante

CROCKER: We didn't know it.

Q: This was a surge, to use

CROCKER: Modern terminology.

Q: But it's a surge that marks a receding tide.

CROCKER: That's right. The Cuban "surge" was probably decided shortly after the seventieth anniversary celebrations of the October Revolution, when the Russians, Cubans and Angolans were all in Moscow and that's when that conversation I think I referred to earlier took place, in which the Cubans said, "Look, if you want us to helpdig out of this hole, we'll take over the war and run it our way. We'll raise the ante, but we want to be in charge of the war. And we'll also join the talks."

So the Cubans really stepped up to the plate in November-December of '87 and then the rest of '88. I don't think we really knew for sure, at least until July of '88, if the purpose of this was to try and win, or to humiliate and bloody the South Africans in a serious way, or whether the purpose was to use our diplomatic framework as a vehicle for extricating themselves from a hideous conflict morass, which it was for them. The diseases that the Cuban troops brought home were unparalleled and the Cubans knew it.

Q: How did we evaluate the Cuban armed forces vis-ï¿½-vis the South African armed forces?

CROCKER: With difficulty, because they were so different. South African forces were multiracial, but segregated, at the same time, with white officered black commando units and then with all draftee white ground force units, a white air force. The South Africans were tough and prepared to take casualties on the ground. They had some of the world's best artillery.

No doubt readers will have heard of the famous G5's and G6's. These were developed by the South African arms industry, having either borrowed or stolen a lot of technology from us and the Israelis and other people around the world. But they had this long range artillery platform that was second to none in the world and the Cubans and Angolans felt the impact of it quite a bit.

So they were pretty good on the ground. We estimated that as the Cubans came south towards Namibia the South Africans would stiffen and toughen and if they tried to come across the Namibian border the Cubans and Angolans would be in deep trouble.

On the other side, the Cubans, thanks to the Soviets, had much superior air force equipment and air defense equipment and the South Africans had trouble in the sky and they risked losing planes every time they flew over some of those areas that had been built up and reinforced by Cuban air defenses.

The South Africans had upgraded and modernized their inventory of Mirage fighter/interceptors buying modern avionics, new French engines, using local facilities supplemented with help from the Israelis and the French. They built a limited inventory of these upgrades (Cheetahs), but were anxious not to expose them to too much risk against the top Cuban Migs and latest Soviet supplied air defense.. Helicopters were kind of a mixed picture.

In any case, we knew the Cubans had their best people down there, people who were very senior in the Cuban chain of command. The South Africans had their best people there.

So the interesting thing about this meeting in London in May of '88 was that we recognized we had very complicated negotiating teams that included soldiers, intelligence people and diplomats, in each of the three teams.

And at one point I said to the top South African and Cuban military reps, "Do you think it would be useful if you two peeled off and had a side meeting and if so, we have arranged rooms in this place we're meeting in," which was a small, private hotel, "We've arranged rooms in which it's quite possible for you to take a break and go upstairs and get to know each other."

And to my delight, the South African chief of defense staff Jannie Geldenhuys then went up to the Cuban chief of staff, a guy named Rosales del Toro, and they agreed to talk with interpreters in a room upstairs and talked for two hours.

And I have no doubt that they were talking tough to each other about intentions, about who's going to outlast whom here and who is worried about whom here. My impression is that the South African general told his Cuban counterpart, "We fought the British Empire to a standstill from 1899 to 1902, we bled the British Empire for three years. We're a small country, we're a small group within that country, the Afrikaners, but we will die rather than be humiliated by your efforts to export communism to Africa". And the Cuban response was probably along the lines of "We don't leave here until Namibia is free. We don't leave here until Angola is protected" and so on.

But it was important I think for then to hear each others' story and get a measure of each other. So we opened up that channel and it was necessary to do that.

But our own estimate varied, depending on who you talked to. I remember being asked by the Seventh Floor of the State Department, including Secretary Shultz and his Under Secretary for Political Affairs, repeatedly, "What are the Cubans doing? What do they think they're doing," because as they began pushing from the south east to the south west, that takes them down to the Cunene River basin, down right towards the Namibian border. "Are they planning to go into Namibia? What do you think, Chet? Aren't the South Africans going to clean their clocks and isn't this going to escalate?"

We tried to make the point that both sides had their limits and that it wasn't totally clear that this was the precursor to a major clash. But I suppose there had to be a clash and there was a clash, not in May, but in late June, and that clash set the stage in a way for a mutual recognition that they were kind of stuck.

They were facing each other in southwestern Angola, just across the border from each other with significant numbers of tanks and artillery and forward deployed aircraft and so forth. They had a small confrontation around the Calueque dam on the Cunene River, and they lost a few people on each side. That was the last major direct combat engagement between Cubans and South Africans.

Q: Up to this point, the South Africans had not really been engaged, it was UNITA that was doing the fighting and

CROCKER: No, no, South African ground forces had been engaged most recently up at that Battle of Cuito Cuanavale, which we talked about, which was in southeastern Angola and that was in the immediate aftermath of the 1987 military offensive. South Africans were on the ground there in modest numbers, by which I mean a few thousand men.

So there South Africans fighting inside and they put a lot of pressure on the Angolans and the Cubans in a particular area, southwestern Angola, but then they pulled back, because they weren't trying to take a major city.

So the Cubans and the Angolans held at Cuito Cuanavale and after that, I'm talking now January of '88, they then began to move down to southwestern Angola. So there had been some previous South African engagement with the Cubans directly.

But in June of '88 there was a significant tactical clash that produced some casualties, right near the Namibian border. But it didn't continue and expand, it was quickly and skillfully contained by commanders on both sides. And I think it was contained because the diplomacy was intact and diplomacy offered a framework for proceeding forward.

Q: Well as they moved towards each other and there's this initial clash, were you seeing this as, "Oh, my God, here goes all we've been working for" or what?

CROCKER: This took place right in the middle of a series of planned meetings and we had been planning periodic negotiating rounds and so our best way of testing things was to see if the meetings would stay on schedule, and they did.

But, yes, it was a nail biting time. We weren't sure how far this would go and we weren't sure what conclusions the sides would draw from it. But in fact the conclusion they drew is that, "Hey, this could get bloodier, and do we really want this?"

The analogy I use, they were like scorpions in a bottle and they were trying to get out of the bottle without killing each other.

Q: Were we aware of the strain that particularly disease and all was putting on the Cubans, because in South Africa, of course, these are people who live there. You're fighting on your borders, but the Cubans, you have a problem of putting expeditionary troops, we're having the same problem today in Afghanistan.

CROCKER: The Cubans of course were in Angola, which is a little different terrain than Namibia. When you get down that far south it's more arid and some parts of Angola are semitropical or tropical, so there was lots of disease of that kind and also disease that was based on a complete absence of sewage systems or fresh water, just awful breakdown of the entire health infrastructure of Angola. Angola's a big place and Cubans were deployed in lots of different parts of it.

Q: The Cubans prided themselves on their medical system. I would have thought that it would have carried over, so that they would be able to take care of their troops.

CROCKER: Well, they could take care of them, but they also knew that when they came home they were coming home bringing things that they'd never seen before and they didn't care for that.

It also was a significant drain. It's not totally clear and won't be for some time, the extent to which they were getting quickly paid in hard currency by the Angolans with the Angolan oil revenues, which were dollar based revenues.

But we don't know for sure whether the Cubans felt that they were breaking even, making money, losing money on this proposition. Or, for that matter, whether the Russians were being generous towards them, in terms of military credits and that kind of thing, because most of the hardware was Russian.

So I'm not saying that the whole thing was driven by health concerns, but I think it just added to the list of things that kind of impressed to the Cubans that, "If we could get out with dignity, we should try to do it and maybe this crazy American diplomacy" led by this crazy State Department team of people who've been trying to do this now for seven years, "Maybe this American diplomacy could be a vehicle for us to achieve, combined with some macho performance on the battlefield, our stated goal, rather than just to keep doing it forever and ever and ever?" We were inclined to think that Angola had become a sort of Cuban Vietnam - their troops presence exceeded ours in Vietnam in terms of the percentage of our populations

Q: Did you have a compromise goal in mind that you felt was achievable and acceptable to both sides, in the back of your mind?

CROCKER: Well, as I learned from this process, there are maybe three pieces to a settlement, three pieces to a peace agreement. One piece are the broad political principles, who is recognizing which international legal norms and is the settlement consistent with the UN Charter and the OAU Charter and other things? Is the settlement normatively acceptable? Is it acceptable in terms of our long-standing declaratory principles? That's one ingredient.

The second ingredient is the specifics of things like withdrawal schedules and implementation of agreements and plans for the UN forces and so forth, timing of the elections, milestones for troop disengagement, that kind of thing. That's obviously where the devil's in the details and all that stuff.

The third is, is this deal going to meet both sides, or all sides, political requirements? Can all sides say, "You know, on balance, this was pretty good for us. We leave with dignity, or we got what we needed, or we achieved our objectives."

It's like declaring victory, but not quite, because there wasn't going to be victory on this one. There was going to be win-win.

But I'm afraid to tell you that I had to learn that there were those three distinct parts by doing it, rather than having some idea from the outset that there were those three parts and that maybe the last was the most important, in a sense that for Castro and for PW. Botha and his colleagues, they really had to be able to say, "We did okay! We brought home something." The Cubans would want to claim they had assured the survival of the Angolan regime and protected the country's security while contributing through their presence to Namibian independence. The South Africans would need to be to claim that they would be able to decolonize Namibia without the Cubans in the neighborhood. Cubans would be leaving southern Africa and they'll be going in the context of the implementation of the UN Plan. From a South African perspective this means that SWAPO never 'liberates' Namibia by means of armed struggle. This is not done with guns; independence is negotiated with diplomacy.

Q: Well, in some ways you're saying that the intervention of the Cubans, which, obviously we decried, was handy, because it threw something in that eventually, if you got rid of it, everybody would be so happy to get rid of it that they would accept less, maybe.

CROCKER: Well, what it did was to create a basis for a linkage-based solution, where you link one agenda to another agenda and you solve the problem. You solve the problem of South African "illegal" occupation of Namibia.

Q: Well, did you have to bear in mind sort of African tribal politics? The African leaders have often quite a different agenda than the Cubans or the South Africans or even the Americans or the Soviets.

CROCKER: Well, of course we had to deal with the politics of decision making inside the MPLA regime, which was and still is a very strange combination of forces. So we had to try to understand what drove it, what their priorities were and I think we eventually figured out what their priorities were. Regime security of course came number one. Being able to keep control of their access to the oil revenues.

On the UNITA side, we were aware that that was a different regional and tribal base and that getting to the point of reconciliation between the MPLA and UNITA was going to have regional tribal or ethnic implications, about power sharing. We understood that.

Savimbi would tell us when we talked to him that those people in Luanda, they're basically Portuguese, mestico, communists and they're basically from one ethnic group and they're kind of a self-anointed aristocracy and they're not the real Angolans, "I'm the real Angolans. Look at me!"

Savimbi had a very dark complexion and his people tended to be. They weren't mesticos. They were mainly Ovimbundus.

So we took that analysis into account, but I don't know if you'd call it a tribal analysis, so much as just the role of ethnicity in governance.

And when it came to the other African states, like the front line states, they were not dealing with us on a tribal basis, they were dealing with us on a kind of ex-colonial basis. They were testing us: "What are you as a superpower going to do to get control of that racist minority regime in South Africa? Are you serious? Can you deliver?" So I call it a neo-colonial complex, more than anything.

Q: So you have all these things playing out?

CROCKER: A lot of things playing out at once, that's right. Carrying water on both shoulders, or whatever. But there's a kind of universality I think to some of these principles about getting to a peace agreement. I think any leadership group needs to feel that they can sell it at home.

And we're facing that now in the Middle East. What can they sell at home, given the complexity of what's at home.

But you asked me a very good question about did I have in mind a kind of settlement formula and we learned it by doing it. On the specifics of the tactical issues of withdrawal schedules, we knew that the Angolans and Cubans had said that they would be prepared by this point to commit to a four-year withdrawal schedule. The South Africans would have to be out of Namibia under the UN plan much earlier than that, the first 12 months.

So there was an asymmetry here and we had to get rid of that asymmetry and we knew we had to get rid of it, we'd never get the South Africans to the altar on this thing if the Cubans were still there four years later, that's just not going to work and it wouldn't work at home, either.

I wouldn't want to take this back home to Ronald Reagan and say, "Guess what, Mr. President, the Cubans are coming home, but not on your watch!"

Q: You're showing me a picture in Prof. Crocker's book, High Noon in Southern Africa of you talking to Ronald Reagan.

CROCKER: This was at a point, this would have been late November, early December of '88, we had a withdrawal schedule agreed between the South Africans, Angolans and Cubans that would get all Cubans out of Africa within a specific time frame.

And I showed him the charts and the graphs and the geography and the maps and so forth and said, "They're going to go from here, they're going to redeploy to the north, they're going to get on ships and planes and they're going to fly home, Mr. President."

He listened and looked at me and he nodded and he said, "But, Chet, do we really want them back in this hemisphere?"

"Thanks a lot, Mr. President. I've been working for seven years to get them out of Africa!"

Q: It seems like each time somebody gets into this negotiating a peace, it's on the job training. At the time you were there, was sort of your academic experience playing a role, or was this so theoretical you just had to discard it?

CROCKER: It's an excellent question. I've often said that that having done it in practice I came back to the academy to see if I could make it work in theory.

What that meant was that I have really dug into the literature, in the theories, in the approaches that are out there, in social psychology and political science and law and other disciplines and I've now written and edited seven books in a series produced by the United States Institute of Peace, all of which are focused on aspects of your question, which is trying to bridge theory and practice.

The background that I had when I was doing it, back in the Eighties, was a background in history and I think a background also in listening to other people, immersing yourself in the culture of the other, that's something I think I've tried to do in my life, whether as a teacher or as a student, as a scholar, whatever.

Being able to listen and being able to put yourself in the head of the other person and sometimes in their language is a terrific asset in peacemaking. So I've focused on that.

But I had not done any formal training in negotiation or mediation when I did this.

Q: To me, as an outsider in this whole thing, it seems that there's always such a tremendous gap between those in the academic field and those that are practicing. One, the people that practice it don't have time to read what those who write about it write.

CROCKER: They have more time than they used to and we're trying to change that at the U.S. Institute of Peace, by having short courses and all sorts of things for professionals, for practitioners, to come in and get an immersion in mediation, for one week.

Q: This is so important, because you don't have that much time.

CROCKER: And the Foreign Service doesn't have the staff to put people in for a year of training, like the military does. So you do need the right kind if course work.

And here we have all these special envoys that this administration has appointed and some of them have worked these kinds of issues before and are really damned good at it, like George Mitchell, I happen to have terrific respect for him, he's done it before, he understands intuitively and he's probably done more reading than we give him credit for, but he's got a real feel for it. And of course Holbrooke and Ross have been doing it.

But you have to ask yourself whether more could be done to acquaint people with some of the basics of how do you structure an agreement, how do you make peace look more attractive than continued war.

Q: Today is November 12, 2009

CROCKER: The meetings in London in May of '88 the first time really that we had senior levels of all three delegations assembled in one place. The Russians had their man, Adamishin. The talks took place at a private hotel called Durrants on George Street, which just north of Oxford Street in London, a rather low key, low visibility place that our embassy Africa watchers had selected because nobody had ever heard of it and the media wouldn't be able to find it, at least not right away. Of course eventually the media did find it and began staking it out and asking all kinds of questions.

It was an interesting choice and the ambience was affected by the fact that the South Africans felt that this hotel was kind of beneath their normal standards when they traveled on diplomatic missions.

The Cubans had never been shopping in London in their lives and were just thrilled with the opportunity to be right next to Oxford Street. The Cubans had to leave their side arms at the door at Heathrow when they arrived in their special plane and they arrived at Durrants Hotel holding video camcorders because El Jefe (the boss) back home wanted to see the visuals of this event. The Cubans had a coming out party in London in May of '88, is what it boiled down to. The Angolans, a little more worldly, were there with their Cuban friends.

We had a day and a half of meetings. Maybe the side sessions were more interesting in some ways than the main event at the table. We gave everyone a chance to vent at plenary, with us in the middle and then the joint Cuban-Angolan team on one side and the South Africans on the other.

Plenty of time for venting and saying things for the record, lots of note takers, it was all very official and officious, and obviously you were not going to get a whole lot of serious business done in that kind of a formalistic venue, but it had to happen, it had to be done.

Q: This is something one hears again and again, used to if you go to Palestine or you go to Israel, you get an entire history going back to 5000 B.C. and then you gradually move up and you have to sort of sit through this each time.

As somebody who's been around for a while, is this necessary, to have to listen to this?

CROCKER: Yeah, it is necessary, if the parties want to do it. And of course, whether they want to do it is a function of who the parties are, who their top spokespersons are and sometimes if they deploy very senior people then it's necessary for them to have some airtime just to vent for the record books and for replaying at home.

But these actually were reasonably well-led delegations on each side and the right people were there, just before ministerial level. If you want to avoid too much sort of 'show and tell' dramas you want to be just below ministerial level, in my experience, at least with this particular negotiation.

Once the ministers get there, it's really pretty hard to control the thespian performances of some of the actors, they have to carry on and be seen carrying on.

I was flanked by Hank Cohen from the NSC and Jim Woods from the Defense Department and each of us said a few words to set the stage and then let the parties talk.

But the interesting things that took place were in the side bar exchanges. We encouraged the sides to sit down and have a meal together, or whatever.

We didn't really solve anything in the May talks, except that we created a tripartite face-to-face negotiating process, we agreed to get back in touch about scheduling the next round of talks and we agreed to put forward ideas if the parties wished us to, but the parties weren't yet there, they were still pretty far apart and they were still feeling each other out.

So we left with press statements that kind of said the parties had had constructive meetings and they'd been frank and free in their discussions and the usual kind of stuff that one says at a fairly preliminary round of direct talks. Mind you, we'd been doing this in separate channels, separate talks, for seven years, but this was the first face to face meeting..

Q: Two things: one, I have to ask this, the Cubans came in, what about cigars? The Cubans relish their cigars, which are on our forbidden list. Were cigars in prominence at the meeting?

CROCKER: Cigars were in prominence at the meeting. Back in those days, there were a lot of smokers around that table, so I think the owners of Durrants were kind of wondering what in earth they had agreed to do, hiring out their primary meeting facility for a day and a half to this crowd.

There were about sixty or seventy of us in the room altogether. It's a lot of people, a lot of smokers.

Q; Was the media interested in what was going on?

CROCKER: Once it leaked that the talks were taking place on British soil and HMG, Her Majesty's Government, had agreed to host them then the usual Africa watchers and there are a lot of Africa watchers in London got very ginned up and we were fending off calls from the BBC and from the Financial Times, the Guardian and the Times of London and so on.

And we had a little stakeout on the final day outside this hotel, which the management was very unhappy about, maybe about a dozen journalists or so with cameras and I said a few words and then offered the microphone to the South Africans and the Cubans and Angolans. There was some spinning going on, but it was civil and fairly proper.

Q: Were the Cubans taking the opportunity, this is really about the first time they really were able to be in the limelight in London, wasn't it?

CROCKER: The Cubans were amusing, because they just didn't know the ground rules for visiting London. They had to be told all the time what the ground rules were, about how you proceeded. But they probably enjoyed themselves, too.

I think the Brits were quite delighted to be hosting, but the questions that we got were "Why Britain?" I had to be at some pains to make it very clear why Britain, because Britain was our closest partner in this exercise, had been for years, knew this brief backwards and forwards, inside and out and was very supportive of the whole process.

Q: Were they playing a role inside the meetings?

CROCKER: Not in the meetings, no.

Q: Were they in the meetings?

CROCKER: No. Nobody else but us.

Q: Were we pushing the Brits out, or did the Brits want to stay out?

CROCKER: They wouldn't have wanted to be in; they'd want just a measure of separation from all this, in case it blew up, in case nothing resulted and to create a clear distinction between their own roles and ours.

It was just perfect for them to be the hosts and to provide security and facilities and to meet and greet at Heathrow and that sort of thing. But they knew that we would be telling them everything that was useful and relevant in any event, didn't need to be worried about being in the meetings and didn't want to be.

Nor would the parties want them. The South Africans wouldn't have wanted Brits in the room.

Q: Really, we didn't have the baggage in Africa that the Brits had, either.

CROCKER: Especially with South Africa. No, we didn't. We had different baggage. We had a lot of baggage in Angola.

Q: And a lot of baggage with Cuba, too!

CROCKER: It was just different baggage and we had earned this role, after seven years plus.

Q: As you approached this, was there a plan, for anybody involved in this type of thing, were there sort of general guidelines of how to run these things, or were you learning as you went?

CROCKER: I think it's fair to say, bottom line, that we were learning as we went. I don't think the United States, at that point, had a long history or guidebooks about how you do a mediation.

Negotiation, we knew about that , but mediation is a very different art form. It's a subset of negotiation. Mediation, where you're actually carrying water on both shoulders and you actually want to listen in an equitable manner to both sides, even if you have views and interests of your own, that's a special art form. We didn't get trained in it. We weren't previously prepared for this.

Q: Were you able to call on union mediators who've been doing this for a long time? It's a different set of issues, but at the same time it's the same type of approach.

CROCKER: My boss, George Shultz, was a former Secretary of Labor and he would sometimes tell me some very straightforward and helpful things from his own experience involved in labor-management negotiations.

You can't force parties to move forward. They have to be strong enough to move forward and they have to be able to speak for themselves and you've got to let them speak for themselves and you've got to let things develop, I think would be the way that he would put it.

He also would say to me very frequently that negotiation that's not backed by power and leverage doesn't go anywhere and that includes us as mediators, but also the parties. The parties weren't going to negotiate very far from a position of weakness. They had to be strong enough to negotiate. That is extremely important in running a mediation.

We also had to keep our ears open and we should have done a better job of this I think, looking back, to what might be available to us from non-official channels, not so much about how to do it, but rather to listen and learn more about the attitudes of the parties.

And occasionally when we did talk to outsiders we learned things from academics who were in meetings with Soviet counterparts, that kind of thing. So that was useful.

Q: On that, were you getting useful tips from, say, the CIA, but also from academics about the mindsets of Cubans? We really hadn't been dealing with the face to face before.

CROCKER: No, that's right and the most interesting thing that we didn't have good expertise on was the Soviet-Cuban relationship, which was the dog and which was the tail.

And as we went through, it became very clear to me that the Cubans were making their own decisions and driving the Angolans; and the Soviets, they were there, but they weren't driving this process, either militarily or diplomatically. But we didn't know that at first.

Q: A recent BBC documentary made the point a couple of times that the Cubans sent troops to Angola without prior clearance from their Soviet counterparts back in Moscow. I don't know.

CROCKER: Which year was this?

Q: Well, this was I guess earlier on.

CROCKER: When they first went in?

Q: Yeah.

CROCKER: Back in the mid-Seventies? That may be the case at least with the initial Cuban initiatives with the Angolans and the early small scale dispatch of technicians and advance units.. The Cuban decisions to escalate in 1987-88 were discussed between Cuba and Moscow back in November of '87.

Castro basically said, "We're prepared to double the ante here in terms of troops, on one condition: that we run the war."

But it was hard for us to know as much as we know in retrospect about the relationships there. As a general principle I would say from my experience that the intelligence we had was vital, but it was never more than ten per cent of what we would have liked to have.

There were always huge holes in what we knew and we knew that were lacking fundamental information all the time.

We had good support from our Agency colleagues and particularly by this point in the chronology, when we no longer had the adversarial relationship between State and CIA, we were getting very good support.

Secondly, we got excellent support from our British colleagues, both diplomatic and intelligence colleagues and we talked to them all the time to compare notes, that sort of thing.

But there was a lot, as I said, that we only could learn by doing. We didn't have a master plan, to get back to your question. We had a sense that there'd have to be a "getting to know you" phase and then we would have to decide then about the sequencing of the issues.

It was much too delicate or too hot to start out by talking about, "All right, what compromises are you prepared to make on the timing of withdrawal of troops?" These are the most delicate security issues. You don't start with them.

You start with general political issues and getting people to understand that no one's going to dictate to anybody else, this is going to have to be a process in which the two sides actually can recognize that they're going to have to help each other get out of the mess they're in.

They're still testing each other, but from our point of view there was actually a stalemate, and we wanted to prove to them that there was a stalemate, but without saying it, because if you say that, then people say, "Oh, the American mediator's trying to soften us up."

So you don't ever say that, but the goal was to convince them of what we knew to be true analytically, which was that there was a deeply entrenched strategic stalemate between the sides.

It's not so much a battle line. There were very few lines. If you look at Angola, Angola is larger than Western Europe south of Scandinavia. They're no lines in Angola. Half of Angola is empty, there's almost no one there. So it wasn't so much fixed lines.

When I say strategic stalemate, what I mean is South Africans were tough as hell on the ground and they had the world's best artillery and they had very good special forces. The Cubans had superior air defense and they had air superiority, in fact and they also had some pretty good armor they were beginning to deploy towards the south.

But the Cubans were far away from home and longer the Cuban lines inside Angola became the more vulnerable they'd become. And vice versa, if South Africa overplayed its hand and had long logistics lines all the way up into central Angola, then it would become very vulnerable to Cuban air power.

So on the battlefield there was a stalemate, but politically there was a stalemate. Here you had an isolated South African government, you had an isolated Cuban government, you had a very dependent Angolan government.

No one was really in a position, as we saw if, to dictate, but did they know that? That was the question. And it wasn't totally clear that they understood the extent of the stalemate.

So as I said, the question for us was how do we sequence this, what do we talk about and how often do we meet after the London talks? So we left London agreeing to get in touch with the parties as to when the next meeting would take place, to make a proposal for the venue and the time for the next meeting and that turned out to be quite a difficult situation, I had to go have a separate meeting with the parties and then to meet with my Soviet counterpart in Lisbon to try and figure out why is it so hard to get agreement on a venue. This was a venue negotiation now, when do we meet next and where?

Of course the South Africans said, "Come to South Africa." The Cubans said, "Come to Cuba." Neither one of those was going to be a starter.

We tried various options. We tried the usual place, Geneva. For some reason that didn't appeal to the parties. We tried various options. It was only after a lot effort that the Egyptians agreed to host the next round of talks.

Q: You have any idea why there was this problem?

CROCKER: Yeah, they were pushing each other.

Q: To see who would give?

CROCKER: Pushing us and pushing each other, yes. It was all about, "Well, it's your proposal, so I'm not accepting." So it had to do with that early testing process.

I mentioned that there was a stalemate, but the sides hadn't yet fully understood that they were going to go to closure, they didn't believe it yet and certainly their superiors didn't believe it yet and there might need to be some more testing going on.

So we got to Cairo in mid-June, at a large hotel not far from the Cairo airport and there were nice facilities and there were lots of attendees and once again the Soviets sent a senior person.

This time it was not Adamishin, it was his deputy, Vladilen Vasev, who came. He didn't attend any of the meetings, but we talked to him after each round, to show that we were in fact willing to do that and to volunteer information and to ask him, "What are you hearing, Mr. Vasev? What do you think the problems are?"

Q: Dealing with the Soviets at the time, did you get any feeling that they were beginning to wonder what the hell was happening in their country with Gorbachev?

CROCKER: We didn't talk about that. We didn't hear much about it, either. We would hear things about the progress that Shevardnadze was making in reorganizing the foreign ministry, which was part of perestroika, but we didn't get into what's happening more broadly.

Q: And you didn't feel that

CROCKER: Things were falling apart? They weren't, at that stage. Not yet.

But of course the Afghan process was moving along in parallel. That was moving.

Q: Were you getting any feel, in talking to the Soviets, about the Soviet-Cuban connection? Were they together "like lips and teeth," as the Chinese used to say?

CROCKER: I don't think so, but the evidence was scant. I think there was enough cultural distance between the Soviets and their Cuban and Angolan fraternal allies. Sometimes we heard interesting things.

One of our problems in Cairo was that the delegations were led by people who were too senior and so there was this playing to the galleries problem that I referred to and there was a tendency for the parties to speak for the record and to score points on the other side.

The Cubans fielded a very senior member of the Cuban Politburo at that time named Jorge Risquet, who was not the senior Cuban we had in London, but since he was the ranking Cuban he got the microphone and did all the talking and he talked and talked, which is a great Cuban tradition, but not a tradition that was appreciated by the South Africans, or, for that matter, by us, all that much. He would actually go on for 45 minutes.

As it happens, the South Africans fielded Pik Botha, the foreign minister and the defense minister, Magnus Malan, each of whom also were pretty good talkers. Pik Botha said, at one point, "If you think you can talk, you ought to hear me get going. I'll meet you outside"

It wasn't funny, though, because it sounded like somebody was about to run to the airport or to break off and rupture.

So at one of the meals at Cairo I pulled this senior Cuban, Risquet, aside and I said, "Senor Risquet, you do realize that your style at the table is having a predictable consequence of bringing out the worst in the other side and I know what the worst on the other side is like, because I've been subjected to it myself on occasion."

And he said, "What do you mean?"

I said, "Well, you're a little windy, Senor Risquet and you also seem to think that history was written by Cubans, for Cubans and always will be."

And he put his hand on my knee and he said, "Senor Crocker, you don't know our history and our traditions. We have been making cigars in tobacco factories for generations, reading history and poetry and literary readings to keep the work force entertained and informed. This is where I come from. You know, our best cigars are rolled on the thighs of virgins while we give speeches and have readings." This was his effort at Cuban culture 101.

Q: In Miami, there's quite a few stories about the Jewish cigar makers in Miami. Always one of their number would read from books and that sort of thing.

And also, El Jefe, Castro, was prone to go on and on and on.

CROCKER: But this was unhelpful by Risquet. The point I'm leading to is that I then went to the Soviet, Vasev and I said, "Is this the best the Cubans can do? Why did they bring him?"

His initial reaction was not very helpful. He said, "It's up to them to decide who they'll have as their head of delegation."

And I said, "Well, if you have any input at all in this process, I would suggest that maybe he's not the ideal person to lead the Cuban team the next time around."

And I feel the same thing way, frankly, about the two South African ministers who came and I said this pretty bluntly to the delegations at lower level, on each side. They understood the problem, but it was still a time of testing. We didn't get that far in Cairo.

The Cairo round took place right on the eve of the final military offensives of the war. This might not have been accidental. They were testing each other at the conference table and they were testing each other on the battlefield.

The Cubans were moving more armor south, down towards some hydroelectric facilities that were quite near the Namibian border. Right after Cairo the South Africans called up the Citizen Force reserves, 140,000 men.

And of course that's partly for theater. They called up the reserves. They didn't actually field 140,000 men, but they called them up and the reason they did that is they saw Cubans moving towards the Namibian frontier, and they were not totally sure what the intentions of the Cubans were. The Cubans had armor which might have kept on rolling south.

At that juncture, I remember being called upstairs in the State Department by Secretary Shultz, who had the same intelligence about these Cuban movements down towards the Namibian border. And Secretary Shultz said to me, "Chet, what are they doing? Do they really think they're going to take on the South Africans, they're going to go into Namibian? Do they have any idea what the South Africans are capable of" and so forth.

I replied to him, "You know, Mr. Secretary, each side could hurt the other. They have advantages of different kinds and I'm not persuaded that they really want to do that, but they're testing each other. The Cubans go too far, they'll get their clocks cleaned, but the South Africans have real limits, too. They can't get new aircraft, they have not got up to date air defenses."

And the way I've described it in my memoirs, it was like scorpions in a bottle trying to get out, but they were not disarming themselves, either. So there was a clash around Calueque and Techipa, the two facilities just north of the border, it took place in the very last week of June of '88. The South Africans lost a plane or two and took a few casualties. The Cubans lost a bunch of stuff on the ground, the South Africans hit them pretty hard and they stopped, pulled back and separated.

The antennae were up, they were twitching, they were anxious, but they separated, they did not have any renewal. This lasted like two, three days and then it was over, the last clash of the war. Of course, again, we didn't know at the time it was the last clash of the war, but that's what it was.

So, we had to figure out how to corral these parties and get them to agree on a sequence for discussion. And until they had had enough testing of each other of this kind, at the table and on the ground, it was not that easy to tell what the sequence would be.

For example, if we said to them, "All right, this is getting dangerous. Let's have a cease fire" or "Let's have an agreement on military de-escalation," I don't think it would have worked, because they would have said, "Well, we haven't even got the outlines of an agreement, why should we? We believe in fight and talk."

It's my view and I have felt this way for the past twenty years, based on this experience, that the starting place in a mediation is not de-escalation of the military, or at least it's not necessarily the starting place, because you need a political framework or climate, of some kind, in order to create the kind of ambiance that supports de-escalation.

Q: Were you getting any good analysis from your military people, the military attachï¿½s and also analysts back at the Pentagon, on what was happening?

CROCKER: Yes, but it tended to be a little bit polarized, until we got to the point that we could put on the ground our military people in a tripartite military commission framework, where they would be there and get them to have live communication and interaction rather than static charges, reports, denials and so forth.

And if one side was suddenly very anxious about what the other side was doing, it could communicate to us, not in diplomatic channels, but in more technical channels. It was hard to do that until we got to the point of greater confidence and practical thinking; and this came after the next round of talks, that we actually could do that. We couldn't do it until the New York Governors Island Agreement that was reached in mid-July of '88.

Q: Were the South Africans feeling the loss of an ally in Bill Casey? He was dead by this time, wasn't he?

CROCKER: Yes.

Q: So that particular, you mentioned earlier you were fighting on two fronts, in a way. Did this have an effect, did you feel?

CROCKER: Well, there were several things that had changed fundamentally that were probably having an effect. There was no such thing as a unified South African view, Stu, during this period.

The South African team included people who agreed with our basic approach and hoped it would work and people who were opposed to our basic approach and hoped it would fail and their superiors in different bureaucracies back in Pretoria had different views.

The State President, we weren't sure where he was. So there were a lot of opinions in the South African team, but until we got to New York and then to Geneva in August of '88 and maybe even well beyond that there was not a unified South African view towards this.

So some of the people on the South African team probably, to pick up your question, would have said, yes, "Where's Bill Casey when we need him?" And others were probably just as glad that he was no longer a factor.

But other things were happening. You had the phenomenon of Gorbachev and his seduction of Maggie Thatcher and Franz-Josef Strauss and eventually Ronald Reagan, which of course that also filtered down to South Africa, that this was a new Russia.

It was a more complicated scene than they were used to.

Q: Okay, we're going to go to what led up to the meeting on Governors Island, New York, in still '88, isn't it?

CROCKER: Yes, July '88 .I've just described the Cairo process and the escalation in southern Angolan at the end of June.

I think that this was a critical turning point, both diplomatically and militarily and the parties may have sense that this perhaps was a moment to take a deep breath and see if we could agree on anything. What could we agree on?

We decided to bite the bullet and propose talks in the U.S. as a next event and we specifically proposed New York and Governors Island, which is in New York harbor, because it's a Coast Guard facility and it can be secured and it's not a bad place to hold meetings and we got permission from the authorities to do that.

People stayed in their hotels in New York, but they'd take a ferry out to Governors Island. The only amusing thing about that venue was that there was a large memorial on Governors Island to the sinking of the Maine during the Spanish American War.

And the Cubans hadn't realized that that was there. When they arrived, they took one look at the display - ship cabins, cannon balls, photos of the event - and said, "Oh, my God, did we have to come here?" because it sort of reminded them of a sore point in Cuban-American relations.

Anyway, we had two days of meetings on Governors Island, 19th and 20th of July. And, again, very large delegations, lots of set piece, for the record, kind of statements, but the right people in the room.

Q: You didn't have the kabuki players and all?

CROCKER: No, we didn't have the ministers. We began asking questions of the parties about when they thought it would be the right time to begin work on a possible common document of some sort, because a peace process needs eventually to get to the stage where you can agree on something.

And it was at that point that one of the sides suggested to us that, well, maybe we could get some principles of agreement that we could talk about, some general principles and what principles might we hold in common?

And the Angolans came forward and said, "Well, we clearly have to be based on UN Security Council Resolution 435 on the independence of Namibia. That's got to be one of our principles. That's sacred writ for everybody in the room, we assume. And that's the basis for the transition of Namibia, so surely that's one of the principles we could agree on."

The South Africans listened and nodded. They weren't going to make an issue of that, because in fact everyone knew if we're going to have a settlement it would be based on Resolution 435.

The South African would come back with a point such as, "Well, another sacred principle in terms of the United Nations and the world community is non-intervention in internal affairs. And you and you," pointing to the Angolans, "You have ANC bases which are focused on creating terrorist incidents inside South Africa. So an important principle is non-intervention."

Of course that opened the door for the Angolans, "Yeah, and look what you're doing with UNITA and Savimbi, in our internal affairs. You're inside our country."

So it was that sort of a discussion, but the idea that was beginning to gel was that there might be some principles that people could agree on. At this point, in my memory of what took place, there was a lunch break and I decided to sit at lunch with the head of the Cuban delegation, a fellow named Carlos Aldana Escalante. Aldana was a labor negotiator and senior member of the communist party, he came out of the labor movement in Cuba, a savvy guy, very practical and confident in his approach. We had had good talks prior to Governor's Island about several issues, very sensitive issues to do with Savimbi and UNITA and how would Angola survive if the Cubans left and so forth.

So we had lunch and we talked about, "How do you persuade the South Africans that this is a serious process and it has a future?"

At that point, Aldana said to me, "You know, Mr. Crocker, where I come from it will be a proud day when the last Cuban has come back from Africa. We'll have parades. We'll have celebrations. We'll have fireworks when all the Cubans have come home. This has been a difficult war. For us, it's as big as your Vietnam."

And he mentioned the social and health costs .. He said, "I know you think we make money out of this and that we are being paid by the revenues Gulf Oil and the Soviets pay for everything, but it's not true. We pay for a lot ourselves. I just want you to know that this will be a proud day when we can get our Cuban troops out of Africa, having accomplished their mission."

I said, "Well, what does that mean?"

"When Namibia is independent and South African aggression against Angola ceases. That's what accomplishing our mission means."

So I said, "Well, that's interesting. What you're basically doing is saying you agree with linkage and that it's all linked together in one package, that we have to have a withdrawal schedule for the South African and for your forces and it has to be in conjunction with Resolution 435 implementation and it's all one package, right? What you've just told me is powerful stuff, but I can't tell it to the South Africans. They won't believe me. Only you can tell it to the South Africans."

He said, "Oh, heavens, I can't speak like that to the South Africans. They would twist it and distort it and take it out of context and go public with it."

I said, "Well, that's a test of this process. Let's take a break and I urge you to think about whether you shouldn't just tell the plenary meeting down the hall exactly what you just me told me at this lunch table," there were only four of us at lunch, "Because they need to hear that and they need to hear it from you."

So that's what we did. Back at the plenary meeting, I said, "Well, we've had lunch. I think it's the Cuban team's turn to speak. They may have some thoughts about political principles."

And Aldana got the mike and he gave the speech that he'd given me, basically. You could have heard a pin drop in the room. It was electric, dramatic. An eloquent vision of the future with some candor and some very explicit statements recognizing and endorsing the necessity of a settlement based on the principle of linkage and explaining how an agreement incorporating linkage might be structured. The South Africans asked for a break and their delegation head, Neil van Heerden said to me "You know what, we need to digest this, because what he said is important. And what we'd like to propose is that we take Senor Aldana back to Pretoria with us, because if we tell the boss what he just told us, he won't believe it. And you, Crocker, we respect you, but if you told the boss, he won't believe it. We've got to find a way to take the Cubans to Pretoria with us." This was of course a figure of speech; they knew that President Castro would hardly authorize his head of delegation to fly down to South Africa.

But this was a psychological breakthrough moment, because what you were hearing at the table was that there could be a win-win, that there was a way to shape and frame this so that a deal could develop around principles that would meet the political requirements of South Africa, Cuban and Angola, because it would be in the context of having achieved what they all claimed they were seeking.

Q: Well now, all during this process, how did Savimbi, our basic support of him, fit in?

CROCKER: It fit in every side conversation, but very rarely at the formal plenary table. Why? Because it would have forced everyone to say things that would be unhelpful in front of other people.

The Angolan-Cuban team knew that South Africa still had troops inside Angola and was still helping Savimbi. They knew that we were still helping Savimbi. So we talked about it off line.

I mentioned Aldana, we talked with him at length about this issue and the importance for them to understand that as the South Africans left Namibia the possibility of logistical support for Savimbi would decline, just as Cubans were leaving Angola and their logistical support for the MPLA would decline and there would be roughly symmetrical reduction of outside support for the two Angolan factions, which would lead to them having to come together.

And they listened and they understood what we were saying. There was no agreement, but we talked about it; we got it out on the table in these side meetings quite regularly.

Q: Did Savimbi have a representative across the street?

CROCKER: No and this was of course a problem, because there were people who were not in the room who wanted to be informed. SWAPO, the leading Namibian liberation movement, didn't, either. And so the various sides would brief these two organizations off line, but they weren't at the table.

Q: As the Americans, we didn't feel we needed to brief these people?

CROCKER: Oh, yes, and we did.

Q: You did, too?

CROCKER: Yes, we did, too. But I'm sure the Russians did, the South Africans did, the Angolans did, everybody did, with their own spin. One reason for the misbehavior sometimes of parties who were not at the table is that they'd been subjected to conflicting spin, they didn't know fully what was going on.

But they couldn't be at the table. This was a negotiation between governments. If we'd said, "Savimbi has to be here," the Angolans would have said, "The ANC needs to be here." It would have blown up before it started.

Q: Then you start getting into the shape of the table, as we had with the Vietnam talks.

CROCKER: Right, and you start negotiating the future of apartheid; it was just not going to happen. You can't have too many people and too much on the agenda. It just doesn't work. You've got to have a focus. So that was the focus.

But we did keep Savimbi informed and he was distrustful, to the end of his days, 'til the time he was killed, he was distrustful. He was a distrustful man, paranoid sometimes, with a lot to be paranoid about, frankly.

But we tried to persuade him that the best possible outcome for him was an outcome in which there were no Cubans in Angola and he would nod, say, "Yes, I agree with you, but I don't trust them. And I don't trust you." It was never an easy conversation.

Anyway, the outcome at Governors Island, New York, was very important. It led to something called the New York Principles, which were signed on July 20, 1988. TO the uninitiated they sound a lot like the Ten Commandments ,but it included and this is very carefully worded language I'll quote from: "Agreement that there should be redeployment towards the north and the staged and total withdrawal of Cuban troops from the territory of the Peoples Republic of Angola, on the basis of an agreement between Angola and Cuba and the decision of both states to solicit on site verification of that withdrawal by the UN."

So what do we have here? We have an agreement that there will be total Cuban withdrawal, redeployment and then withdrawal and that it will be on a timetable determined by Angola and Cuba, it doesn't mention South Africa or the United States.

So that's an art form in which we said, "Look, we don't have to be the signatory of the withdrawal treaty, but the South Africans have to agree to and accept the terms that are in it. It's your agreement, an agreement between two allies, but the South Africans will have to agree to it."

Then Principle Four, "Respect for the sovereign equality and territorial integrity of all states, non-interference with the internal affairs of all states, abstention from the threat and use of force against the territory of all states" and so forth. Sounds like standard UN prose but it had particular salience and significance in the content of these interacting and intermixed wars in which everyone was mixed up in neighbors' affairs - the ANC based in Angola, SWAPO based in Angola, UNITA supported by South African forces from Namibia, and so on..

Principle N: "Recognition of the mediating role of the United States of America." It's just a page, but it's a page of solid gold, and it made all the difference. Once we had that, we had our first joint agreement.

Q: How'd you draft this thing? Did we have this in our pocket, or somebody would suggest wording? How did this come out?

CROCKER: At the plenary there'd be suggestions for what principles needed to be in the agreement and then we'd break and we'd prepare text and then the text would get massaged, most often in side talks, not hammered out in plenary.

That third principle that I mentioned was extremely delicate, took a lot of time, because we had to persuade obviously ourselves and the South Africans that we could accept the fact that the withdrawal schedule would be as a result of a bilateral treaty between the two communist allies, but there would also need to be a tripartite agreement that would serve as a chapeau over the whole thing. And at the very end of the day - when the negotiation concluded six months later - we had a tripartite and a bipartite treaties, mutually reinforcing and interdependent..

But there were a lot of issues like that. The wording of things, you can imagine some of the language that might get people into trouble. Here's one where you can image there was debate: "Reaffirmation of the right of the peoples of the southwestern region of Africa to self-determination, independence and equality of rights."

You can drive a Mack truck through that. Who the hell are "the peoples of the southwestern region of Africa?" Does this mean that the Herero people of Namibia have their own state? Does it mean that the Ovimbundu people of Angola have their own state?

No, it doesn't mean that. But it means the peoples, as defined in UN Charter terms, who live within colonially-defined territorial states.

Q: Were there tribal difficulties in Angola?

CROCKER: Yes.

Q: Angola, it's not a monolithic state. This was just their problem, the Angolan government's problem?

CROCKER: UNITA, the rebel movement, its social base was the Ovimbundu people, who were the largest ethnic group in Angola, but they were also among the least developed, in economic terms. They don't live around the capital city, they're in the center and the south.

There were clearly tribal issues. There were also ideological and power issues.

In the case of Namibia, SWAPO is based on the Ovambo people, who are the majority people in Namibia and there was never any question that in a free and fair election the Ovambos would assure that SWAPO wins.

So there are issues like that and of course in South Africa there are issues like this, of race and of tribe. But the word tribe is not PC. You don't use the word tribe in these kinds of negotiations. You talk about states and governments, not tribes.

It's not very honest, maybe, but it's a reality. If you had tried to talk about tribes in a negotiation like we had on Governors Island, we would have had people walking for the door.

Q: Was this the breakthrough, or was this just the beginning, or what?

CROCKER: I guess you'd say it was the beginning of the endgame. We had our first joint agreement, there were signatures. That's important stuff, when you have signatures.

So it was the beginning of the endgame, but we didn't have several things. We did not have agreement on a military withdrawal schedule. We did not have agreement on a de-escalation process, how to control the risk of incidents blowing things up, because there's always that risk, these armies are still deployed out there. There was nothing about timing or about implementation.

And we didn't have treaty language. We had principles, we didn't have treaty language. We didn't have an agreement on verification. We didn't have agreement on the role of the mediator going forward, or the date when the UN would get involved in the process, because the UN had not been involved in this negotiation directly.

So there were a lot of things that had to be worked out and we took some of those issues up at our next round of discussions, which took place in Geneva in August of '88.

Q: You had signatures and all, you knew there was progress, but to the outside observer, when are the troops going to get out of there and when is this going to happen? Progress in the middle of something is kind of hard to display.

CROCKER: Oh, sure and especially when you brief the American press. The State Department press corps is a very jaded bunch, veterans who've been there forever. They say things like, "You've said there's been progress for about seven years now."

So you're right, but within our ranks we knew this was an important step. It wasn't peace in our time, but it was an important step.

Q: We're talking about an election year. In the normal course of events, you didn't know what was going to happen. And so did you feel that

CROCKER: Time was running out? Well, we knew time was running out. What we didn't know was whether the parties were focused on it at this stage, July of '88, enough to think it was important. Of course it's a tricky ball to play.

Q: Always, because maybe you'll get a mediator more amenable to your position.

CROCKER: So we didn't try to play that particular card at that point. Later on, we did. We did some coaching, later on. We didn't play it at this stage, but we were certainly aware of it.

We had had meetings with the parties in one format or another since January and we were getting into a rhythm now, where I was on the road virtually every month with my negotiating team and that was 12-15 people. We were moving around the world in this negotiation and in motion all the time - for the past six months.

The parties were getting used to the idea of when's the next meeting, where is it going to take place and who shall we send as our head of delegation, that kind of thing.

Q: Were you ever looking towards having a meeting in Cuba?

CROCKER: I had enough problems in Washington without that.

Q: Today is March 4, 2010

CROCKER: As this peace process developed in 1988, it kind of went through a period of what seemed to us like endless acceleration. The rhythm of meetings got more frequent, the sense of pressure got greater, because we had accomplished some things, but we hadn't yet gotten to the goal line and so there was a sense that if you don't keep momentum, you lose momentum and if you lose momentum you're toast. So you've got to keep momentum, you've got to keep the initiative, and the clock is moving.

The clock was moving for Ronald Reagan, because it was coming up to the end of his second term. That was one timing factor. But there were a lot of other timing factors, having to do with the fragile state of what progress we had made by July of '88.

And so as I look back I think the architecture of this process included some "getting to know you" sessions, face to face "getting to know you" sessions, it included some pushing and shoving at the table, it included a final phase of military escalation on the ground in southwestern Angola that we've already talked about, that was in late June.

And then it included the construction of a two-page document called the "Governors Island, New York, Principles" which were agreed in the middle of July of '88. Those principles, as we've discussed, if you read them, they look a little bit like the preamble to yet another UN Security Council resolution. They're a little bit legalistic and there's a lot of kind of diplospeak but they really were significant, because they provided us with a foundation for the house. A house has to have a foundation and that was the foundation.

And to get to those principles required the most interesting and quite deft to acts of statesmanship by the leaders of the delegations, to actually begin treating each other at the table with respect, giving each other credit for concessions or verbal gestures that were made, recognizing that each side had political requirements and talking in that manner, rather than "Why don't we step outside and I'll show you what I'm made of" kind of talk.

We sensed that the July Principles really were a foundation. The next move took place in the middle of August in Geneva, when the delegations arrived to see how do we build on the New York Principles, what's the next step?

Well, it was quite a dramatic time. We had I think four days of meetings and we always seem to wind up in one or another of those diplomatic hotels in Geneva and the different delegations stayed in different places. But we had a good meeting facility that was made available to us actually by the Swiss foreign ministry, which opened up some good facilities that we could use.

But on the first day of this round we were surprised to hear and the Angolans and Cubans even more so that the South Africans had been very busy: they came to Geneva with a full blown, comprehensive proposal to settle everything.

This was quite stunning, because it was "Okay, guys, here it is. Here's our proposal and we are going to table it and we want you to reflect and if you need more time we can go to the airport and come back another day, but here it is."

It was quite dramatic. It addressed the issues of ceasefire. There wasn't yet a ceasefire. There was a stand down, if you like, but there was no ceasefire.

Q: What is a "stand down," as opposed to a ceasefire?

CROCKER: They just weren't moving around a lot. They were in place and they were not out on aggressive patrols, looking for trouble. The forces that were engaged in Angola were separated from each other and they were staying where they were, they weren't out in active combat patrol mode.

So in that sense it seemed stable, but there was no agreed ceasefire and so that obviously had to be discussed. There had been, in the interim between the New York and Geneva sessions, there had been a meeting of military delegations on the island of Cape Verde, which is a place that the parties often liked to go to. South Africans, Cubans, Angolans went there.

We were not at all sure that that meeting had produced any progress. There had been some signal sending, but it wasn't clear that there was real tangible progress on defining a ceasefire, but there was talk about having some kind of mechanism for military to military communication. So we knew that that issue was on the table.

The South Africans proposed, as they came in the room in Geneva, "Let's have a de facto ceasefire and let's set target dates for completing this negotiation." Let me be very precise here. What they wanted to do was to say that all the Cubans would have to leave within either seven or ten months, depending on when the clock starts, from today, all the Cubans out of Angola. There were 50,000 at this point.

And they proposed to start the clock rolling on the UN Plan in ten weeks (!) by the first of November, if my memory serves. November of '88, the UN would begin deploying into Namibia.

That means that between August 15th and the end of October we have to finish negotiating everything: the withdrawal schedule, the ceasefire, the stand down of political rhetoric, some kind of understanding on respect for each other's sovereignty, that's code language for not harboring rebels, working out some arrangements for the implementation period.

So the South Africans were asking the Angolans to stop providing bases to the ANC. And I think the South Africans also recognized that they would be asked to stop promoting UNITA's offensive activities and in turn South Africa would say, "We hear you on that, but then you have to stop active combat patrols against UNITA. So there has to be a zone of safety for UNITA if you want us to stop supporting them..

So there were a lot of different military issues here. Anyway, this was a bold South African plan put on the table.

The Cubans and Angolans were not amused, because there was no negotiation going on here, this was a unilateral proposal.. They wanted a recess and they came to us and said, "What is this? What kind of a stunt is this?" They were very upset, because they saw it as a stunt. They said, "Are they about to go public with this, because if so then we're going to have to go public."

So there was a real problem of calming nerves down. We had good delegation leaders in Geneva, fortunately and they were people who we could work with and get things gradually calmed down.

But it took some time to calm them down. The Cubans and Angolans said, "We've seen your proposal, thank you very much for responding to our proposal" of last February or January, because they had put forward, back at that time, a four year schedule for Cuban withdrawal (as contrasted with 7 months in the South African bid).

So we then had both sides putting things on the table related to the critical military issues: we had a four-year plan and we had a seven-month plan. It took some time to get them to agree on practical steps.

Q: I'm looking at the South African proposal. Was this a stunt? Were they asking for more? Did it represent really certain practical developments?

CROCKER: It was what you would call an opening bid, a very raw and somewhat provocative opening bid, because logistically getting all those troops out of Angola in seven months would have been a challenge; and the purpose of it was to try to force the Cubans to look at the idea that they had to get out of Angola before there could be an election in Namibia.

And so it was rigid, front-loaded withdrawal schedule that they had in mind and the Cubans were offended, the Angolans were offended. Of course they're very good at getting offended. As George Mitchell once said of some of his Irish interlocutors, they would go a hundred miles to receive an insult.

So they got offended, even more so when there was some quite slick press backgrounding by the South Africans, who had some friends in the press that they had brought with them to indicate that the South Africans had taken a bold gesture for peace and that they were really stepping up the pace of negotiations and challenging the other side to see we could get everything agreed so we could start the UN plan by the first of November.

Well, once one side goes public like that, as you will appreciate, it puts the other side kind of on the defensive and they've got to go public with something, so there was some press hype.

But by the end of the four days in Geneva we had actually put together something we called, not very originally, a "Geneva Protocol," it must be about the eightieth Geneva Protocol in modern diplomatic history, but, anyway, this one including the terms of reference of a de facto cease fire, it did establish a joint military commission between the sides, which was a very important step, it did talk about the target date of November 1st, even though all sides recognized that this was hyping the pressure on ourselves and could lead to disappointment down the road.

So what we had done at Geneva was to put our arms around some of these immediate military issues. By the time we left Geneva in the middle of August the obvious remaining issue was the great gap between the different troop withdrawal calendars.

So here we are in late August. I'm on vacation. Everybody knows that there's one huge issue left, because a lot of other matters had been addressed.

Q: Including a ceasefire?

CROCKER: Including a ceasefire and it's sort of holding, it seems to be holding. There are no incidents of note. There are some communications to do with primarily how do the Cubans and Angolans keep SWAPO from messing around and crossing the Angola-Namibia border and trying to continue infiltration into Namibia, because SWAPO was not officially a party to this interim ceasefire, it was not at the table and neither was UNITA.

So we were talking to three states. We did not have the liberation groups, if you want to call them that, at the table. So we had to rely on the states that controlled them, or influenced them. It was quite complicated trying to figure out how to avoid the kind of difficulty which insurgents could create. There were ANC insurgents, as well.

So I think it's fair to say that we had a de facto ceasefire and a mechanism for observing it and for talking to each other when there were violations. We had military communications set up, so the sides could reach each other by radio.

But the big issue was the gap on the Cuban departure schedule and how that would be linked up to the South African departure from Namibia.

I am in my vacation place in the Adirondack Mountains in the third week of August of 1988. I get a call from my staff assistant in the AF Bureau saying, "Chet, would you be willing to come and meet with two senior South Africans? They have some concerns, some questions and they want to talk to you - now."

And so we agreed on a place and my staff assistant flew up to Kennedy Airport, met the two visiting South Africans, escorted them up to a lodge on Lake George and I drove down from my place in the central Adirondacks and we met for a full day with the top guy in their military intelligence and the number 2 of Neil van Heerden, the head of the South African delegation.

We're sitting in the Adirondack sun, swatting the occasional deer fly, and they really wanted to put cards on the table: "Where are we going with this process? How do we get clarity about Cuban sincerity? They have a lot of additional troops. We've got to get a front loaded schedule of withdrawal, meaning lots of Cubans leave early. Otherwise, there's a great asymmetry in the calendars because of our (South African) timing commitments in terms of UN Res. 435."

Not to belabor this is in too great detail, there were four very difficult meetings between that rendezvous on Lake George and the middle of October, and they were very frustrating meetings, because what you were seeing was a shoving match between the sides about what was politically acceptable to each when it came to the degree of 'parallelism' on the withdrawal schedule and how would you verify, how would you guarantee, and all kinds of "what if" questions were being asked.

We met in Brazzaville repeatedly, we met in New York, we had a series of rounds and it was very demanding, a very accelerated negotiating schedule. And there were times, I think, quite frankly, when it looked like we were running out of time to maintain a sense of momentum and to conclude this process.

The U.S. election of 1988 was the first Tuesday of November. It seemed like maybe the parties were going to possibly piss away the great opportunity that we thought lay before them. So we didn't have the highest sense of confidence during those four meetings.

And it was agreed eventually that we had to go back to Geneva and really give it a final push. So I'm now moving ahead from those four meetings, which were basically, how can I put it, they were close-in work, they were hard work and they simply were a learning process in which parties talked at each other and tried to educate each other about political requirements that each had. The sides were down to their few remaining cards on the main issue - though there were other important topics raised from time to time (including side conversations between the Angolans and South Africans on the delicate issues of ANC bases and support for UNITA).

By the time we got to Geneva again in the middle of November, I'm moving ahead, now, to November of '88, this really was almost a do or die, in a sense. The election was over.

Ronald Reagan's term of office was going to come to a conclusion in two months and it was not automatic that under the new George H. W. Bush administration there'd be continuity of policy or people.

So the sides were kind of wondering about whether mid-November '88 was a great moment to grab and get it done or was it going to be a time when people say, "Let's wait and see what happens."

Q: We've had this happen I know in negotiations in Korea and other times. People said, "Well, different administration, even in the same party, we might get a better deal" or something like that.

CROCKER: Or, "We might not have to deal."

Q: Were you playing this card?

CROCKER: Yes. We were playing it, but trying not to overplay it, because if you overplay it then it looks like the mediator is the one who is most needy, when what we wanted was for the parties to have needs.

The mediator's leverage is a function of the parties' needs (and I am quoting the leading scholar of mediation, here, Bill Zartman). If the parties don't need you, then you're running around looking for work. So we didn't want to seem too eager and, frankly, we thought they would probably sober up and get the point.

But we did play that card, yes, we did play it. We pointed out that there was no guarantee of a continuity of policy, that George Bush, while he supported what we'd been doing, he was a different president, he might have different priorities, there's a lot going on in the world.

I at one point made a comment, when I was finished chairing a very frustrating session of mostly intense side meetings in New York, I remarked to the parties in plenary session that the American people wouldn't know what Angola was if it hit them over the head, they might think it was a form of imported cheese and as for Namibia, they'd never heard of it. And I made that statement and the delegation heads actually got quite angry, because what I was saying to them (though not in so many words) was: "Get real, guys, or I'm out of here! The U.S. has other things on its plate."

So we did try to play that card to some extent and I suppose it probably worked in some way. They probably looked at this and said, "We also have invested years of effort and time on this."

I remember going to Cuba six months later and Fidel Castro saying to me that he was cross, that he thought there might be damage to "his" peace process, he used that pronoun: "I thought my process was in jeopardy." So there was some ownership there.

Q: Well, this is what you want, of course.

CROCKER: Yes.

Q: Did you feel that the other parties had time constraints or other things that were happening

CROCKER: There of course were things going on in all the countries. South Africa was very much the polecat of the international community at this point. It was feeling the isolation impact of both symbolic and real sanctions. We knew that service in 'border wars' was not popular with white draftees in the South African forces. There was feeling that there was a need to find a way to get extricated, but only if it could be done in a way that was honorable and proud, which is exactly what Castro's view was. In effect both leadership groups were saying "I need to leave with my head held high."

Q: During this process, were you up against another major factor and that was the dislike on the part of our political masters of South Africa? Were they saying, "Do this, stick it to the South Africans," with no regard to the peace process, but just as part of the political process, to show we were doing something to the South Africans?

CROCKER: There was some of that in the Congress, but of course there was another side, which was the people in our political system who were not at all happy with the fact that we were talking to the communists at all. So there was some degree of push from both sides.

There was a point at which there was some talk in the Congress and I don't have the month but there was some congressional initiative to maybe pass yet another sanctions bill on South Africa.

And I remember going up to the Congress with Colin Powell and talking to the Democratic leadership in the House and we heard from people like Tony Coelho and others that there was some pressure and that they were thinking about doing something more.

And Colin turned to me and said, "Chet, what do you think?" And I said, "Frankly, if you want to terminate this peace process, that's a great way to do it." The congressmen were not impressed with that argument, particularly; nor was Colin Powell as I recall. There were few people in our system who grasped the significance of this negotiation as one that was at a decisive stage and could become transformative for the region.

But within the administration most people understood that we had to deal with this in a balanced way, so we tried to keep the balance there. There already were sanctions. We didn't need more sanctions.

Anyway, so we get to the middle of November, let's say the 15th, 16rh of November, back again in Geneva and at this point the issue of withdrawal schedules was one that could almost be quantified.

We had our people running around with flow charts and graphs and schedules and looking at equations and looking at who will have which numbers of brigades still in which places, at which dates that were the benchmarks in Res. 435, and so forth.

Another three day meeting. My senior military advisor, Jim Woods, who worked as the deputy assistant secretary of defense for Africa, at one point said to me that he had about given up on this, because we weren't getting there, we just weren't quite getting there.

But then all of a sudden toward the end of the meeting we got there. An idea was put forward and there was a slight modification and then another idea was put forward and before we knew it we had an agreed schedule that of course would be the Cuban-Angolan schedule, but the South Africans had approved it, and it was more or less a front loaded schedule.

It was a longer schedule than the South Africans had suggested back in August but a far shorter schedule than the Angolans and Cubans had initially suggested. Without getting too far down in the weeds, there were variables within the schedule. One variable was how many Cuban forces leave early. A second variable was how many Cuban forces move north to which parallels. A third variable was how long is the total withdrawal period? Is it seven months, is it four years? It turned out to be thirty months, but front loaded. Another variable is how many Cubans would remain (if any) on the date the South African flag came down in Namibia.

Anyway, by the end of that wonderful day there was a lot of huzzahs and a lot of celebrations and a lot of champagne toasts and it was quite an amazing time, because we had actually cracked the nut, we had solved the biggest issue, which was to get an agreed schedule that put South African withdrawals and Cuban withdrawals on the same page so you could see them.

Q: Was there a practical problem and that is airlift or sealift to get the Cubans out, 'cause that's not exactly a country with tremendous airlift or sealift resources?

CROCKER: You know what, they were very good at pointing that out, because you have to close down bases, you have to gather equipment, you have to move heavy equipment, you have to assure that what you're leaving behind doesn't turn to scrap overnight and you have to bring in your Angolan partners to take over your facilities and it's a fairly elaborate process.

Part of this is politics, face and part of it is real logistics, as you're suggesting and bringing home all that number of boys in a hurry was a big deal for Cuba.

Q: Was there a ghost at the banquet sitting off there, somebody who could really screw things up?

CROCKER: Oh, yes, there were ghosts. We hadn't finished. One of the things that we did at this round in November was to make sure that this rather complex package stayed on track. And there was still quite a few things to do. We had a schedule approved in principle but it had to be confirmed in capitals, it had to be translated into a formal bilateral Cuba-Angola treaty which was acceptable to South Africa, we needed to develop a tripartite agreement among the three of them that would incorporate the bilateral agreement by reference, there was the question of coordinating with the UN Secretariat on what we called D Day, that's the day of the official start of the UN implementation plan, Resolution 435. There was the question of when does the UN secretariat formally join these US-mediated talks, because the UN always sent someone (typically, the special representative for Namibia, Martti Ahtisaari) who was available to talk to, but he wasn't in the meetings.

When does the UN become part of this? When does the UN dust off this now ten year old UN peace plan and begin to figure out whether every single part of it is going to go forward exactly as had been negotiated in the previous period? There were a bunch of those kinds of issues to be worked out, so we actually needed two more rounds of negotiation that took place in Brazzaville, Congo before we got to New York and actually signed everything. But we agreed the troop withdrawal schedule in November. And it was at Geneva that a conversation occurred which planted a seed in my mind: I think I mentioned earlier a late night drink that I had in my Geneva hotel room with my Russian colleague Vasev, who by this point had probably had several scotches and he remarked, "I've spent my entire career trying to block everything you do, but this is really enjoyable and creative! We're working together!" That exchange underscored the Russian evolution toward seeing value in thinking about a cooperative approach to security.

The Brazzaville meetings in early December were intense, back-to-back affairs. They included the usually range of high drama, practical work, serious glitches over issues large and small. We discussed target dates for signing in New York, D dates for UN implementation, the texts of accords including legally binding treaty language which required input from four sets of lawyers, and done in three languages, and so forth.

We also began a delicate side conversation with the parties and the Russians about possible terms of reference of a joint implementing commission, What about the notion of some sort of joint commission to keep things on track? Who would be part of it? Is it a good idea for the U.S. and the Soviet Union to be members of it? I had to run that up the chain in the State Department and get the Legal Advisor's office to chop off on that. I had a lawyer with me at all times throughout the eight years, but still there needed to be a senior level chop that there could be on-going U.S. membership in such an entity (as well as the Russian issue). One of my biggest worries was the risk that the U.S. might get distracted and not stick around to see this through. Implementation was going to take a minimum of 30 months from D day.

This was one of the best things that we did in this process. We made mistakes, but we got a few things right and one of them was the notion that the process doesn't end when everything is signed and sealed. Implementation requires commitment and engagement.

It seemed to us since Geneva that the way to get the Russians completely committed to what they were already getting more and more involved in was to have them be formal members of something, give them some sort of a formal link to this. But rather than have us propose it at the table, it would better maybe if they volunteered. So we went back and forth with the Russians, should we propose you, or do you want to volunteer? It was a "shall we dance?" kind of thing. And the Russians were intrigued by this, absolutely intrigued.

Eventually we got the Russians to agree to be nominated, we would nominate them and they would accept, to be members of a joint commission and that seemed to make sense. But the joint commission wouldn't come into effect until the UN plan began to operate and as we looked down the timetable, that would probably be sometime in the early months of 1989.

So we had to work out all these dates and timing and so forth. We agreed we'd go to New York just before Christmas of '88 and have the final, big signing ceremony with all the delegations coming at fairly senior levels, ministerial level and that we would have two signing ceremonies, one between Cuba and Angola and one between Cuba, Angola and South Africa. But in some ways the most exciting breakthrough came with the signature on December 13 of the Brazzaville Protocol. It formally accepted and reflected all that had gone on during the previous 12 months, reiterated the key decisions and commitments, set December 22 as the date of signature in New York and April 1, 1989 as D day for the UN Plan, agreed on timing for exchange of prisoners of war, established the terms of reference for a Joint Commission to oversee implementation, and confirmed that the UN, Angola and Cuba would work out arrangements for verification of Cuban withdrawal from Angola. This last item took a lot of hard work. The Angolans and Cubans 'volunteered' to arrange a UN mechanism for verification (later UNAVEM), but this was hardly going to satisfy the South Africans (or the U.S. for that matter). It was necessary in the end to have a side understanding that confirmed Washington's readiness to use its intelligence means to monitor Cuban departures (thousands of UN personnel would be monitoring the South Africans in Namibia).

Amazingly, there were ghosts even the night before the final signing ceremony in New York. There were issues that required my senior deputy, Chas Freeman, to get involved late in the evening December 21 trying to manage some bad tempers about who would be in the room and what sequence would take place on details of the implementation of the UN plan, various things that we thought we'd sorted out but came up again on the eve of the big day.

Something else that came up on the eve was Pan Am 103.

Q: You might explain what Pan Am 103 was.

CROCKER: Pan Am 103 was the Pan Am flight that went down over Lockerbie, Scotland on the 21st of December, which is the day before our big signing ceremony. The South African delegation for the signing was to have been on that plane, including two ministers and the entire negotiating team.

This was a remarkable piece of fate. Less fortunate was a Swedish diplomat who'd been the UN Commissioner for Namibia, a kind of UN job that didn't really get involved in anything substantive, but was it sort of a symbolic gesture that the UN system had created a UN Commissioner for Namibia. His name was Bernt Carlsson. He was killed on Pan Am 103 and had been planning to attend the ceremony.

Q: I assume that the immediate assumption was this was somebody trying to screw up your work?

CROCKER: Well, it was Gaddafi.

Q: It was Gaddafi, but I'm just thinking that the fact that the South African delegation planned to be on that plane, your focus on your issue, were you looking around and saying, "Who's trying to sabotage this?"

CROCKER: Well, we didn't have time to think about that, about any possible linkage. It was just remarkable. It went through our minds.

The day of December 22nd, 1988, will be etched in my memory for the rest if my days as the day when all this came together in one place, and we managed to pull off a fairly intricate signing ceremony in the UN's ECOSOC chamber.

This is UN politics for you: this was a great UN victory. When you think about it, UNTAG, which was the UN force that would implement the Namibian plan, was one of the most successful UN peacekeeping operations in the UN's history and it was going to be led by some very, very capable people, including Martti Ahtisaari, who was going to be the UN SRSG to oversee implementation.

You would have thought that the UN, led by a very able Perez de Cuellar, would see fit to have this signing in the Security Council. No, these peace agreements were the result of constructive engagement, this was the American diplomacy to bring peace to southern Africa. And so, the regional groups that lobby around the Secretariat like feral cats raised a stink about having a signing ceremony in the UN Security Council for the U.S.-led negotiation bringing independence to Namibia and getting the Cubans out.

So that was okay, but it's typical of the UN politics.

Q: Well, in actual fact, the UN had no seat at the table during the negotiations.

CROCKER: Not formally, no. They were in the next room, or they were in the next hotel. Ahtisaari was with us throughout most of these incredible number of meetings. He flew sometimes in our plane, sometimes by his own means.

He would come and be available to the parties, in the wings, to talk, to encourage them, to see how this could all work. And he's such a skillful guy that to say he wasn't at the table is technically true, but he was there in every way except formally. The UN had an ear and had eyes and it had a spokesperson who could coach the parties. He did some of that.

So Perez de Cuellar was very well informed. He knew what was going on. But the politics of the UN headquarters were such that there was an argument about where to have a signing.

I should just mention an interesting bit of atmosphere from the day, this was a situation where the American Secretary of State was handing the UN Secretary General a peace agreement ending years of regional, cross border wars in southern Africa, but before he could hand them peace he had to give the delegations the opportunity to speak about peace and what it meant and what they had contributed.

So there was an Angolan speech, then a Cuban speech, then a South African speech and they almost ripped it up. They could not resist scoring points for the history books and speaking to their various audiences.

Q: Did Shultz have any problem with sharing the platform with a Cuban representative?

CROCKER: He had to admit them into the room, otherwise we're not going to have a signing. No, he had no problem with that.

But the Cuban Foreign Minister - Isidoro Malmierca, who had played no role whatsoever in the process - used the microphone not only to celebrate Cuba's contributions to this process, but to attack American foreign policy on three continents, to attack South Africa's political leadership over apartheid and other sins, and generally to behave badly. South African Foreign Minister Roelof ('Pik') Botha would not be outdone, and suggested that the two of the step outside to settle matters.

When he finally got the microphone back, Shultz said, "Well, I think we know what the American negotiating team has had to deal with the past eight years."

But Shultz made very brief remarks and then just handed the treaties over to the UN and then we had a big party at the American mission.

Q: This was signed a day or two before Christmas.

CROCKER: Yeah, three days before Christmas.

Q: Had George H.W. Bush, the president-elect, put together any sort of an African team in the State Department by this time?

CROCKER: No. You know what happens in transitions is that all people who are presidential appointees are asked to submit their resignations pro forma and that includes ambassadors as well as assistant secretaries and so on. So there was no clarity on that point.

I had worked closely with Bush as Vice President during those eight years, and we knew each other pretty well. His wife and my wife had enjoyed times together at dinners and stuff like that. We'd visited their home up on Observatory Circle a number of times..

So there was good vibes there, but the real issue was how to get from December 22 to April 1st. April 1st was the agreed start date that we finally came up with, April 1st of '89, for the UN plan.

By April 1st we had to have the UN somehow either deployed or deploying and South Africans confined to base in Namibia and so forth, all those provisions that are in the UN plan that were quite specific.

So there was an interim here of four months or so and one of the questions was should I stay on for those four months, would I be asked to and would I want to stay more than four months if I was asked to and would Jim Baker, who was going to be the new Secretary of State, want me to stay on?

So I had to think about all of that over the Christmas-New Year holidays, but they also had to think about it, figure out where they were going. But those months of January through April are worthy I think of another conversation..

I made the decision that I did not want to stay on beyond the point of getting the UN on the ground. Once the UN was on the ground this was hopefully an irreversible process. If the UN didn't get deployed properly or if there hiccups (and there were between January and April) God knows what would happen, and we needed to have a firm hand on the steering wheel during this process.

So I felt it was very important to see it through to the point of implementation, but not to see it through throughout the implementation, which was thirty months. I'd been doing this now for eight years!

Q: How about your team? Did they immediately disperse, or were you able to sort of keep together a State Department team to keep an eye on what was going on?

CROCKER: It's interesting you ask that question. Foreign Service Officers, in my experience, hard to generalize, of course, but they tend to be motivated by competence and the possibility of success. They're not motivated by the opposites.

And this was a winner, so we had no trouble attracting and keeping good people. But, obviously, people have tours of duty and so you're going to have some turnover in any case.

But I had a very strong senior deputy in Chas Freeman and there were a number of other people who were helping and doing wonderful work in the AF Bureau, at all levels. (Among them who were part of these efforts over the years I would particularly highlight Robert Frasure, Nancy Ely, John Byerly, Mike McKinley, Dan Simpson, Robert Cabelly, John Ordway, Jeffrey Davidow, Tex Harris, Ken Brown, Earl Irving, Paul Hare, Raymond Smith, Lannon Walker, Frank Wisner, Jim Bishop, Jerry Gallucci, Mike Ranneberger, Charles Snyder, Mark Bellamy, Jim Woods, and Hank Cohen.) Some of them were on the job in 1988-89, others at much earlier stages. We had a very strong team and they stayed engaged, for the first few years or so, anyway. And then things begin to move on and people get new jobs and so on.

Q: Today is May 5, 2010 with Chet Crocker. Chet, talk away.

CROCKER: When I think about the various things we were doing in the African region during the 1980's apart from the southern African negotiations, I break it down into three or four categories of activity.

I'm not going to go into country by country stuff, because that gets tedious and down in the weeds, but the categories that I would identify would be first trying to be more effective with our allies and working intensively with allies.

With the Brits it was never hard to do that, because they were eager and we were eager, and we had a lot we could learn from each other and they were very good at coaching us and also we used their channels in many places to get things done. So we talked to the Brits all the time.

I think I've discussed that and of course this was particularly in Anglophone Africa. mainly on places like Kenya, East Africa and then southern Africa and to some extent Nigeria with the Brits. Our intelligence sharing nicely complemented the diplomatic coordination and consultation.

The other allied relationship that's interesting and was critically important to us is the French. The French, as we all know, looked at Africa as a very important place for them.

One of the reasons why they were still a great power is they saw themselves in the Eighties and perhaps even do under Sarkozy is that they have this cultural-political support base of some Francophone Africans who are with them on a lot of issues, especially in New York in the UN, but not only in New York.

But by the time we get into the 1980's the French are finding that the maintenance of their client-patron relationships is getting quite expensive, so they're not as hostile to American involvement in their former colonial areas as they used to be.

At one stage they were so paranoid and defensive that you couldn't really do any business talking to them, but that changed and they became more interested in engaging with us, as long as we weren't there to push them out commercially.

Q: One of the things that we seem to have relationship on was in airlift. We had the planes that could move things, people around and the French had the troops to be moved around. During your time, was that much of a factor?

CROCKER: I think that's true if they were doing big deployments, but the French during this period still had their network of bases in Africa and so they had their own forward deployed people and they had some transport aircraft that could move them.

I think they would have been a little bit sensitive to the idea of our flying their troops into conflict zones, though. The case that was most dramatic in this regard in the Eighties was Chad, where we were working with the French, and it took a lot of hard work to coordinate with them on how to stop Libyan adventurism in Chad.

Almost every Chadian regime change has taken place with support from either Darfur in Sudan, where the rebels come from, or else with Libyan support from the north. So Chadian politics had long been internationalized, but we did not want to see Libya controlling Chad, and nor did Chad's black African neighbors such as Cameroun, Gabon, Congo-Kinshasa, Uganda. And so when the Libyans began backing rebel factions using heavy armor and so forth, we sat down with the French and I'm talking now the mid-1980's and we worked out a very detailed plan for providing support to the legitimate government of Chad.

Q: You want to talk a little about your personal contacts and dealings with the French?

CROCKER: Sure, it was always interesting, you'd go to Paris and I guess kind of like coming to Washington you'd have to touch three or four bases to find out what the hell was going on, because the French have a complicated structure and back then it included the Quai d'Orsay, of course and you'd stop there and have good conversations, very expert conversations.

Then we would go to the Cooperation Ministry, which is where the money was, where the budget was that was supporting a lot of these individual countries. And it was interesting because sometimes the Cooperation Ministry people were more socialist- oriented and more NGO-oriented and also skeptical about the nature of these French-African political relationships, whereas the Quai was much more straight-laced and proper about everything and also I think felt that they didn't really run the policy, because the policy was run by the gentleman in the Elysee known as "Papamadit," who was Francois Mitterrand. Papamadit was the phrase used to describe Jean-Christophe Mitterrand, the son, who ran the Africa cell in the Elysee. So we talked to Jean-Christophe a lot.

And we would talk to the intelligence people and exchange information and analysis with the military. So there were five channels to consult with and we always had a very expert Africa watcher in the embassy in Paris that would help keep us briefed, so we didn't have to come in cold from Washington.

So this provided a basis of expertise and a number of my colleagues would spend a lot of their time in coordination with the French.

Q: Did the French have the equivalent in Washington?

CROCKER: I think they did and we of course had our own multiple channels, but I think when it came to dealing with Francophone Africa this was not a high priority for the CIA or for the Defense Department, for the most part.

The only exception being Chad, where we did a good deal of practical and I'm talking logistical and operational coordination. The French had a good deal of air power available and they had some ground troops and the Chadians had an under-equipped and rather ill-led armed forces, but we provided a lot of hardware to them. And eventually the Chadians, with French help and some of our help in both overt and not so overt channels, the Chadians cleaned the clocks of the Libyans. Our side of this effort was stitched together brilliantly by my deputy Jim Bishop and his DOD counterpart Jim Woods, working also with Agency counterparts.

Q: This was the "Toyota War," wasn't it?

CROCKER: Yeah, the Toyota War, yes, exactly. It sounds a little bit light hearted and a little bit Beau Gesteish.

Q: It was a significant tactical way of dealing with a heavily armored Libyan force.

CROCKER: It was, indeed. You took the words out of my mouth. It was a very proud moment. Hissene Habrï¿½, who's now of course under a dark cloud for human rights violations and all kinds of awful things that no doubt he had a role in but he was one gutsy, capable desert warrior and he waged a good campaign against the Libyans. He was really in the lead, but a lot of French support and U.S. support.

So allied coordination was important and we took seriously the notion in the Eighties that we didn't have all the answers or all the resources, so we would talk very regularly to those two allies, but also with Germans, with Canadians, with Japanese. The Portuguese, of course, especially for southern Africa. And the list went on.

So I just want to emphasize that theme of working with allies and not imagining that somehow Americans had the answers.

Q: There's been a major change and I don't know where it took place, with not just our government but other governments, with the role of the non-governmental organizations, NGOs. There was a time when they were considered sort of interfering do-gooders and, yes, you could use them. You mentioned the French, at least the Quai d'Orsay had sort of this feeling.

But we've learned that these organizations are now an arrow in our foreign policy quiver.

CROCKER: I don't know if we really realized at the time the extent to which that could be true, at the time being the 1980's. Of course, what's happened since the end of the Cold War is that the barriers to entry for NGOs have collapsed and so they're everywhere and there are all different kinds, in many different fields, as you know.

Back then the main sign of the NGOs would be religious and secular humanitarian groups, like World Vision and Save the Children, for example and we saw a lot of them and they played a key role in bringing relief in areas of humanitarian crisis.

And there were others who were operating, but we probably had less contact with them, or at least I did. There were some conflict resolution and mediation types on the edge of our activity and we saw the Dartmouth Process, which was then run by the Kettering Foundation, I believe, Hal Saunders and people working with Hal, engaged in U.S.-Soviet Track II dialog efforts, and we became aware of that and we welcomed briefings and we would brief them in turn. They were talking to Soviet academics in parallel while we were talking to Soviet officials. So there was some of that.

Another major sector of our activity in the 1980's I would describe as basically economic engagement and economic dialogue. This was a massive effort (often jointly with allies) to encourage Africans down the road of policy reform, reducing the role of government in the economy, liberalizing exchange rates and trade, reducing subsidies, opening markets and that kind of thing.

It's a huge topic and it was a feature in virtually all of our relationships with African countries; there was an important economic policy discussion taking place and so I had to learn about development economics and I had to listen to colleagues who were well briefed on it in order to understand what was on the minds and the priority lists of a lot of our African friends.

They'd come to Washington or I'd go to their capitals and they'd want to talk about foreign assistance and whether we would help them address their endless 'financing gaps' (code language for dealing with debt arrears and budget woes), they'd want to talk about what the IMF and World Bank were doing to them under the rubric of 'structural adjustment programs'..

Q: Was the ghost of the London School of Economics still weighing heavily over particularly Anglophone Africa? You know what I mean, the socialists?

CROCKER: Sure and it wasn't just British academics, it was also Scandinavian ones who were very heavily engaged and for a while still believing in the old Fabian socialist and similar parallel doctrines. So there was a lot of doctrinal baggage out there.

I think the Africans are very pragmatic about their situation, and if they saw there was an alternative road that they could consider walking down, they were prepared to look at it.

But they needed to know there'd be someone at their side, in a sense, if they went down a path that was somewhat different. They need to know that the IMF and the World Bank would support them and that we would support them in the Bank and the Fund, that's basically what it boiled down to.

So we're talking about aid conditionality and the policies associated with the so-called Washington consensus. All these things were front and center in our African policies during the 1980's, an important component, whether we're talking about troubled friends like Liberia and Zaire, as they were very troubled then and remained troubled for a long time afterwards, or countries that were somewhat easier to talk to, like Zambia or Ghana.

And we had progress in some of these economic dialogues and we saw real breakthroughs. In other cases, we felt like we were chasing our tail and there really wasn't enough in it for the local head of state to consider taking the risk of going more in the direction of liberalizing his economy.

Africa's economies, still, today, to some extent, but back then especially, were very heavily controlled by government and very closed even to their neighbors for trade, so that it was very hard for foreign investors to see a major magnet or pole of attraction because there were so many tiny, balkanized economies.

That's changed a lot in the last 25 years.

Q: Most of their economies are based on some form of sort of extractive activity, sending it out, but not much on trade.

CROCKER: Well, the great story that's really taken place since the Nineties is the opening up of consumer production. It's focused much more on things like cell phones and radios. FM radio is a big deal in Africa today. Light manufacture, textiles and all kinds of clothing and shoes, beverages and personal products of all kinds.

Africa's growing today in a way that was almost inconceivable back in the 1980's, so there's been a lot of change.

I would like to believe that we - specially key colleagues like Princeton Lyman, Eleanor Constable, Roy Stacy, Peter McPherson, Bob Pringle and others working the economic issues sowed the seeds for this shift in economic doctrine back in the 1980's. But it took a long time for it to really mature and produce results.

Q: Sort of in your mind and those who were in Crocker's circle, did you really see that Africa could really come out, you might say, come out of it and become self-sustaining?

CROCKER: Not unless we could get the wars stopped, which is why the priority was on conflict resolution, conflict management, mediation and so forth. There's no way that you could expect people to be able to work towards a more open political and economic system if they've got militarized conflict on their borders or inside their territory.

So that was the way we looked at it and I think it's been borne out by history. Those parts of Africa that have stopped their wars are actually doing quite well today. The parts that are still in wars are just about to fall off the edge of the earth. I'm talking about places like Chad, Darfur/Sudan, the DRC, and the Central African Republic

Q: And the Horn of Africa?

CROCKER: And part of the Horn, yes. It's a huge, night and day, difference between better governed and worse governed.

Q: Well, how did the Horn hit you at the time, our concerns?

CROCKER: We had, I'd say, at least two major concerns. So much time has passed, I have to ignore all that's taken place more recently and go back to that period.

Item number one was that there was in Sudan a government friendly to the Middle East peace process and supported

Q: Recognized Camp David.

CROCKER: Recognized Camp David and had supported the courageous Egyptian decisions at Camp David. We're talking now about the government of Gaafar Nimeiri, which lasted for a while, but eventually Nimeiri lost his way and began drinking the Islamist Kool-aid.

And then he got overthrown and Sudan had a military government and a not very effective civilian government and then these guys, Omar Bashir and his colleagues, took over in the late 1980's.

So Sudan was an important client, an important friend, for Middle East policy reasons, but as its leadership began to go down the wrong road on domestic politics, it began listening more and more to the Islamist voice, it was tearing apart its own national unity, in a sense and it became a more and more troubled partner.

By the time I left the State Department we were seeing the beginnings of the real Islamization of Sudanese politics and it was very worrisome. And also there were huge humanitarian issues and problems getting food to people in outlying areas of the country where local militias (often supported by Khartoum) and local disputes disrupted any semblance of normal life.

So Sudan was a major preoccupation for us. The other, parallel, preoccupation was Soviet-dominated Ethiopia, next door. We tried repeatedly to engage with Mengistu of Ethiopia and to offer the Ethiopians, as we had the Mozambicans, Angolans and others of Marxist orientation, an alternative to relying on Moscow and being closely tied to Moscow.

Every time we got close to a real effective set of meetings with the Mengistu regime something would happen and meetings would get cancelled and we concluded that they were cancelled in Moscow.

I once tested that by talking to the head of that section of the International Department of the CPSU, this was in 1988 and I said to him, "Why is it that you guys are so opposed to us having conversations? We have many friends in Ethiopia. It's been a strong relationship for decades. You seem to want to prevent a U.S.-Ethiopian dialogue from taking place. What is the problem?"

He looked at me and said, "You want everything, you Americans, you want everything. You want southern Africa and now you want the Horn of Africa. Why don't you leave things alone?" He was very frank.

Q: Of course that was the last outpost, wasn't it?

CROCKER: They felt like they were being pushed out of Afghanistan, we had signs of a peace process in Central America, a lot of positive things were happening in Angola, and in Mozambique the Soviets were no longer getting much joy in that relationship.

People often kid and joke about whether or not we exaggerated Russian influence and I'm sure there were times when we did and we distorted our priorities to some extent.

Q: This is true in every phase of foreign affairs.

CROCKER: Yes. But Ethiopia was a case, a concrete case, where everything should have worked for some kind of a thaw or a detente in our relationship, excepting that Big Brother didn't want it to and Big Brother had them by the short hairs, if I can be coarse here, Big Brother had them dependent on military assistance, huge debts, lots of civilian sector loans and so on and they were not really free agents.

Q: When you left, what was sort of on the right course, it may take work, but on the right course and where were there going to be continuing troubles?

CROCKER: Well, the Horn, as we were just talking, is an area of real concern and I know my colleagues who served out in Somalia were also very worried because they could see that Siad Barre was not good for the Somali people or for the region.

He was very troubled and his regime was getting more and more narrowly based and relying more and more on his Marehan clan, at the expense of other clans of Somalis.

And we had fairly active embassies that were trying to keep this from going off the track, but it was a holding action and we were worried about it. I don't want to read back retrospectively and rewrite history here, but I think by the time you got to '89, '90 it was pretty far gone in Somalia.

We had difficulty with that relationship and Siad Barre, as he would quickly confess, was not a paragon of human rights leadership. He joked about it. I'd go see him and he said, "I know you're coming to talk about human rights issues and about opening up my political system and doing the things that you Americans would like to see us do.

"Let me tell you. I live in a rough neighborhood. I've got these awful Ethiopians next door." And then he would stop and he would say, "Somalis are not Americans. You need a strong hand out here. And, by the way, I'm no Abe Lincoln," he said to me once. So we knew we didn't have an Abe Lincoln on our hands. It was a very worrisome place.

But even more worrisome was our inability to get the Sudanese to stop trying to impose Sharia law on the South, to stop tearing their own country apart. .

We tried to shift Nimeiri's course, we tried to work with his successor, a general named Suwar al-Dahab, who came into office in the mid-Eighties, we tried it with Sadiq al-Mahdi, who I always thought was a person one could have worked with and he was in office from 1986 to 1989, right before Bashir came in.

For some reason, Sadiq just never got traction politically in Sudan and he lost control of the Islamist dialogue and the Islamist aspect of his domestic policy, so that he was outmaneuvered and he lost power. This was disappointing to me. He was the leader of the important Umma party and had a proud lineage as the great grandson of the Mahdi who fought against the British and Egyptians in the 19th century, but he failed to master the scene.

It's been downhill since then. We've seen the results over the last twenty plus years in Sudan. To be frank, this is a part of Africa that's been hard for anyone to get a handle on, back in the Eighties and since.

Q: How did we view Islam, from your perspective, at that time, or were we really looking at Islam, trying to figure what the hell was going on there?

CROCKER: It's a very good question. Where we'd run into it was when we would go to black African countries, sub-Saharan African countries and we would be talking to our interlocutors in places like Kenya and Uganda and DRC-Congo and Senegal and Cï¿½te d'Ivoire.

We'd talk to leaders in those countries and they would begin to volunteer to us that there was an Islamic threat, that they were facing pressure and maybe subversive influence from the north.

And you'd sort of peel that back and you'd ask them, "What exactly are you talking about?"

They'd say, "Well, they come to town with a lot of money and they reach out and they build relationships with our young people and offer lots of free goodies. They're being subversive."

So we would ask, "Well, who is 'they'?"

"Well, it's Egyptians, it's Libyans, it's Algerians, it's from the Gulf, it's Moroccans, it's Saudis, it's Omanis."

"Well, are they all on the same page? Is this a single monolithic problem that you're facing?"

And then it would get very fuzzy and you'd realize that those were very different vectors of Islam coming down from the north and the northeast, there was no unified Islamic game back then.

What's changed today, of course, is that there's a greater concern about the possibility of a unified Islamist game and today we have allies within the world of Islam who are also very worried about that prospect.

So the United States today is able to work with Algerians and then to some extent Egyptians, Sudanese and Moroccans to try and counter the worst kind of radical Salafist Islam.

Anyway, if you look at the map, there's a whole lot of Muslims in Africa, probably close to half the continent. Maybe forty per cent of the continent would be Muslim believers of one kind or another.

Of course, this is not to say that they're all Islamists, but there are some areas where radical Islamist doctrines have made some headway.

But back in the 1980's, we didn't bring up this subject, our African friends brought it up.

Q: Could you reach into the State Department personnel pool and say, "I need an African specialist on Islam" or something and get somebody, or was there even the possibility of having such specialists because it was so bloody complicated and so sort of amorphous?

CROCKER: What I would rely on, more than looking at some expertise pool in INR, let's say, I would look at our most savvy veteran diplomats who knew this patch well, people like David Shinn, Robert Oakley, Hume Horan, who were, as far as I was concerned, they were walking encyclopedias, when it came to the world of Islam in Africa, because they'd served in these areas and they knew them well.

The career service had a lot of expertise on Islam, people like Paul Hare and Frank Wisner and others. They had expertise from having served there. They were my think tank.

Q: In general, it has the advantage of talking to people who had to deal with the problems, rather than to making these elaborate doughnuts which they cast out or whatever you want to call it.

CROCKER: This was the pre-Islamist peril time that we're talking about and the only people who talked Islamist peril back then were certain Francophone leaders and occasionally Anglophones like Daniel arap Moi in Kenya, who was very worried about Islamic intervention in Africa.

And I suspect they were coached a little bit by some hard line French in Paris, who were also worried about it..

Q: Well, you have the French who were worried and rightly worried, but did we find that we tended to discount French concerns?

CROCKER: We would always pour some additional hot water in the cup when we heard these kinds of messages and there were some places where there was just still a longstanding rivalry and you could sense it, like Gabon, which was a jewel in the French crown and a place where they made a lot of money and raised a lot of political money for French metropolitan elections.

Also in Zaire (DRC), we knew whenever we came to town that as soon as we left the French would be there to spread a different message to Mobutu.

You asked what we thought about towards the end of the Eighties and what we were concerned about, in terms of prospects for Africa. Of course Zaire was a troubled, sick country and it became very clear soon after the Cold War ended, in the early Nineties, that Zaire was going to crumble and perhaps fall apart.

It was held together with scotch tape and paper clips, in a sense, by a very odd regime and when Mobutu began to lose his way and lose his support, external as well as domestic, it just imploded and created a disaster in Central Africa that still afflicts the region 15 years later.

So we had some difficult clients, some troubled clients, really troubled ones and the only reason we continued to work with them was because we didn't know what to replace them with.

Q: Towards the end, obviously the Middle East, no matter what happens, sort of sucks the blood out of any administration, this is where the action is. Did you find pretty good support, understanding, from secretaries of state and all that sort of thing?

CROCKER: You're now asking me a very different kind of question. I had the very good fortune to have an outstanding, world-class statesman, in George Shultz, as my boss and he had good people around him, too, that provided excellent support. It wasn't always with the Secretary himself.

I'm not sure I would have stuck it out without Shultz having been there, because he gave me a long leash and he gave me great air cover and he organized for the president, on occasion, to give me air cover when I needed it.

I got the attention I needed. That's one of the nice things about being an assistant secretary for Africa, you don't have daily interference from the Seventh Floor in all the things that you're doing and you don't have 7 different senior voices around town all thinking they run policy.

Q: And you didn't have the equivalent to an Israeli or Greek lobby getting at you all the time.

CROCKER: No. We did have a lot of that on southern African issues sometimes, as we've talked about, but that was different. We had some of that, but in general we had more running room, if you like and if something really awful began to happen in a country we'd set up a task force and we'd get support from the Seventh Floor and we'd try to manage as best we could.

But the area where we had the most difficulty I'd say in terms of getting support from the building and from other parts of the Executive Branch was when it came to resources for foreign assistance, to top up our levels of economic support so that we could do more with our African partners, to give them more evidence, if they would take any steps we could support them more, that kind of conditional message.

And we launched a few economic initiatives in the mid- and late Eighties which I had to fight hard for and my colleagues, people like Princeton Lyman and others, worked nonstop to try and get more support from the Seventh Floor.

This was a struggle every year, the budget. But I will say, looking back, by the mid-Eighties, I'm thinking '86, '87, we had pretty decent levels of economic assistance for Africa. We won some of those battles.

And it wasn't until the G.W. Bush Administration that the absolute levels began to go up again. But between the mid-Eighties and the late Nineties there was actually a relative decline in budget support for Africa.

Q: One hears the story that if you give money for economic assistance somewhere in the Third World, that the recipients would always take off their ten per cent or twenty per cent or something, corruption and all, but when you got to Africa, that figure was around ninety to a hundred per cent or something. Africa was really bad mouthed by people who looked at corruption. But how did you see it?

CROCKER: Well, there were two different kinds of programs that we had that were aimed at dealing with these problems and promoting development generally.

We had DA, or development assistance, which was more project based and in a project you have AID people and AID contractors very much involved, both in the negotiation and implementation of a project. So you could actually track the extent to which you were getting some result. You could see what was happening.

And there I'd say the weak link always was implementation and maintenance. You'd get something started, but would the local government actually take ownership of it and keep it going after the money stopped flowing? So that was the big headache.

The other kind of program is what we called program lending, where you're providing essentially budget support and that was the trickiest, because you don't know the extent to which money is fungible.

You put money in one place to support a positive activity, like for example privatizing the transportation network, you don't know if that's going to show up somewhere else where they've in effect diverted the funding that you've provided in order to buy something that you didn't want them to buy, like armored cars or something of that kind.

And of course whenever there's a purchase element to an assistance program there's an opportunity for gatekeepers to put whatever it is, ten per cent or eighty per cent, in their pocket. And getting control of procurement is the biggest problem in Africa. Procurement is the place where corruption takes place, when you're purchasing something.

I wouldn't describe it as ninety per cent, but I would say that we had problems of this kind in almost every African relationship. And of course we were dealing in the Cold War era. You couldn't make anti-corruption your number one priority if you were also trying to maintain relationships that were privileged relationships in a Cold War sense.

You couldn't be an alliance leader and a Cold War leader and a UN-based superpower if you were going to make anti-corruption your number one issue. You'd lose customers quickly if that was your number one issue. I think you get my drift.

So everything had to be balanced out: human rights, anti-corruption, calling for regular elections, opening up the political system, dealing with economic management, also dealing with conflict issues and providing support on regional conflict agendas.

So we had lots of different priorities that we had to weigh.

Q: Did we have a conscious policy of trying to keep sophisticated military hardware out of Africa, as we did with Latin America?

CROCKER: Yeah, we did and I think we generally succeeded, in part because they didn't have the money, for the most part, to buy fancy stuff. So there were very few serious military assistance programs in Africa.

They tended to be in places where governments were very military oriented and had real, as they saw it, domestic security challenges, or even cross- border challenges, like Somalia facing the Ethiopians.

The Ethiopians vastly outgunned the Somalis. We would feel under pressure to provide some support, limited support, for things like, again, armored cars, some light fighting vehicles, communications equipment, that sort of thing.

But fancy stuff, very little of that. The Sudanese got an occasional airplane or two from the United States and from other places. But we didn't provide a lot fancy stuff. We didn't have the budget for it if they didn't have the budget for it.

The fancy stuff coming into Africa throughout the Cold War period, or at least the expensive stuff, was overwhelmingly from the Soviets.

Q: That's gathering rust somewhere now.

CROCKER: It is, yeah.

Q: During this time you were in Washington, how were your relations with Africanists in academia? Obviously you were attracting spears and arrows over your policy of constructive engagement, but, basically, was there a growing African community of knowledge?

CROCKER: Well, for many years the African Studies Association has been the main scholarly body for Africanists, and I would occasionally attend its meetings when they took place in a convenient location.

I stopped doing that when, as you said, slings and arrows, when the abuse got to be ridiculous and I realized that what I was dealing with was just a kind of a know-nothing claque that was interested in ideological warfare rather than practical foreign policy.

I think it's fair to say that there's a very limited interest in practical foreign policy in most of these regional studies associations and the ASA was no different from, let's say, the Latin American equivalent.

So I stopped going to ASA meetings in the mid-1980's. I went to one or two of them after I left office and I found the atmosphere still to be sufficiently poisonous that it really wasn't particularly worth my time.

Q: Where were they coming from, the poisoners?

CROCKER: The conspiratorial poisoners believed that our basic agenda was to be a friend of white South Africa, when in fact we did more to complicate the minds of white South Africa than any administration in our post-World War II period.

They just didn't understand the subtlety of our policy, they didn't understand that we were working sequentially to create the conditions on the ground in the region that would make possible a transition to free and fair elections, the release of Mandela, the unbanning of the ANC and so forth.

You'd have to slowly and carefully explain to these people that in fact it wasn't an accident that after Namibia and Angola were settled that F.W. de Klerk unbanned the ANC and released Mandela. It wasn't an accident the sequence happened that way. But most academics have no acquaintance with the way foreign policy actually operates. The word 'constraint' is not in the lexicon; the notion of trade-offs and sequences and respecting another side's political requirements - these things were not part of IR theory.

So I think it was a losing debate from the standpoint of persuading the academics on those sorts of issues. And also I think many of them were genuinely resistant to the notion that there was any Soviet (or Cuban) problem in Africa. Well, by the time we were done with it there wasn't.

Q: Of course, too, you were dealing with a particularly difficult academic group. These were the people who had fought the battle, usually on campus, not anywhere else, against the Vietnam policy and many of the people who went into the academic world kept staying in school in order to avoid the draft. I'm not denigrating them too much, but to a certain extent, yes.

CROCKER: Well, if what you're saying is that there was a generational issue, I'm with you. There was a kind of Sixties flower children quality. I don't want to overdo this or imply there was some sort of axis of ideological evil. Frankly, some of these folks had very good relationships with people in the career service that they knew who were experts on, let's say Uganda, or on Ghana or on Burkina Faso or what have you and that's fine.

If you're an Africanist because you're interested in the comparative politics of West Africa, that's great, that's fine, I'm with you. I like the comparative politics of West Africa, too.

My job wasn't was to get deeply enmeshed in the comparative politics of West Africa, it was too advance the U.S. national interest in West Africa and those interests were limited, but they were clear. We thought we knew what they were and we tried to advance them. It's a different set of focuses and priorities.

Q: And the focus is, the difference is still, I am not in the business anymore, but I think quite profound between the practitioners and theorists or the teachers.

CROCKER: Well there are different kinds of teachers. Let me put it this way, when I came to Georgetown in '89 I had seen and done mediation and it had worked. I'd learned a lot from it and I thought, "Well, I've done it in practice, let's see if I can find a way to do it in theory," meaning I wanted to educate myself in what the academic scholarly literature on mediation and conflict resolution, conflict management, was all about.

And there was a very substantial field of knowledge and expertise which I enjoyed getting to know, and I'm still enjoying getting to know it today, 20 years later!.

But that wasn't where most of the Africanists were. They were very few, there was a handful of outstanding exemplars who are exceptions to what I've just said.

But for the most part, Africanists are rooted in fields like sociology, anthropology, political science, comparative politics, ethnographic studies of different kinds, gender studies of different kinds, linguistic studies, cultural studies, cross-cultural studies.

Those fields are less relevant to the conduct of foreign policy. But the people doing work on foreign policy case studies and the role of different countries in their African policies, that was very relevant. I tried to stay in touch with them.

Q: In dealing with foreign policy, I've talked to people who served in Indonesia and dealt with the period of Sukarno, Suharto and you can't talk to them without Cornell coming up.

Cornell was apparently very influential as far as you might say anti-U.S. governmental policy, really Sukarno supporting academics and everything that went wrong was due to our plots.

Was there any sort of either poisoned well among Africanist academics?

CROCKER: Oh, I'd say sure. You had people who were disaffected expat Zairois at Howard University. You had people that were very disaffected from everything to do with South Africa, southern Africa, Zimbabwe, Rhodesia at the University of Indiana, which had a very strong African studies program, but they also had people affiliated who wrote reams and reams of stuff about how evil we were.

Q: This applies to any part of the world, among academics.

CROCKER: Sure, it goes with the terrain.

Q: I remember talking to an Israeli consular officer in Chicago who said that they had not realized how many assistant professors from Palestine and other places were spread throughout our academic world who were giving him a lot of trouble.

CROCKER: Well, there's thousands of expats in the African field and many of them are first class because so many African universities have been badly dealt with by their governments that there's no budget and no support for research and so on. So the good people leave their home countries.

It's sad, but a lot of the very best academic minds in Africa have left for the UK or U.S. or France or elsewhere. I don't mean to imply that it's total, but it's a bit like a vacuum cleaner: if somebody wants to strengthen their African studies program, they put up an opening, probably two thirds of the people applying are going to be African expats. And some of them do great work and so on, I'm not knocking that, but what it leads to is a sort of hollowing out of the universities in Africa.

Q: This really does point to a problem for the future and that is you might say universities are very significant parts of the infrastructure of any country and if they're not getting proper money or being used for political purposes and the best and brightest are fleeing, then you're weakening the country.

CROCKER: You are and there's got to be a way to bring the fantastic, rich resource of the African diaspora back to Africa and if you can't do it physically, you've got to do it virtually.

That's true not only in the academic field, but in the medical field. There's a famous one-liner that there's more Sierra Leonean doctors in Chicago than there are in Sierra Leone. That's a problem. It's true in health, it's true in a lot of fields.

But I think there's also some degree of diaspora recognition of a responsibility and a connection, which hopefully will strengthen and will lead to a reverse flow in due course in countries that are on their feet again and you see that a bit in some countries.

I want to go back a little bit to the lessons learned aspect if I could of this whole experience of being for eight and a half years I think the longest serving regional assistant secretary in the history of the building, what does one take away from that?

One thing I took away from it was that the people in the Foreign Service represent a fantastic resource, if motivated, mobilized and coherently organized to get something done.

And one thing that we would never be accused of I think was that we didn't try to get anything done. We tried to get a lot of things done and we succeeded, in some cases.

I've often been asked since that time, including by folks who worked with Secretary Baker when they came in replacing Secretary Shultz, they would come knocking at the door and say, "How did you work it? How did you work with the career service? How come your bureau worked well and you only had two political appointees in the bureau? How'd that work?"

Well, I think there's two answers, maybe three answers. One is that if you treat people as if they are trustworthy and you listen to them, they're more likely to be trustworthy and worth listening to. It sounds pretty basic.

Q: Many political appointees come in highly suspicious.

CROCKER: Yes, they've been told to be suspicious and when administrations politicize the Service or some part of the Service, then there's a reaction and there's a pendulum swing, and some people are considered to have been too close to the previous administration and so on.

I tried to avoid that, but it was a battle, especially in the early years, because I inherited a bureau that was heavily staffed with people who were identified with the Carter Administration and I fought to keep my senior deputy, who was inherited, kept him for over a year.

And when the long knives were out in my confirmation battle they wanted to get rid of my senior deputy, they wanted to replace him with someone that they would impose, some political appointee from one of the Senate offices.

And I said back then to Al Haig, "If that's the price of my getting the job, you can have the job. I don't want it. I want people that I have chosen."

Now you can't always get your way on everything in personnel, but if it's going to be that kind of politicizing of one's office, then you're no longer in charge of your office. I intended to be in charge of my office.

So I kept good career people and then when the came for them to go I got good career people to succeed them and serve as office directors and deputies. I had, most of the time, four deputies in the bureau, which is a lot.

One of them was political and that was basically a deputy who served the function of outreach to the business community and to the African-American community, but the other three were career people.

And of course all the office directors were career. I had a special assistant who was a political appointee and that was it.

So one of the takeaways for me is that I don't care if you do a detailed analysis of the political affiliations of FSOs. I've no doubt that if you did that that there'd be a substantial majority who were not supporters of the GOP.

But more than anything, what they were supporters of was competence and getting the job done and doing something to advance the national interest. It wasn't about party politics.

Q: Well, for example, I don't think there's been any president more partisan than George W. Bush, yet I get some very strong statements from FSOs who I've interviewed about how George W. Bush did more for Africa than most other presidents. And there's a lot of support for Richard Nixon. He knew his brief.

CROCKER: I think what you're describing is a kind of professional mentality, as distinguished from a party political mentality. I think that's right. And so you look at it and you say, "Well, who was effective in dealing with a region like Africa?"

George H.W. Bush was also very effective in Africa. G.W. Bush did a hell of a lot, in terms of new program initiatives and raising foreign assistance and all the rest. His attention span was limited, because he was doing other things, but selectively he got some things done.

Q: One other aspect of this, not really a lesson learned, but what happened to you when you came out of office? You get into the academic world again. Were you a pariah for a while? Did you have to sort of earn your bones again or something, or what?

CROCKER: That wasn't really a problem for me. The big issue for me was suddenly going cold turkey from having a bureau of 240 or whatever it is and 46 embassies out there and a front office with fantastic executive support, personal assistants is the right term, going from that to zip.

That was actually quite an interesting transition to make and it was very healthy for me. I learned how to fend for myself, learned about computers, information technology and things like that!

But I was doing a bunch of different things. I didn't have time to think about what you're referring to, because I wasn't relying primarily on a university income stream or a university affiliation for my livelihood.

I was re-establishing my consulting practice, I was going on boards and I was getting involved with the U.S Institute of Peace. I went on their board in 1991 and became chairman of their board in '92 and was chairman for the next twelve years.

So a lot of my professional activity was in fact linked to the Peace Institute and from that I did writing and research that fed right into my teaching here. So it was a good mix.

Frankly, Georgetown is a good place for an academic like me, because there's a tolerance factor. It's not a politically correct straightjacket, let me put it that way.

If I was teaching in the English Department it might be different, but not in the Foreign Service School, which is a much more practitioner-oriented place, with a lot of adjunct faculty teaching interesting stuff.

Q: People who'd been in the business.

CROCKER: We were practitioner scholars, so there wasn't that issue. It worked well.

I want to go back to my time in the Department, though, for a minute, because some people have occasionally asked, "Why did you stay in that job so long?" Part of the answer was that I had a job to do and I wanted to finish it, very, very, very much, and I got a chance to finish it. That's unusual, but I saw that gleam, that light at the end of the tunnel, that maybe we could get this done. So there was that.

Secondly, I really enjoyed the people and when people would say to me afterwards, "What do you miss? Would you ever want to go back?" I miss the people. I didn't miss the working environment. I didn't miss the budget preparation process or the congressional testimony process, getting ready for hearings. But the people relationships were very intense and very important. And so there was that.

But I think the third factor was my boss, George Shultz. He made it possible to stay doing that. And for a lesser man or woman who was more political, less principled, less courageous, less substantive I think I would have walked, just because it got old at a certain point and you take a lot of slings and arrows.

There was a financial cost, as well. Before I went into government I had a consulting practice and you get impoverished when you're a hundred per cent in the Executive Branch. So my wife went to law school to try and keep us afloat financially and keep our kids in school, that kind of thing.

And I've stayed very close with him. Shultz is a very special guy. And as I had he had good people, like John Whitehead and Larry Eagleburger, Mike Armacost, good colleagues around, as well. So that was a worthwhile environment.

One other thing I wanted to mention about lessons learned: we ran the bureau kind of like a team. It wasn't a top down authoritarian environment. We had a team.

The Foreign Service is a very rank-oriented place. We would have meetings in my office to talk about what are we going to do with Samuel Doe in Liberia, who was a constant headache and a difficult relationship and there'd be myself and maybe one or two deputies and an office director and a desk officer, maybe somebody from the political-military shop that we had, or the economic policy shop.

I'd try to get the conversation going, but I wasn't interested in having this discussion run by the ranking people in the room. I wanted to hear what people had to say. And so we tried to run it kind of like you might run a graduate seminar, in the sense of getting people to talk, and initially I found there was some resistance to that. People didn't want to be out of step with my senior deputy or their own office director.

As far as I was concerned, the policy line was not established until the meeting was over and I didn't have a line going into the meeting. I learned from this process and I tried to engage people. I sometimes think that's a management style that needs to be more widely used.

Because otherwise it's like sending a cable out to the field in draft, to tell them what to report back.

Q: I think about courts martial in the military. When the court votes on a verdict, the junior officer votes first, so he's not influenced by what the ranking member wants.

CROCKER: The place of professionalism, what does professionalism mean, what does pragmatism mean, what does realism mean, what impact does ideology have to say in the conduct of foreign policy. These are all interesting things.

Q: Of course, using the African bureau as an example, you're far more likely to get self-selected people who really enjoy working on Africa.

CROCKER: One of the secrets to our success and I think we had personnel success in the Eighties, people would say to me for years to come, "The bureau's never been in the shape it was in the 1980's, never been since. What's the difference?"

We took recruitment very seriously. One of my deputies spent a lot of time with the personnel system and we had a number of Africanists working in the personnel system who knew a lot about where the bodies were buried and where good people were. We reached out to people from other regions. We had a lot of people from EAP and from NEA who came to our bureau.

But we also had to find good opportunities for people who had always been with the African Bureau. You wouldn't want to exclude them from the good opportunities. So we had a mix and I think it was a healthy mix.

But the reason we could recruit is because we were doing interesting things, so we could offer good jobs. In addition, AF has a lot of posts and a lot of jobs.

Q: And the crown jewel, the title of ambassador. You've got a lot of countries, not much competition from the political appointees..

CROCKER: That's right. So people would be very interested. But I like to bring them in before they suddenly wanted to go for the crown jewel. Let's get somebody who's hungry to start by becoming an office director in West Africa, then we'll talk about that ambassadorship.

End of interview