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

AMBASSADOR JOHN M. EVANS

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is the 19th of October, 2009. This is the first interview with John M. Evans, E-V-A-N-S. And John, you go by John? Or not?

EVANS: Yes, John; Marshall is my middle name.

Q: And Marshall. Is that with two Ls?

EVANS: Yes.

Q: Two Ls, okay. All right, John, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

EVANS: I was born in Newport News, Virginia, on May 16, 1948.

Q: And let's get a glimpse of your family. How about let's take the Evans side and then we'll move to your mother's side. What do you know about the Evanses?

EVANS: I know a fair bit about them, actually, because my great-great grandfather, who was a businessman in Philadelphia, had the good fortune to make a bit of money and retire at the age of 32; he spent the rest of his life taking his family around Europe and doing genealogical research. So we have a big book at home which traces our family back 12 generations to one William Evans, who arrived in 1699 near Philadelphia and founded the town of Limerick, which is about 10 miles from Valley Forge.

Q: Was he coming out of Ireland?

EVANS: Yes.

Q: Evans would seem to be Welsh.

EVANS: Well the surname is Welsh but this is a family that had moved to Ireland. Presumably they were anglicized Welsh.

Q: Miners came in there too, I think.

EVANS: Miners did too. These people, well, first of all, there was a Captain John Evans who in the 17th century was in the New York area. We suspect that he was a privateer and sometimes a pirate.

Q: This is switching back and forth.

EVANS: Depending on the circumstances. He got an enormous grant of land from Benjamin Fletcher, who was at that time governor of New York, and it was basically the Palisades, which are, you know, that part of New Jersey across from Manhattan. But there was some wrongdoing involved here and by the time William Evans came over to join his cousin John in what was going to be a big project there, John Evans was in chains and on his way back to England with Benjamin Fletcher. There'd been a turnover in the New York government and so that deal was off. So instead William and his family continued on to found Limerick, Pennsylvania.

Q: Well did your- the man who retired at the age of 32, this is the great-great grandfather?

EVANS: That's right.

Q: What was his business?

EVANS: Well, he prepared to go to the University of Pennsylvania but then he ended up working; he was interested in chemistry and science. He ended up working for a lab and found out that he could make money and he got involved in a number of things, including tanning and the production of women's shoes and so that served him very well.

Q: Well how about your grandfather; what was he up to?

EVANS: My grandfather on the Evans side did go to the University of Pennsylvania and ended up as an executive; he was vice president of Bell Telephone and he had three sons and they lived on the Main Line of Philadelphia, in Wynnewood.

Q: And then, let's take a year or so, where did- how did your father come along?

EVANS: Well, my father attended the William Penn Charter School and then Amherst College before World War II and he got a PhD at Princeton in neo-Platonic thought and then started teaching. He taught at Tulane. Right after Pearl Harbor he enlisted in the Navy and was a commander of a mine-sweeper in the Pacific. Then, after the war, he found a teaching position at William and Mary and that's why I came to be born in Williamsburg.

Q: What sort of a war did he have? Did he talk much about it?

EVANS: Yes, and he knew about the Pacific Campaign. He had read all the official histories and so on. The mine-sweepers, of course, were the first to go in to places that needed to be swept of mines before invasion and he was involved in that; he took fire several times. We have at home a Japanese bullet that whizzed past his ear and landed in the bulkhead. But fortunately he survived and came home in one piece and resumed teaching. He was a little bit older than many people who fought in the war.

Q: He was teaching at William and Mary; what was he teaching?

EVANS: He was teaching primarily Renaissance literature, of course a certain amount of freshman English and other subjects and he also taught graduate courses. He taught the Bible as literature and some courses in classics.

Q: Well let's do your mother, on your mother's side. Where do they come from?

EVANS: Well it's another old family from the Philadelphia area by the name of Moore. They founded Moorestown, New Jersey.

Q: Is this M-

EVANS: Double O-R-E. My maternal grandfather worked for Day & Zimmerman in Philadelphia. My mother and father actually knew each other in kindergarten.

Q: My God.

EVANS: Amazingly.

Q: And they, I mean, did they sort of grow up together or had they parted and come back together?

EVANS: They did go separate ways in their early youth and only really ran into each other again after the war. In the meantime my mother had completed the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and had set out being a painter and she had a one-person show in New York at one point and sold everything she had produced. But that was during the war and a very hard time to be a painter, particularly of the subjects that she chose. She had been very much influenced by the collection of the Barnes Foundation in Merion; she knew Dr. Barnes and spent a lot of time there with the Cï¿½zannes and the other Impressionists. But her career really didn't continue after her marriage to my father.

Q: Well you certainly came from, you know, an intellectual background. How many- Were you one of several children or-?

EVANS: I was one of two. I have a sister, Ann, who's four years younger. But you have a point that it affected our lives, growing up with a professor as a father. My first dog's name was Ulyssebecause he was a wanderer - and whenever we had plumbing problems it was always "double, double, toilet trouble," things like that were present in our lives.

Q: Well then let's talk a bit; did you grow up in- Where did you grow up?

EVANS: Well, we lived all my life in a house that my father largely built with his own hands - he was quite handy with carpentry and so on - overlooking a lake near Jamestown just outside of Williamsburg. And I went to the public schools of Williamsburg/James City County, until the eighth grade. It was a pretty good school system because there were a lot of interesting people there. We didn't know it at the time but Camp Peary was the CIA training "farm" just outside Williamsburg so a number of the young people from those families were in the school system.

Q: Well then, did- let's talk a little about family life. Did you sit around the table at night and talk about things or how did the family get together?

EVANS: We always did have a family dinner. That was absolutely for sure every single night and one of the great advantages of having a teacher for a father. Although it wasn't the most remunerative profession it did mean a long summer vacation and so from very early years I remember we would go to Maine. We had a little cottage which again my father built with his own hands on the coast of Maine looming out over the rocks and with the surf coming in underneath and we learned to sail and did all sorts of things in the summers on the Maine coast. So I feel very blessed that first of all we lived in one place all those years and I had educated parents and was fortunate in my schooling.

Q: Where did your family or maybe- politically?

EVANS: We were really Yankees, as you can see, and we were living in tidewater Virginia, so there was a difference between ourselves and some of our neighbors, although there were quite a few Federally-employed families on the Peninsula of Virginia, military families and so on, but we found ourselves rather liberal in a rather conservative neighborhood. And I remember the election of 1960 when my father first got us a television so we could watch the campaign and we were all for Kennedy.

Q: This is Kennedy versus Nixon.

EVANS: Exactly. And I remember tacking a political poster, a big portrait of Kennedy, to our oak tree in the front yard and finding that the neighbors were quite disturbed by that and said some pretty nasty things about the Kennedys being, and I use this in very heavy quotations, "nigger lovers" and that sort of thing. So there was that prejudice and my father had always been a generous donor to the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and the United Negro College Fund and so, yes, you put your finger on that; we were...we did stand out as Yankee "liberals."

Q: How did- Well let me ask one question and then I'll come back to that. Religion. Where did your family fall in the religious spectrum?

EVANS: The first Evanses who came to Philadelphia and a related family, the Brookes, were Quakers, but sometime before the American Revolution they mostly became Anglicans and by the time of my generation we were members of Bruton Parish Episcopal Church in Williamsburg.

Q: Well now, as a kid, let's talk about the racial situation, because Virginia was one of these states that was going to fight it to the very- Well, it shut down a school system at one time.

EVANS: That's right.

Q: Did this affect you or did you get- your family at all?

EVANS: Desegregation was coming to Virginia during the years probably when I was in seventh and eighth grade and it wasn't on account of that but for other reasons that for my ninth grade year I was sent away to St. Andrew's School in Delaware, which is an Episcopal Church school. They had far more on offer in the way of the classics, Latin in particular, modern languages, history and sports, because I wasn't big enough to participate on the big teams in the local high school, and also they had a greater variety of sports at St. Andrew's. But of course my sister went through the desegregation process because she was younger and it affected her more.

Q: Well how did- What were you gathering, how did this work in your public school, desegregation?

EVANS: In Williamsburg there had been for many years separate education. A school that served black children was called Bruton Heights and the school that served the white children was James Blair, on the high school level. I think two things happened. First of all, the population started growing and there were more and more schools. There was some moving of people around by busing but we were not particularly aware of that, and I think the fact that Williamsburg had two major employers, the College of William and Mary and Colonial Williamsburg, which - those two employers - were more progressive than one might have expected other purely commercial employers to be so I think Williamsburg actually got through this moment of crisis better than some parts of the state. For example, Richmond.

Q: Yes.

Well, I was wondering, William and Mary is actually a state school, isn't it?

EVANS: William and Mary was a private college in the early days but William and Mary's endowment was basically invested in the Chickahominy Ferry, which crossed the Chickahominy River and sometime in the years after the Civil War - when there were no students, the professor simply rang the bell for classes - after the Civil War a great storm took the ferry down the river and smashed it and they were left penniless. So in, I think it was in 1906, William and Mary was taken over as a state school. And again I should mention in this connection that the Federal involvement on the peninsula of Tidewater, Virginia, I think had a lot to do also with easing the process of desegregation because there were so many people at places like Fort Eustis and the Mine Warfare School and so on who were used to Federal policies.

Q: Yes. And of course the year you were born was the year that the military was desegregated.

EVANS: That's right.

Q: Let's talk about the school you went to in that area. What were classes like and sort of what was it like there?

EVANS: Well, the Williamsburg/James City County school system was considered one of the best in the state outside Northern Virginia, where of course really the outstanding high schools were and I don't have too much to compare with. I think it was quite a good school; there were some good teachers, good programs. I do remember one teacher who showed up probably in my seventh or eighth grade who was a former Soviet citizen. He was a Russian, he was young, he was an excellent pedagogue and I believe he taught us English literature. And I was very impressed with this man from Russia who was just a terribly well prepared teacher.

Q: Were you much of a reader, you know, when you were on your own? I mean, considering your background you probably would have been crucified if you weren't but how about were you- was reading a big part of your life or not?

EVANS: Yes. Reading certainly was. One of the points I made earlier was we didn't have a television until 1960 and so what we did was read and also during our summers in Maine there was a public library there and we were always getting books out of the public library. I guess my tastes mainly ran to the normal things that boys are interested in, adventure stories, Slocum's "Sailing Alone Around the World" and "The Cruise of the Cachalot" and "The Red Badge of Courage" and those kinds of adventure stories.

Q: How about Kenneth Roberts? I mean, considering you're up in Maine did that ring-?

EVANS: It rings a bell but I can't name a title.

Q: Okay. Well, oh boy, also I've lost.

EVANS: But there were many about Maine and shipping and fishing.

Q: Yes, "Oliver Wiswell" and "Rabble in Arms." But where in Maine was your house?

EVANS: Well, we were in an unfashionable part of the Maine coast in the fishing area of Muscongus Bay at a place called Friendship, which is famous for only one product, which is the Friendship sloop. It was a gaff-rigged fishing sloop that was extremely well conceived and they've been found in the Mediterranean and off in Asia and lots of places and one of the great fun things every year is that they would have a homecoming regatta of many of these Friendship sloops, which came in all sizes and colors and it was great fun. And I must say that I, from a very young age, I started sailing and loved to do that.

Q: Well then, you- When did you go to St. Andrew's?

EVANS: I left for St. Andrew's to do ninth grade and I was there for four years.

Q: Was this a- Were you involved in the decision or was this sort of made for you or how did this come about?

EVANS: I absolutely was involved in the decision and in fact we learned about St. Andrew's School from friends of ours on the Maine coast who were sailing companions; the dad was the professor of mathematics there and they told us about St. Andrew's and we went to see it and I fell in love with it. It's a beautiful campus; was founded by the Du Pont family on the on the banks of a large pond which is used for rowing and it's a good school, now co-ed; at that time it was not, it was all boys. And there was another boy from Williamsburg who was headed there that year so we ended up being roommates and I think I learned more at St. Andrew's in some ways probably than I eventually did at Yale.

Q: Well talk about the education there. What were the subjects that particularly grabbed you and the ones that you didn't care for particularly, or were there any?

EVANS: The school was very strong across the board but I had always been interested in Latin. I pulled out a big Latin dictionary when I was in sixth grade and one of my happiest memories is of working through some Plautus and Terence, difficult stuff but comedy, with my father in his study one evening. We were just in gales of laughter as we tried to decipher this Latin. So their Latin was very good; they had a Latin teacher just out of Oxford and I altogether had five years of Latin. They were very strong in English, not surprisingly, and in English history, which was a fascinating subject, did very well, taught also European history. Chemistry, math. I didn't do as well in the sciences as in the humanities.

Q: Well did- During this- You would be at St. Andrew's from when to when; this would be-?

EVANS: I entered in 1962 and graduated in '66.

Q: Did the Cold War, Soviet Union, all that intrude much?

EVANS: Well, yes and no. The Cuban Missile Crisis must have been around that time.

Q: Just about the time you entered the school.

EVANS: That's right. And we all sort of remember those duck-and-cover exercises. But I also remember the school had a practice of bringing prominent people in to speak and I remember one of those speakers was Harrison Salisbury.

Q: Oh yes.

EVANS: Who had been-

Q: "New York Times."

EVANS: "New York Times" reporter in Moscow and I remember the talk he gave about the Sino-Soviet split and the difficulties that he had observed between China and the Soviet Union as a reporter. So yes, we were aware of the Cold War, and there were a number of people, fellow students, whose parents were one way or another involved in Washington at that time, and in fact several of the students were in the Foreign Service and in fact it must be from one of them and his family that I learned about it: Walter Pratt's father was Jim Pratt and he had served in Moscow. And I remember visiting the Pratts here in Washington; they had a little townhouse near the State Department, and staying up late into the night to hear Vaughn Pratt, Mrs. Pratt, talking about adventures in the Foreign Service.

Q: So the Foreign Service was part of your upbringing, you might say.

EVANS: Well, not really. I didn't know anything about it growing up in Williamsburg, except that it was the practice of successive administrations to bring high-level guests to Williamsburg before taking them by helicopter to the White House. And so growing up my mother would often take me to see - Queen Elizabeth certainly came in 1957 and various other world leaders came, touched down for the night and then were brought up to Washington. And the president of Colonial Williamsburg at the time was Carl Humelsine, who had been chief of staff to General Marshall and really it was Colonel Humelsine who introduced into the State Department the staffing arrangements that we still basically have, having the executive secretary up in S/S and its creatures so the paper would move effectively and the decisions would actually be made and recorded.

Q: Yes. And it's interesting that the State Department really has two, its organization has sort of two not completely diverse ways; it's the embassies actually the State Department is set up on naval principles because it was after the war, after the Second World War was over naval officers came in and they said this is- you know, you have your executive officer, you have your gunnery officer and navigation and all and these became the different sections that you can find in embassies today and then Marshall came in and brought in the staffing, the army staffing arrangement.

EVANS: Yes, exactly.

Q: And they both worked. I mean, these-

Did you have any- were you getting anything about communism, Marxism, the Soviet Union and what it was doing?

EVANS: Yes we did. St. Andrew's was unabashedly an Episcopal Church school and we had to attend chapel five days a week; there were Sunday services and evening chapel.

Q: Only five days a week.

EVANS: We got Tuesday nights off and I think maybe Friday nights but...

Q: Ah, well, you were slackers. I went to Kent.

EVANS: Oh, yes!

Q: And you know, run by Episcopalian monks, you know, twice a day and on your knees for four years.

EVANS: Well, you see this was the Mid-Atlantic, not New England.

Q: Yes, yes, I'm sort of in the sloppy area, you know.

EVANS: But in our so-called "sacred studies," which was the academic side of our religious training, in the spring semester of our senior year what we studied was Marxism and other -isms but there definitely was an attempt to connect religious values with a political life as it was being lived. I ended up quite successfully at St. Andrew's. I was the senior prefect in my senior year and involved in school government and also in the disciplinary system; we had an honor code and occasionally, if there was some misdemeanor committed we had to, if it fell into that category, the students had to conduct an honor court.

Q: Were the prefects sort of the inspectors? Did you do jobs?

EVANS: Yes. Every student did a job and they were in the morning; right after breakfast and before classes started the entire school had to be cleaned, not to mention everyone's room picked up, very much Navy fashion. And you got demerits if you didn't do it well.

Q: We used to get something called "hours," which meant you had to work an hour on the woodpile or do something or rake leaves or something.

EVANS: That was more productive than what we were condemned to. We had to walk for every demerit: you had to walk a half a mile.

Q: Anyway, it's to keep boys busy.

EVANS: I thought the structure was great. We were very busy at all times. There were study halls at night and we had only a few minutes then before lights out and we were exhausted from the athletics and all the study.

Q: Yes. Well then, was there- What were you point- I understand you went to Yale but what were you- was Yale in the offing or were you really thinking about other places like Amherst for example?

EVANS: Well, yes. My father of course had a preference for my going to Amherst. My two uncles had also gone there. I forgot to mention that I went to first grade in New Haven, Connecticut, when my father was teaching for a year at Yale, and I had a very good experience during first grade so I knew about Yale and I really was so confident that I could have my choice of schools that I applied only to Swarthmore and Yale. I interviewed at Princeton and Harvard and I already knew about Amherst. Swarthmore tempted me somewhat because obviously it's a very good college but it was a little too small and a little close to St. Andrew's so I wanted to go further north and to a big urban university and I chose Yale.

Q: So you were at Yale from '66-?

EVANS: And graduated in '70.

Q: Of course this is the height of everything as far as civil rights, anti-Vietnamese protests and just generational raising hell. How did this hit you?

EVANS: That's correct and furthermore it was particularly pronounced at Yale because a couple of years before I got there there had been a big change in the admissions policy and a fellow by the name of Inky Clark had come in and changed the criteria so that Yale ceased to be a place where it was mostly legacy students, children of alumni, and apparently in earlier days there had actually been quotas on Jews and on others. And by the time...

Q: Yes. I mean, this is, I think, Harvard had it; I mean, this is sort of the standard.

EVANS: But by the time I got there all that was gone and our class was self consciously aware of its great diversity and of the break that it represented between the old Yale and a new one.

Q: So how did that play out? Well I mean, in the first place, maybe we'll move into that but when you got to Yale how did Yale strike you? Were you- Was it- Did you feel, I mean you came sort of from a good prep school and all, did you feel sort of this is where you belonged or not?

EVANS: I did feel very comfortable going there and I remember having the sense that some of the students who came from big public high schools were not serious in their studies. They had a lot of steam to blow off and I really wanted to study and I got advanced placement into, mostly into sophomore classes in a number of areas. I had good grades; I went there with the intention of majoring in English and following pretty much in my father's footsteps as a teacher but between St. Andrew's and Yale, in the summer of 1966, I took a trip that totally changed my life.

Q: This was what year, 1960-?

EVANS: Sixty-six.

Q: Sixty-six, hm?

EVANS: And it took virtually the whole summer. We ended up, after Italy we ended up in Switzerland and finally we had a week in the central part of France where we worked on our French, staying at a small chateau and then we ended up in Paris and sold the Volkswagen for nearly what we bought and it turned out to be virtually free transportation.

Q: Well how did you find, in the first place, the Intourist and the Soviet impact?

EVANS: Well, for me that was the main thing. Now, whether I was sort of primed for that or not it's hard to say. It is true that my mother, during the war, had lived in New York when she was painting. She lived on Park Avenue with Tatiana Woronoff, the daughter of Paul Woronoff, an officer in the Tsarist Navy who was in charge of the last Tsarevich, Alexis, and so I had heard a lot of these stories indirectly from the Woronoff family who had to leave everything in Russia and came to Philadelphia. And Paul, Lt. Commander Woronoff, I think he was, ended up as a doorman in a Philadelphia hotel. But the saga of their escape from Russia was something that I'd heard about from very early days and my mother also had introduced me to Russian icons, which was a favorite artistic subject of hers.

So I was interested in Russia and that trip only increased my interest. I saw that the Soviet Union that everyone was so frightened of was really a colossus with feet of clay, that things didn't work, that there was terrific poverty, that the people were perfectly normal people who didn't have horns and a forked tail and they all were talking about wanting peace with the United States. We talked to a lot of the young people and had those normal contacts about blue jeans and about music and so on.

The effect of that trip was such that in my freshman year at Yale I totally switched direction and started studying Russian and changed my plans from doing English literature to studying Russian history, literature and politics.

Q: Well it's a very good school to do that. Also, I imagine your Latin held you in good stead because Russian is much more-

EVANS: It's highly inflected

Q: -inflected language and so you could learn, I mean, it wouldn't be a shock to you to understand the changes.

EVANS: That's right. The structure of language is very highly inflected, like Latin, with case endings and so on. Yes. But I had to scramble to get my Russian into shape and I had to double up in my sophomore year to catch up with the other students.

Q: What was the Russian faculty like? I'm thinking about both the language but the history particularly, because you're often dealing with an ï¿½migrï¿½ group and they have their own axes to grind and all that.

EVANS: Yes, well there was one fantastic professor who is still with us today, Firuz Kazemzadeh, whose name doesn't sound Russian and that's because his father was the Persian ambassador to Moscow when Stalin was in charge. But Kazemzadeh's mother was Russian and he taught the Russian history course, several Russian history courses there at Yale and was my senior thesis advisor.

The other star professor we had was Wolfgang Leonhard, who was a former official of the East Germany communist regime and knew communism from the inside out. He spent a semester every year at Yale and his courses were absolutely packed, standing room only, and then the other half of the year he taught in Germany.

We also did have a very sad case of a Russian language instructor, Vladimir Sokolov-Samarin, who turned out in years later to have been an accomplice of the Germans, who had run a pro-Nazi newspaper in Kharkov during the war and was hounded out of the Soviet Union. Yale didn't know anything about that when they hired him and unfortunately when this all came to light he had to be fired.

Q: Well did- So many universities have sort of the campus Marxist; you know, Marxism is very appealing to young people. I mean, it's a structure and it sounds, you know, everybody- to everybody what they have to have whether it's for each- I can't think of-

EVANS: Oh, from each according to his need, to each-

Q: Yes, yes.

EVANS: To each according to his need, from each according to his ability.

Q: Yes. To the young person it sounds great and all that. Was there much of a Marxist movement or professors at Yale when you were there?

EVANS: Yale was not Berkeley.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: And it was, for that matter, not Harvard. And I think, particularly in the area that I was in, the Marxists were few and far between. I think people who knew the reality of Soviet life were fairly much inoculated against Marxism and you probably would have found more Marxism among those teaching sociology and perhaps Latin American studies. We did not have violence on campus during the years I was there. We had a lot of protests against the Vietnam War. I had a pretty low draft number and the reason I wasn't taken into the armed forces was because of a collapsed lung that I had while I was there, which made me IV-F. We did have one violent episode involving tear gassing and so on which was at the time of the trial of Bobby Seale one of the Black Panthers, and at that time we got a dose of what it's like to have order break down. We had National Guard troops stationed around Saybrook College where I was a resident and a lot of tear gas in the air. It was very scary.

Q: Did you get any feel for the town and gown? I mean, Yale is in the middle of a working class area, New Haven and all that.

EVANS: Yes, I have to say there was some of that. There were incidents that took place on Dixwell Avenue, which was a dangerous area and there was tension between the city police and the campus police and of course there was a certain amount of drug-use, playing around with drugs on the campus and of course there was a good bit of drinking. But also our class was integrated then and we had some very fine black fellow citizens in our class and so we, I think, knew what the score was.

Q: Where did- Yale was not co-ed at that time, was it?

EVANS: In my senior year the first girls arrived from Vassar, so that would have been in the fall of 1969.

Q: Well where did you go for girls?

EVANS: Well, we took road trips, and I got to know the road to Poughkeepsie, New York, pretty well, also Wellesley and South Hadley, places like that.

Q: Yes, because I went to Williams some time before, class of '50 there, and we learned- we used to hitchhike all over the place.

Did- You mentioned you had to do a paper, thesis, did you?

EVANS: Yes.

Q: What was this on?

EVANS: Well, I got interested in student revolt and I had come across, in various places in my study of Russian 19th century history, the student disturbances that took place in 1861 in St. Petersburg and several other university towns in the Russian empire. But what I discovered was there was no single comprehensive look at that. There were mentions in memoirs, there were mentions in official histories and various reports and so on but what I tried to do, and I hope I did, was to find virtually all of the accounts and then turn it into a comprehensive and credible explanation of why those student revolts took place precisely in 1861. And it was fascinating.

Jumping way ahead, when I later on was assigned as consul general to St. Petersburg in post-Soviet Russia, I was invited to present my student work at Leningrad University - which it's still called: Leningrad University - and so I had it translated in a shortened version into Russian and presented it there to a faculty meeting.

Q: Why 1861? It was freeing the serfs at the time.

EVANS: Well exactly. That's right. There were a number of things going on then and I don't want to get too deeply in but it was a time of reform...

Q: Because 1848 is something that sticks out in Western Europe but this is-

EVANS: This had more to do with a reforming tsar, namely Alexander II, and the aftermath of the Crimean War, in which Russia had been pretty much humiliated by the Western Powers and shown to be backward. And there was a lot of concern about whether Russia was on the right track. This is right before the Populist movement; in fact, the "Movement to the People," as they called it.

Q: Narodniki-?

EVANS: The Narodniki, precisely. That grew out of these student disturbances. But there were some very local causes also that students all over the world from time immemorial have always complained about, bad food, increasing cost of books and various fees and so on, so it was a typical mixture of things that were in the social milieu and atmosphere. Herzen was working at that time and various other Russian radical thinkers, Chernyshevsky and so on, but then there were also some very specific grievances that the students had.

Q: Well speaking about student movements, how felt you about the Vietnam situation?

EVANS: I didn't like the Vietnam War. I thought it was the wrong thing to be doing, the wrong way to be handling it. But I also, at one point, I remember considering very seriously leaving Yale and signing up for officer candidate school. This was after the North Koreans shelled one of our ships.

Q: That was the Liberty? No; I'm not sure.

EVANS: I can't remember the name of it; I think it begins with a "P." But-

Q: Not the Liberty.

EVANS: That was in the Med.

Q: Yes, that was in the Med. It was the same type of ship, yes, I know what you mean.

EVANS: Yes. But in any case my father talked me out of that. Had I not been IV-F, I would have gone ahead and served in the armed forces with a preference for the Navy. Pueblo.

Q: Well did you find- One of the things the anti-war movement did on campuses was it allowed much greater scope for young leaders to be- to try their oats, to get out there and stir up the students and all this. Because you had something to attack; it's a little hard when there isn't a real issue. But did you find that sort of movement going on at Yale?

EVANS: Oh yes, that's true. And of course John Kerry is an example of someone who fought in Vietnam. He left Yale the spring of the year I arrived, in '66. But it was very much a feature of our lives. I remember all of us cramming in to common rooms to watch President Johnson speak about the war; I remember the booing that accompanied some of the statements by McNamara. I remember the, I actually remember the night of one of the draft lotteries when it was on television. So it was very much a part of our life and we...I knew several people who lost their lives in Vietnam.

Q: Well you're moving up to graduation. What do you want to do?

EVANS: I graduated in 1970. I had managed to win a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship to go on as a graduate student at Columbia and this was part of my plan at that time to become a teacher of Russian history, because I had found that very few Americans knew much about that part of the world and I thought it would be a noble calling to try to help educate our future generations. I got to Columbia and as you may know they don't have a Masters program; you go right into a PhD. Well, there is now and there was even then the Russian Institute where Zbigniew Brzezinski was, but I was in the graduate faculties, headed for a PhD in history. And right about that time was the bombing of Cambodia, which I think happened in May of 1970 and I got to Columbia in the fall... I'd also taken another trip, by the way, to the Soviet Union in 1969, going to Bloomington, Indiana, for intensive Russian at Bloomington and then we all went over to the Soviet Union and we were on a Russian-only regime.

Q: How did you find that trip?

EVANS: That was an excellent experience. That time I really knew Russian, which I hadn't the previous time, and we... it was a big student group. We learned a lot and we talked a lot of politics with Russians at that time.

But the bombing of Cambodia in 1970 and all the things that were going on at that time, both domestically-

Q: We had the Kent State-

EVANS: We had Kent State-

Q: In the spring of 1970.

EVANS: And of course before that we'd had the murders of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. So basically sitting there in Butler Library at Columbia University working on questions of the Russian gentry economy in the 1880s was... seemed to me so irrelevant to what was going on in the outside world that I decided to take the Foreign Service exam.

Q: Well now, had the Foreign Service been fooling around in your memory or not? Or were you running across Foreign Service types in these trips or anywhere else?

EVANS: Since I had left St. Andrew's and the fellow students there whose parents were in the Foreign Service I had run into a couple of them, for example, on one of the trips I stopped by the embassy in Moscow and met Jim and Vaughn Pratt. And traveling you inevitably run into passports and you see embassies and that kind of thing. But it was really not my goal to join the Foreign Service until very late in the game when I decided that really the PhD was a research degree. I knew from my father that it didn't really teach you to teach; it turned you into a serious researcher. And there was also a pretty serious looming shortage of teaching positions in Russian history around that time. I don't know whether... I think it correlated negatively with dï¿½tente; that is, as relations with Moscow got a little bit easier the enrollments in Russian and things Russian tended to go down rather than up and so I could see the handwriting on the wall that a PhD in Russian history might mean five or six years of hard study and then going to teach as an assistant professor in some God-forsaken Midwestern college town. Nothing against the Midwest.

So I took the Foreign Service exam in December 1970 in New York City.

Q: I take it you passed the written?

EVANS: I passed the written.

Q: And how about the oral; can you recall any of the questions or how you-?

EVANS: Yes. There were something like 18,000 applicants that year. It was a peak, a spike in the number of people interested in the Foreign Service and I remember the first thing that happened is I was told that there wouldn't be any more admissions for another 18 months or something like that. But I took the oral exam, and Bill Woessner was on the panel, as well as Melissa Wells, and I remember that Bill Woessner, presumably to ease the nerves of some applicants, was wearing bright red socks.

Of course I had been involved full-time in studying for a PhD so when they asked me questions about arms control and so on I'm sure I gave rather inadequate answers. I knew much more about the causes of the agricultural collapse in western Russia in the 1890s and I didn't think I was going to be accepted from what Bill Woessner was asking me but then Melissa Wells - she must have been the good cop, he must have been the bad cop - but Melissa Wells was able to draw out some other things and I was put on the roster but then told that there would be a long wait.. And so I set about reading.

I went back to Williamsburg and-

Q: You dropped the Columbia thing?

EVANS: Yes, I left Columbia; I returned the remainder of the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship and I went back to Williamsburg, toyed with the idea of various jobs. I had worked at Colonial Williamsburg some summers but now I did some intensive reading; I read everything I could get from George Kennan, his two-volume memoir, his "Russia and the West," as much as I could get of George Kennan and no doubt Acheson and other books about U.S. foreign policy and also about European affairs. And then I was planning to take advantage of my Columbia affiliation and go live in France. Columbia has a kind of a house in Paris where you can work on your French and I thought I would set off and perfect my French when I got a call from Washington saying there's a place in the, what was then the 35th class, I think. No, it was the 98th, or something like that.

Q: To give you an idea, I was in class one. There had been a long hiatus and I came in with Herb Okun and what's another student?

EVANS: Well, I'm not sure about the number but there were 35 of us, it was a big class.

Q: Yes. How did they- This was when, 1971 or-?

EVANS: This would have been '71 so Dick Erdman was in it, Barbara Bodine, Marty Mclean.

Q: How did your fellow students, everybody sort of looking at everybody else and thinking where are they coming from and who are they and how we're going to fit together; how did these people strike you?

EVANS: It was a very diverse group, no question about it. We had Jacques Klein, who already had been a two-star general and was now starting a second career. I came in as an FSO-08 along with Barbara Bodine and others who were at the 08 level. But it was a good class, it was an active class; we got on extraordinarily well. We were troubled about some things. We immediately started seeing things about the Department that we deplored or at least questioned but we were not together long. The A-100 course was not long. Some of us got language after that, some of us went straight out to postings.

Q: Well was it a period where still sort of a carryover from the mid-'60s of- there was something called Jeff Sock, junior officers; I mean, there was a period in our cultural history where anybody under the age of 30 was considered to be particularly able and all as compared to anybody who was over the age of 30 was an old fogey. Was that attitude still around or not?

EVANS: I think it was because this generation of boomers, the baby boomers - some have likened it to the rabbit going through the boa constrictor - it has affected the institutions these people have belonged to or joined. There was definitely an effect lingering from the '70s. We were still at war in Vietnam. There were many people with questions about our policies in Latin America. I even had, when my first assignment turned out to be to Iran and I had a little bit of a chip on my shoulder about whether it was right for us to be supporting the shah, others had various concerns; none of us were far-out lefties. We were all pretty moderate in our views and I think sensible but there was... it was not a group that was simply going to stand for anything and just thoughtlessly take instruction without questioning it.

Q: Well what- Your first assignment was to Iran?

EVANS: Yes. By that time they already were handing out lists of assignments for the bidding process and...

Q: This was fairly new at that point.

EVANS: It was pretty new and I remember I was also interested in Izmir in Turkey but as it turned out I was assigned to Tehran to the consular section and because I had worked withFiruz Kazemzadeh at Yale I was not disappointed at all to be going to Iran. He had always taught Russian history with great emphasis on the influence that Iran and Persian culture had had on Russian thinking over the years, the Eastern influences on Moscow. So I was quite excited.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you got there?

EVANS: When I arrived there in the early winter of 1972 the ambassador was Douglas MacArthur II, who was the nephew of the great general.

Q: I've interviewed Ambassador MacArthur, one of my first interviews. He had quite a career himself as POLAD (political advisor) to Eisenhower, interned by the Germans for awhile and-

EVANS: He was really one of the great old men in the Foreign Service at that point but it was also... it was definitely the old Foreign Service. The servants wore white gloves. Mrs. MacArthur...

Q: Wahwee.

EVANS: Wahwee.

Q: It was one of the great Foreign Service dragons issue.

EVANS: Exactly. She was the daughter of Alben Barkley - who I recently heard had never paid federal income tax. In any case she used to convoke the embassy wives - the spouses were all wives at that time - every Thursday morning to drink Veuve Clicquot in her boudoir. She would be lightly dressed and they would all wear white gloves and pay homage and talk about various charities and so on.

Q: Did you have a significant other at this point?

EVANS: No, I was a bachelor and so when I arrived I had to knock on the big door of the residence and be prepared to turn down the right hand corner of the visiting card and leave it in a silver plate that was motioned to by the butler.

Q: Yes. Oh yes. I mean, we had this- there was this whole card protocol. Certain- you turned cards one way- the corners one way or another-

EVANS: Whether you were attached or not.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: I can't remember the exact corner.

Q: Well let's talk about- What was the situation in general in Iran and all and then how were our relations but first, the situation.

EVANS: When I got there in the early '70s the United States was already a major supporter of the shah and the shah had just thrown a 2,500-year birthday party for the Pahlavi dynasty or really for Iran because his - the Pahlavi dynasty - was not an old royal house, it went back to his father who had been...

Q: He was a Cossack.

EVANS: He was a part of the Persian Cossack brigade. That was, of course, Reza Shah, who was something like Ataturk in what he did with Iran. But the big buildup in our involvement there had not yet begun. There were signs of it. Of course it was President Truman who forced the Soviet Union out of northern Iran when they set up the short-lived communist Mahabad Republic in...

Q: Azerbaijan.

EVANS: Azerbaijan and the shore of the Caspian.

Q: It's really remarkable when one thinks about that, that you know, the Soviets were in there and they got out.

EVANS: Well, that's right. Of course they had divided Iran during World War II with the British and they basically refused to get out and they were also menacing Turkey and that's when Truman got together with Acheson and devised the Truman Doctrine and we put...we organized CENTO and kept the Soviets back where they belonged.

The Peace Corps was just wrapping up their operations around this time. We had had a very successful Peace Corps record in Iran. There was some business and we were starting to get more deeply involved militarily. There was already a military advisory and assistance group active there. We had posts in Isfahan and in Khorramshahr and in Tabriz. The one in Isfahan was closed. One of the first things I had to do as a consul was make radio contact every morning with Tabriz because there were no telephones.

But back to the situation, the shah was trying to carry out what he called the "white revolution" to modernize from above. It was very much a continuation of what Reza Shah had done and it was similar to what Ataturk had done in Turkey, to try to fight back the religious folks who were seen as a sign of the country's backwardness and to try to educate, build roads, build hospitals. But there was a lot of corruption that was affecting this white revolution so it was not by any means the great success story that was written about in "Time" magazine at the time of the big party in Persepolis.

Q: Well then, when you got there, what were you getting from your colleagues about the shah? I mean, were they- How did they look at him?

EVANS: The shah was our partner, was our client, was very much respected, was treated as a monarch but as more, really as more than a monarch might be thought of in a constitutional monarchy. He was everything. And certainly, I had three ambassadors there; Douglas MacArthur, the first one: he left on Leap Year day in 1972 and somebody quipped that he left on that day so we couldn't celebrate his departure for another four years. That was kind of cruel. But certainly MacArthur and his predecessors had treated the shah with utmost respect, with kid gloves, and as a major partner in securing the stability of the Persian Gulf. I mean, he was treated with great seriousness and with great hopes for his potential.

Q: Did, I mean you obviously didn't have a reporting job at this point but were you getting any complaints from your- sort of the junior officers who had reporting responsibilities but they couldn't get in there and report this isn't working or that corruption, that sort of thing?

EVANS: That developed during the three years I was there. There had been no explicit prohibition on reporting officers talking to anybody but during the time I was there that prohibition became explicit. We had a star reporting officer there, Stan Escudero. He knew the language, he knew his way around and he got very close to...he loved to collect rugs and samovars and every weekend would see him down in the bazaar drinking tea with these guys who were bazaar merchants and so on, who turned out to be the people who were bankrolling Khomeini. And he was getting some very interesting reporting. There was also a communist movement still there, leftover from earlier days, the Tudeh Party, and so there was reporting that was being done but at a certain point, and I can't tell you exactly when this was, I think it was during the term of the next ambassador, Joe Farland, that the shah basically said "back off those people in the bazaar, I don't want you even talking to those folks." And we, I think to our discredit, went along with that, and Stan Escudero was told to stop seeking out these people and concentrate on other things. So I think we kind of blinded ourselves, allowed ourselves to be blinded by the shah's devout wish that we not talk to those folks. He didn't want us messing around with them.

Q: Yes, that, I mean, I think all of us in the Foreign Service abhor that sort of thing because it, I mean, we're not out to make somebody look nice; I mean, we're out to say the way it is, let other people maybe make the decision s but at least we should be able to report where the problems are.

EVANS: Well, I know there was a time, it must have been in June of 1972, Henry Kissinger and President Nixon, well, President Nixon and Henry Kissinger I should say, visited Tehran and it seemed from that moment on that the relationship grew like topsy. I wasn't in meetings, I did have some interesting experiences on the fringes, but apparently that's when we went into full gear in our relationship with the shah and started supporting him more and more militarily, selling more military equipment, backing him, and he seemed to become more and more megalomaniac at that point.

Q: Well what sort of interesting experiences did you have on the periphery of this presidential visit?

EVANS: My job was to take care of Kissinger and White House staff people who were all being put up by the shah, the ministry of court, at Saad'abad Palace, which was one of the shah's old palaces. And my job was to see to their arrangements. They were people like H.R. Haldeman, Chuck Colson and several other people who were in Nixon's clique, John Dean and a number of other people.

Q: One only has- Their names loom large in the Watergate investigation.

EVANS: Well that's exactly right. But the chief guest at Saad'abad was Kissinger himself and what I had to do, first of all, was to... they sent a big list of what they wanted in their rooms. Now, the Iranians are a very hospitable people and they think they know how to play host and what should be in a room and what shouldn't but I, for example, had to find a way to get a bottle of scotch into Henry Kissinger's room. I think Haldeman also wanted whiskey but wanted it under the bed so that it wouldn't be visible. And there were all these little requests that I had to somehow satisfy.

And then I know that, I remember that Henry had some laundry. They had come down from Moscow, I think, from the Soviet Union, and he gave me the laundry to do or to have done and he said "I need this back by 10:00 in the morning." And I said, "well is it more important that it be cleaned or that it be back in your possession?" And he said, "well, certainly back in my possession but preferably both." And on the basis of that the next day he asked for my name and he said "you should come work for me on the NSC" (National Security Council) but that call never came.

And I remember at breakfast the shah served, well, in the Saad'abad guesthouse they served, a mound the size of a croquet ball of "golden caviar" from the shah's private stock. The shah, as you may know, was allergic to seafood or anything from the sea so he actually couldn't eat caviar himself but that's what appeared on everyone's plate. Henry didn't eat his; I ended up eating it after the breakfast.

Q: It's wonderful getting these wonderful vignettes of dealing with the high and mighty, you know.

EVANS: But you know, there was something more serious at that time. There were serious security concerns even then. Now, this was 1972 and there were a few little explosions that went off during President Nixon's visit which were an indication that something was not altogether right.

Q: Well actually Douglas MacArthur was- his car was attacked by the mujaheddin.

EVANS: That's correct.

Q: Which was, you know, even earlier.

EVANS: That's correct. His car, his armored limo, was attacked by two fellows, one of whom had a Kalashnikov and the other had a, I think, an axe, and it was the Armenian driver, Haikaz was his name, who managed to keep the car going, just as cool as a cucumber, and he kept the car moving and got the ambassador out of danger and was something of a local hero because of that.

Q: Yes. Well let's talk about consular work. What were you up to?

EVANS: Consular work, I think, remains a wonderful way for new Foreign Service officers to learn something about our business, about the legal side of it and the human side and the public relations side of it. My job was American Citizen Services or protection of Americans. Within just a few weeks of my arrival there, unfortunately, a young American girl had gone climbing in the snowy mountains behind Tehran and there had been an avalanche and she was killed, and one of the first things I had to do was go and identify the remains, of which there was not much because both of the young people had been devoured by animals. And there were the typical cases of Americans in bars who stripped naked to show they didn't have an American Express Card and the craziness like that. But there were two things worth mentioning.

First of all, there was an entire class of American women trapped in Iran because they had married young Iranian students in the United States then come back to Iran and were considered by the government of Iran to be citizens or subjects of the Empire of Iran. Their American passports were taken from them at the airport and they were effectively trapped in Iran. So we had this whole group of unhappy wives.

And then the other thing that's worth mentioning is that it fell to me to keep tabs on the relative size of the American expatriate community. And when I first got there we had several thousand but at the last count it had gone up very rapidly to 12 or 13,000 by the time I left in '74. So there was major growth.

Q: Were we having problems of- You know, I heard at one point that sort of Bell Helicopter mechanics getting on their bikes and running through the souqs or the bazaar, you know, I mean, you know, these are pretty much hard working, hard drinking, hard playing rednecks.

EVANS: Yes, that's true, and they came with their wives and families and some of the wives were going around in states of dress that were not appropriate in some of these more conservative Iranian villages where they lived in some cases, near Isfahan in the case of Bell Helicopter. So I think we poured a lot into Iran that was indigestible to the Iranians and at the same time then we had blinded ourselves to what was really going on politically. So we were setting ourselves up for a very unhappy outcome.

Q: Well were you picking up any thoughts of your own about whither Iran, whither America and Iran and all as you-

EVANS: Well, I have to say that the original chip on my shoulder that I arrived with in Iran, thinking that perhaps we were ill-advised to be supporting such an obvious dictator, I was cured of that pretty much. And it was because I saw what a primitive society we were dealing with there. I mean, if you went outside the bright lights of Tehran where there were nightclubs and people drank wine and were educated and spoke English and so on, but if you went just a few miles away people were living in mud hovels with no running water and no electricity, no access to education, in many cases no jobs, the only outlet to another life being the mosque. And so I must say that I felt that the shah needed to be in a hurry and he was building roads, he was building hospitals, he was building schools. So I thought that the general direction he was taking the country was the right one.

Q: Did you get any feel for the Iranian students who sort of flooded our country around this time?

EVANS: After doing American Services I did a stint as a visa officer and I and my colleagues issued a lot of student visas. What we found was that there was a tremendous amount of fraud, you know, faking assets and connections, and as it ended up there was a lot of adjustment of status that took place, typically when a young man reached his 26th birthday because then he was not eligible for the U.S. draft.

Q: And avoiding the Iranian.

EVANS: At the same time, yes.

Q: John, I've got to stop you short. But we'll put in here, sort of the end game in Iran. We've talked about, you know, how you- did you have any other- what was social life like and what else you might have been doing in Iran the next time around.

EVANS: Next time around, yes.

Q: Today is the 26th of October, 2009, with John Evans, and we're in the- in Iran and you're going to tell us what you're up to. When was that, when?

EVANS: That would have been between 1972 and 1974, when I left. And thinking back on it we had put a lot of our eggs in the Iran basket, so to speak. Of course back in the '50s the United States had been involved, perhaps more than it should have been, in the internal politics of Iran, but by the early '70s and in particular by the time of that famous visit when President Nixon and Henry Kissinger came to Iran in 1972 that was the beginning of a big increase in our strategic bet on Iran. And it was from that time that the increasing defense relationship grew like topsy. More and more Americans came to Iran, as I was able to see through the figures in the consular section that we kept and after the short ambassadorship of Joe Farland, who was a crony of President Nixon's who had previously served in Pakistan, the relationship got another big boost when Richard Helms was appointed ambassador to Iran.

Now Richard Helms of course had been director of the CIA. He had been, before that, in the OSS (Office of Strategic Services), he had been really a chief in the CIA for many, many years, a highly respected intelligence professional, and there was a lot of speculation of course when he was named by President Nixon to become ambassador to Iran. This would have been in 1973 after the very short stint that Joe Farland spent in Iran. There seems to have been some connection with Watergate. Richard Helms, of course, had been appointed to be CIA director by a Democrat, by President Johnson. Of course the tradition has been that that's a non-political position and though the Director may formally tend his resignation it was normal for a CIA director to continue but there was this sense we had that President Nixon didn't much care for Richard Helms, who had come from a rather well-to-do, Main Line Philadelphia background, educated at Williams and so on, and furthermore that he probably knew more about Watergate than Richard Nixon wished he did. And so, whatever the procedure was, apparently President Nixon called Helms in and said "Dick, I'd like to send you out as ambassador," and he - Nixosuggested, "how about Moscow?" But Helms apparently, in his own telling, thought that was not wise since he had spent most of his career working against Soviet intelligence and he himself suggested that Iran would be a more reasonable choice. And that a little bit explains why Joe Farland was only there for nine months or so, because there was this necessity on the part of the White House to take care of Richard Helms but get him out of town.

Q: Well then, what was your job while you were there, the two years you were?

EVANS: I started off as vice consul in charge of protecting Americans, basically, American Citizen Services, looking after people who got in trouble with the police, who ran out of money, sometimes looking after deaths; there were a number of death cases in those days. And it was one of the more lurid of those consular cases that brought me to the attention of the ambassador's office. I won't go through the whole story but basically...

Q: Go through the whole story. Well, part of this thing, I think consular stories are good, and two, I think it sheds light on one of the aspects of Foreign Service work.

EVANS: Okay. As briefly as I can then, what happened, we got a call one day in the consular section and it seemed that it was a call from an Iranian official in the holy city of Mashhad in the east near the Afghan border. And I think it was the chief prosecutor who called and said there have been two Americans killed here and we need your help in deciding what to do. And indeed two young Americans, about 18, a boy and a girl, had been in Afghanistan, traveling by motorcycle. They crossed over from Afghanistan from Heart into Iran in the early evening hours when the light is very poor. People in those days didn't have their headlights on yet and yet the natural light was waning so shadows were confused and they apparently ran hard into an oil tanker truck. The boy was killed - he was driving - he was killed instantly. The girl, unfortunately, lived for another three hours in some terrible agony and then died. And the bodies had been retrieved by the police and were in a refrigerator in the prosecutor's office.

Now, in that part of the world the practice is normally to bury a body before sundown or at least very quickly so they don't have, generally, outside the major cities, places to keep corpses. So these two bodies were literally in a refrigerator when I arrived from Tehran with my Azeri Turkish assistant, Mr. Massoumzadeh. And there were only two flights a week from Tehran to Mashhad and back so we basically had three days in which to decide what to do with the bodies. A complication was that the parents of both of the deceased were divorced and they were living in four, literally four, different places around the world. One parent was in Korea, one was in Florida, one was in Washington and one may have been in New York; I can't remember exactly. But we had to contact the parents to get their instructions as to the disposition of remains. That turned out to be very difficult in the age before - not only before cell phones and the Internet -but in the age when just getting a telephone call from Mashhad out to Tehran was a problem. But we finally got the word out that we needed instructions and we also needed money if there was any intention of shipping these corpses out of Mashhad back to Tehran and on to the United States.

Well, we waited, we waited and we waited, and we had set a deadline of something like, given the difference in time zones, something like 9:00 a.m. on the Thursday morning of that week. The last plane out of Mashhad was on Friday. So we got a call, must have been the Friday morning because we had extended our deadline, having not heard on the Thursday; right, about 3:00 a.m. on Friday we finally got a call from one of the parents saying we do not want you to bury our children there, we want you to send them back to the United States. Still no money and this was a costly undertaking. By that time, in fact, we had already had to go ahead and bury them. So the day before we had done that, because we had had no instructions, we had to leave and the refrigerator in the prosecutor's office was filling up. There were some fresh corpses. So it was really a necessity that something be done. We were being told that we had to do something.

So we contracted some gravediggers who dug all Thursday night. We arranged for an Armenian priest to show up at dawn, an Armenian priest being pretty much the closest thing you could get to a Protestant minister in those parts. We got black cloth, we had coffins built, we did all the intensive paperwork that was necessary to have a body buried and certified that they were dead and so on. In the middle of the night when we got the call saying that was not what the parents wanted we went completely into reverse. We raced out in an ambulance that we hijacked to the graveyard where the gravediggers had just finished their work, we literally snatched the corpses out of the grave, got them into the ambulance, took them into town where a different sort of coffin was built which met the standards for air shipment, and it had to be draped in black. So there were a million things that had to be done and furthermore all the paperwork needed to be reversed, and that was actually more difficult than moving the bodies, just getting bureaucrats to believe that somebody who had been certified as dead and buried was now going to rise from dead and buried and be shipped to Tehran. But we managed to do this and just by a matter of seconds, with our ambulance that we had hijacked, we made it to the side of the plane, which was delayed about 10 minutes, and we got those coffins onto the plane and it almost immediately took off. We didn't even have time to tell the embassy what was going on.

We arrived back in Tehran and I called the embassy and I said "I'm here at the airport with two corpses; can you send a truck?" Well, this brought me to the attention of the ambassador as somebody who I guess they thought had accomplished the impossible, although really it was just force of circumstances. Oh, I forgot to mention that the public prosecutor in Mashhad had lent us the equivalent of about $800 with which to get all this work done. We had to pay off the gravediggers, we had to pay off the Armenian priest, we had to get the coffins built and so on. And so the ambassador, this was Ambassador Farland, called the prosecutor and had him come in to Tehran, he was given an award for services to the American people and he got his money back and that's when, I think, the DCM (deputy chief of mission) decided that I was going to be brought in as aide to the ambassador, taken out of the consular section and brought in to work for the new ambassador who, by this time he knew, was going to be Richard Helms.

So I spent the rest of my time in Tehran as special assistant to Richard Helms.

Q: What was the reaction of people, you know, you're a junior officer there and all but you're-nobody is more, in a way, hearing all the rumors and all, what were you getting about all of a sudden the head of the CIA appearing in Tehran? I mean, we'd gone through that, was it Kermit Roosevelt?

EVANS: Yes, who was involved with the Mossadegh overthrow.

Q: Very much the Mossadegh- I mean, you know, the CIA had kind of a, you might say a reputation.

EVANS: Well, that's true. And in Iran there had always been great suspicion of the British, going way back. That suspicion to some extent was transferred to the Americans after the overthrown of Mossadegh. And so indeed there was a lot of talk about the CIA chief coming to Iran and speculation about what this meant for U.S. policy in the region. It was already clear that the strategic wager that the United States was making on the shah was a very serious one. There was a joke going around at the time based on the reality; the Soviet ambassador apparently had been going around saying oh, look at America, they're sending a spy here to Iran, this just shows what kind of a country America is. And one wag said "well, the Soviet Union sent a pretty low ranking spy here as their ambassador, at least the Americans sent their top spy." That actually is quoted somewhere in the papers, I think.

As it turned out, Richard Helms and his wife Cynthia were the most able couple, diplomatic ambassadorial couple, that I have ever encountered. Mrs. Helms has a British background; they are both very sensitive to Persian culture. Mrs. Helms in fact went on to write a book about archaeology and Persian culture. They made many, many friends there. The ambassador himself had been at the same school in Switzerland, Le Rosey, where the shah had studied, although I do not believe they were in the same class, but they knew each other. And so our ambassador's relationship with the shah was an extremely close and effective one and I think he managed things there extremely well. He traveled a lot and I traveled with him and interpreted, in fact, for him on several occasions. My spoken Persian was quite good. He went to the south to investigate everything involving oil; he went to the normal places that Westerners visit, like Shiraz, Isfahan and so on.

But in our last session I talked about the mistake that was made in cutting ourselves off from the opposition. A request had come from the shah not to have our domestic political analysts meet with the people in the bazaar who were bankrolling the Ayatollah Khomeini who was then in exile in Iraq and we, I think ill-advisedly, agreed to that and pulled our people back, in particular Stan Escudero, who was getting very close, just a step away from some of these opposition figures. And that, I think, combined with the big bet that we had made on the shah, resulted in our not understanding the political dynamics that were at work there.

Q: Well did Helms to his staff or to you anyway muse about this limitation on the traditional work of any embassy, and that is to, you know, to report on all sides? I mean, this is really exceptional.

EVANS: There was some discussion of it and I know that Stan Escudero, whose office was next to mine for a time, was unhappy about it. I don't know how much... I wasn't there when the request by the shah was made. I presume that our ambassador felt that there were other ways of finding out what was going on and it could well be that the idea was that the CIA would do some things but the State Department people were not to be seen talking to the bazaar merchants.

Q: Yes, well that would, you know, considering the personnel and Helms' background, you know, the CIA was of course an instrument which he was very familiar with.

EVANS: Not only that - that's a good point - but also, let's say, let it be said that the CIA was in very close cahoots with the SAVAK, which was the shah's own intelligence agency and it may well have been that the bet was that we didn't need anything that we would get in the traditional way: we could get it through those sources.

Q: Well while you were there was there- were you picking up, was there a feeling that this was a regime under siege or- It was obviously, you know, it's forgotten today but as you mentioned before, I mean, it was sort of a revolutionary regime under the shah at that time of the white revolution and you know, really trying to change his country and bring it into the 20th century.

EVANS: Well, that's right and it was recognized internationally as doing that. The shah's family included his twin sister and the empress, who did a lot of things to improve the status of women. Back in the early '60s, for example, the legal age of marriage for girls was nine. Now that was gradually raised to 15 and then 18 and this is one of the issues on which the Ayatollah Khomeini, by the way, clashed with the regime.

Q: It's back to nine, I think.

EVANS: It's back to nine under the current regime.

Q: This is incredible.

EVANS: And so, you know, in Western eyes what the shah was doing was progressive. Now, he was doing it with harsh means in some cases. Foes of the regime were being treated very harshly, in some cases imprisoned and worse, but let's remember that the first organized opposition to the monarchy was really on the left. The Tudeh movement was still present - that's the communist movement - and we have to remember also that this was the height of the Cold War and the Soviets were definitely present and active and Tudeh was out there. So we definitely were banking on the shah to force Iran into a rapid modernization.

Q: MacArthur had been ambassador earlier, is that right?

EVANS: That's correct.

Q: And he had been attacked by the Tudeh, his car was, wasn't it?

EVANS: Yes, that's-

Q: It was an assassination attempt.

EVANS: That's right, that's correct. And in my time there were already some signs of disaffection in the sense that, for example in about 1973 two colonels were murdered on the streets of Shemiran in north Tehran. Now, that was an assassination; I think they apprehended the people who did it but it was nothing like a mass movement. That came much later in the '70s, of course.

Q: Well how- I realize, you know, you were at the bottom of the food chain at this point but still you're, I think the thing that's interesting in these interviews, I think you have people in positions like yours where you're sort of the fly on the wall. Did- Would you say that the wealthy ruling class sort of monopolized the ambassador's time or was he able to talk to the bazaaris and to, you know, more, let's say ordinary folks or not?

EVANS: In Iran under the old monarchy, well, the Pahlavis were a new monarchy but the old regime we can now call it, there were about 1,000 families, it was said there were 1,000 families who ran the country. And it certainly did seem... It's like the 400 in New York. It did seem as if they were very much the focus of our attention. But there were, in addition to the old aristocratic Muslim families, the minorities in Iran at that time were feeling very much protected by the shah. For example, the owner of the Coca-Cola Bottling Company was a Baha'i.

Q: Yes, or really anathema to the present regime.

EVANS: They're considered heretics, that's right. Also the Armenians, the Assyrians, even Jews felt relatively safe under the shah because his attitude was not to persecute them and to have them contribute. And they did contribute and some of them became quite well-to-do from their business activities. So although there was a nasty side to all this which involved the SAVAK and its persecution of regime opponents still there was a growing middle class, good things were being done, highways, hospitals, schools and the amenities of public life were improving. The educational levels were going up and so on and so forth. There was very decent medical care, if you could pay for it; it was at a pretty good level. So all these things seemed to us on balance to be going in the right direction in the early '70s.

Q: In Iran, were there real splits of the Baluchis, the Azeris, the different, you know, these tribal splits?

EVANS: You know, you have put your finger on one of the things that Americans today have largely forgotten about and that is that this was the "Empire of Iran" with only about 50 percent of the population being Persian, that is Shia Farsi-speakers. The largest other minority group is the Azerbaijanis, a Turkic speaking group focused or settled primarily in the northwest around Tabriz. Actually there are twice as many Azeri Turks in Iranian Azerbaijan as there are in today's Republic of Azerbaijan. And indeed in the southeast there were, in Baluchistan, Baluch tribes, some of them still nomadic. There were a large number of Kurds in the northwest and various other tribes and one of the previous empresses, Soraya, the predecessor to Empress Farah, was from one of those tribes; I want to say she was Qashqa'i. And so yes, indeed, there were tribes, some of them nomadic, some of them settled, some of them more restive, some of them less. And I should also mention there's an Arab population in the south. So yes, it was a mosaic, it still is a mosaic, of nationalities.

Q: Having trouble with the Baluch.

EVANS: Baluch, yes.

Q: Baluch right now.

EVANS: Well, they are, and the Baluch are in three countries; there are Baluch in Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as Iran, so it's an area and then of course this applies to the Kurds as well, being in Iran, Syria, Iraq, Turkey and even the Caucasus.

Q: What was the feeling, that you were going to ally with the shah, that this would be a unifier for that whole area or would it be a base- I mean, what would it be for?

EVANS: I think the term that we were mostly using was that he was a "pillar of stability" or something like that. In those days academic practitioners talked about the "arc of crisis" from Bangladesh in the east through Somalia, cutting through the Middle East, and the idea was that Iran was going to be a bastion of stability in that arc of crisis and someone no doubt carried the metaphor too far and said it would be the keystone of the arch or something like that.

What was also important: let's remember that Henry Kissinger was Secretary of State at that time. Kissinger understood the dynamics of the region extremely well and so did Helms, and as a fly on the wall I did see that Kissinger and Helms, who were in very close contact with each other, were able to calibrate things on an almost daily basis, if there was an instability or a hint of an imbalance in the area, and they were particularly good about balancing Iraq and Iran. And the Kurdish question was there too and there were various levers that they were able to use to keep the Gulf area stabilized and moving in the right direction. And of course it was one of the calamities of the loss of Iran from American calculations or at least an ability to deal with Iran was that you then had a terrible disbalance between Iraq and Iran which showed up in the war that broke out in the '80s right after the Iranian revolution.

Q: Well, we're talking about the Kissinger era and Kissinger had, as I recall it, had developed quite a bad name among the Kurds for encouraging the Kurds, I mean we the United States, at one point and then cutting them off. What was going on when you were there Kurd-?

EVANS: Well, I don't know all the ins and outs of that. I do know that we had to be talking to the Kurds at that time; I think some Kurdish activists would probably say that this has always been the history, that people have encouraged their aspirations and then when it was convenient turned their backs on them. That's not me speaking, that's just what I've picked up from Kurds. But let's also remember that at that time Henry Kissinger was very much involved in seeking improvements in the Middle East and it was during... in the spring of 1974 as Watergate was getting to be a much more serious problem for President Nixon that Kissinger was shuttling between Damascus and Cairo and Tel Aviv and even with a stop in Alexandria here and there, working just incredible hours and logging innumerable miles trying to settle that part of the Middle East. And of course there had been the Middle East War which had necessitated this.

Q: In '73.

EVANS: In '73.

Q: To the U.S. the Yom Kippur War.

EVANS: That's right, that's right.

Q: Well were you there during that time?

EVANS: Yes, and I remember there were afternoon newspapers in Tehran at that time and I remember driving home and seeing "Jang dar hovar-e-miyaneh," (war in the Middle East) in the headlines. That was a big shock.

The other big major geopolitical shock that I remember from those days was when the Indians tested their atomic weapon, which must have been in the spring of '74, and that, although you couldn't literally hear it you could metaphorically hear it just rattling the chanceries in every capital in the region.

Q: Was India looked upon as a real threat? I mean, with India part of the calculations because it's a one removed from Iran.

EVANS: Well, Iran has a very long history of statecraft. Like the Ottomans they go back centuries. And Iran's policy as I would describe it to you has been one of balancing, of cultivating good relations with the neighbors next to their foes, sort of a chessboard kind of pattern. And so Iran maintained rather decent relations with both Pakistan and India. Iran at that time had relations with Israel that were considered strategic although the Israeli embassy was not called an embassy, it was called something else; it was called a liaison office or something like that. And there were no relations with the Saudis because of the Shia-Sunni division and there was... I remember two serious territorial disputes that sometimes came to minor violence, one was over the Tunb Islands in the Strait of Hormuz, and the other was on the Shatt al-Arab, the river that divides Iraq from Iran, and there were different ways of or calculating the border, whether it was the... it's not called the rhumb line, there's a word for it, the tollweg... and other ways of calculating that, and there were always little spats arising over this...

Q: But of course there was an absolutely crucial- crucial to Iraq, you know, a way of getting out.

EVANS: Oh, absolutely, that's right. We had at that time, by the way, the United States had no embassy in Iraq; it was the Belgians who were acting as our representatives there, and I recall every week when I was still in the consular section we would get a diplomatic bag from the Belgian embassy in Baghdad that mostly contained the passports of Iraqi Jews who wanted to get out of Iraq; we were the nearest embassy and we would visa those passports and send them back.

Q: I go back to the '60s, well to the '50s; actually, when I was in Dhahran, and there at that time we were in Saudi Arabia and we were not abutting on the Persian Gulf, we were abutting on the Arabian Gulf. And that's what we were told to say.

EVANS: Well, this is a terminological dispute that continues to this day but I remember the shah once heard some mention of the Arabian Gulf and he said, "What nonsense is that! Go back and look at your atlas. It says the Persian Gulf."

Q: Yes. But there was considerable concern. I go back to the '50s; Iranians, too many Iranians were coming in to Bahrain and this was- it was- this was sort of a disturbed area in a way that- I don't know if it remains disturbed or not.

EVANS: Well, you're absolutely right. I mean, one of the great divides in the Middle East is between the Arabs on the western side of the Persian Gulf and then this Iranian colossus to the east. And of course what has been the stabilizing factor, first, was British power in the Gulf and then we inherited the mantle and of course the U.S. Navy is a major factor there, particularly on Bahrain.

Q: Yes. It was called MIDEASTFOR in my era and there was a mighty seaplane tender as its flagship. But the British were beginning to pull out but they still had political control over the Trucial States and Bahrain.

Well, did Watergate- How was Watergate being reflected sort of to the embassy? You know, this is going on and it was sort of a puzzle to an awful lot of people.

EVANS: When Ambassador Helms arrived in Tehran, I can't give you the precise date but it would have been in 1973, it was a wonderful, positive impulse to the work of our embassy. He really put things on a very professional basis. I have to say that standards had slipped under the previous ambassador.

Q: Joe Farland. He is a, you know, a business investor whom I'm interviewing.

EVANS: He's a perfectly nice man and had some nice people with him but Helms brought in some new people and put things on a very good footing. What we didn't know at the time... At that time we knew nothing about Watergate beyond just a few little inklings in the press that something was going wrong but this started to snowball and it had a very distinct impact on us because Ambassador Helms was repeatedly called back to testify in the Watergate hearings that were being ginned up in the Congress, and a couple times he had just come back to Tehran when he was called immediately back for another committee's hearing. So it had a very definite effect, impact, on us and on the ambassador himself because he was exhausted from all the traveling. He was a heavy smoker and during that period I remember he was chain smoking and got letters from people who had watched him on television and advised him to stop smoking, which he eventually did in one day. He just completely threw that habit over in one day, such was his willpower.

But we did have the impression that Ambassador Helms was more and more becoming...He had never ceased to be involved in Washington politics and the people who came through from Washington to visit him, a combination of socially prominent Americans, former CIA people and various officers of the government, it was really a parade of top-ranking Washington people, and he did very much keep up with the goings-on in Washington. But during the summer of 1974, of course, the final tape was released that showed that Nixon had been involved and was aware of the cover-up and it was in those last days of July '74 and I remember that was just when I departed Tehran; I went back the other way, through, I stopped in Thailand and Singapore and the Philippines and Hong Kong and Japan and went back to Washington that way. And I arrived in Washington on the day when Richard Nixon took off in his helicopter from the White House.

Q: Were you getting questions from Iranians, what the hell is this all about?

EVANS: Yes, but you know, even the Soviets saw Nixon through the lens of foreign policy and wanted... they didn't understand this little American internal squabble and even Gromyko when he met Nixon in that period had said some encouraging words. So I don't think overseas this was seen as anything more than one of those odd, weird things about Americans; they didn't get it because all their leaders had been involved in much worse things and this seemed like just a... they saw Nixon as a capable statesman on the world scene. I'm sure that was the feeling in Iran.

I should mention something here and that is that the USIA (United States Information Agency) contingent ran something called the Iran-America Society, and it was a beautiful building, it had a library, it had a cinema. Iran-America Society was the name of it and that was such a magnet for so many young Iranians of not only student age but on into through their 30s and 40s, it was a place where they felt safe to come, they knew a lot of the other people there. And this leads to another point, which is that because of the huge number of Iranians who came to study in the United States, when the revolution finally happened a lot of them, because of the prominence of their families or the business connections, so on, a lot of them ended up coming to the United States, they'd been educated here, they were comfortable here, and they have really become one of the most successful emigrant groups in the United States. They are a Diaspora which has done well, which has prospered. All you have to do is go out to Beverly Hills where a couple of years ago the local election bulletins were printed in Farsi because there are so many Iranians living there, or Potomac, Maryland, is another place and there are other pockets, New York City and so on, where that generation of Iranians, educated, from well-to-do families and with an education, having lost everything are therefore driven to succeed in their new society. That has been one of the fruits of the Iranian revolution.

Q: During the time you were there, was the problem of corruption of concern to us? I understand, for example, the shah's twin sister was-

EVANS: Ashraf.

Q: -I mean, how did we view it at the time?

EVANS: We certainly deplored it, maybe not publicly but we sort of muttered about it. But in those days the old idea that you didn't interfere in internal affairs was still much more in force and since we were - since the shah was our guy - we were willing to close our eyes to a lot of the things that were happening. There's no question in that society from time immemorial, baksheesh or some kind of lining the palms of bureaucrats has been the way to get things done. And I remember conversations where we debated this and I think the conclusion of some was that corruption actually is a lubricant for the society to a certain extent, that the bureaucrats are underpaid and if you have to get things done it's not surprising. That doesn't mean that we thought it was right but we just accepted it as part of the landscape.

Q: Well you know, when I was in Vietnam in the late '60s, I mean talking about you had to pay somebody to get pieces of paper to use for government things, and all of a sudden it occurred to me, you were paying for services rendered. These people, the bureaucrats weren't paid enough to get by and so in a way it was a perfectly, almost natural form of making things work.

EVANS: Yes. Well for that part of the world it was no surprise and many of our people in the embassy staff were specialists on the Middle East and they knew that this was part of the landscape.

Q: Speaking of the staff, was there a divide- Often junior officers are more, you might say idealistic where senior officers are more ground down and cynical about things.

EVANS: Jaded.

Q: And sometimes- So you get your young officers being sort of practically out there in the streets saying we've got to do something, change the society and the older people saying keep it cool. I mean, was that going on?

EVANS: I don't remember it quite in those terms. What I do remember, though, is we had a fairly young contingent at the consular section and we truly believed the idea that senior officers should not be pushing visas and so there was at times quite a divide between the consular section and particularly the economic section. And the very good economic counselor at that time was Bill Lehfeldt, who's one of my favorite people, a wonderful officer and a great sense of humor, but, boy, was he a visa pusher! So that was a strain and even the ambassador at times would give a call and we resisted with varying results.

Q: Yes well as a long-term professional consular officer I know what you mean. It's one of those battles you fight; you win some, you lose some.

EVANS: Yes.

Q: Well then, where did- Incidentally, you mentioned Stan Escudero; is he still around or is he-?

EVANS: Yes. Stan went on to have a quite illustrious career in the newly liberated Soviet Union. First of all, he went back to Iran at the time of the revolution and was, if we can just jump forward a second, he was more or less acting political counselor under Bill Sullivan during the hardest days of the revolution. He ended up going as ambassador to Dushanbe in Tajikistan; he was later ambassador to Uzbekistan and then Azerbaijan. And if I'm not mistaken he, until very recently, was doing business in Azerbaijan.

Q: Did you ever run across Mike Metrinko?

EVANS: Yes, and I want to tell you a story.

Q: I've had some fascinating interviews with Mike and I was wondering-

EVANS: Well, I want to tell you a story about that. If we can jump ahead a little bit to the eve of the Iranian revolution. As Mike probably told you in his interview, he was the consul in Tabriz during the beginning of the revolution and I was at that time working in Secretary Vance's office. The first thing that really got our attention is when on Valentine's Day, February 14, must have been 1979, there was a convulsion that gripped the whole Middle East. I don't remember what set it off but our embassies were attacked in Pakistan and I think in North Africa and a group of Iranian radical anti-shah forces made its way into the consulate in Tabriz and took Metrinko hostage or prisoner and as I remember from the time they were on the verge of running him up the flagpole and hanging him. But he had done good consular work and knew the police and the Tabriz police arrived on the scene and took him under arrest and so he was taken to the prison in Tabriz and then shipped to Tehran so at least he was out of harm's way temporarily.

Well, I had been working on the Iran Working Group, I had been detailed because of my former service there; we were at that time located in the operations center and we had to keep a phone line open 24 hours a day to the embassy, and the only way to do that was to chatter, talk about whatever came into your head to keep the line open; otherwise some operator would figure it was a dead line and you'd lose it. So I remember doing that and by this time it seems to me that things had eased up a bit; I was supposed to go to replace Mike after this incident that had occurred with him but somehow things had eased up a bit and he had a collection of samovars and carpets in Tehran and he decided he would take his chances and go back and try to claim his property and would not leave the embassy staff. By this time I already had in hand a plane ticket and I was all ready to depart for Tehran but I was talking every day to Ambassador Sullivan and one Saturday morning, this must have been in 1979. It was March by this time; Mike decided to stay so I did not go on that Saturday and on the Monday I stayed home to do my taxes, as I remember, and that was the day that I got a call from the operations center saying "President Carter is going to the Middle East and we want you to advance that trip for Secretary Vance." I was on Vance's staff and so I went out there and it became the trip that produced the Camp David accord. So I did not become a hostage in Iran. But Mike Metrinko did.

Later in the year, of course...

Q: There was a takeover in February that only lasted a day or two.

EVANS: That's right, that's right.

Q: Things sort of swelled up and then it went away and it was in, I believe November of '79-

EVANS: When the embassy was taken over.

Q: -when the embassy was completely taken over.

EVANS: That's exactly what it was. And so I did not become a hostage but I did get to go out to Jerusalem and advance that spot for Secretary Vance.

Q: Well we'll come to that.

Okay, well then we're talking about '74; Nixon has departed the scene in a helicopter and you've arrived to almost replace him, is that-?

EVANS: Hardly. But I had my assignment at that point; I had been assigned to Czechoslovakia. And so after a couple of weeks of getting myself settled I started Czech language training.

Q: Okay. Well then let's talk about- How did you find Czech as a language? I take it you're fairly- if you are picking up on Farsi fairly well you're one of these people somewhat adept at languages, aren't you?

EVANS: I've been lucky, I think, to have very good instruction in languages all along and I may have had some disposition to learn them. I had high verbal scores and so on but I've always found it difficult to speak any language really well. My Persian got to be quite good. I'd previously studied Russian. Czech I found quite frustrating because I wanted to use Russian. It's close enough to Russian that one is tempted to decline nouns and conjugate verbs in a similar way and it's quite different; the Western Slavic languages - like Polish and Czech - are quite distant actually from Russian in their formation.

But I did learn Czech quite well and a year later took off for Prague, and of course this was a time of not quite Stalinism but virtual Stalinism of a new generation.

Q: The Czechs have been quite adept at being nasty.

EVANS: Well, I don't think they would agree with that, quite, but they are sort of a dyspeptic group; some ascribe it to beer drinking. But what I found was - in the summer of, by this time it would have been '75 - I flew to Paris, bought a Peugeot and drove alone through Germany into Czechoslovakia and of course I saw the great divide that then existed between Western Europe and the moment you got to that border fortified with guard dogs and barbed wire you knew you were going into a different world.

Q: How would you describe the political and sort of economic and overall situation of Czechoslovakia in '75?

EVANS: 1975 was less than 10 years after the Prague Spring when the Czechs and the Slovaks, more the Czechs, but under Dubcek, had tried to reform the system, tried to open things up, tried to liberalize and of course they were crushed by not only the Soviet Union but all their Warsaw Pact neighbors save Romania. And the result was a kind of conservative reaction, a kind of a Thermidor in which Gustï¿½v Husï¿½k, a hard line Slovak communist, was in charge and you had very hard line people in the governing communist party. So it was a kind of neo-Stalinist atmosphere. The United States was constantly criticized if not reviled in the media; people were afraid to meet with Americans, and yet there were some avenues and there was a great reservoir of love for the United States that went back to Tomas Masaryk and Woodrow Wilson, the foundation of Czechoslovakia after Versailles and the many connections between Czech emigrants, going back even to the 19th century when Antonin Dvorï¿½k came for a stay in the United States and actually appeared at Carnegie Hall. So these memories were there and the main train station had been called the Wilson Station; that of course had been changed.

Q: And I think for somebody who's reading this later, Wilson was very much involved in the formation of Czechoslovakia-

EVANS: Yes.

Q: -during the Versailles Conference.

EVANS: That's right, that's exactly right. And Tomas Masaryk, who's considered the founder of the Czechoslovak state, his mother was American, so there were those connections. And at the end of World War II it's also true, and Czechs remembered this, that General Patton had liberated from the Germans the southwestern part of Bohemia and there were graves to the soldiers, American soldiers, who had fought down in those parts, in the west and south that we visited every year. And every year, quietly, people would come to those graves, some of them with mementos from the soldiers they had met, some of them with their Shirley Temple fan club cards or various other things.

Q: She had been ambassador there.

EVANS: She was ambassador there later and I was her DCM but that was in the '90s.

But there was that reservoir of friendship for the United States, which to some extent tempered the popular feelings but of course made friendship with American diplomats even more suspect to the authorities.

Q: What was your job?

EVANS: I started off as consul, this time doing visas. At one point I had the great honor of giving a tourist visa to Martina Navratilova, the famous tennis player, and of course it was a non-immigrant visa. Had I known that she was going to stay in the United States I would have had to deny her; we later got the notice from the Immigration Service that she had decided to stay. And what I most remember was she had enormous hands and when I shook hands with her I felt as if I had put my hand into a baseball mitt.

Q: Well let's talk a little about the visa business. You must have- In the first place, it must have been hard for people to get passports, wasn't it?

EVANS: Yes. All travel was pretty closely controlled and people, some professionals, got permission to go to international conferences and there were cases like that but basically the visa business was fairly slow. What wasn't so slow was the issue of Czechoslovak citizens, in particular Slovaks in the eastern part of the country, who were beneficiaries of various American social programs such as black-lung compensation. These were the survivors of immigrants in the '30s who had come to work in the coal mines during the Depression and had then gone back and married Slovak girls who had far outlived them, largely that's what it was. And I remember taking one fascinating 18-day-long trip through Moravia and Slovakia with a Czechoslovak foreign ministry official who was my "chaperone." We would drop in on these farmsteads in the middle of nowhere in the mountains and in various isolated valleys for the purpose of discovering whether the beneficiaries were one, still alive, and two, actually benefiting from the checks that were being issued. We needed to find out that they were indeed getting the money, that their children and relatives weren't siphoning it off, and in one case we did find a situation like that where the children were intercepting the checks and preventing the old grandma from seeing her money.

Q: Well it's interesting that that relationship, I know I was in Yugoslavia back in the mid '60s and we had Social Security investigation there and it was going on in Czechoslovakia where Social Security people and Yugoslav authorities, I believe, was duplicated in Czechoslovakia and went out and did a survey.

EVANS: Well that's right, and this was actually in their interest also, to make sure that these benefits were going to the proper destinations and that fraud was not being committed.

Q: Well then, did you get involved in any, before we move on to the political situation, were there Americans or Czech-Americans who were getting into trouble?

EVANS: There was far less of that than in Iran. First of all, there were far fewer tourists who came to Czechoslovakia in those days. I mean, Prague is an absolutely superbly beautiful city and yet it was almost empty of tourists expect for East Germans, who came largely to drink beer. There was a class of wealthy American tourists who were able to come through on organized tours or special arrangements but you didn't get the middling sort of tourist.

There were some cases that became problematic but they mainly had to do with people involuntarily violating security restrictions on photography, that sort of thing, or problems with their papers, people whose passport had expired, that sort of stuff. But there was nothing particularly lurid.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

EVANS: Well, when I first arrived the ambassador was Bud Sherer, Albert Sherer, who at that time was participating in the talks in Geneva that led to the Helsinki Final Act being signed, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, and I remember Ambassador Sherer departing that summer of 1975, and I'm pretty sure he was at the Helsinki conference. And that of course ushered in a very new era in East-West relations which came to affect very much our work in Czechoslovakia.

Q: But that was, in a way, unforeseen by almost everyone.

EVANS: It was even opposed by some, and you may recall that President Ford was advised by none other than Henry Kissinger not to sign the Final Act of the conference at Helsinki and there were many conservative columnists who deplored the idea that the U.S. president would go and sign an agreement with all those communists.

Q: Well I think part of the thing was that the Soviets saw this thing as being- it firmed up the borderlines and all that, which for the conservatives on the Western side, you know, they saw this as being, you know, I mean why acknowledge borders which are already pretty well established anyway, whereas the Soviets and company didn't realize that they were allowing a virus to get into their system, i.e., the, what is it, the third basket.

EVANS: The third basket, yes.

Q: The third basket, which was also some human rights things.

EVANS: That's right. Really the original idea went back to a proposal the Soviets had made in the 1950s for a European security conference, which was seen in Washington as a way of dealing the United States out of being a European power. That of course went through several different variations and in the end two negotiations were set up; there were the Mutual and Balance Force Reductions, or MBFR, which were focused on conventional weapons and troop levels, force levels. And then there was also this Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which was through Western efforts, NATO efforts, balanced to involve a first basket on security matters, a second basket on economic matters and a third basket on human rights and related issues like movement of people, exactly. And so by the time this conference really started it was a very different thing than what the Soviets had originally envisioned.

Q: Well I know, I've interviewed George Vest, who was very much involved in that in the negotiations and he talked about how Henry Kissinger was basically undercutting them. He was telling what's his name, the Soviet ambassador-

EVANS: Dobrynin.

Q: -Dobrynin, well don't pay any attention to that. You know, I mean, the word was getting to Vest through the East Germans, who said you know your secretary _____ very impressed in this. I mean, it was a bizarre situation.

EVANS: It was a bizarre situation. I knew George Vest and had huge respect for him. He grew up in Williamsburg in a house on the Duke of Gloucester Street that you can still see. A fine man.

I think Kissinger's idea was more the 19th century Metternich-Bismarck vision of the concert of nations and balancing power with power, with countervailing power, and what the participants in the Helsinki conference were talking about was a broader, more modern, more far-reaching process, that was non-traditional, had never really been tried. It was not another version of the League of Nations. There were two military blocs and neutrals interspersed but it was a kind of a dialogue and I think many people were suspicious of it. And Washington has always, as a culture, far preferred NATO where it controls, largely, to the CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) now the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) where, although everything is done by consensus and there's no real voting, there's no tallying of votes, but if somebody holds out a consensus fails and so when you have a consensus in the OSCE you have a lot, but when you are lacking one party then you have nothing.

Q: Well you were in Czechoslovakia from '75 to when?

EVANS: To '78.

Q: Were you- What were you doing; were you doing the consular work the whole time?

EVANS: No. I did one year of consular work, during which I traveled around a great deal, as I mentioned, to Slovakia and Moravia, as well as much of Bohemia. And I then moved into the political section in '76. We by that time had a new ambassador, Thomas Byrne, who had come out of the labor movement. He was a friend of George Meany's and had already been ambassador in Norway. And it was a wonderful time to be in charge of domestic political reporting. First of all, we had a new ambassador and I traveled around with him a lot and sat in on his meetings with various officials. For example, we went to Bratislava and met with the premier in Bratislava and we met with local officials and so on, so that was a good education for me, certainly in taking notes.

The other thing that was going on at that time was that some Czech and some Slovak intellectuals were taking the Helsinki Final Act signed in August of 1975 very seriously. In 1976 the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act were published in full; that was a requirement of the agreement. It was published in full in the Czechoslovak newspapers and many Czech dissidents cut it out and had it on their refrigerators or whatever. And during 1976 it was enacted into Czech law and a very interesting group started to compose what became later Charter 77, which was one of the milestone human rights documents of Eastern Europe in the 1970s and led directly to Gorbachev and the loosening up of the system, the whole communist system. But in those days it was just a twinkle in the eyes of these intellectuals.

But I was fortunate enough to fall in with some young people who were very closely connected to this group, in particular I chanced to meet Marta Kubisovï¿½, who was a pop singer and had sung, I must say at the top of her lungs, with Dubcek at her side, during the Prague Spring in 1968 and was very much connected with people close to Dubcek and those who, after the Prague Spring, had fallen into disfavor with the hard line regime. So through Marta and her circle of friends I ran into a lot of these people and they were really composing this Charter 77, which was scheduled to be published on January 1, 1977. I would go to the Cafï¿½ Slavia, which is an old cafï¿½ on the banks of the Vltava River and they would be passing drafts around, drinking strong coffee and deciding how to word something or other. In the end we obtained the draft of Charter 77 on about December 10, 1976, and I'm pretty sure that I was the first person to render it into English, on my old Smith-Corona.

Charter 77 had three spokesmen; a former Czechoslovak...Dubcek's foreign minister, Jiri Hajek, by this time a retired professor, and Jan Patocka, who was a prominent intellectual, and Vï¿½clav Havel. They were the three spokesmen, so to speak, of Charter 77. But then they opened it to signature and little by little more and more people signed on. The activists had gone through Czech and Moravian and Slovak towns and had gotten people to sign and so the list of signatories by the end was very impressive and it made the regime, of course, extremely nervous. What the signers and spokesmen were demanding really was that the principles of the Helsinki Final Act, which were now part of Czechoslovak law, actually be taken seriously and put into practice. And this was absolutely subversive in a one-party state and I do believe that, contrary to the claims of some that it was Ronald Reagan who brought down the Soviet system, I think that the activities associated with Charter 77, not only in Czechoslovakia but in Poland and Hungary and various other countries of what was then the Eastern Bloc, the activities of those people, based on the principles of the Final Act, had more to do in breaking down the old structures, in opening up new possibilities, in providing for contacts with the West than almost any of the other things that were done.

Q: I agree with you. I mean, this is obviously- Talk about almost unintended consequences. Maybe there were people within who were doing the negotiations who saw, who could at least hope for real consequences but it was considered sort of a throwaway at the time, you know. Okay, we have to do this but the main thing was to stabilize the borders and to set up things so that you wouldn't have military maneuvers menacing each other, that sort of thing.

EVANS: Yes, there were several parts to it, of course, and each of them played its own role.

Q: Okay. You're the political officer; how were you playing this? Were you watching this and- What were you seeing at that time and passing on to your colleagues?

EVANS: Well, I was with my girlfriend, who was another employee of the embassy; we had to be accompanied by another American in those days traveling in communist countries and so you couldn't go out very much by yourself; we got around a lot. We visited Marta Kubisovï¿½ in her farmhouse in eastern Bohemia and people showed up there without our having to be involved in inviting them. People who were involved in the dissident movement showed up there and we, I had these fascinating conversations with all sorts of people, some considerably older than I was at the time. We ran into other people; there was another foreign ministry official whom we got to know who had a little chata on the Sazava River and so mostly on the weekends, I have to say, we were off and about and sometimes trailed by the secret police, which were known as the STB. It was a kind of a KGB sort of organization and I remember taking evasive action at times to avoid their attention. I never had any serious altercation with them although I do believe that one of my maneuvers on the highway caused two of their cars to crash into each other.

But also, that was the time when the United States was toying with the idea, you may remember, of a so-called neutron bomb. This was a low-blast, high-radiation anti-tank weapon, basically. It was meant to fry the people in the tank and stop it if they came through the Fulda Gap but the Eastern bloc labeled it the "neutron bomb" and said "this is a perfect capitalist weapon that kills people but leaves property." That was their twist on this. Well, we started getting a huge number of letters from groups of "concerned Czechoslovak citizens," no doubt organized by the local communist party's functionaries and we decided to answer these letters. And so we pointed out - and it was all done in Czech - we pointed out that this was in fact a battlefield weapon which was meant to neutralize the preponderance of Warsaw Pact tanks in this potential northern European battlefield. Whatever it was we said, I had to get these things mailed; we couldn't simply put them in the outbox and let them be handled by the Czech employees, the local employees, who undoubtedly were in the pay of the secret police, but instead, after work, I would go rambling around Prague and find mailboxes that looked like good places to dump a bunch of these things. And I think a lot of these letters got out, in fact, to the population and the number of letters that we were receiving went way down. But there was a cat-and-mouse game definitely at work here between us and the secret police.

Q: Well now what were they- I mean, you have a- say a post Stalinist regime, how come that Havel and the other two and the singer weren't all tossed in jail and the thing was squelched?

EVANS: You know, the Czechs have a very interesting political culture. The law is important. And there's a lot of lip service to the law and what these people largely did was through their stubbornness and cleverness they were able to play legal games with the authorities. They would have the legal text at their side and they would point at the law and the people enforcing the law were not as ruthless as they are in some places further east, but they would try to fight this battle within the confines of the law. And so it became a very intricate game with the dissidents insisting on the letter of Czechoslovak law which was actually pretty good. There was a hypocrisy involved and they worked against this hypocrisy and were relatively successful, although Havel did spend time in jail. I remember running into him on a street corner just a few days before he was taken off for one of his stints in prison.

Q: Well were we doing anything of people going- I mean in promoting this or were- did we make a calculation they were doing the job and they could do it a hell of a lot better than we could?

EVANS: You know, it was always a question, there's always a dilemma of does the attention of the American embassy on a particular case make things better or worse for that individual. And we faced those dilemmas again and again. Sometimes the decision was made to very quietly ask for clemency for someone or suggest that something be done differently. And if that didn't work we sometimes would get instructions to make more of a fuss about it. I mean, this was a constant issue in all, I think not only in Prague, but in all the embassies in that part of the world.

Now, what changed radically in 1976, I think, was when President Carter, against the advice of some in the State Department, wrote a letter to Academician Sakharov, who was at that time in exile in the city of Gorky in Russia. And that was the first time that an American president had ever brought an individual human rights issue to the very top. That was a milestone in establishing human rights as a legitimate area for action by other states. It was based, of course, on the Helsinki Final Act.

Q: Did you see a major split between Slovakia and the, later the Czech side of things?

EVANS: This question belongs more properly in my second tour in Czechoslovakia when I was DCM.

Q: Well I'd like to catch it at that time; were we seeing-?

EVANS: Yes. We were aware, one cannot fail to be aware of the differences between the Czech lands, which are Bohemia and Moravia, and the Slovak Republic, which was, after 1968, made a full republic in addition to the Czechoslovak Republic. Bohemia and Moravia were not a separate republic but Slovakia was and it had its own Communist Party whereas the rest of the party was the Czechoslovak Communist Party. And you do see the differences, cultural and language differences, of course, when you go to Slovakia. Originally the Czech lands were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire ruled from Vienna whereas Slovakia was ruled from Budapest and that has a lot to do with the differences and there also is a sizeable Hungarian minority in the south of Slovakia. So yes, in my travels around I did run into this but I have to say that the level of expression of nationalistic feelings was quite low. Czechs love the Slovaks; Slovaks bridled to some extent under what they saw as something of a patronizing attitude by the Czechs but there were a lot of Slovaks who had ended up in Prague as "federal" Slovaks. And in fact, there was a saying, and I can't quote it now, it works better in the local language, but it basically was a saying that "Czech lands are now ruled by Slovaks" because there were so many, starting with Gustav Husï¿½k and his other Slovak colleagues.

Q: He'd be a Slovak.

EVANS: Yes. They were considered the loyalists of course, by the Soviets, because the Prague Spring was more of a Czech event than a Slovak one.

Q: Was the Sudeten Deutsche issue an issue anymore or was that gone?

EVANS: Yes, it was an issue under the surface. The Sudeten Germans after the war had been expelled under the Benes decrees, which are still controversial today because in the context of the European Union Treaty there are still descendents of the Sudeten German groups who meet every year usually in the Munich area in August and September and sing their old songs and talk about going home to the Sudetenland and of course their property was seized by the Czech state and there are other people living in it for the most part now. This was an issue; it was not a major issue but it did come up from time to time in commentaries. I'm sure it was discussed in some of the meetings in the Helsinki process.

Q: What about- How are the Soviets seen there? I mean, from the optic of an American official looking at the political situation.

EVANS: First of all, the way they were seen by the normal Czech citizens was interesting. I remember one weekend there was a light rain falling; the day must have been a Soviet and Czechoslovak holiday, something like May 9, and at the beginning of the day before the rain started almost every window on that street in Prague had had a Soviet and a Czechoslovak flag out, displayed for the holiday. As the rain intensified the Czechoslovak flag was pulled in, in every case, and the Soviet flag was left to get wet and lose its color. These were the kinds of subtle signs that the Czechs would send.

Another case of that, and there's a name for this; it's named after a character in Jaroslav Hasek's novel "The Good Soldier Ã©vejk."

Q: A wonderful book.

EVANS: It's a wonderful book, very difficult in Czech; I have to say, because it's very much in the vulgate or the vernacular. Another case of this was a bookstore with the required display of the collected works of Lenin: I remember seeing one such bookstore with all the works of Lenin displayed there but somebody had walked through this shelf and left footprints in the dust. So, you know, it was just that kind of a subtle signal: you couldn't really say anyone was guilty of anything in particular but the signal it sent was clear.

Q: Did you find much adherence to true communism or was this, you know, I've talked to people who were in Poland who about this time, maybe a little later, but saying they were convinced there must have been three, maybe four dedicated communists in the country, you know. I mean, did you find, I mean, was it sticking or was this how you ruled?

EVANS: Outside the official circles where people said what they were expected to say, I ran into exactly one convinced communist, by accident. I was in a restaurant and I ran into a woman who was railing on about capitalism and saying that we don't need such "magnates" in our country and so on. But it was very thin. The population was tired; they were just trying to get on with their lives. They aspired to the kind of prosperity that their parents had enjoyed in the first republic, the first Czechoslovak Republic, which actually had had one of the highest standards of living in Europe, higher than Germany's, and people, there were enough people around who really remembered quality goods and how markets worked and the strength of the Czechoslovak crown at that time. So I think there was very little loyalty to the regime or to the Soviet Union.

Q: Did you get any feel for the academic life, the students, the faculties?

EVANS: I did get to know quite a few students. I met some of them through Fulbright professors; there was a Fulbright exchange and there were some other young people, young Americans, working there. And I think, if anything, the disgust for the current political and economic conditions was greater among the younger people even than some of their parents who had come to terms with it.

Q; How about Czech officials? How did you find dealing with them?

EVANS: Some of them were downright rotten in a sense that they were just flunkies and they would just do what they were instructed to do and they had no imagination or, I would say, even sense of decency. But there were others. I remember working with a consular official who actually had at least a little bit of sense of responsibility for doing the right thing. And there were a couple of diplomats who actually in the end lived through the transition and went on to serve as officials after communism fell.

Q: What was the role of Western embassies there, because I go back to my Yugoslav times and you know, you get pretty good relations. This is during the mid '60s but still the Western community was very much a very cohesive group, and I was wondering in a more difficult place like Czechoslovakia how would you find it.

EVANS: We were very much thrown on each other's company; the NATO group I have in mind, primarily, with the occasional neutral thrown in, particularly the Austrians. And at two different levels there were regular meetings, actually three different levels. The ambassadors met as the NATO caucus, you might say on a regular basis to exchange notes and impressions and discuss issues. The deputy chiefs of mission met as the Club de Prague and enjoyed nice lunches on a rotating basis at each other's houses. And then the political officers also had a smaller version of that; we met, we exchanged visits on a monthly basis. The strong embassies in terms of reporting among the Western camp were the Germans, who had some entrï¿½e through old connections, the British and ourselves. The British are always good in my experience and we were good because we had the best language capabilities of any of the Western embassies. What was particularly interesting at that time, though, was the Romanian role. The Romanians had not invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968 along with the Warsaw Pact...

Q: This is Ceausescu?

EVANS: That's right.

Q: Cutting out a separate, nasty but separate, line.

EVANS: Exactly, that's exactly what it was. He was the maverick of the Eastern Bloc and we therefore got some very good information and useful guidance from one particular Romanian colleague. Now, I can't say as much for the Finns, and in fact a very sad thing happened during those years in which our ambassador was entrapped by the Finnish consul, a local Czech woman, and I'm not at liberty to go into the details of this but it was a very nasty situation and it resulted in his early departure from Prague under less than ideal circumstances.

Q: I mean, was this a feeling this was a Czech operation using the Finn?

EVANS: Yes, absolutely. The citizen was an honorary consul. She was clearly in the pay of the STB (Czechoslovak secret police).

Q: At this point were you- you were unmarried?

EVANS: That's right - but not single.

Q: How did this work within the sort of Foreign Service situation in a difficult country?

EVANS: I arrived as a bachelor and within three or four months a young woman arrived to work for USIS (United States Information Service), a very attractive lady, and we hit it off and were, for all intents and purposes, like a married couple there in Prague. We traveled together, we had friends among the Czechs together, we went out on commissary runs to Germany together and that lasted through the entire tour.

Q: What was social life like, particularly vis-ï¿½-vis the Czechs?

EVANS: The Czechs came to official events, certainly the ones who were in the foreign ministry and official life. They came to visit, they came to meet visitors from Washington, and they always came to the Fourth of July in large numbers; that was something that was permitted. What was more difficult for them was to come to private dinners or semi-private dinners although some of them did, in particular journalists who were either stringers for a Western organization like Reuters or some of the other Western news organizations. They would come to our events but one of the problems was that people were poor. They couldn't reciprocate. They simply didn't want to be interviewed by the secret police after going to one of these events so they largely stayed away. Where we did find we could have conversations was in the pubs and the wine cellars. And if one went out and could speak Czech one could join a table, might never see the people ever again, but you could have a very good conversation for one evening.

Q: Did you feel that the people you'd meet, say particularly at a bierstube were they pretty well informed what was happening in the United States? I mean, were they getting- was news getting to them?

EVANS: It's hard to judge, but I think a lot more news was getting to the Czechs than I had observed getting to Russians 10 years earlier. They just seemed much closer, probably because they could receive radio broadcasts; in some parts of Czechoslovakia they could receive West German or Austrian television. So they just seemed more European in that sense. Not that they fully understood American life but they had a much better general idea of the West.

Q: Well was there a certain amount of almost contempt for the Soviets, for the Russians?

EVANS: Oh, yes. There were jokes, there were some fairly off-color jokes, in fact, about the Soviets and some Czechs would refuse to speak to Russians. Occasionally Soviet troops - not necessarily were they Russian in nationality, they might have been from Central Asia - would show up in Prague in the last week of their service in Czechoslovakia. They would be herded through the National Museum and across the Charles Bridge and inevitably the Czechs were very disdainful of the Russians and I think a lot of Russians and Soviets, I should say Soviets, not Russians, felt quite uncomfortable there.

Q: I take it Prague was not an R&R (rest and recreation) spot for the troops, Soviet troops in the area.

EVANS: The Soviets kept their troops largely away from the big cities. They had a couple of bases which were off limits to Western diplomats that are still closed areas. This is an old technique that even the Imperial Russian army discovered in its occupations, 19th century occupations of Poland, to keep the troops in the forest and away from the cities.

Q: Did you ever get the feeling from military attachï¿½s what do we think about, you know, the Czech army was right on the border ready to go across; was it on the Fulda Gap?

EVANS: The Fulda Gap is a bit north.

Q: What was the feeling about the, you know, if the whistle blew what would the Czech army do?

EVANS: The Czech army, going back again to the culture that "The Good Soldier Ã©vejk" represents was not considered to be one of the greatest military machines in history. There was a sense that the Slovaks might have been the backbone of the Czechoslovak army more than the Czechs.

Q: This is traditional peasant, I mean more country or- same way we use the south, at least used to, as being the backbone of our military.

EVANS: Something like that, and there may have been some additional reasons as well. In fact, a lot of the Soviet military might was kept in Slovakia, sort of once removed from the frontline. You're reminding me though of some wonderful stories about our attachï¿½s. Whenever the Warsaw Pact would have a maneuver our attachï¿½s would be out there shadowing them, usually with their wives doing the navigating or driving or something. And there were some hilarious moments when one of our attachï¿½s who spoke fluent Czech was asked directions by a Soviet commander who came through and they pulled out the maps and the Soviet commander had the entire exercise mapped out on his map and he was asking our attachï¿½ how to find the next little town. So there was a lot of cat-and-mouse sort of stuff that happened in those days but rarely with serious consequences.

Q: Did you ever find the heavy hand of the Soviet, I mean of the Czech secret police trying to do something to you, set you up or impede you or anything like that?

EVANS: Only in the sense that they followed us on the weekends and sometimes we had sort of chases on the highways, that sort of thing. But they never...and I'm sure they interviewed the lady I had cleaning my house. One of the reasons I never kept a journal there was that I feared by keeping a journal I might make myself liable to having things found out and Czechs would get into trouble.

Q: Were there any incidents that you knew of of Americans being compromised or threatened with compromise?

EVANS: The only one was the one I mentioned at a very high level which ended very badly for the ambassador.

Q: Okay. Well I'm looking at the time; it's probably a good place to stop. And you left in '77?

EVANS: I left in '78.

Q: Where'd you go?

EVANS: I came back to the operations center.

Q: Okay, so we'll pick it up then.

Today is the 3rd of November, 2009, with John Evans, and John, in 1978?

EVANS: Nineteen seventy-eight.

Q: And you're back, going to the Department.

EVANS: Just back from Prague and I was assigned to the Staff Secretariat, S/S-S, and I think I can go fairly quickly through this.

Q: Well let's just talk about it; I don't try to move anything quickly.

EVANS: Okay, okay.

Q: In the first place, going to the Staff Secretariat means that usually, you know, you're, you might say one of the chosen at that point, I mean, given that the secretariat is considered a road up.

EVANS: Well, I hoped that's what the calculation was. I was put in charge of the European section of the Staff Secretariat where we dealt with European and political-military issues so I sat in on the staff meetings of those bureaus and tried to anticipate the paper. We were in charge of what we called the "slow paper," the memos for decision and information that were coming up as opposed to the "fast paper," which was the telegraphic traffic, and part of my responsibility was to stay in close touch with a certain number of bureaus and the most important of those were the European Bureau and particularly the Political-Military bureau which was then run by Les Gelb. I think George Vest must have been the assistant secretary of EUR. And I did have good contacts with Frank Wisner, who was at that time the deputy executive secretary; Peter Tarnoff was the executive secretary. And his two deputies divided the world between them.

Q: Yes, I'm, right now I'm, just last Friday I'm interviewing Marisa Leno.

EVANS: Yes.

Q: She was a very junior officer in that organization, I think about that time.

EVANS: That's probably right.

Q: Well now, what- When you say "slow paper," you know, one is always used to the idea that if you want, you know, if you want toilet paper or anything you send a telegram. But what's a slow paper?

EVANS: The idea was these were products of the brain trust in the State Department, everyone who had something to contribute to a decision or an analysis. We called it "slow paper" simply because it was moving pretty slowly in those days. It wasn't like today; these were memos that were typed, that were retyped and reviewed and our job was to make sure that by the time they reached the decision-makers they were in the best possible shape, that no bureau had been omitted that should have been consulted, that no logical inconsistencies existed or false choices or simply mistakes.

Q: Well when you say "false choices," I mean there's this story that goes around that most State Department papers, I can give you three choices; one, declare war, two, surrender or three, do whatever the person who writes the paper wants.

EVANS: There's no question but that that calculation was operative, that there were attempts to steer the decision, but I certainly remember there being more than three choices in many cases and some of the options quite complex. Another bit of received wisdom is that the choices are always between bad and worse. There are no easy choices in this business. And I think that's true and it's hard, sometimes, to communicate that to the great American public which doesn't always see things with all the nuances.

Q: Well how would you see, you know, you say "false choices." I mean, you're not the expert in this and the people who write the memo supposedly are but I mean, are you sort of looking at it as the outside observer or what?

EVANS: Certainly it would not be appropriate for a staffer on the secretariat to question the essence of one of these memos absent a mistake that has crept in, something that just doesn't make sense, that doesn't add up. So we weren't simply proofreading these memos, we were thinking them through and trying to imagine how Secretary Vance, ultimately in most cases, would react to the memo. If there was something that just didn't make sense or needed clarification then we would go back to the bureau and ask them to clear up those misunderstandings.

Q: One of the things about working in the secretariat, you understand who does what to whom in the system, which I don't think most Foreign Service officers get a good feel for.

EVANS: Well, they get a feel for it when they feel the lash, because one of the other purposes of the secretariat was to make sure that memos arrived on time, cleared as they ought to be, so the decisions were not unduly postponed or delayed, and I remember one of the things we did was to task the memos, to try to describe what was desired by the seventh floor and then to track its progress and then make sure that it showed up on the principal's desk when it was promised, and sometimes this meant the late afternoon saw a lot of calls to staff assistants and sometimes office directors, dunning them for these memos.

Q: Of course there's a lot of footwork in this, wasn't there? I mean for getting- not necessarily for you but somebody had to really hand carry these things around.

EVANS: Well, to a certain extent that's right. There was a network of staff assistants who all knew each other and it was important to stay in touch with those people, and I also attended daily staff meetings. I remember very clearly, particularly political-military affairs where Les Gelb was charge and I had a good feel for what the bureau was producing and also tried to convey to them what was needed. I also sat in, oh, that was a later time when I sat in on the Secretary's staff meetings. But we got a briefing after the Secretary's staff meeting from either Tarnoff or Wisner so that we had some sense of what the principals were working on and could convey that to people who needed to know.

Q: Well did you run across sort of, I almost call it a phenomenon of Pat Derian and the Human Rights Bureau? I mean, I've interviewed her and she said she discovered the- was unfamiliar with the State Department or bureaucracy but she discovered the Clearance Procedure and found that she had sort of inserted herself and said I want to clear these things and everybody was afraid to- not to cross her because they thought she had a line right to the President.

EVANS: Of course her other connection was with Hodding Carter, the spokesman of the Department, and they were very well connected, both of them. I think the Human Rights Bureau at that stage was still quite new...

Q: Oh it was brand, almost brand new.

EVANS: Almost brand new. She was the first one to head it, if I'm not mistaken, and there was great reluctance and trepidation on the part, particularly of the regional bureaus, to let the Human Rights Bureau in on their dealings with, particularly with certain countries where defense sales and human rights issues seemed to collide.

Q: I was on the country team in Seoul, Korea, during this period of time and we were very nervous. We had a rather significant armed force to the north of us, 35 miles to the north and we didn't like people messing around with anything other than let's keep these people- our people strong.

EVANS: The regional bureaus have always been, I think, the most assertive, and it's been harder for the functional bureaus to find out what the regionals are doing. The regionals are very solicitous of their clients overseas, quite naturally, whereas the functional bureaus, particularly human rights, see things from a very different perspective.

Were you there when Park Chung Hee died?

Q: No, I had just left.

EVANS: You'd just left. Because I remember attending his funeral with the Vance delegation; Cyrus Vance went as the President's representative to that.

Q: Well I mean, did you get into things such as- political-military, sometimes there's, you know, do we sell boots to Argentina when they're being nasty to their people or something like that, military boots or that sort of thing?

EVANS: Certainly the political-military office was dealing with a very wide range of issues all around the world and many of them had to do with licensing, with training and all the programs that the U.S. Military, the defense establishment, runs. But one of the other big issues at that time was the SALT treaty...

Q: Strategic-

EVANS: Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty. That was an issue that was very high on the Administration's list and Les Gelb was deeply involved in that as were others and there were special negotiators and so on. I think the best treatment I've read is probably Cyrus Vance's own book, "Hard Choices," in which he details what he and Gromyko were doing in addition to what was happening at the negotiating table.

Q: Did you find yourself getting betwixt and between bureaus or, you know, getting sort of enmeshed in a bureaucratic struggle or anything like that at all?

EVANS: There were some cases of that sort but I must say that the greater pressure was that we felt between the seventh floor and the rest of the building; we were sort of the crunch point between them. The principals, and particularly Peter Tarnoff, were whipping us to whip others to get the papers...

Q: Peter Tarnoff was the head of policy planning at the time, wasn't he?

EVANS: No, he was the Executive Secretary.

Q: Executive secretary.

EVANS: Yes. So that's where the pressure was coming from. We were a transmission belt for the pressure from above.

Q: How long were you doing this?

EVANS: I worked slightly over a year on the Secretariat staff and then I was plucked up by Tarnoff and Wisner to work in Vance's personal/ immediate office as one of his two staff aides under Arnie Raphel, who, I guess it was when Raphel took over as the main assistant to Vance, chief of staff to Vance, that he brought me and Richard Baltimore in as staff aides.

Q: So you did work for Vance for how long?

EVANS: It would have been for slightly over a year because Vance resigned in April of 1980 after the abortive attempt to rescue the hostages in Iran.

Q: So this is 1979 to '80.

EVANS: Seventy-nine to April '80.

Q: Okay. Well let's, first place, could you talk a bit about your impression of Cyrus Vance as a person and how he operated?

EVANS: Yes, indeed. I went into that office with great high hopes. I had great respect for Vance, for his intellect, for his previous accomplishments. He had gone to Yale, which gave me a sense of confidence, since I had gone to Yale myself.

Q: He was, by the way, a Kent graduate.

EVANS: That's true.

Q: Which is my school.

EVANS: These things sometimes matter and I had every good feeling about going to work for Cyrus Vance and for Arnie Raphel whom I had known in Iran. He had been in and out of Iran. And I thought it was a good operation, generally, but unfortunately over those years two things dragged Vance down. One was the worsening climate with the Soviet Union culminating in the invasion of Afghanistan.

Q: This is December-

EVANS: Of '79.

Q: -of '79.

EVANS: And that really brought to an end the dï¿½tente process. The arms control treaty had by that time been signed but President Carter pulled it back from ratification. And Vance had worked very hard with Dobrynin and Gromyko to try to improve relations with the Soviet Union. This was a great blow to him.

The other thing, of course, was the Iranian revolution and the taking of hostages which we talked a little bit about last time and that became the really awful reality of the late Carter years and I think contributed a great deal to the defeat of President Carter in the 1980 election.

Q: Well how was Vance to work for?

EVANS: Cyrus Vance was used to working in Wall Street firms - I'm trying to remember the name of the firm he worked for - but he was not comfortable as a public person. He didn't like going up to the Hill and testifying, he didn't like appearing on television talk shows and making big speeches. He was more used to law offices, that kind of atmosphere, not necessarily backroom, but private dealings. He was a quintessential Wall Street lawyer. He was a fine man, he was a decent man, he was a fair man. I came to regret that he had no sense of humor, at least in my sense; it may have been so wry that I missed it.

One of the things I did for him was to draft a great deal of correspondence and short statements and what I found was that even when I introduced just a tiny bit of humor or levity it would always come back scratched out. That was not the case with Edmund Muskie, who took over from Cyrus Vance. He had a great sense of humor. So he (Vance) was a little bit dry.

Q: Plus he also figured- I mean, plus he was a political figure.

EVANS: Yes.

Q: I mean, this lack of humor, Warren Christopher had the same problem.

EVANS: Well, it's interesting you mention that because both of them, Christopher and Vance, suffered from this. I don't think they had stage fright exactly but they were unaccustomed to the limelight. And at one point the Department brought in Dorothy Sarnoff, a speech coach, really, she was from the family of David Sarnoff, who founded, I think, NBC.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: And a very good analyst of what makes an effective speaker. And since I was doing some writing for Vance I was categorized as a speechwriter, along with several of the people from Policy Planning, and we were all brought together and given some training ourselves so that we had a sense of the challenge that Christopher and Vance faced in going behind a microphone or going on television, seeing themselves on TV, and we got a bit of training in how to write for the ear rather than for the eye, because this is one of the mistakes that so many speechwriters make, they write in a way that is easy for the eye but doesn't work for the ear. And Dorothy Sarnoff also gave, I think, some very good advice to both Christopher and Vance in private meetings and it has to be said that both of them became much better and much more at ease with their public appearances after that.

Q: Did you have a chance at some point, not in the- not with Vance but with Dorothy Sarnoff to say you know, he really doesn't like humor or something like that? I mean, were you able- Because you know, a little levity goes a long way in public presentations.

EVANS: Well, Dorothy Sarnoff definitely was of that opinion and we have seen with an earlier secretary, Henry Kissinger, who had quite a wit and constantly had the press in stitches. It was very effective. Vance was just very different. He was not given to joking, he was a very serious man and he was not warm in any sense.

Q: Yes. I mean, one forgets that for public figures, I mean they're really, I mean the intellect and the knowledge is a wonderful thing but there's also how to present it, and if you don't have that you're not as effective as somebody who does.

EVANS: I think that's true and I believe it was George Kennan who once wrote that he thought lawyers were not the right people to be involved in diplomacy because lawyers have a professional bias to looking at the specific meanings of words and various terminology and maybe miss the larger picture. And so Kennan's view was that one needs a very broad grounding and to avoid the lawyers.

Now, Acheson was of a different opinion.

Q: Yes. Well one can see these- Well, I mean, on this, what sort of, what issues were you, did you find, what were you doing?

EVANS: Well, I of course was a lowly staff aide; actually, it wasn't so lowly because I had a nice office right outside the Secretary's own office and at that time I sat in on his staff meetings so that I could keep abreast of what was going on. But I dealt with any issue I was asked to and was not considered a substantive expert. It's true that during the Iranian revolution, I think I may have mentioned, I was put on the Iran Working Group during hours when I could be spared and spent a lot of time in the operations center on the telephone with our embassy in Tehran, keeping tabs on events as they were reported. But Iran was the only issue on which I was really selected for my knowledge of a subject. I carried out for some months a correspondence with Mrs. Vance's cousin, William Sloane Coffin, who was a well known...

Q: Yale-

EVANS: ... chaplain I had known slightly at Yale. He had written to Vance repeatedly about some of his human rights concerns and I would draft letters for Vance to sign going back to Sloane Coffin, basically saying that "we welcome your views but you're wrong."

Q: Sloane- he was a figure in the Doonesbury cartoons.

EVANS: Yes, of course he was, because Gary Trudeau was my classmate at Yale and he's the only one of us who's been truly successful in life.

Q: Did- How- When did you arrive in that office?

EVANS: I would have to check this.

Q: Well it was before or after the takeover in Tehran.

EVANS: It was before the takeover of the embassy. It was between that event in February-

Q: That was February 14.

EVANS: February 14.

Q: Seventy-nine.

EVANS: Right, of '79, and the November takeover in the embassy so it was probably June when a lot of people move.

Q: Well how did the- how would you put the atmosphere, from your perspective, because you'd been there, you know, I mean, this was on your turf. We all feel rather possessive of places we've been. How did you feel about this and what was sort of the developing reaction that you were getting from your colleagues and from seeing the secretary of state, the whole government operation?

EVANS: First of all, there was growing alarm as developments occurred. There was great alarm in February with the first outbreak of this violence, then it seemed to calm down but each development just seemed worse and worse and worse. If I remember correctly, we heard about the Tehran Embassy takeover as we were flying back from Park Chung Hee's funeral. We were somewhere between Alaska and the mainland, and Vance did ask me a couple of times what I thought of various things and I answered as best I could. We had reinforced the embassy with some experts like Stan Escudero but then when the takeover happened this was a disaster of the greatest magnitude and it meant constant crisis. We had a crisis group - the Iran hostage task force, I think it was called - and that went on for, I think, the whole time.

Q: Four hundred and forty-four days.

EVANS: 444 days. And of course Vance was very upset about that and worried about the hostages. But he wanted to do things as much as possible in a considered legal way.

Now, I should mention that in this period there was a growing rift between Cyrus Vance and Zbigniew Brzezinski, who was the national security advisor. Despite the fact that every Thursday there were three-way lunches of Vance, Brzezinski and Brown, Harold Brown, the defense secretary, which were meant to be coordinating sessions, but as things moved on we discovered that Brzezinski was very much using his proximity to the President to elbow Vance aside and it came to a terrible crisis in April of 1980 when Vance was out of town, as I remember, I think he was on a speaking trip to Florida, and a decision was made about the attempt to rescue the hostages using helicopters in the Iranian desert. Vance was opposed to this and when he came back and discovered what had happened - of course the operation went terribly wrong, with deaths and two helicopters, two of them, crashing into each other - Vance then went into a terrible, terrible slump. He was troubled by gout and at that time walking with a cane and I remember distinctly that he requested a meeting with the President and the President kept him waiting for a week.

Q: Good God, the secretary of state.

EVANS: That's right.

Q: Did the president know what this was-?

EVANS: I'm sure the President had every idea what this was about but it was a signal to Vance that if he couldn't get a meeting immediately with the President his days as Secretary of State or his authority as Secretary of State was compromised and he had to leave.

Q: Well was there the feeling that, I'm using the wrong term, but Brzezinski was sort of the evil force or something? I mean, you know, I mean a bureaucracy, the people down below begin to see things in fairly stark terms sometimes.

EVANS: I think the terms people were using were that Vance is too much of a "gentleman" and Brzezinski is more of a "street fighter." And they felt that...of course, Kissinger himself had once said that "nothing pinques like propinquity."

Q: Yes.

EVANS: And Brzezinski was right there in the West Wing and he was no gentleman in this respect, although he is a brilliant analyst.

Q: Yes. Well, did you ever hear any ideas, I mean, one of the things that was said at the time and later, that, I mean, if you're dealing with people who are children of the souq, you don't keep standing there and haggling, you walk away at a certain point and then come back, because the president was considered captive to the Rose Garden, he wouldn't- he wasn't getting out and doing things and all this. Was this sort of a-?

EVANS: Well, President Carter trod new ground in a number of ways. First of all, it was a tremendous milestone in American diplomacy when he wrote a letter to the Soviet dissident, Sakharov, Andrei Sakharov, considered to be the father of the Soviet hydrogen bomb, in his exile in Gorky. That was a clear statement that we were going to be involved in human rights matters. And it was on a visit to Tehran, must have been, I have to be careful about the timing, it must have been in late 1978, if I'm not mistaken, the president was in Tehran and he made remarks that seemed to distance the United States to some degree from the shah's policies on human rights grounds, and this was seen ultimately as having undermined our strategy there.

Q: Did you see at your level any war of memos between the National Security Council and the State Department?

EVANS: I think in those days it was conducted more in meetings at the White House and we did not witness that. We saw that Vance was depressed by the way things were going, we heard little comments and one of the things that Vance did every day was to send a so-called "night note" to the president, which sometimes wouldn't be ready until 9:00 p.m., and I remember there were occasions when I forged Vance's initials on the memo because he had gone home while it was being typed. This was Vance's main regular channel for getting issues to the President without anyone interfering. Those memos went directly to President Carter.

Q: But there wasn't a constant state of phone calls and visits, dropping by the White House as there had been with other secretaries of state?

EVANS: Vance was frequently at the White House. There were so many difficult issues in those days, whether it was the Soviets in Afghanistan or the Iran problem, there were many, many high level meetings of the National Security Council and Vance did go to those. I'm not sure that in the later days he had as much access - well, clearly he didn't - he was having trouble with access to the President.

Q: Yes. What about with the Soviets going into Afghanistan, we got- we reacted very strongly to this; what was sort of, again, the feeling or the reaction around? Was this a concern of this is a new, you know, a really enforcing of the Brezhnev doctrine, that no communist state will become non-communist although hell knows what the Afghan government was at that time, it was a revolting communist state or something.

EVANS: Well, there were so many coups and counter-coups in Afghanistan that I've a little bit lost track of them, but you may remember that our ambassador Adolph "Spike" Dubs was assassinated. That would have been, I think, in 1978 and that was in the course of one of these coups.

I should also mention the figure of Marshall Shulman. Marshall Shulman was brought in as a special advisor to Vance on Soviet affairs. Marshall had been teaching at Columbia for years; he was a soft spoken, fine scholar with good Russian and good contacts and I must say a very benign view of the USSR on the spectrum of American opinion. That is, he had a rather less negative view of the Soviet Union. He was all in favor of dï¿½tente and he, in his soft spoken way, tried to persuade Vance, and I think successfully, that we could deal with the Soviets, and we did. After all, Carter and Brezhnev in Vienna in '78, it must have been in the spring or summer of '78, signed the SALT agreement, and there was the famous kiss between Carter and Brezhnev that was flashed around the world and didn't go down well in many quarters, but that's a Russian tradition and Russians kiss each other, but it looked soft, it looked weak, it looked wrong to the American public. But the invasion of Afghanistan in December of '79 was taken by Vance and Shulman, I think, as a double-cross by the Soviets.

I remember that the first indications of troop massing were coming to us, Soviet troops massing on the northern border, must have been in the middle of December and our intelligence people were very worried, but just on Christmas Eve Ambassador Dobrynin made an appointment with Vance. It had been my job in those days to meet Dobrynin who was coming in through the State Department basement under a special proviso that Henry Kissinger had worked out, and he brought Vance a beautiful Christmas present of a vodka decanter and little glasses to go with it, made of crystal. Now, Vance had vacation plans that Christmas that coincided, dovetailed, beautifully with mine. Because of his friendship with the Rockefeller family he was invited to spend the Christmas holiday in Williamsburg, Virginia, my home town, and to stay in the Rockefeller estate there, which is very... it's an 18th century house close to town. And I remember going to Bruton Parish Church for Christmas morning services and Vance, Cyrus Vance and Gay Vance, his wife, were there but during that day we learned that the Soviets had invaded Afghanistan and Vance had to cut short his vacation and I did too. We rushed back to Washington to deal with the fallout, which included intensive consultations on how to respond. In the end we responded by barring exports of oil and gas drilling equipment; there were some trade sanctions and we boycotted the Moscow Olympics.

Q: Olympics.

EVANS: One of the most unpleasant tasks that Vance took upon himself was to go to Lake Placid to meet with the International Olympic Committee and convey the American decision not to participate in the Moscow Olympics. I went with him on that trip and it went over like a lead balloon.

Q: You know, looking back on it, I mean, certainly the Olympics because then the Soviets didn't go to the next one and all and it- Once you get into that game-

Well I mean, did you, were you privy to any cogitation about what the hell were the Soviets about? Because, you know, for many it looks like a gerontocracy at the Politburo at that time; Brezhnev was seeming to be coming increasingly out of focus or something, you know, I mean, this didn't make much sense.

EVANS: Well, from the point of view of the old men, as you correctly put it, in the Politburo, when things got to the point they did in Afghanistan they felt in their bones that they had to respond to it, and what they were up against was the prospect of a fundamentalist Islamic state bordering on Central Asia where they had their own restive Muslim populations. And they simply felt they had to do something.

Now, it seems in retrospect that we were more involved in some of this than it seemed at the time, or at least than I knew at the time, and in particular Zbigniew Brzezinski went on record with the French newspaper "Libï¿½ration" in about 1998 basically boasting that the United States trapped the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, set a trap for the Soviet Union and created a situation in which they would move in and then bleed themselves to death. Now, whether this is... I don't know to what extent we really triggered their response but it does... certainly Zbig Brzezinski believes that this was how we brought communism to its knees.

Q: Well, knowing how the U.S. Government works, the idea that we could plan ahead and do something like that seems to be a little bit out of this world.

EVANS: Whether we caused it to happen or simply took credit for it happening, I'm not sure, but after it happened there's no doubt about what ensued and that is that we started arming the mujaheddin who were fighting the Soviets and we went as far as to provide Stinger shoulder-held anti-aircraft missiles.

Q: Yes. As we're talking today, where have we evolved in Afghanistan? You know, you think about that barren piece of territory-

EVANS: Which has never been conquered by any outsider.

Q: Yes. Well, did you- How did you find Vance's authority in the Department? Were there any bureaus that were more difficult to deal with or-?

EVANS: Vance of course mainly dealt with the principals. There was one very difficult individual who I had to cross swords with on occasion and that was Richard Holbrooke, who was then heading the Far East Bureau. He was a raging bull, always barging into Vance's office and saying "Cy, you've got to read this." And I remember on one occasion at the United Nations when we were at the General Assembly Secretary Vance had an important meeting with a European coming up in a matter of minutes and Holbrooke tried to barge in and I literally put my hand across the door and said "Dick, the Secretary needs the next 10 minutes to get himself briefed" on the meeting with whoever it was. Holbrooke just burst through and monopolized Vance's next 10 minutes so that he didn't have a chance to brief himself and later, because Tarnoff was a good friend of Holbrooke's, I caught hell for interfering.

But there was another personality who should be mentioned; David Newsom, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, a very wise, seasoned diplomat. I remember when he conducted meetings on various subjects he invariably started by saying "let's hear what the facts are, let's start from the facts." There would either be an intelligence briefing at that point or the relevant bureaus would state what the situation was and then we would proceed in very orderly fashion from then. And that was also Vance's way of proceeding, and Christopher's, to his credit.

Q: Well there was a book that came out around that time called "Thinking in Time," with Neustadt and I can't think who else from Harvard, in which they talked about put the facts first and then get off- I mean, it was- it makes very good sense.

EVANS: It was a non-ideological approach and I must say I think the Department respected all of those men very much for that style of operating but it wasn't going down well at the White House. It was seen as too, perhaps, too cautious, and it wasn't understood fully by the public.

Q: Did you get any feeling, were people talking about Brzezinski trying to out-Kissinger Kissinger, you know, as the head of the National Security Council, because we had two very powerful people who were intellectuals who were allowed to play in the government sandbox or something like that.

EVANS: I think there were such comments being made, and of course Brzezinski and Kissinger have sparred many times over various issues but one can also recall that after their government service they both landed at CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies) and were members of the same groups there and had a very collegial relationship.

Q: How would you- Did you get any feel for Vance and dealing with, particularly the Senate but Congress?

EVANS: Yes. I think he hated testifying before Congress. He hated the position that it put him in, being on the other side of the table, being interrogated by people who, although he never showed arrogance, I think he felt that some of these people were not his intellectual equals, did not understand the issues as well as he did, and of course they had all the power and the weight in those settings. He fretted greatly about his appearances and spent an inordinate amount of time preparing for them. I think if one looks at the transcripts of his appearances they were very good. He was very persuasive in his exposition of our policies.

Q: Well of course in those hearings an awful lot of the hearings are political theater.

EVANS: Theater.

Q: And there's posturing and all that but often there's- that's theater and then there's the behind the scenes where you sit down with each with a scotch and talk to somebody. Was there any of that?

EVANS: I think there was some of that, not a tremendous amount but definitely some late in the day meetings and that sort of thing.

Q: Did you get any feel for the input of embassies on issues?

EVANS: Yes. Vance was a voracious reader and one of the things that Richard Baltimore and I on a rotating schedule did was to come into the State Department at 6:00 in the morning, just before Vance who was there by 6:20 or 6:30 most days, in preparation for a 7:00 phone call with the President, which was, I believe, usually a conference call. And we would put on his desk as many as perhaps 20 telegrams from the key posts around the world, whether it was Moscow, Delhi, Cairo, Tel Aviv and so on, and particularly the NODIS traffic.

Q: "NODIS" being no distribution other than to the person to whom it's addressed.

EVANS: Exactly, very closely held by the Secretary. And we did our best to highlight important parts of it but Vance was such a good reader that he hardly needed that. But he did read those things and sometimes took the telegrams to meetings.

Q: Do you have any feel for the input of the CIA at his level?

EVANS: One of the things that was on his desk every morning, of course, was the daily, what was then called the "National Intelligence Daily," the NID, and INR's product as well. We did not, as I remember, handle the President's daily brief; that was briefed by a CIA person to the Secretary individually. But certainly there was intelligence input and it followed the big policy issues, that is, there was a great deal on the Soviet Union, including the Afghanistan war and on Iran and the Middle East generally.

Q: Did Africa or South America play much of a role?

EVANS: Well, there was one big thing going on at that time and that was the negotiation of the Panama Canal treaty and so Vance was very much involved in that and writes about it in his book. I'm trying to remember if there were any particular African issues; there probably were, for example the transition in Rhodesia, but I wasn't particularly involved in that.

Q: Then how did the resignation of Vance hit you and your colleagues?

EVANS: It was a very sad thing because we personally all liked Vance very much and respected him. We saw that he had been put in a very disadvantageous position, partly though the efforts of Brzezinski, partly because as a gentleman he was not willing to resort to the kinds of maneuvers that others were. But there was, I think, a sense he had failed at the most important job of a secretary of state which is to stay close to the President. And when that relationship deteriorated it spelled the end of his effectiveness.

Q: Did you get any feel, I mean this would be in retrospect, but about that Carter and Vance really didn't fit well together? I mean, were they- or not?

EVANS: I seem to recall that Carter announced the appointment of Vance in a very positive way and there was every reason to believe that these two people, despite their disparate backgrounds, would cooperate extremely well.

Q: One would think so. I mean, they both seemed to have, you might say, both a liberal and an outgoing; you know, let's make this work and let's not be confrontational.

EVANS: Yes. I think they started off very much in step and they did make progress on dï¿½tente with the Soviet Union, they did make progress in the Middle East with Camp David but then these other things that came up just, as Vance put it himself, caused them to face very hard choices.

Q: Well now did the Soviets make any effort to explain or to smooth over the Afghan adventure?

EVANS: I seem to recall that they did give explanations, they talked about it being temporary, they talked about stability. By that time, of course, next door in Iran things were in a shambles and that was part of the calculation as well. But the American public in particular was not buying it.

Q: Well I mean, you know, there were big arrows pointing through Afghanistan into Iran, heading for the Persian Gulf and oil there in the newspapers and magazines.

EVANS: Well that's right, although-

Q: Red arrows, I might add.

EVANS: Big red arrows. Of course, if anyone had taken the time to examine that terrain they would have ceased to worry so much about this alleged quest for a warm water port, because there's no place in Baluchistan that would serve. But there was this vestigial fear of Soviet pressure, going back to the days of Truman, and I think that played into our reaction.

Q: Yes. Did- How about- Did you have any Iranian connections, friends or people or even the Iranian specialists in the State Department during the takeover?

EVANS: I did but it brings to mind another thing that was happening at that time that I ought to mention, and that was the sad spectacle of the shah of Iran chased out of his own country, suffering from terminal cancer and looking for a place to be treated. As I recall he was admitted briefly to the United States and there was a terrible reaction in Iran...or was it that we feared there would be... in any case, he was barred and went to Panama.

Q: Yes, he was in Egypt first.

EVANS: He was in Egypt.

Q: And then he went to Panama.

EVANS: He went to Panama, he died, but he ended up being buried, if I'm not mistaken, in Egypt. But David Rockefeller, being very close over the years to the shah and his family, was working very closely with Vance to try to find a place for the shah to get treated and have some relief from this cancer that was afflicting him.

Q: Well as all of this is going on, did you- were there outside groups of either Republicans or interest groups or something that were sort of going after Vance? I mean-

EVANS: There were conservative columnists and, well, they were attacking the Carter Administration in general. It wasn't so much Vance in particular who was feeling their ire but it was the Carter Administration itself. I mean, there was the speech that President Carter made in which he never really said "malaise."

Q: I know but-

EVANS: ...but everybody thinks he did.

Q: I thought he said it.

EVANS: One amusing but really sad thing from that period was that the president actually sent a handwritten note to Cyrus Vance saying "Cy, please verify that the thermostats at State have all been turned down" to whatever the number was, way colder than it should have been, and we had no hot water in those days by presidential fiat. And you can imagine, you're working with telegrams and ink and papers and typewriter ribbons in those days and you go into the men's room and you can't wash your hands with hot water. It was the most penny-wise, pound-foolish approach to conservation you could imagine.

Q: Well you know, I go back to a different era when I remember when Eisenhower came into the presidency and he noticed that the venetian blinds were different levels in the State Department and said something that they all should be at the same level. Such is the power of the presidency.

EVANS: And of course it was widely known that President Carter also had gotten involved in scheduling the White House tennis courts.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: So the administration was under great pressure. I mean, Ronald Reagan was giving his radio commentaries and others.

Q: What about the wives and families of the hostages? I mean, this, always when you have something like this and you had, how many, there were about 50, weren't there?

EVANS: Fifty-two I think.

Q: Fifty-two. I mean, you know, this is- these were a pretty potent group that was-

EVANS: Well they were part of our family and I mean, we knew so many of them. I knew a number of the people who were being held hostage and there were terrible imaginings about what they might go through. There was fear that they might be executed.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: And indeed there was an organization formed by the families of the hostages and they regularly came in to the State Department to be briefed on developments and what our approach was. Warren Christopher was leading the attempt to negotiate their release and I think, if I'm not mistaken, he was using the Algerians as a...

Q: I mean, the Algerians turned out to be sort of the key group.

EVANS: The mediators in that.

There was also another event that I should mention from that time which was the fact that some of the hostages, unbeknownst to the Iranians, had gone to the house of Canadian Ambassador Taylor and were being hidden by Taylor in his residence. There were fewer than ten, I believe. The fear was if they were discovered not only would they be in jeopardy but the Canadian ambassador might be in for some trouble.

Now, this story at some point in 1980 was discovered by a little newspaper in Quebec but the "New York Times," ever vigilant, had picked up the story and was about to run it and the State Department learned of this. Probably "The Times" had called to ask about it, and I remember that Vance called Sulzberger at "The Times" and prevailed upon him not to run the story and then Ambassador Taylor contrived to get the Americans out. He somehow got them out of Iran.

Q: He gave them actually French diplomatic passports.

EVANS: French or Canadian?

Q: I mean Canadian diplomatic passports.

EVANS: Yes. And they somehow got out.

Q: It was kept quiet until after everything was-

EVANS: And when they had reached safety, I remember there was a huge outpouring of sympathy or thanks, gratitude, to the Canadians. Opposite the Canadian Embassy on Massachusetts Avenue a big banner appeared saying "Thank you, Canada!" But I happen to know from my wife, who was in the Canadian Foreign Service, that Ambassador Taylor was not universally applauded in Canada and the Canadian Foreign Service for this; they felt that he had unwisely endangered Canadian interests on behalf of the Americans.

Q: Did you have the feeling that the hostage thing sort of tied everything up? I mean, was this, you know, were we so involved in this one horrible incident but at the same time, you know, we had other- we're a mighty power and we had other things to do?

EVANS: Yes, you're absolutely right. This issue moved front and center, not only for the State Department but for the entire foreign policy apparatus and it was front and center in the news, the television news in particular, and there were added insults that kept coming. And I seem to remember that about that time also the Russians had used quick and deadly force in Lebanon to prevent some of their people from being taken hostage and that was seen as an unfortunate commentary on our apparent weakness in the face of this affront.

Q: Yes, it-

EVANS: And it was an election year.

Q: You, I take it, worked with new Secretary of State Muskie?

EVANS: Yes. What happened was that when Vance walked off the job, resigned, in April, there was not much left to the Carter presidency; there was only slightly more than six months and Edmund Muskie volunteered to leave the Senate and come and run the State Department. I must say we found him to be most engaging, very knowledgeable. He came with his own staff so that was something to adjust to. But we had the feeling that if there had been another Carter term and Muskie had remained he could have emerged as a very successful secretary of state because he was strong in precisely those areas where Vance was not. He had... he loved the Senate, he knew everybody on the Hill, he had a politician's charm and again, the humor was helpful, and he was so good on television. He could talk about issues. He wasn't as precise, he...there was a little bit of a lazy streak.

Q: Somebody I've interviewed who was on the staff as saying he sort of kept Senate hours.

EVANS: That's right.

Q: I mean, rather than being in at 7:00.

EVANS: Yes, that's right, and he didn't burn the midnight oil the way Vance sometimes did. Vance on occasion would stay until 10:00 or 11:00.

Q: You know, sometimes this is a mistake. I mean, the long hours means more work.

EVANS: Well, in general I think that principle holds, but when there is a burning issue that's facing you, staring you right in the eye, you sometimes feel you have to violate it. But I remember the bureaus worked very late hours also and Assistant Secretary Gelb was sometimes there until 9:00 or 10:00.

Q: Well what was this doing- Were you married at the time?

EVANS: No, I was a bachelor and I wouldn't have had much of a marriage.

Q: I was going to say, I mean, this work as staff assistant to, particularly the secretary and operations center can raise real hell with a marriage.

EVANS: Well the only thing worse is the NSC.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: But it also, I remember, very hard on Arnie Raphel, the late Arnie Raphel. His marriage dissolved...

Q: I've interviewed two- his two wives.

EVANS: There was a third, I think.

Q: Was there a third? Okay, well I missed one.

EVANS: No, it was difficult but I was fortunate to live just up on Q Street and I shot down to the State Department and had my own parking place so it was not so bad. But it was a 12 hour day.

Q: Yes.

Well then, the election came; how did that hit you all? I mean, Ronald Reagan was sort of a- he was considered way out in right field at the time and, you know, sort of a complete repudiation of Carter and how he stood. What was the feeling on you all?

EVANS: Well, I can't speak for others, really, but I myself was by that time very disenchanted with the Carter approach. Although I had sympathized very much with Cyrus Vance I think we had come to such a pass that it was time for a change. And I had also characterized Reagan as being of the right wing fringe. But I voted for Reagan in that election, partly on the basis of what I had seen on the inside of the Carter Administration which I thought was not good for our country.

Q: Yes, there was something about the Carter- You know, we talked about the so-called malaise speech in which he didn't say it, but you had to wonder gee, I mean, this isn't somebody- it's really running- I mean, he's not a good person to be in control of the government.

EVANS: Well, you may recall at that time there was a lot of discussion; there was criticism of Carter for being an engineer. He had worked in the nuclear submarine program in the Navy and people were saying that he thought like an engineer. Now, I think that's an affront to engineers worldwide who do wonderful things but there was a sense that he was miscast and there was also a sense that some of the people around him, Hamilton Jordan and others who came from Georgia, were not really quite ready for prime time in Washington. And that, by the way, was the sense that my wife reports from the diplomatic crowd here, including the Canadians. They were quite appalled by some of the antics. There was also President Carter's brother, Billy Carter...

Q: Yes. Who was too close to Libya for one thing.

EVANS: Too close to Libya, involved in beer promotion and I don't know what else. And of course the Panama Canal was also a cause cï¿½lï¿½bre of the conservatives. They thought we were giving away "our canal" and that became quite a fight also.

Q: Well what about - this wasn't in your particular bailiwick - but what about Camp David? Did you get any feel for Camp David?

EVANS: Well, it was during my time in the secretariat that I was involved in advancing President Carter's trip to the Middle East, which in the end produced the Camp David agreement. And this provided for me the most vivid memory of my entire career, I think. I may have mentioned that I almost went to Tehran to replace Mike Metrinko but that was called off because Mike decided to stay and I had stayed home one day to do my taxes, I got a call from the secretariat saying pack your bag, you're going to Jerusalem. And indeed by 6:00 that evening I was at Andrews and on the Secretary's plane for - well actually, it was an advance plane, it was not the Secretary's - the Secretary was coming with the President later. But we advanced Cairo and Jerusalem. The first stop was to be Cairo and then Jerusalem so I had the great good fortune of getting to Jerusalem about five days ahead of President Carter and Secretary Vance and was able to explore the West Bank and the Allenby Bridge and the city of Jerusalem.

My memory is of the last day of the talks, which was a Sunday if I'm not mistaken, and we were working through the night to be ready for a 9:00 departure. We were on the top floor of the King David Hotel, the secretariat operation. And I remember at about 6:00 in the morning the phone rang and on the phone was Moshe Dayan and he said "this is Moshe Dayan, get me Cy." And so we woke Secretary Vance, he came padding out in his bathrobe, took the call and apparently the Knesset had been in session all night long. The sun was rising in the east over the Judean Desert, a big orange fireball reflected in the Dead Sea, which we could see from the seventh floor of the King David Hotel. Moshe Dayan had just called and told Mr. Vance, "don't let President Carter leave; we think we have an agreement." And indeed we delayed President Carter's departure, I think he stayed until early afternoon, and the deal was basically done and a week later you had the famous photograph of Carter, Begin and Sadat on the White House lawn with that famous handshake.

Q: Yes. You know, when you think about Carter he really did several- he took some- several difficult things. One, he got that damn Panama Canal off our backs, which had been a real albatross for a long time. He did the Camp David Accords, which helped immensely and at least it kept Egypt out of the war there. And the China full recognition and all. So I mean, these were major accomplishments.

EVANS: And I think Vance thought so as well. They had worked very hard on these things and I also should mention the NATO dimension. NATO was in pretty good shape in those years. I mean, the Afghanistan war tended to push the allies together a bit.

Q: Yes and of course Ronald Reagan is given credit for it. We were really boosting our military prowess after the- again under Carter, after the, sort of the slump following Vietnam.

EVANS: That's right.

Q: Well then, where did you, finally after work at the top where did you go?

EVANS: Well you know the precedent for people who had worked directly for secretaries of state, like Jerry Bremer and David Gompert and others was that the Secretary would give them a little boost in their careers. But in our case, I mean me and Richard Baltimore, our Secretary had resigned so we had no one giving us any boost and I was rescued at the end of the summer by Sherrod McCall, who was deputy director of the Soviet desk, because he knew that I had been interested for a long time in affairs Russian and he offered me a job in the Moscow embassy starting in 1981. So I went into refresher Russian training and prepared for my assignment to Moscow the following year.

Q: So you were in- then you went to Moscow- you were there from when to when?

EVANS: From 1981 to '83. This was a time of great tension; it was probably the worst period of relations between Washington and Moscow. We had...it was against the background of the Afghan war, continuing tensions over freedom of immigration and it also was the time when Brezhnev died. Brezhnev died, his death was announced at 11:00 a.m. on November 11 of 1982 and so that began the period of many funerals, because he was succeeded by Andropov and then by Chernenko in rather quick succession; both of those men had existing health problems.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you arrived?

EVANS: When I arrived the embassy was in the care of ...

Q: Jim Collins?

EVANS: No, no. It was, oh, how can I possibly... Let's go-

Q: We'll keep moving on.

EVANS: Yes. I would have to check. Jack Matlock.

Q: Sure, sure.

EVANS: Then an ambassador was named and it was Arthur Hartman.

Q: Had the Lonetree incident happened before?

EVANS: No, that was after my time but by that time I had had an assignment at NATO and then was on the Soviet desk so it happened in one of those years.

Q: All right. Well in the first place, what was your job?

EVANS: Sherrod had asked me to go to Moscow to be the Africa watcher in the Moscow embassy. I had never served in Africa or even traveled to Africa if you don't count Egypt and so I took the African area studies course and learned what little I could. But immediately on arrival in Moscow I was told that no, it wouldn't be the Africa portfolio; instead I would be working on Eastern Europe, Soviet policy in Eastern Europe, which very prominently at that time included the difficulties that were starting in Poland. It was during the first weeks of my return to Washington that a Polish pope had been named to the Vatican and that and a number of other things had led to increasing unrest in Poland so I was very pleased to be assigned to work on Soviet policy there.

Q: Well let's first talk about, before we move to policy at the top, were you all- I've talked to people who served their time, would sit around TV and watch Brezhnev on TV and wonder, you know, could he, was he going to make it through a speech as he was reading them. I mean, he was really at the end of his rope, wasn't he?

EVANS: Yes. And he did sound very feeble. It was clear that he simply read whatever was put in front of his face. There was even a joke that he started reading a paper and he said "oh, oh, oh, oh, oh," and he was reading the Olympic symbol. But of course we did monitor the television very closely; it was an important medium for the Soviet leadership. We also did a great deal of textural analysis of "Pravda" and the other papers. We got out as much as we could to talk to Soviet citizens, although I have to say I was in the external political section and therefore most of my work was with other diplomatic colleagues. And our political counselor at the time was Ed Djerijian but Ed didn't stay very long and then, as I remember, Sherrod McCall replaced him. So we had a good team there and many, many difficult issues.

Q: Alright, well let's talk about your particular slice of the pie, Eastern Europe. You say- In that time Czechoslovakia was pretty- I mean-

EVANS: Crass.

Q: Crass, just plain cold, wasn't it. I mean, it just-

EVANS: Well it was still under this rather stolid leadership of Gustï¿½v Husï¿½k. Charter 77 was already rocking the boat to some extent but most of those dissidents had been either arrested or in some way neutralized, some of the air had gone out of- wind had gone out of their sails. But Poland was the key issue and just a month before I arrived there, in summer of '81, Jack Matlock, who was the chargï¿½, had tendered his analysis that the chances were 50/50 that the Soviet army might go into Poland. Now, as the crisis in Poland advanced there were members of the Politburo, in particular Suslov, who went to talk with the Poles and it seemed more and more evident to us that the Soviets were not actually going to attempt an invasion and it was then in December of 1981, I think December 10, that martial law was declared.

Q: Jaruzelski.

EVANS: Jaruzelski, the general, took charge. And that began a very difficult period for the Poles, first of all, and for our embassy there. I believe it was Ambassador Davies who was there...

Q: Richard Davies.

EVANS: ...through those years.

Q: Well was there a feeling of almost, on our side from the optic of Moscow, a certain amount of relief that the Poles had taken this martial law state because the alternative might have been a Soviet invasion and that would have been really awful?

EVANS: I don't think American officials ever gave voice to that view, although it may have been their private calculation. By this time we were in the Reagan Administration and Poland was used, I think sincerely, as a club to beat the Soviets. The Afghanistan war was still going on so we had yet another grievance against the Soviets, that they were using Jaruzelski and his hard line coterie to repress the Poles. So it was true there were many meetings at NATO in those days and consultations among Western governments as to how to react and there was a lot of verbal support given to the Poles.

Q: Well what was happening in Poland during this time?

EVANS: Well it started as a real workers' revolt and the revolt produced its leader when Lech Walesa jumped over a fence in Gdansk. But there were some secretive Polish organizations at work, KOS-KOR was one of them, and apparently the AFL-CIO also got involved by providing printing materials for some of the dissidents there. Poland was known to be one of the least Sovietized of the Eastern Bloc countries. The regime there was not as rigid; more things were allowed to be published. The Catholic Church, of course, was the only organized belief system outside the Communist Party and Poles were known for centuries as having been good Catholics and the Church was considered the Mother Church of Poland.

So this crisis went on and as it did so we had very interesting talks in Moscow with, in particular, Alexander Janowski of the Polish embassy who was designated to talk to Western diplomats about the situation in Poland. As we discovered, the Poles were building a new embassy in Moscow at the time and there was a little Solidarity cell among the Poles working on the embassy, as we found out.

Q: These were workers?

EVANS: These were workers. They didn't go so far as to unfurl a banner in front of the Russian authorities, Soviet authorities, but there were mixed feelings among many Poles, even in their diplomatic service.

Q: Well did- I mean, the situation was, and obviously Poland was the, that's where really the Iron Curtain abutted on the West, but as I recall there weren't many Soviet troops in Poland, they were mainly troops as supply. I mean, this was-

EVANS: Well, the Soviets, the main force of the Soviet army was in East Germany. There were also bases in Czechoslovakia and, you're right, they had not garrisoned Poland but what they did do in Poland, they followed the 19th century Russian Imperial practice of garrisoning Soviet troops outside the cities. They were off in the forests so that they didn't have much contact with the native Polish population. They were there but they were not brought into use...it was Polish forces under Jaruzelski who carried out the curfew and the imposition of martial law.

Q: Was there any feeling during this time that there might be a clash in Poland or was, you know, the martial law had pretty well stabilized matters?

EVANS: On the surface it stabilized matters but there was a great deal of activity going on underground. There were various statements that were being issued, there were some of the dissidents who were in hiding, were fugitives, and our embassy in Poland kept up a steady stream of reporting on all of this. It was my personal bad luck to have been attending my sister's wedding on December 10 back here in the United States when martial law was declared, and I got an urgent call from Moscow telling me to come right home, or back to Moscow rather. But we followed that very carefully; we followed the ins and outs. I felt as if I came to be quite expert on the goings on in Poland.

Q: Did you have any contact with the Catholic Church in Moscow? Was there a nuncio there or-?EVANS: There was a Catholic Church, one Catholic Church, and I do recall attending one service there, which was probably for some kind of memorial purpose. But we didn't really deal with the Church politically.

Q: Did the subject of the- I'm not going to pronounce this correctly but- the Katyn Forest business, the slaughter of Polish army officers during World War II by the KGB come up at all? Was that bandied about still or not?

EVANS: I do believe there was talk of that Katyn Forest massacre which for a long time the Soviets were claiming had been done by the Germans. But later investigation, in fact we the United States knew by about 1948 that it had actually been done by the NKVD and the British knew that, but at that point we didn't want to strain our relations with the Soviets so we downplayed it. But I do seem to recall that having been an issue.

Q: How about East- Did you have East Germany at that time- Or we had an embassy there.

EVANS: We had our embassy "to" the German Democratic Republic in Berlin.

Q: I've got to get this right; it's not in East Germany but to?

EVANS: "To" but located in Berlin, which had of course the four-power status, and we had a small but very good staff there. And of course I monitored all the traffic coming from the East European countries.

I also undertook something at the time that was a little bit provocative and that is I...we had films made available to us through USIA and through the Army network, AFN or something, and I found that I could obtain all of the films by the iconoclastic Polish filmmaker...

Q: "Knife in the Water" and that sort-?

EVANS: No, this was "Man of Iron," "Man of Steel," "Man of Marble" by...

Q: You can fill this in.

EVANS: Yes. He's still making films and he just made one about the Katyn Forest, as a matter of fact, that we saw last year. I got hold of these films one after another; about every two weeks I would get a new film, and I invited my main contacts from all the East European embassies, a Hungarian, a Romanian, Alexander Janowski from the Polish embassy, a Czech, a Bulgarian and to my amazement they all came to my apartment. The East German did not but the others came to my apartment, watched these films, which were very, shall we say, their effect was to undermine any belief in the communist system in Poland. They were subversive. And no doubt that's why the directoAndrzej Wajda - had had so many troubles himself in Poland. And we had some very interesting discussions after those films I showed.

Q: Okay, you've got- these were all people who had been obviously vetted by their respective parties and all, but could they- how did they talk?

EVANS: It very much depended on who they were. I mean, the Polish representative was most on the spot, I suppose, and he was able to convey on the one hand, by winks and nods, a certain sympathy with the films as well as for the Solidarity movement and again at the same time to stop, in case we were, as we probably were, bugged, to stop at the proper moment. I remember also the Hungarian seemed to have a certain sympathy although he later revealed himself after the fall of the Wall to be a hard-line communist.

Q: Well were you, I mean this was part of your portfolio but were you looking for or seeing a beginning of the dissolution of the solidarity of the Soviet empire or not in Eastern Europe?

EVANS: The Romanians had for some time been the odd man out and I think that's what really began the movement of the various states to draw distinctions on various issues. And we did see that, when there were varying communiquï¿½s. It was reading tea leaves, of course, for the most part. We looked for differences in language on various occasions when different party leaders spoke and this was fascinating. It was a combination of textural exegesis and political judgment and it was really quite a fascinating process.

Q: Well this is Kremlinology in its ultimate. I mean, you know, here are people who learn all this and I don't know whether, well they're probably playing this game in Tehran with Iran these days but-

EVANS: Some people have declared that one has to be a Kremlinologist to understand Washington these days. But no, that was the heyday...well, no; the '50s were maybe the heyday.

Q: Because then you really had to worry about who stood where on Lenin's tomb.

EVANS: Exactly. That was the ultimate. We had some contacts; we did talk to some Soviet officials, some academic people. The Institute of the USA and Canada was a typical place to talk to experts on various subjects.

Q: Well were you- I mean, this is early Ronald Reagan and following Carter's disillusionment with the Soviets; I mean, you must have been frozen out of a lot of things weren't you or not?

EVANS: Yes, we were. It was a very difficult time to do normal business in the Soviet Union and our contacts were monitored. I had some Soviet friends who had been bequeathed to me from a previous embassy officer. This was a young Soviet couple and they were dissidents by their own admission. I remember that she had a difficult pregnancy which coincided with one of the Soviet elections. She had been taken to the hospital for some internal bleeding and on Election Day the hospital officials insisted that she not be present in the hospital during the voting because they were trying to approximate 100 percent voting for the chosen candidate. So I got an anguished call from her husband saying "can you help us?" What I did, I went with my car, my Volkswagen, to the hospital at the time when she was to be forced out, and she and her husband sat in my car all day long until she was permitted to go back in. This is how beastly the system was. Today is Election Day in Virginia and I don't believe anybody's been discharged from a hospital for political reasons.

Q: What about the Baltic States? Was that in your portfolio or not?

EVANS: It wasn't in my portfolio because I was working on external matters but I traveled there one time with my girlfriend of those days who was another American diplomat and we had the sense that the Baltic States were...once you crossed into any one of those three states you felt you were truly in a different country. It was so different in every respect, the way people acted, of course the language was different, the customs and so on. It was truly a revelation.

Q: Well how did you feel, I mean, with the Soviet Union at that time? I mean, right in Moscow or its vicinity? Was it not a place that was working very well or-?

EVANS: Well it was working well then in a very sort of brutal fashion. The subway cars come one every 15 seconds on the Moscow subway; there's a great rush of people. There's a lot of hustle and bustle, crowds, movement. Not as much traffic as they now have, of course, but there was a kind of dynamism despite the old men at the top. There were people doing things.. And also the diplomatic calendar was very full. I remember sometimes having three or four events in one night, various national days and receptions and other dinner parties and so on so it was a busy time.

Q: What about shopping, going to restaurants and all that?

EVANS: In those days our main provisioner was the coupon stores, which were special stores with foreign goods and caviar and various other provisions that weren't available in the local Soviet shops and the great Finnish department store in Helsinki, Stockmann, which had a regular delivery of fresh vegetables and meats and so on to the Moscow community. We rarely shopped in Soviet stores except for a few little things like maybe cheese or yogurt.

Q: Restaurants?

EVANS: There were some good Soviet-style restaurants, the Praga, which was loosely modeled on a Czech restaurant and some of the Georgian restaurants, the Aragvi, for example. There were some others which were not expensive, with slow service but adequate food.

Q: How about KGB at the time and moving around, both in the city and out on your travels ?

EVANS: Other members of the embassy staff and particularly those up in Leningrad at the consulate had trouble with the KGB. Those of us who were dealing with external issues were not of as great interest to them. It was the people who were meeting with dissidents and following human rights issues who were most under scrutiny, and some of our diplomats were actually roughed up in Leningrad, where there's a KGB training school, sometimes in retaliation for things that happened in this country. For example, in those days the Jewish Defense League in New York particularly was active in sometimes violently setting upon Soviet diplomats at the UN and so sometimes we would have a retaliation for one of those attacks. There was a lot of tit for tat and you could more or less predict that if something bad happened at one end there would be an answer.

Q: What was sort of your feeling and maybe the chitchat that you'd hear at the embassy about the early days of Ronald Reagan vis-ï¿½-vis the Soviet Union?

EVANS: I think that generally the whole country was behind Ronald Reagan in those early years of the '80s. The Soviets had shown us their ill intentions in a number of ways and we were all rooting for Ronald Reagan to be successful in his more robust approach.

Q: How did things work inside the political section? I mean, did you sort of get together and talk about how things were doing or each sort of do your own thing and report back or was there much collegiality or what?

EVANS: Oh, there was lots of collegiality but it was quite a hierarchical embassy. Only section chiefs went, of course, to the country team meeting and the political section had a deputy and then directors for external and internal affairs and multilateral affairs, I think. But we all, after the staff meeting, heard what had been discussed. It was a bit like the State Department; the people at the top discussed the issues and then the people at the bottom... you know, there's a food chain and they learn what the tasks of the day are to be and what the latest news from Washington is. There was a special channel, the so-called official-informal telegram that for years and years was sent every night by the Soviet desk and arrived in Moscow in time for opening of business and that was the informal way, that was all the scuttlebutt and sort of the advance warning of what was coming down the line, either in policy terms or in some other way, and so we learned about that. And then we were off doing our analysis of the day's papers and typically off to a lunch with other diplomats to compare notes on things, then back in the office writing it up for reporting to Washington. And then again in the evening social events or possibly a trip to the theater or opera or something.

Q: Was Cuba in your portfolio?

EVANS: It was not in my portfolio. Curt Kamman was there for a time as political counselor and he had, if I'm not mistaken, served in Cuba. He'd also been trained in Mongolian at one point. So we did follow Cuban affairs.

Q: Yes, because I think it was around this time when Cuba was sort of taking off on its own and heading into Africa without real consultation with the Soviets. The Soviets were trying to, in a way disengage and the Cubans were putting troops in.

EVANS: Well that was even in the Vance years. I think that was another one of the burdens that Vance had to bear. Weren't they in Namibia?

Q: Yes. Well, they were in Angola.

EVANS: Angola.

Q: And that brought the South Africans into Namibia and then you had border clashes.

EVANS: Another issue that Vance worked very closely with David Owen, of course, was the progress of Rhodesia, the decolonization of Rhodesia.

Q: Which later became Zimbabwe.

EVANS: Zimbabwe, that's right. One of the many good things about the Moscow embassy was that because it was a world capital we really had a view of the entire world. We had experts on every part of the world, we got into every issue, and it was almost like "NSC East" in a sense.

Q: Did you get any feel for the- well when Andropov came in? I mean, here he'd been the head of the KGB but you know, there are stories that he's really liked jazz or, you know-

EVANS: And drank whiskey.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: We had a bit of skepticism for those rumors...I mean, it just seemed like sort of propaganda designed to lull people into a sense that he was a more modern person but you know, the Soviets had a saying that "KGB is our Harvard," and there was a feeling that people in the KGB knew more about the world: they traveled, they were worldly, they were well trained, they were loyal, they were not corrupt in particular. Of all the...there's much corruption, there was much corruption in the Soviet Union, still is in the Russian Federation, but the KGB was seen as somehow an elite that was above all that.

Q: Did you get any feel for the, what later became known as the Stans and all that? Were we looking at this as being possibly- these areas were no longer as wedded to the union or not?

EVANS: Yes indeed, you're absolutely right. I took a trip with another colleague, Wayne Merry and a Dutch colleague of ours; we went to Tajikistan/Uzbekistan. My interest in particular was to discover how the Tajiks viewed the ongoing operations in Afghanistan. So we poked around and we looked at graveyards to see if there had been victims of the fighting, Tajiks who had been buried there. There were some. And the bottom line was that the Tajiks didn't view Afghanistan as a country or as a nation; they only cared about their Tajik brothers on the other side. I mean, it was very much viewed through a tribal prism, not in some more European or Western way. I was able, by the way, to talk with Tajiks because I had learned Persian for my assignment in Iran and all one had to do was substitute a few Russian loan words and one could have a conversation.

Q: Well looking at graveyards, I'm told we were doing quite a bit of that in this period because they would put pictures up on the gravestones and you know-

EVANS: With the dates.

Q: With the dates.

EVANS: So you could surmise what had happened. And we also...we did talk to some Tajik citizens. I know we were denounced... this was already in 1983, shortly, in the spring before I left there but after I departed there was a denunciatory letter - or editorial - published in the "Evening Dushanbe" about our visit because they felt that we had been trying to suborn citizens.

Q: Did they do that when you- could you meet ordinary citizens, say, at a restaurant or something like that?

EVANS: We did meet some younger people just by going into a local restaurant and where Tajik music was being played. In Samarkand we were invited to a wedding of Tajiks but this was in Samarkand, and so we were further away from the capital and though we undoubtedly were under surveillance, there were still possibilities to talk. One thing we noticed was that there were a number of mosques being built in that part of Central Asia, apparently with Saudi money behind them.

Q: Did fundamentalist Islam play much of a role in our thinking at the time?

EVANS: At that time, no. Of course we were in Afghanistan arming, with Saudi backing also, arming the mujaheddin and they were... had we looked carefully we would have been perhaps more worried about their views than we were.

Q: Were you getting any repercussions from the Soviets, to say what the hell are you doing by, you know, helping these tribes people kill Soviet boys?

EVANS: I remember sitting in with Ambassador Matlock on some very heated discussions at the Foreign Ministry about the war. Jack always made it a point of honor to speak Russian with his interlocutors. His Russia was excellent but they went at it hammer and tongs about the reasons for the war and what Soviet intentions were.

Q: Well, maybe this would be a good place to stop, do you think?

EVANS: Sure.

Q: Where did you go after you left Russia, the Soviet Union?

EVANS: I first of all was promoted on the basis of my work in Moscow and contrived to be assigned then to NATO in Brussels.

Q: All right. Just one further question; when you left, it's a big question that obviously- whither the Soviet Union, whither American/Soviet relations? You left in '80-?

EVANS: Eighty-three

Q: Three.

EVANS: They were only about to get worse because shortly after I left they shot down the Korean airliner over...

Q: Over Kamchatka.

EVANS: Kamchatka, that's right. And that was yet another crisis in our relations and as we now know from archives that have been released, Russian archives, we came much closer in 1983 to an outbreak of a hot war than anyone knew at the time.

Q: Okay, we'll stop there. Okay, we'll pick it up in '83 when you're off to NATO.

EVANS: Okay.

Q: All right. Today is the 17th of November, 2009, with John Evans. And John, you have left Moscow and you're going to where, NATO?

EVANS: The U.S. Mission to NATO.

Q: NATO. That's in Brussels.

EVANS: In Brussels.

Q: What year was that?

EVANS: That was the summer of 1983.

Q: Okay.

EVANS: U.S.-Soviet relations were in a very bad way at that point, from a combination of factors. The big political shift that had occurred in the previous elections here which brought in Ronald Reagan and a lot of very conservative thinkers, Cap Weinberger of the Defense Department and so on. And then there had been the troubles in Poland.

Q: Had martial law been declared at that point?

EVANS: Yes, it had been. And there was the invasion by the Soviets of Afghanistan.

Q: Yes, in '79.

EVANS: Right. So all of these things and a few more were adding up to very bad state of relations.

Q: Well let's just take sort of an overall look of when you arrived there; I mean, you were looking at the other side of the moon, having been in Moscow. But how did we view "the Soviet menace"? I mean, did we feel that this was something that, I mean, they launched out in Afghanistan and things were perking up in Africa and all. I mean, how did we view it at that time?

EVANS: Well, our view was getting worse and worse. That is, our sense of what the Soviets were up to was getting more and more dire and I arrived just before... I arrived at NATO just before the Soviets shot down the Korean airliner, which must have been in September '83.

Q: It was over the Kamchatka Peninsula.

EVANS: Exactly. And that, of course, was an atrocious thing to have happen; 260-some people perished in that. Now, that was during the Andropov years. Well, it was a very short time that Andropov was in power but he was the former chief of the KGB and Washington's view of what Moscow was capable of and intent upon was very, very negative. And it was reciprocated by a view in Moscow of the United States as having ill intentions towards the Soviet Union. The dï¿½tente of the previous decade was completely dead at this point. Carter had shelved the SALT agreement; we were not talking to the Russians at that point about strategic arms and the Soviets had walked out of the arms talks, I think it was in December of that year probably.

Q: Had they introduced the SS-20 at that time?

EVANS: That was one of the issues. Yes they had, and we were responding - we had reached a decision at NATO in 1979 to place ground-launched cruise missiles and Pershings in Europe but also to keep the way open to negotiating. And we went ahead with the implementation of that missile decision in the first six months that I was at NATO.

Q: Well, when you arrived there what was your job?

EVANS: Well, I had to take a compromise. I'd just been promoted in Moscow for my work there but I wanted very much to be at NATO and for my first year I took the job as executive officer, which was really a kind of glorified staff position.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: It meant moving all the telegrams and making sure they made sense and that...

Q: It's like being the head of the secretariat-

EVANS: That's right. And so for a year I did that with the payoff that for the next two years I was in the political section of the mission.

Q: Well in the first place you were just hot out of Moscow; were you finding your colleagues in NATO, and I say NATO as a- what the hell's going on out there?

EVANS: I considered myself very lucky at that time because I was just coming from Moscow; I knew the players, I knew what the thinking was in the Western group of diplomats in Moscow and so I was looked to at the U.S. mission as the authority on what was going on, even when I was XO and participated in staff meetings I was often asked what I made of certain recent developments and I was asked to write memos for the ambassador and so on.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

EVANS: When I first arrived it was Tap Bennett - right at the end of Tap Bennett's tenure - he was followed in very short succession by David Abshire and Steve Ledogar was the DCM.

Q: Well what were you, you know, did you sort of keep... this was before the era of emails and all but were you able to keep up with your Moscow connections or-?

EVANS: Absolutely. Embassy Moscow was, and still is for that matter, a very productive shop and every day, by the time we opened in Brussels, there was already a take from Moscow, which kept us fully informed, and for that matter there were fairly frequent occasions when people from Moscow came through Brussels on their way to Washington or London or wherever and we followed things through their eyes as well.

Q: Well was there a feeling, well, actual, were we cranking up our defenses; were we putting more tanks in the Fulda Gap? What were we doing?

EVANS: The main thing we were doing of course was implementing this decision from 1979 to put the Pershings and the ground-launched missiles in Europe, Germany being the main host country for the Pershing missiles. But we were also leaning on the other allies to increase their defense spending, aiming for four percent of their budgets. And there were some very serious exercises that NATO ran at that time which even contemplated...they went right up to the nuclear threshold and there was a lot of talk about what would happen if we really did end up at war with the Soviet Union.

Q: Well was there the thought that NATO as a military force could actually stop the Soviets without going nuclear?

EVANS: You know, the conventional imbalance in Europe was always in favor of the heavy armored divisions that the Soviets maintained mainly in what was then East Germany. And we had never ruled out the possibility of first use; we did have tactical weapons in place and I think there was a general understanding that without the nuclear card to play Western Europe was not defensible.

Q: What was your impression, let's talk about, I mean, you were sort of- you'd been in it all the time so you were coming to a new organization; what was your impression of say, let's take the Germans first, the German staff, the German military.

EVANS: Of course I dealt mainly with the diplomatic side, rather than the military side. Each of the NATO delegations has, of course, both civilian and military components. My main point of contact with the other delegations was through the NATO political committee, which some dismissed as a talking shop but it actually did do some very useful work in terms of analyzing trends, looking at policies and coordinating the thinking of people from the various NATO capitals.

Q: Well, I mean, as point of fact, one has to only look at the question of the era was what about these response to the SS-20s? And that essentially was a political diplomatic matter.

EVANS: That's right, that's right.

Q: To get it right with the people in the various countries.

EVANS: That's right. The other thing that was very much a front burner issue at that time, of course, was President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, and I remember one of the things that I was called upon to do in those years was to go out to various European destinations and talk about the Strategic Defense Initiative. One of the most memorable of those meetings was one called by the French but since the French were skeptical about SDI they actually had it take place in Monaco, so it wasn't really under French sovereignty although we all knew that it was a French operation or conference, and I actually did that talk in French, although I fear that my audience was not too impressed with my level of French, which was definitely "schoolboy."

Q: Well how did you feel, what was sort of your attitude towards the SDI which was also known as "Star Wars?" That was, you know, that we could come up with missiles to stop incoming missiles that would completely knock out the missile element in any war.

EVANS: I have to confess that I had a certain skepticism about whether this was going to be practical in the short run but at the time I think most of us felt that at least developing the program was a reasonable thing to do under the circumstances. There would be spinoffs, we would learn a lot, as we had from the program to go to the moon, and there were all kinds of different options being bandied about about how you could combine technologies in different ways and whether you used it for stopping short range or long range and so on, so there was quite a literature, a growing literature and debate about this. And so despite a certain amount of skepticism about it I was following it very carefully and it was no difficulty for me in doing what I had to do.

Q: Well also too, it scared the hell out of the Soviets, didn't it, because, you know, they- although we were expressing skepticism, I mean, we had done- we had gone to the moon, we'd done a lot of stuff and the idea that oh, they can't ever do that, I don't think was part of the Soviet thought process.

EVANS: Well, the Soviets had for a long time been thinking about missile defense. They had, after all, the only ABM (anti-ballistic missile) system in existence around the city of Moscow. We had decided not to put one around Washington, although we had something out in the missile fields in the West. But they were seriously concerned about it. First of all, their military establishment was eating up a huge proportion of their national wealth; estimates of what went into their military establishment ranged as high as 40 percent of GNP (gross national product) and so they were very concerned about this new pressure on their own defense effort that SDI represented.

Q: Well let's talk about sort of the diplomatic side of things. How would you- let's box the compass; how about the Germans? What was your impression of the Germans in NATO?

EVANS: The Germans were very ably led at that time by a fine ambassador who went on to be the head of their Bundesnachrichtendienst, the equivalent of the CIA, and they were strong right down the line; they were a very good delegation.

Q: What about the British?

EVANS: The British likewise were superb and I ought to mention that at that time Lord Peter Carrington was the secretary general of NATO and his immediate assistant was Brian Fall, who later came here as ambassador to Washington. They were very good.

Q: The troublesome people, the French.

EVANS: Absolument.

Q: How did that work out?

EVANS: Well the French indeed were at their most troublesome during those years. It was always a prickly relationship, particularly between ourselves and the French. But oddly enough, on the military side, particularly the navies got along perfectly well. The military people understood each other and, for example, French and American vessels, naval vessels, exercised in the Atlantic without even...they knew exactly what they had to do and there were no problems whatsoever.

Q: A little earlier, '79 to '81, I was consul general in Naples and at one point I remember talking to Admiral Crowe, who was the CINCSOUTH (Commander in Chief, Allied Forces Southern Europe), and I was asking him kind of the same question; he said you know, the French are no problem at all. Now, when you get to the Greeks and Turks-

EVANS: Well, you know, the political counselor at that time was Bob Frowick, who was a great diplomat and a fine man. He was assisted by Norm Frisbie, who was the deputy political counselor. Frowick once said that the French were with us in a strategic sense and it's only in some of the tactical areas that we have trouble with them. And I think that's right. In the big things the French were always with us.

Q: Well did- The Dutch and the Belgians; they had a problem, particularly with the missile defense.

EVANS: That's true. The missile deployments were not popular in either Belgium or the Netherlands or for that matter in Germany, and there were some massive demonstrations that happened. But of course it was judged a major success when the first of the Pershings arrived and were in place. That would have been, I think, about December of 1983.

Q: Well did the Italians play much of a role? They were not really on the- what would appear to be the major front.

EVANS: The Italians, I think, always suffered from the feeling that they were not in the Big Four, and they were very jealous of the French for that reason. But they did certainly contribute, and one of their diplomats went on to be deputy secretary general. So they did plan an important role and of course you mentioned Naples and that dimension of Italian participation was very important.

Q: Portugal was, by this time, was in good order, wasn't it? It had been, in the mid '70s it had had its revolution and flirting with extreme socialism and then...

EVANS: And the Spanish had just been brought in. I mean, Portugal had been in for longer and of course the main consideration had been the Azores. The United States had wanted Portugal in NATO because of the Azores. But Spain was a different question. Spain did enter NATO, it must have been in the late '70s after the king was restored and brought about a democratic transformation.

Q: Did the introduction of the SS-20s and the reaction to it in a way reinvigorate NATO, would you say? I mean, it would seem that here was a purpose which NATO really had kind of drifted away from.

EVANS: I think it was a combination of factors. The growing apparent threat from the Soviet Union with the invasion of Afghanistan and the other things that happened went hand in hand with the determination of NATO to deter - by deploying what was deemed necessary - to deter the SS-20s. And I think the major emotion, once we succeeded in bringing off that decision, in implementing that decision, was one of great relief. Because it had been a tough fight with the public opposition to it in so many European capitals, when we actually did it, it was seen as a victory.

Q: Well in many ways this is really, looking at it, it's almost the last hurrah of the Soviets, wasn't it, as far as really constituting a threat to anybody?

EVANS: The Soviet Union was in the midst of a generational shift, which turned out to be a very significant one. Gorbachev was in his 50s; the average age of the Politburo member in the early 1980s was something in the 70s. Now, Andropov, who succeeded the long-serving Brezhnev, had wanted to jump directly to Gorbachev but with the old ways very much still in force it was a kind of a "seniority rules" kind of system so they went to Chernenko. But significantly one of the old guard, one of the longest serving Politburo members, was Gromyko, and it was Gromyko who eventually, after Chernenko died, put Gorbachev's name in nomination to be the next general secretary, and that brought about the big change, the generational shift in the Soviet leadership.

Q: Were you in NATO when Gorbachev became-?

EVANS: Yes, I was. Chernenko was sick from the start-

Q: I mean, he could hardly breathe.

EVANS: He could hardly breathe; there were several times he lost his breath as he was giving a speech and had to start over. And it was obvious to everybody. I remember writing a memo for Ambassador Abshire when Chernenko was clearly...I think we had heard that he had died, in fact, and the question was who would succeed him. And one of the old guard was still contending to be next.

Q: Suslov?

EVANS: Well, Suslov was there and Suslov had been very active on the Polish issue. But it was Viktor Grishin who had come out of the Moscow Party apparat; we in the Moscow embassy called this the "Grishin formula," thinking that Grishin might indeed be the next one to succeed, but it was Gromyko, as we now know, Gromyko put Gorbachev in nomination and we learned that it was Gorbachev when he was named to head the funeral committee.

Q: This is Kremlinology at its best, wasn't it?

EVANS: Yes, it was.

Q: Who's standing where.

EVANS: Exactly, exactly.

Q: Were we seeing, from your optic in NATO, were we seeing Gromyko as being a real change in the situation or just a more efficient cast to the Soviet machine?

EVANS: You probably meant to say Gorbachev.

Q: I meant Gorbachev, excuse me.

EVANS: Yes. You know, at first we didn't know what to think of Gorbachev and one of the great things about being at NATO and being a Soviet specialist of sorts was the demand for discussion and theorizing and it was a wonderful place to be in those years. There were so many meetings of the political committee and various other briefings that we gave and participated in. People didn't know at first about Gorbachev and it was really when Gorbachev went to the UK and met with Margaret Thatcher; it was his first major...I think he was not yet general secretary but he went to the UK, took his wife Raisa, which was so unusual for a Soviet leader to do, and - they went out to Chequers with the Thatchers, with Margaret and Denis Thatcher, and afterwards she said "this is a man we can deal with." And then the British shared with us their assessments and eventually this all worked up to the first summit that Reagan and Gorbachev had.

Q: In Geneva.

EVANS: In Geneva, at which they both invited each other to visit each other's countries.

Q: Well you mentioned the discussion that's going on, something that's always struck me as I've been doing these oral histories and sort of monitor some of the things that are coming out of the academic world is almost the chasm between the academics who are dealing with the subject like the Soviets and the practitioners like yourselves. I mean, was there much sort of academic participation, somebody coming around saying did you hear what Professor So-and-So thought about this or-?

EVANS: We were all absolutely attuned to what was being said by experienced academic experts but the real cleavage, I would submit, was within the Reagan Administration, where you had on the one side Caspar Weinberger and one of his assistant secretaries was Richard Perle. On the other side you had George Shultz, who was just as horrified as anyone else when the Korean airliner was shot down but who still believed that we needed to deal with the Soviets, we needed to have arms control talks, but there was a huge fight within the administration between the hawks and the, I wouldn't even call them doves, but the hawks and the moderates, you might say. This was the period when, for example, Ambassador Nitze, once the arms talks got going again, Ambassador Nitze had his famous walk in the woods with Kvitsinsky to try to fashion an arms control agreement and what they came up with in that walk in the woods was too...was unacceptable in both capitals, as it turned out. It was killed by the hawks in Washington and there were hawks in Moscow as well. And so they, in a sense, the hawks in the two capitals really fed each other.

Q: Well in a way- You mentioned the shoot down of the Korean airline but you were in a military atmosphere and if there's anything one knows when you're dealing with the military it is that things really can screw up. And it seemed to me like this was, you know, a screw up; it was not a calculated decision up and down. But how did you all feel?

EVANS: Well, at the time we didn't know everything that we know now. The Soviets had said that they thought the...First of all, right after it happened they said nothing and they denied... they were in a terrible state of denial and putting out half-truths and so on which just deepened our suspicions of what had gone on. There was a famous...We overheard, apparently, from one of our outposts, we overheard the pilots talking, and one of the most quoted lines was, "the target has been destroyed," and that seemed like a terribly crude way to characterize the shoot-down of a 747 which, as we all know, has that very characteristic dome and should have been recognized by almost anybody as a civilian airliner. It's a huge thing; I mean, it's not...it doesn't look like any military aircraft. But as we now know there had been some very aggressive maneuvers that we had carried out in that part of the Northwest Pacific, testing Soviet defenses, and some of the Soviet military men who were charged with intercepting anything that came over their border had been severely dressed down earlier that year, 1983, and were fearful of being accused of laxness, of laxity, I guess is the word, in defending the Soviet border. It was dark, it was foggy, and there was another...apparently we did have a military reconnaissance aircraft in that area at roughly the same time and it's conceivable that the Soviet radar, which were trying to track the military craft, then latched on to the civilian one. We don't know exactly, even today, exactly what happened, but it does seem to me that it was not an act of cold-blooded murder as we were portraying it at the time.

Now, at that Geneva Summit that took place a year or so later the two sides did agree on some better rules for air transport over the Pacific routes to prevent that kind of thing from ever happening again.

Q: And of course the Korean airliner was on the wrong course, too.

EVANS: The Korean airliner was way off course, was to the north of where it should have been.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: You know, George Shultz I think was very wise, and I would never characterize him simply as a dove, but he used to say "U.S. policy towards the Soviet Union needs to be able to take account of both the best and the worst of Soviet behavior." And I think Shultz and Reagan, actually, better understood Gorbachev than Caspar Weinberger did. Weinberger perhaps was getting advised by Richard Perle and some very hard-line types who actually thought...And then there was Casey, who was in charge of the CIA, and it seems to me that they were trying to argue that Gorbachev was a fake, despite his preference for nice suits and a presentable wife and those sorts of things that this was all for show and that in fact he was just trying to strengthen the Soviet positions.

Q: Did- I mean sort of in your own heart and your colleagues', when Ronald Reagan came on the scene, was there concern?

EVANS: Among specialists on the Soviet Union?

Q: Yes.

EVANS: You know, I voted for Reagan and I felt that the Carter presidency had been a failure in foreign affairs and I think the mood of the whole country had shifted in those crucial years to one of being very suspicious of the Soviets and I can't say that my two years in Moscow terribly much eased those suspicions on my own part. I mean, I shared in the concerns that were more widely entertained.

Q: You know, looking at Soviet behavior and our behavior this is a very dark time.

EVANS: I think it was. I think you're right. I think it was a darker time than we knew because we didn't know then what we know now from Soviet archives that have shown that there were some close calls. The Soviets were worried that their leadership might be decapitated by a precision strike, for example by one of our ground-launched Cruise missiles, which can come in under the radar and land on a target several yards wide with great precision. So they in those years were taking measures to ensure that even if the leadership was decapitated there would be an appropriate nuclear response. So I think we were in a very dangerous time then.

Q: How did you find- I imagine you got very much involved in the, was it twice a year, once a year meeting with secretaries of defense and-?

EVANS: Oh, yes. Twice a year there were ministerials of the foreign ministers and also ministerials of the defense ministers, and typically the pattern was that the autumn meetings would take place at NATO headquarters but the spring meetings would take place in a rotating sequence in one of the countries of the Alliance.

Q: How did France fit into this? Because while you were on the political side France was in it.

EVANS: Yes. They were not in the military structure.

Q: They're really screwy but anyway. I mean, such is diplomacy, I suppose, you learn to deal with the screwiness. But what was the contribution or lack thereof with the French on the political side?

EVANS: They played fully on the political side and they had...I remember in the political committee they had some very astute judgments and information about what was going on in the Soviet Union. We always listened to them with great care.

Q: Now, you were a part of the American delegation.

EVANS: Absolutely.

Q: So what would you do when you were acting as a political officer? Who would you see and what would you do?

EVANS: Well, between official meetings - the political committee met, as I remember, on Tuesdays and Thursdays - I had a range of contacts with diplomats from the other delegations. I actually met my wife, who was working on the Canadian delegation, so I met her. And I also had close contacts, for example, with a Finn, with a Finnish diplomat who was a very astute observer of the Soviet Union and was posted to the Finnish embassy in Brussels and I saw him quite frequently.

Q: How stood the Scandinavians in NATO at the time?

EVANS: Well of course the Danes and the Norwegians were members of the Alliance; there had been a period of time during which the Danes were known for taking footnotes to virtually all NATO documents.

Q: A footnote being?

EVANS: Being an objection to, or a distancing from, some element in a report. But the Danes came more and more - it depended a lot on their internal politics - but they came more and more aboard. The Norwegians were always staunch members of NATO and one of my best contacts was Kai Eide, who these days is in Afghanistan as the UN representative there. The Swedes, of course, were neutral. They were not there at NATO and the Finns were completely neutral in name but in sentiment they were quite, shall we say, they knew what was what with the Russians and had there been - had the flag gone up - there was no doubt about where the Finns would have stood.

Q: What about the Swedes? I mean, were the Soviets playing games with their submarines during this time, both in Finland- I mean both in Sweden and Norway?

EVANS: There was a famous incident called "Whiskey on the Rocks," in which a Whiskey class, that was our designation, of course, a Whiskey class submarine was basically found on a reef right outside Stockholm, if I'm not mistaken. It was very close; it was definitely in Swedish territorial waters. That must have happened in the very early '80s when I was in Moscow because I remember it as an issue and again, the Soviets' inability to confess to anything undermined their credibility and undermined any status they may have enjoyed as a believable partner.

Q: What was- I assume there was an endemic problem; what was the problem within the Soviet bureaucracy of this? I mean, we're pretty good at- we get into these things and we at least work on the spin or whatever you want to call it, how to make something out of a worst case situation.

EVANS: The political systems, comparing the Soviet system and our system, are so completely different. I mean, the transparency and democracy that we've enjoyed in this country at least since World War II are built on the concept of accountability and there was no sense of accountability in the Soviet system except the accountability to the Party. But the rulers of the Soviet Union did not see themselves as in any way accountable to anyone, certainly not to their own people. I think in the Soviet military also there was a general philosophy that you never confess to anything that you might have done. Part of it may have been fear of retribution within their own system.

Q: Yes. Did- You did this from '83 until when?

EVANS: I was at NATO from '83 until '86.

Q: Did you see a change by- when you left in '86?

EVANS: Yes. The worst time was right around '83 when negotiations broke down and we placed the Pershing missiles and it was in the wake of the Korean airliner and so on and Afghanistan was raging. This was a terrible, terrible time. But after the first summit between Reagan and Gorbachev, and I should also say Shultz made a special trip at one point to Moscow to set up the summit and got the dialogue going again, and in particular the arms control talks resumed in Geneva and we got regular reports from the negotiators in Geneva who would come to NATO to brief the permanent council there and there was a committee of people from the Senate, senators, who were very close to the negotiators and they would also come traipsing through Brussels. But the sense that there was a negotiating track, that people were working on trying to solve the various security problems, that sense was recovered with that first Reagan and Gorbachev summit.

Q: Was there any sense by '86 and all that you might say, I don't know, depending on your point of view the poison or the good or whatever it is, of the Basket Three of the Helsinki Accords in right of dissidents' ability for the media to attend meetings and you know, I mean, in other words these sort of human rights things; was this- did we feel that this was having any effect on the satellite nations?

EVANS: Yes, I think we did. The most notable case, of course, was Poland. Now Poland was under martial law for most of those years of the '80s but there was a culmination of factors again; there was also a kind of an economic slowdown going down in Eastern Europe which was having its effect. There were more and more reports of things going wrong in the whole Soviet domain as Gorbachev tried to loosen things up.

Now, one imagines that Gorbachev was trying to save the system by reforming it. He certainly was pursuing Soviet interests as he saw them but it was seen as a general sort of breaking down of the old Stalinist monolithic political system.

Q: Well were we, you know, if you're looking at it from a strategic, tactical, whatever you want to call it, here is the main Soviet army sitting in East Germany, its lines of communication run through a large and almost hostile power. I mean, was Poland at that point. I mean, this must have, you know, worked in NATO calculations, wasn't it?

EVANS: Well I think it did, and you've put your finger on it, your question almost answers itself because Poland was precisely in the worst place from a Soviet point of view. I mean, you know, Yugoslavia long ago had been pretty much written off in Soviet calculations.

Q: Yes but, I mean, it just wasn't terrain, it-

EVANS: Yes, yes, but Poland is sitting right there. Now of course one of the reasons the Soviets did not maintain major military formations in Poland was precisely because it was a relatively hostile territory; they were all in East Germany. But then of course at the end of the decade when things really started to come apart as we've just noted in all the anniversary materials, it was East Germany where things really started to unravel. That was where the knot was tightest tied and that's where it started to unravel.

Q: Were we getting fairly good reports about East Germany and Poland and Czechoslovakia particularly in NATO?

EVANS: You know, people always want more intelligence and better intelligence. But I feel that the people working in those embassies and consulates were doing a wonderful job at that time. There was a constant flow of useful material. And although we didn't have the Internet there also were Radio Free Europe people and others who were reporting; there was more than we could deal with when there was a good flow of information.

Q: What about the Katzenjammer Kids in NATO, Greece and Turkey?

EVANS: Well, you know there was the old saw about NATO that it was "to keep the U.S. in, Germany down and the Soviets out" but one of its purposes was to keep the Greeks and Turks from each other's throats. And at the time I was there Marc Grossman had a full-time job in the political section dealing with issues of the Eastern Mediterranean, which meant the Greeks and the Turks, and there were little flare-ups and incidents and so on that had to be attended to.

Q: Well I remember sitting in a country team meeting in the early '70s in Athens where we talked about the Greeks and the Turks over on Thessaloniki and thinking they probably got each about a day's worth of ammunition and then they'll be throwing rocks at each other. But you know, it-

EVANS: Well of course Ataturk was from Salonika.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: So yes, that...And as recently as three years ago there were two fighters, one Turkish and one Greek, that collided over the Mediterranean.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: So it's not totally resolved even now.

Q: No. Well you left there in '86.

EVANS: That's right.

Q: Where?

EVANS: I went to work for my old Moscow supervisor, Mark Parris, who had been asked to head up the Soviet desk. And he came through Brussels at one point, we had meetings for him and so on, and he asked me to be his deputy on the Soviet desk, which I thought was a wonderful appointment, I looked forward to it very much. And so I arrived in the summer of '86.

Q: So you did that from when to when?

EVANS: From '86 to '89 I was deputy director of the Soviet desk.

Q: Okay. It was- Was it really- When you took over then, you didn't realize what it was going to be like later, did you?

EVANS: Absolutely not. And I took over, well, I joined the desk that summer of '86, which was a time of great tension on the espionage front. And in fact my whole tenure there in those three years was a demonstration of how non-central issues can come back and affect the central ones. In particular, in August of 1986 the FBI had been complaining that the Soviet presence was too large, both in Washington and in New York. Now we as the host nation of the United Nations couldn't do terribly much about the size of the foreign delegations in New York but we did want to even up the size of the Soviet presence here in Washington as compared to our much smaller presence in Moscow.

In the summer of '86 the FBI decided to move against a Soviet "illegal" operating out of New York. His name was Gennadiy Zakharov. They picked him up and sure enough within a matter of a week the Soviets arrested the U.S. News reporter Nick Daniloff in Moscow. Now, Nick Daniloff was not a spy but he was very knowledgeable, he spoke Russian, his family originally hailed from an old Russian family, and he was put in jail and everything seized up around this Zakharov-Daniloff issue, these two cases. After we moved to expel Soviets, there was a whole tit for tat and in the end the U.S. embassy lost the services of all of its Russian local employees, including, you know, people who cleaned and swept and ran the motor pool and so on. So we had a terrible crisis that grew out of that.

But that entire crisis did two things. It, first of all, it stimulated the development of a special forum, we called it the Bilateral Relations Committee, the BRC. We had BRC meetings scheduled to deal with these tough issues which included various visa cases and all sorts of relatively extraneous but nonetheless damaging issues. And the other thing that the Daniloff case stimulated was the Reykjavik Summit in October of 1986, which did not produce any agreements but it was there that President Reagan and Chairman Gorbachev talked about eliminating nuclear missiles completely. Now they were pulled back on each side by their advisors from going down that road but just having put it on the table changed the atmosphere and it changed the relationship, I believe, between Reagan and Gorbachev for the better.

Q: Okay, let's talk about the spy versus spy business. I mean, this often- You know, spying- these are often- it's sort of a game that's played but every once in awhile it intrudes into the real relationship problem. I mean, you can- something which is taking place almost in its own little field, you know, well we know more about you than you know about us and all of a sudden it's on the front pages and relations are awful and it had nothing to do- I mean, this- it's an unintended consequence of spying. How did- In the first place what happened to Daniloff and how did this thing work out?

EVANS: Well, I had just arrived at the desk when I was asked by the deputy assistant secretary, Tom Simons, to prepare a memo about the arrest, the impending arrest, of Zakharov. And proceeding from the Shultz dictum that U.S. policy needed to be able to cope with the worst and the best of Soviet behavior I wrote a memo in which the State Department did not object to the arrest of Gennadiy Zakharov because he was acting as an illegal; he was not conforming to the accepted rules of what one did as a diplomat. He was, as I remember, on the staff of the United Nations, not in the Soviet diplomatic mission, but he was out there meeting with high tech institutes and doing some stuff that we really didn't want him to do. And so I wrote a memo in which I - of course it was approved way above me, probably went to the deputy secretary or the secretary - said we did not object if the FBI picked him up.

Now, some weeks later when the whole edifice of U.S.-Soviet relations looked like it was tumbling down people were asking for that memo and wanting to know who wrote it.

Q: Oh yes.

EVANS: And, you know, that didn't make me feel too comfortable but at that time we did believe that in the context of everything that had been going on and in the context of the Soviets having this huge disparity in numbers, we had the feeling that it was not fair and that we needed to bring those numbers down. And so that's why we moved.

But you're absolutely right that these espionage cases and the other category is human rights cases, can rise up out of nowhere unexpectedly and bite you. In the '80s there were quite a number of incidents also with the Jewish Defense League attacking Soviet diplomats.

Q: The Jewish Defense League in New York.

EVANS: In New York, in New York, attacking or roughing up sometimes Soviet diplomats and their families and this would instantly be followed by somebody being roughed up, usually in Leningrad, one of our people. And so there was definitely a tit for tat calculation that was in full force in those years.

Q: Well how did the- I mean, what happened in that case?

EVANS: It was a long story in which Dick Combs, the DCM in Moscow, played a very important role in negotiating Daniloff's release, and in the end both Sakharov and Daniloff were "expelled" by the two countries.

Q: Were we seeing significant changes in the Soviet Union during this time?

EVANS: You know, it was always difficult to see deeply into the Soviet Union because of the travel restrictions and the opacity of their media. With Gorbachev those who were at least tuned to Gorbachev and reading what he wrote and listening to the discussions, we all sensed that there was something important happening; that a new broom was sweeping. There were reforms that were announced; one of them went very badly, that was the anti-alcohol campaign, but some of Gorbachev's other reforms were clearly enunciated and the only people who didn't believe it were the CIA apparently and the Defense Department. But at the State Department, and INR, I include INR in that; they sensed these winds of change blowing.

Q: Well did you gather, I mean was there- you were fairly young at the time when you went to the-

EVANS: Oh, I guess I was in my early 40s.

Q: Okay. But you know, you had a generation of people, I'm talking about Americans, who grew up as Kremlinologists and all and I was wondering whether you- did they almost have a tin ear when it came to changes? I mean, were they, you know, I think all of us tend to straight line things, I mean, whatever we thought we continued to think that way and it's easier when you're younger to say hey, this is different or something.

EVANS: I do think there was a kind of professional weakness, a professional proclivity to discount evidence that didn't fit one's preconceptions. The best of the Sovietologists I think did get it, people like Bob Legvold and maybe, but not so much, Arnold Horelick. But to his credit President Reagan and Secretary Shultz brought specialists in on several occasions to tell them what they knew about the Soviet Union and about the Russians. One of the most surprising things that Ronald Reagan did was to bring in Suzanne Massie, who with her husband had written the bestselling book "Nicholas and Alexandra" about the Tsar, the last tsar and their hemophiliac son. And Reagan had several conversations with Massie, who has a deep understanding of Russian psychology, Russian culture. And so many of the other specialists on the Soviet Union had come to the problem through the whole security question, national security, and they knew very little, actually, about the people behind the Soviet mask, whereas Suzanne Massie had a real understanding and apparently got through to Reagan at a certain point and appealed to some of his already pre-existing instincts, and Reagan took that, that understanding, and deployed it very effectively in the talks with Gorbachev apparently. Reagan of course had been a negotiator for the...

Q: Screen Actors Guild.

EVANS: ...Screen Actors Guild way back and so he was a shrewd negotiator and a talented one. But he did care about the problem of nuclear weapons in a way that people probably at the time didn't grasp. He was very concerned about that issue. And then he got to see Gorbachev as a real person and I think these meetings...in my three years on that Soviet desk I think there were four summits and 28 ministerials. It was an incredibly busy and productive time in U.S.-Soviet relations.

Q: Well you mentioned one, the Defense Department. Of course they had this, particularly under Weinberger and Weinberger and Shultz, you know, we got along a lot better with the Soviet Union than Shultz and Weinberger did with each other. But Weinberger, I mean the whole Defense Department was keyed to presenting the Soviets as a huge menace, therefore if they have so many tank divisions we have to have so many plus. And you know, I mean there's a lot of money and jobs and everything else resting on this, and then you had the really pernicious effect of Bill Casey as the head of the CIA. I'm talking to Chester Crocker now, who is saying you know, Casey was- he had to have his own espionage systems to find out what Casey and his cohorts were doing regarding talks about Angola. I mean, you know, I mean it's a Byzantine world out there.

EVANS: Well, I think that's right. I have been told that Casey actually undermined many of his own analysts, insisting on the last spin on things going to the President and so on. And you may remember in those years the Pentagon came out annually with this assessment of the Soviet military...

Q: Yes, Might.

EVANS: Might or something. I can't remember the title of it but it was something like that, Soviet military threat or something like that [Soviet Military Power]. And in retrospect some of this is... some of it was relying on... they were cherry picking some of the facts and it had a definite political intent.

Q: How about the Soviet embassy? What was your feeling about the role Soviet representation played in the equation?

EVANS: We on the Soviet desk dealt with the Soviet embassy on a nearly daily basis and much of what we had to do was sweep up the various messes that occurred, whether it was involving some citizen in trouble or something that had gone wrong or...parking tickets were a hardy perennial. But we always found the Soviet embassy to be staffed with very highly professional people who spoke better English than we spoke Russian, who were, in the main, looking for solutions to these problems as good professional diplomats must do. There were a few cases of some who drank too much and ended up in the wrong places, those kinds of things, but in the main they were a professional group.

Q: Was Congress, I mean, you know, you have congressmen, particularly when we were in this rivalry with the Soviet Union and if you want to get votes posturing about being anti-communist and all, to get a congressman extra points. I mean, did you have problems with Congress?

EVANS: Well, yes, and the most notable example, which continues on even today, was the Jackson-Vanik amendment to the 1974 Trade Act. This was an amendment devised by Senator Scoop Jackson and Charlie Vanik in the House, and it was a rider to that act which penalized the Soviet Union for not allowing the free emigration of Soviet Jews to the West and particularly to Israel. And at the time it was hailed as a very sensible act of statesmanship and so on and it did serve its purpose; it put pressure, that and many other things that were done at the time, including actions that we took at the recurring CSCE meetings where the Third Basket of human rights was always discussed, I mean all these things worked together and we succeeded in opening the doors to the Soviet Union to allow Jews who were unhappy there to come out. Now unfortunately the Soviet Union being what it was there were a lot of people who claimed Jewish ancestry and came out with that false claim, but it did work.

Now, when George Bush, the first President George Bush, declared at the beginning of his presidency that he was ready to seek the removal of the Jackson-Vanik legislation which already had been...there's a provision for waiving its effect annually. That's still being done, by the way, because that provision of the law has not been rescinded. But that was the kind of congressional interference that was very difficult to deal with precisely because it was popular in the constituencies of some of the leading congressmen.

Q: How did you find particularly the American media dealing with the Soviets? I mean, was this basically a source of information or was it a problem that would report things that really weren't quite accurate and cause more trouble than it should?

EVANS: You know, I would not fault the mainstream media of that era for their reporting. They were very good on some of the issues, for example Whiskey on the Rocks. I remember they did a superb job of reporting that issue and by mainstream media of course I have in mind "The New York Times," "The Washington Post," and "Christian Science Monitor" was very good, as well as "The Chicago Tribune," "The Los Angeles Times." But what we were watching in those days even more carefully than the reporting was the opinion columns in everything from commentary "The New Republic," occasionally "The New Yorker," and the editorials in the big papers because there was such a discussion, an argument about whither the Soviet Union, what does Gorbachev mean, what should be the American response, are we doing enough to deter the Soviets and so on. So it was really...because the State Department is a policy making institution it was really the editorials that we always dove for.

Q: Well you know, I mean part of the process were retired but you know, today in Washington a given set of people all pick up "The Washington Post" and "The New York Times," turn to the editorial column and that sets the discussion for the day practically.

EVANS: One of the best lessons that I ever learned was from Richard Helms when he was ambassador in Tehran and I sat in on daily staff meetings. One time the political counselor came into the meeting without having read that morning's press. There was in those days an English language press in Tehran. He was severely chastised right in front of the rest of us and was sent out of the meeting to go read the papers, and Ambassador Helms said to the rest of us, looking us all in the eye, "don't ever attend a meeting in any organization without having read the morning papers." And I followed that rule.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: But I would stack the journalists and the papers of the 1980s up against what we have today any time. I think those journalists working in very difficult conditions in Moscow did a splendid job covering the, for example, the impending death of Brezhnev, all those deaths that took place, the closest guarded state secrets, they did an extremely good job. Dusko Doder was heading "The Washington Post" at the time, the office in Moscow. You had Serge Schmemann for "The New York Times." These were giants in the world of journalism. I don't even know if they...most of the papers now rely on stringers. And I think "The Washington Post" has totally misunderstood Vladimir Putin from the day he was named prime minister by Yeltsin, simply because he at one time worked in the KGB.

Q: Yes. It is- We're going through a difficult time because the reportage- newspapers are falling off, money is scarce and there's nothing to take up the slack. I mean, there's an awful lot of opinion and misinformation floating around the Internet but it doesn't really pass the intelligence test in a lot of cases.

EVANS: And that's so true, particularly with regard to international coverage where the number of minutes in any given half hour of news, the number of minutes that's devoted to international news is greatly reduced and it's mostly about what American troops are doing overseas.

Q: Yes. You know, I find it so pretty shut off because sort of as a sort of an old line person I sort of relied on what is known as the "Lehrer Report," and that's mostly about American economics and the political maneuvering, very little about anything else, you know.

EVANS: Although that's one of the best news hours, one of the best programs.

Q: Well, it is, but the international side is terrible. Not terrible but I mean really is lacking, badly lacking.

EVANS: I agree with you. Perversely the current Russian number one TV channel does a better job of international news than any of ours unless it's an issue that is very sensitive to the Russians. But if it's coverage of Latin America or Africa or Asia they actually have some good reporters out there and it stands up very well.

Q: Well you mentioned Africa; during the time there who was your Africa watcher? Because this, I mean, you know, I interview people like Chester Crocker who is involved at this particular time in trying to deal with things and the Soviets were beginning to withdraw. How did we feel about Africa?

EVANS: I think I mentioned when I was originally recruited by Sherrod McCall to go to Moscow I was supposed to handle the Africa brief, which had been handled up until then by Rudy Perina, and I can't tell you what the succession was there; we always had somebody watching Africa from Moscow. At NATO we didn't have anybody exclusively assigned to that because it was considered out-of-area for NATO. Now today that's no longer the case.

Q: But what was- But okay, you're on the desk. You've got to look at what the Soviet Union is doing and Africa was sort of the- Africa and to some extent Latin America, we'll talk about some about Africa first; what were they doing?

EVANS: Well the most notable thing was the involvement, along with the Cubans, in Namibia and I want to say Zimbabwe, at one point. Was it ZANU?

Q: Yes. I mean, there was Angola-

EVANS: Angola, right. I have to plead a certain amount of ignorance because I just don't remember. I do remember that we, one of the problems with the central relationship was always these other things that were going on in other parts of the world, various strains and...

Q: Well I mean the Soviet Union had been pretty active in Africa along with the Cubans but in Ethiopia and-

EVANS: And West Africa too.

Q: West Africa but then by the time you're talking about they were beginning to feel real constraints, I think.

EVANS: Well, I think it was in part budgetary but oddly enough after the Soviet Union finally went out of existence in 1991 a number of the Russian companies still had contacts in Africa and even the U.S. on occasion would charter aircraft that had Russian pilots and so on, so yes, there has been a kind of a Russian interest in Africa that has shown itself from time to time.

Q: Well you were on the Soviet- Russian desk, Soviet desk-

EVANS: Soviet desk at that time.

Q: -during the Reagan Administration up to the end of the Reagan Administration and you have this civil war going on in well, Nicaragua and El Salvador in Central America, and Reagan had made noises about the Soviets there but more Cubans but how did we view the Soviet interest in that area?

EVANS: Well, we certainly disapproved of it. We no longer quoted the Monroe Doctrine but we still got our hackles up at evidence of Soviet involvement, typically things in Cuba. I remember Cuba always being there as a reminder that the Soviets had influence very close to our borders in a nation with which we had no diplomatic relations except through the interest sections. And these did come up; these issues did come up at the various ministerial meetings, perhaps more than at the summits; Shultz and Shevardnadze definitely dealt with those issues to a great extent.

Q: Did you- How did you sense the relationship as it grew between Shevardnadze and Shultz? Because one knows that Baker and Shevardnadze really, I mean it was an extremely close and positive relationship but how about with Shevardnadze and Shultz?

EVANS: Well, I don't think it was quite the same but Shevardnadze was Gorbachev's choice. He was a surprise to the establishment in Moscow but Gorbachev of course came from a southern province, Krasnodar, in the Soviet Union and Eduard Shevardnadze was just across the border in Georgia as the party boss there so they knew each other, they had known each other for quite a long time and so Shevardnadze was someone Gorbachev felt saw the world very much as he did and that made Shevardnadze the man to talk to. He was of a very different cut than Gromyko and he and Shultz really were able to work together as those 28 ministerials showed.

Q: Did you get any feel for the professional Soviet Foreign Service and Shevardnadze, how they-?

EVANS: You know, the Soviet Foreign Ministry was very strong in Americanists and there were...Gromyko himself had started life here in Washington, in the Roosevelt Administration and had all those years worked on American issues and had reared a stable of very fine experts on the United States. And Shevardnadze listened to them, he made them part of his team. I'm sure there were at times disagreements as there always are over policy matters but I think he was quite well served by them.

Q: As you moved into this, moving towards '89, was there any sense, was anybody talking about the communications revolution that was going on? I mean the, you know, we're talking about cell phones, Internet, faxes and all this and communications have always been what dictatorships or centralized states try to control. And I mean this was just going completely out the window.

EVANS: Well I think what I really have to say is that my main concern in the three years I was on the Soviet desk was with the microphones that the Soviets had allegedly planted in the Moscow embassy that we were trying to build. There undoubtedly was talk about the nascent Internet and communications and so on but the real issue that so burdened us in those years was the fact that our embassy had not been certified because of irregularities in its construction. We were quite naï¿½ve but a whole industry grew up, a multi-agency, interagency group that developed technologies for examining parts of that Moscow embassy, which went on for years and years and years and there were endless meetings about what could be done to save the embassy, was it the...would you make a top hat? In the end that's what was done; we built on the top of it with a totally secure section and then we abandoned the lower floors for all intents and purposes to unclassified work. But this also coincided with a scandal involving supposedly the Marines...

Q: Sergeant Lonetree.

EVANS: Sergeant Lonetree, and others have written about that and I don't want to get into the details but only to again underscore the point that these peripheral issues... Of course Lonetree was not peripheral; that was spying right in the heart of the American embassy. But what I mean is that issues that are laden with a sense of betrayal and emotion and very sensitive issues can come to dominate the main line of the relationship and certainly the Lonetree incident and the bugging of the Moscow embassy, all these things were heavy burdens on their relationship.

Q: Did- What was your relationship with INR?

EVANS: It was excellent, in a word. INR has always in my view been one of the most intelligent analytical shops around town, and we knew all the analysts who worked on Russia, some of whom are still there, and it was Morty Schwartz and Jack Sontag, and Wayne Lindberg and John Parker and a lot of others. But they were daily turning out very cogent briefs on the situation as it developed, both the leadership and other issues.

Q: When you left- You left in '89?

EVANS: Yes. Before I talk about that though there's one thing I should mention because it's where several things intersected. In December of 1988 Chairman Gorbachev was in Washington for a summit, which was highly successful. It was one of those summits in which there was a lot of good will expressed, the perspectives on the relationship looked very positive. It was during that interregnum when the election of '88 had taken place; George Bush had been elected but not yet inaugurated so we had an outgoing president and a president in waiting. And it must have been on December 8 that we got the word of the Armenian earthquake, a terrible earthquake which had ravaged the Caucasus or at least that northern part of Armenia. When the news came Gorbachev was in New York and he had to abruptly cancel the rest of his program and go back to the Soviet Union because of the earthquake. There's a famous photograph of Gorbachev, George Bush Sr. and Ronald Reagan on Governors Island in bright sunlight right before Gorbachev went back to deal with the earthquake. President Reagan asked Gorbachev at that point, is there anything we can do to help? And Gorbachev responded by saying there might be. And sure enough, in very short order we learned that the Soviet Union would, for the first time in history, accept outside assistance in trying to rescue survivors from the earthquake.

And I remember, first of all, receiving the official request from the DCM of the Soviet embassy, Mr. Kutovoy, but I also remember sending one of our Soviet desk officers. He had already gone home for the night but I reached him at home at about 7:00 and I said Aubrey - it was Aubrey Carlson - how would you like to spend the next two or three weeks before Christmas in Armenia because we need somebody to go over there and help with the earthquake. And he said "sure, will do." And he got his stuff together and at 9:00 that night he was at Dulles Airport and they were winging their way towards Armenia or towards the Soviet Union, without visas and with no flight clearance to enter Soviet territory. Now this was less than 10 years after the shoot down of the Korean airliner. What a change, that we dared - In fact I had an argument with Julia Taft, who was at that time...the late Julia Taft who was running the Office of...

Q: Economic bureau?

EVANS: No, it was the immediate relief office. I can't remember the acronym [FDA] but it was an office of AID that dealt with crisis relief, and she had organized these flights using Fairfax County's search and rescue, which is a very fine, state-of-the-art search and rescue group with the sniffer dogs and everything, and they went immediately to the scene. Of course there were no incidents, everybody was trying to save lives and Aubrey Carlson did a splendid job there as our man on the scene. Also Ross Wilson came down; he was at that time assigned to Embassy Moscow and he went down to deal with shipments of relief supplies and so on.

But it was a milestone because it was the first time the Soviets had requested assistance and a major Western power had provided it.

Q: Yes, I got involved in one back in '63 when there was a very bad earthquake in Skopje, Yugoslavia, and we offered a MASH (Mobile Army Surgical Hospital) hospital and Tito accepted it. And so I was the political officer in this hospital in Macedonia.

EVANS: Well, that was a measure of how much closer to the Western world Yugoslavia was.

Q: Absolutely, yes.

EVANS: But in the Tashkent earthquake in '65 and various other disasters the Soviet approach had been to say, often curtly, "thank you, we can handle it ourselves."

Q: Well in '89, what happened? In the first place, when in '89 is a rather important question.

EVANS: Yes. And I left in the summer and for my exertions...that's all I can really call them, I was exhausted after these three years, just totally exhausted. It had started with the Daniloff case and I remember that fall, at one point I emerged from the State Department and realized that the seasons had changed. I'd spent so much time in the building I wasn't even aware of it. And all these ministerials and summits and so on, it was just a back-breaking three years. I was, for those exertions, awarded a Cox Fellowship so in September of 1989 I migrated over to the Kennan Institute down at the Wilson Center and started to develop a thesis, which was not original to me, it was Timothy Garton Ash who had, in an article in "The New York Review of Books," I guess it was back in April of '89, he had thrown out the idea that the Soviet Union might fall apart much in the way the Ottoman Empire had done, and he called this his "Ottomanization" thesis. But he didn't develop it and so I took as my hypothesis that the Soviet Union might break up and go into a long, slow decline much as the Ottoman Empire had done. And I'd always wanted to read more Ottoman history so I took it upon myself to start reading as much as I could about the Ottoman experience in search of possible parallels for what might happen in our own time with the Soviet Union. Of course that fall the Wall came down and the Soviet Union - and the Soviet Empire in its larger sense with the satellite countries and so on - almost vanished overnight. And so my thesis was totally undermined, it was nothing like the centuries-long Ottoman decline and I eventually...the paper that I wrote I presented it in a great hurry at the Wilson Center before taking up another job because I was called back to the State Department before the end of that sabbatical year and the thesis was clearly untenable.

Q: Well I think this is probably a good place to stop here. And we haven't picked up your reaction to the fall of the Wall; really we're talking about November-December of '89 when things started-actually are beginning to fall apart earlier-

EVANS: In the summer.

Q: In the summer; Czechoslovakia, Hungary and all that.

EVANS: That's right.

Q: So we'll pick this up the next time because I think it gives- we've been at this, I think it's a good place to stop.

EVANS: Yes, good. Okay. Thank you very much.

Q: Today is the 25th of November, 2009, the day before Thanksgiving with John Evans. And John, where were we?

EVANS: We were in 1989; I was just wrapping up my stint as deputy director of the Soviet desk. And 1989 of course was a very important year in the history of Europe and the history of the world.

Q: When- It's important when we talk about 1989- You wrapped it up, I suppose, in June or July?

EVANS: Well actually there was a conference, a very important meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the CSCE, that started at the end of May in Paris; it was 200 years after the French Revolution, 1789 to 1989, and it was one of the three meetings on the "human dimension," so-called, that had been mandated by the Vienna Review Conference. The Vienna Review Conference was the second of the review conferences after the original Helsinki conference and it ended just as the Reagan Administration ended in January of 1989. It was notable for having pushed forward the understandings of what we had meant in the Third Basket, the human rights provisions, in particular it had achieved a consensus on the freedom of people to leave any country. And already at that Paris conference- I was asked to go to the conference and be a member of the delegation mainly to deal with the Soviets; I was still on the Soviet desk, just at the tail end, and we had a number of issues with the Soviets involving some people who wanted to emigrate and so on. And so I went off to Paris to that meeting on the human dimension. And I remember that already there, this is the early summer of 1989, the Hungarians at one point held up a piece of barbed wire, saying that this had been snipped out of the common border with Austria, and so there was quite a bit of talk about freedom of movement at that point.

Q: Speaking of freedom of movement and Soviet affairs, were we looking at the Soviets particularly because of Jewish migration and I assume the rather heavy concentrate of Russian Jews in sort of the scientific fields, were we seeing that Soviets were actually suffering from a brain drain or was this more it's damned embarrassing to have people getting out of your country?

EVANS: I think it was a combination of things. We had been pressing since the '60s, really, and certainly in the '70s we had been pressing the Soviets to ease emigration policies. In 1974 the Jackson-Vanik Amendment was attached to the trade act, which was a way of pressuring for freer emigration. In the Helsinki Final Act there's phrase that talks about freer movement of people and by the time of the Vienna meeting the flow had really opened up, it was under Gorbachev, of course. One of the bureaucratic mechanisms the Soviets used to stanch the flow was the state secrets provision, and while all countries have some version of this, even there are some people in the United States who aren't allowed to travel completely freely if they're doing highly sensitive work, but we tried to, in the CSCE process we tried to, make those limitations reasonable so that a year or five years at the most after somebody had been in engaged in highly secret work they would be allowed to leave, not 20 years after they had done so. But there was quite a flow at this time of people leaving the Soviet Union.

Q: I'm interviewing, actually yesterday, Steve Mann-

EVANS: Oh yes.

Q: -who's talking about when he was a junior officer in '79 in Moscow and going to sort of farewell parties of dissidents who were leaving but they left everything behind. You know, they couldn't take anything with them.

EVANS: That was very often the case, that either their property and certainly their immovable property didn't go and many other things they had to leave behind, and I even had one story told to me, a tragic story, about a Russian - a Soviet couple - that was about to leave for the West, they had just had a child born to them, and in this telling they did away with the child to start a new life in the West. It was a horrible thing. Now, it's only anecdotal but it may have been true.

Q: Well anyway, so how did this meeting go in Paris?

EVANS: Well, the Paris meeting was the first of three meetings on the human dimension mandated by the Madrid Review Conference. It was of course a major event for the French because it was done on the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution.

Q: This is around July 14?

EVANS: It ended around July 14 and it was a triumph for them; it was held in the Grand Palais. It was important, as I remember it, we were getting along at that point very well with the Soviets. Gorbachev had been in Washington the previous December in that interim between well, Reagan was still president and Shultz was still secretary and Bush and Baker were in the wings waiting to come in. We were getting along extremely well; no one on our side wanted to hamper Gorbachev in the reforms that he was undertaking so clearly in the Soviet Union and oddly enough the pressure at that meeting tended to focus on East European regimes, most notably the Romanians and to some extent the East Germans, whereas we saw that in Poland and Hungary the winds of change were already starting to blow a bit. So the dynamic had ceased to be so purely bloc-to-bloc and it was much more a discussion among European countries.

Q: It's interesting because Romania under Ceausescu had been probably the- as oppressive a regime as one can think but it was sort of our semi darling because it had been standing up to the Soviet Union and all of a sudden we're using a different yardstick and it didn't measure up at all under a human rights yardstick.

EVANS: Well, that's right. It was a repressive regime; it had taken some independent steps in foreign policy but at home it was really totalitarian. At the Paris conference in 1989 the chief of our delegation was Morris Abram, who had been a high executive in various Jewish organizations in the United States, a very well trained and capable lawyer, and he was very sharp in his criticisms. Romania came in for criticism even from its technical allies and there was tension between the Hungarians and the Romanians because of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania. Also, as I recall at that time, there was great criticism of the Bulgarians for their campaign to rename Turkish citizens of Bulgaria, that is ethnically Turkish citizens; they were being repressed in Bulgaria. That was an issue.

Q: How were the Romanians responding at this conference?

EVANS: Very truculently and I seem to recall that the Romanian foreign minister did not receive applause for his speech. Secretary Baker didn't attend, but the Romanians were very much the odd man out and there was no final document of the Paris experts' meeting, it being rather clear at that point that we did not have a consensus, largely because of Romania.

Q: I take it the French sort of- What was their attitude towards us? They've always been sort of odd man out within the West but obviously they're for human rights and all this. I mean, was this the sort of thing that they really jumped in with both feet and into pushing this or not?

EVANS: The French were always great believers in the CSCE. They also have a long tradition of wanting special relations with Moscow and at that time it would have been Mitterrand and Mitterrand every once in awhile would go and have a meeting with Gorbachev and sometimes the French would act without coordinating things in NATO. So they were strong, independent but very active in the CSCE.

Q: Were we seeing the CSCE, well the Third Basket, as being a really effective instrument, you know, as far as so long it had been considered, particularly by Kissinger and the realists, of being something- it was just smoke and mirrors; the real thing was arms control and all. I mean, what was your feeling there when you went there?

EVANS: I believe that over the years, since the very beginning of CSCE when, you're quite right, Secretary Kissinger had in fact counseled President Ford not to sign the Helsinki Final Act, but over the years top people at the State Department came to realize that the CSCE was a useful instrument, and I think this included people like Larry Eagleburger, who back at the beginning, he was with Kissinger, I believe, in the mid '70s, on his staff, and was skeptical. The other thing we were skeptical of in the State Department was the Helsinki Commission that was set up by the Congress as an independent commission to provide long term expertise in the CSCE, the fear being that with State Department assignment policies you'd have people coming in and out every two years and there would be no consistency, no institutional memory. But there was a kind of jealousy as well between the State Department and this commission, which indeed started to develop considerable expertise and the compromise that made it work was that the commission normally had two or three Foreign Service officers assigned to it and we came to know the experts on the Helsinki Commission as real colleagues and very knowledgeable and people who could help us do our job better.

Q: Did you, in your assignment up to that time, have much contact with Helsinki Commission?

EVANS: Yes, in the sense that the Helsinki Commission particularly kept a sharp eye on the Soviet Union, and so we often met with them to discuss various problem cases. But one of the things that originated in my time on the Soviet desk was this institution of a bilateral review commission with the Soviet Union. This was a regularly scheduled set of meetings, usually twice a year, sometimes more, in which we looked at the bilateral issues and that was a broad umbrella to cover various human rights problems, emigration issues, problems involving our representation and sometimes of course it meant things related to espionage. But because we had that special relationship with the Soviets and that special mechanism for dealing with these problems we didn't rely, as some of the European countries did, on the CSCE meetings as a way to deal with these problems.

Q: Well then, was there much accomplished by this meeting or is this more review or-?

EVANS: As I said, it was the first of three meetings on the human dimension. I think the palpably changed atmosphere was the main event at the Paris meeting. Now, Rudy Perina was Morris Abram's deputy but Rudy had to leave in the middle of the conference for a family emergency and I ended up moving into his spot, effectively, and I also, with Jane Fisher of the Helsinki Commission had several bilateral with the Soviet delegation to work primarily on emigration issues. And the other thing that we introduced at the Paris meeting - not as a full proposal - but we put forward the idea that as Europe was evolving we ought to talk about the question of free and fair elections. Now we'd just put that idea out there at Paris and it was only a year later at the Copenhagen conference that that became a centerpiece of our delegation's focus. Paris was in the early summer of '89; things moved very quickly during the fall of '89 and by this time I had been released from my duties at the Soviet desk and had won a Cox Fellowship and had gone off to the Kennan Institute to read as much as I could on Ottoman history.

Q: The Ottomanization of the Soviet Empire.

EVANS: Exactly, which turned out to be a misleading thesis.

Q: Well you were not the only one who was caught. Can you imagine all of the dedicated students of Marxism who were left at the universities and all? I mean, you know, as sort of a, sort of like Zoroastrians in the Roman Empire or something.

EVANS: Well, I hadn't thought of that comparison but indeed, people, scholars in particular and even journalists who had made it their life's work to study the workings of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Empire were caught flat-footed, many of them, and there was less interest in studying the old texts.

Q: Yes. Well on this Cox thing, did you- were you having- were you able to monitor events pretty well?

EVANS: Yes, indeed I was. First of all, my topic was, although partly historical, that is, reading Ottoman history, I was very consciously looking for parallels between the decline of the Ottomans and what we all saw was the impending decline of the Soviet Empire. We just didn't know how it was all going to go and so I was definitely watching things, and I remember by early November of 1989, when what happened really was that the Vienna Review Conference had established, by consensus, that any person could leave any country. That was a basic right. And what happened in November is the East Germans in Prague and Hungary, East Germans started to leave those countries, and those countries, when the East German government, relying on previous agreements, said "you've got to send these people back," they quoted the Vienna Review document and said it's now established that people have the right to leave. And so there were East Germans abandoning their little Trabants and crossing into Austria. A lot of Trabants were abandoned also in the Czech Republic. It was then Czechoslovakia.

Q: And you had this huge encampment within the German- the West German compound in Prague too.

EVANS: That's right, that's right.

Q: Well, I mean, you were sort of off on this nice assignment, you know, the Cox is a sabbatical essentially, but I would think as a Soviet type somebody would say hey, no sabbatical for you, and call you back into the fold.

EVANS: That's actually what happened. It happened in the winter. My wife and I watched all the events on television, the fall of the Wall and so on, but then I got a call shortly after New Year's saying that I was needed to come back and coordinate work on the CSCE in the European Bureau, at EUR/RPM, which is where the CSCE coordination was done. And so I wrapped up my work at the Kennan Institute as quickly as I could, delivered my paper at one of their noontime lunch events and very quickly started working on the first of several experts' conferences that had been called to talk about cooperation in the New Europe, and the first one was at, it must have been in February of 1990 or so, and it was on economic cooperation, and it was held in Bonn, hosted by the Germans. And it was a discussion of how to reform economies. There was a great concern, of course, among the East Europeans about how they were going to manage under the new system, how they were going to integrate into the rest of the world. And so what we tried to do was to provide some experience on how economies can be modernized and reformed.

Q: Did you have any particular piece of this action?

EVANS: I was the all-purpose deputy for these experts' conferences and so my job first of all was to help the head of delegation pull together a group which was both officials and experts from outside, and we always tried to mix U.S. Government people with the best experts we could find in the private sector. And of course we had people from the Helsinki Commission who also joined the delegation. So we pulled the delegation together, we had at least some meetings before we deployed to the conference location. Before some of these experts meetings I would go with the head of delegation and consult in capitals. Before the Bonn conference we didn't have a chance to do that. But these conferences, of course, it's the Second Basket of the Helsinki three that focuses on economic matters and it was more of a discussion than anything else.

Q: Well was it apparent at that point that the Eastern bloc countries were essentially going to move their economies from the strictly controlled economy of the Soviet Empire to a freer flowing economy with the West?

EVANS: To varying degrees it was clear. The Poles and the Hungarians were definitely in the forefront of this. They were already making rapid strides. The Czechoslovaks were perhaps next in line. The East Germans, Bulgarians, Romanians had their own approaches but it was clear that there was nowhere else to head.

Q: Was it that the Soviet system was so deficient that it really couldn't offer to, you know, to improve its system or something?

EVANS: I think the East Europeans felt a mixture of relief but at the same time concern. It was as if Moscow under Gorbachev was basically washing its hands of the East Europeans and that they would have to find their own ways forward. And so the Germans in particular took a lead within the CSCE in trying to help them, sometimes making loans and certainly promoting West Germany in the Eastern sphere.

Q: Well while you were working on this, in the first place, did- was it sort of a revelation of how awful the East German economy was? Because you know, it was almost considered, you know, to be ahead of the rest and from what I gather it really, no matter how ahead it was it was pretty awful.

EVANS: The East German economy was well known for precision tools, optics and a lot of defense-related materials that the Soviet Union incorporated into its military effort. And in some ways, for a controlled, planned economy it was doing better than say Bulgaria, which is largely agrarian. But there were problems in East Germany as well and of course when the Wall came down it became quite clear that maybe five million East Germans would choose to leave, which would undermine the Honecker regime completely.

Q: Did- Were you picking up within the State Department concern of, you know, as things developed West Germany is going to become the center of the economies of Eastern Europe? I mean, it's a natural; it abuts on so many and it's got the, you know, engineering genius and all this, and that, you know, we were not- we wouldn't be too happy to see a dominant Germany in Eastern Europe.

EVANS: There was a feeling that Germany had perhaps the most advantageous position vis-ï¿½-vis the developments in Eastern Europe. I think that Washington was less fearful of that than some of the European countries may have been.

Q: Maggie Thatcher was not enthusiastic about this whole thing, I believe.

EVANS: I suspect that's right. I think we actually looked at Germany as our great partner in this and we were happy to see that the West Germans were stepping up to the challenge.

Q: Well how long were you doing this?

EVANS: I worked as the CSCE coordinator all through the following year; that is, through 1990 all the way to summer of '91. And we did a couple of other experts conferences and we also in, it must have been October of 1990, the United States hosted the one CSCE meeting that we've ever hosted and it was a foreign ministers' meeting in New York at the Javits Center preparatory to the December 1990 Paris ministerial...or maybe it was a summit; it must have been a summit because that meeting in Paris issued the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, which became the new...almost the constitution within CSCE of the new Europe and it recapitulated all the progress that had been made since Helsinki in the area particularly of human rights.

Q: Well were you seeing- I mean obviously people getting out from under the Soviet system would be overjoyed to get out from under the Soviet system, but were sort of the traditional animosities or concerns, the Poles versus the Germans or the Hungarians versus the Romanians and all, I mean were these sort of getting into all of the negotiations?

EVANS: Yes, they were. I mean there was a kind of return of nationalism after this frozen situation under the Soviet domination. Of course we had suspected that there were things going under the surface even then but it became much more obvious that precisely some of the examples you've mentioned: that Hungarians and the Romanians were not on the best of terms.

Q: Of the Eastern European countries, which ones were sort of in the forefront, would you say, during this time?

EVANS: Certainly the Hungarians and the Poles. The Hungarians more because they were not coping still with the problem of the martial law, which had seized up Poland. Poland had been perhaps in the lead but because of the martial law that was imposed in 1981 they had really been frozen in place during most of the '80s. The Hungarians with a different approach quietly and without making much political noise had gone quite far ahead economically; Austria was also a player here, not only West Germany but the Austrians in their quiet way were working with the Hungarians. And so I would say that probably Hungary was in the lead.

Q: How did our involvement and others' involvement in the Kuwait, Saddam Hussein's Iraqi invasion of Kuwait; did that intrude or not?

EVANS: In my work it intruded in a very ironic way. Another one of the experts' meetings that was scheduled was on the question of Peaceful Settlement of Disputes, which is based on Principle Five of the Helsinki Decalogue of Principles, and in January of 1991 we launched a delegation to Malta, to Valletta, for a three week conference on this question of peaceful settlement of disputes. Now, the irony came in when precisely while we were on the island of Malta the first Gulf War began several hundred miles to the east of us, and in fact one of our private sector legal experts became so nervous about the fact that there was a war starting that he asked permission to be detached from the delegation and go home to the Midwest somewhere, although in fact things were rather peaceful in Malta.

The effort there in Malta was to strengthen something called "the mechanism," which was a procedure devised at the Vienna Review Conference under which one country could approach another country with a problem of some sort that they detected in the addressed country's practice and could ask for answers. It was called the "Vienna Mechanism." It was fairly sparsely used although a couple times it was used against the United States by Moscow. Moscow, for example, invoked the Vienna Mechanism when we had turned down visas for some Soviet trade unionists and I remember at the Paris meeting I was designated to give our answer under that mechanism, why it was that we had denied these visas and I did so at that conference.

Q: What were the reasons?

EVANS: Well, basically we said that we did not believe that these people were truly representative of the workers, that they were political bureaucrats and not true labor union representatives, but we did at the same time say that we would review... there's something called the McCarran Act, which bears on this question, and I said...

Q: If you are a member of a communist organization you can't get a visa.

EVANS: Right. But we said that we would take a flexible approach to future applications by people claiming to represent the Soviet workers.

At Valletta what we tried to do was to make this mechanism more workable. We had the then legal advisor, Mike Young, who was a Columbia law professor who had come down to work in the Bush Administration, he had some very able people he attracted to our delegation and we worked on this mechanism and tried to explain for the formerly communist countries how developed Western countries deal with their problems. And often enough the United States would cite its many differences with Canada and the way we have institutionalized methods of dealing with those through the Great Lakes Commission, for example, and various other mechanisms we have for dealing with trade disputes and so on.

But the ironic thing was that the world was focused on the war that had just started and "peaceful settlement of disputes" was very far down in the fine print.

Q: You didn't have an Iraqi yet representative there?

EVANS: No. Of course Iraq was not present in the CSCE. What was noticeable on the island of Malta was a very visible Libyan presence.

Q: Yes. Well, did you have- I imagine you had a lot of contact with people in what you were doing, didn't you?

EVANS: Certainly with the other delegations. The wonderful thing for a diplomat at either a place like the United Nations or NATO headquarters or in the CSCE process was that one was doing diplomacy with 35 countries and later 54 other countries. So it was multilateral diplomacy. There were real issues and it was quite fascinating.

Q: Did you find, I mean was there a spirit of cooperation that really sort of worked within this? I mean, here we are, we're all human beings and maybe we can work to do something or did matters far into sort of national interests?

EVANS: Well, I wouldn't say that there was any sense of naï¿½ve idealism. At least that was not the predominant philosophy. There had been such tough fights in the past, at the Madrid Review Conference, the Vienna Review Conference, that the rules of diplomacy were by no means suspended and it was still the case that NATO caucuses would meet, European Union caucuses would meet. It was less so on the other side by this time; there was no real Warsaw Pact caucus by that time. At the same time there was also a feeling that change was happening. The United States in particular did not want to unduly complicate Gorbachev's agenda so we became somewhat less obstreperous, perhaps, in our statements and more willing to achieve small but sustainable gains than to make big gambits and loud statements. It was a gradual, patient way of working.

Q: Were there any indicators during this time of the problems in the Baltics? Not the Baltics but in Yugoslavia?

EVANS: I wish you had kept it on the Baltics because indeed there was.

Q: Okay, well let's keep it to the Baltics.

EVANS: Right on the eve of our departure for Valletta for the meeting on peaceful settlement of disputes there was an incident in Latvia in which Soviet troops killed maybe a dozen demonstrators. It was a very...

Q: Trying to seize a radio station.

EVANS: That seems right to me. I don't remember all the details but it meant that our meeting in Valletta started off against the background of this very serious interference with the right to demonstrate or right of peaceful assembly, and during that meeting Mike Young, the legal advisor and I received emissaries from the Baltics...from Latvia. I remember the name; one of them was Loristin. And we made statements in the plenary sessions and met with the press about this and so it definitely intruded into our work.

Q: Yugoslavia?

EVANS: At that time my recollection was that Yugoslavia was still Yugoslavia and still operating diplomatically in the same area.

Q: I believe-

EVANS: Flexible and working with both sides.

Q: Yes. You did this for how long?

EVANS: The high point of my involvement in these experts' meetings came in May and June of 1990 when the second of the mandated human dimension conferences took place in Copenhagen and Max Kampelman was named to head the delegation. I was his deputy or his principal deputy because we also had somebody from the commission and Paula Dobriansky from the Department who was...we were three deputies. And Max brought in some very fine legal talent; he brought in Tom Buergenthal, who was a judge and scholar; he brought in Hurst Hannum, who was, I think, up at Tufts up the time, another legal expert, and Theodor Meron, who was a lawyer from New York. And we made a very bold proposal which got quite quick support from other Western countries and it had to do with defining what is a free and fair election. And when all was said and done the document that we issued at Copenhagen became the only agreed definition of what is a free and fair election. And at that time, just at that time, various of these Eastern European countries were having their first go at real democratic elections. My wife during the Copenhagen conference had been sent to Bulgaria by CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies) or I guess by the International Republican Institute. She was working at CSIS but she went as an election observer for the first Bulgarian election in June of 1990. So the idea of free and fair elections was really spelled out in detail in that Copenhagen document and for quite some time was considered the gold standard.

Q: Well, I was going to have to point out that it's really from about that time when elections really, you might say, almost took off. I mean, all around the world there were elections with observers and it became sort of a mechanism for watching it. Not all of them were good elections but they were much more important; they were no longer the sort of pro forma elections.

EVANS: Well, that's right. And the Vienna Review Conference had spawned three institutions. I mean, the CSCE had always been very light on institutions but it spawned a special office to be located in Warsaw, the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. And they, once they got up and running, developed procedures for long-term and short-term observation of elections that still continue to this day. The other two institutions were a conflict prevention center to be located in Vienna, and there was a kind of archival office to be located in Prague. The CSCE had always believed in spreading institutions and meetings around among the participating states.

Q: Yes I was an election observer twice, in Bosnia in the 1990s, and I was impressed; it was a good, solid apparatus.

You mentioned your wife; you've mentioned her a couple times. Could you tell me about her background?

EVANS: Yes, very briefly my wife, Donna Chamberlain, was actually born in Leipzig. Her family had come from Poland and Austria and during the war her parents ended up in forced labor camps and she was born in a forced labor camp near Leipzig. At the end of the war they moved to Canada so she grew up in Canada and when I met her at NATO in the early '80s she was in the Canadian Foreign Service. We then, a few years later, got married, she left the Canadian Foreign Service and in 1991 became a U.S. citizen and has always found useful things to do during our overseas assignments.

Q: All right, then we have this treaty in Copenhagen.

EVANS: I wouldn't call it a treaty but a document of the...

Q: A document. Then what did you do?

EVANS: We had one more important experts' meeting, which had to do with the preservation of the cultural heritage, and that was held in Krakow in 1991.

And I should come back to Copenhagen for one second more and say that the other two achievements besides defining free and fair elections, Ambassador Kampelman managed to get into the final document the first ever international condemnation of anti-Semitism, because one of the things that was starting to come back as the system melted through the former Soviet Empire was there was a recrudescence of anti-Semitism and considerable concern about that, including on the part of the Russians. So that document condemned anti-Semitism, we think for the first time ever in an international document, and it also for the first time mentioned the problems experienced by the Roma, or gypsies. So that was an achievement as well.

The Conference on the Preservation of the Cultural Heritage was a different kind of event.

Q: Just one second.

Okay. Before I forget, how did- I've interviewed Max Kampelman; I have a couple of things- he's in our collection, but how was he to work with? I mean how did he operate?

EVANS: Max was a wonderful diplomat. He, of course, had a great deal of experience by this time. He had worked on Strategic Arms; he had been involved in the CSCE. He had been brought aboard to work on Strategic Arms by President Carter and that must have been under Griffin Bell, if I'm not mistaken. Griffin Bell retired when Carter went out of office and Ronald Reagan had the wisdom to keep Kampelman on and he really was one of the great diplomats of our time. A pleasure to work for, always reaching for consensus, building consensus, tough but willing to talk to anybody, very good with the press, soft spoken but when necessary very strong in argument. And I must say I learned a great deal from him and consider him one of my personal heroes.

Q: Well I was very impressed by the gentleman myself and he's in our collection.

Okay, then you- go on.

EVANS: Well, I mentioned the experts' meeting on peaceful settlement of disputes which took place in January of 1991 just as the Gulf War was getting underway. Then in the early summer there was a meeting in Krakow, Poland...

Q: This would be '90?

EVANS: Ninety-one.

Q: Ninety-one.

EVANS: ...on the preservation of the cultural heritage. And our delegation was headed by Nancy Reynolds, who was a close collaborator of President Reagan's from California days and had been a lobbyist here in Washington. The State Department was not particularly thrilled by her appointment but I was to be her deputy and to bring together the delegation and we had a good delegation and Nancy Reynolds turned out to be quite a good chief of delegation and gave a very fine speech about the cultural heritage of America in which she mentioned, for example, jazz and the way that the African American element in our culture had so enriched our heritage. And so we got a good document about the need to preserve elements of the heritage, whether it was art, fine arts, architecture, and also places of remembrance. This was something on people's minds. It was not simply a question of preserving concentration camps but that was one of the concerns, was to make sure that concentration camps and the archives that went with them were not destroyed, that these were unhappy memories of mankind but as important as any others.

Q: Babi Yar, I imagine.

EVANS: Well Babi Yar in particular. When Yevtushenko wrote his famous poem about Babi Yar, as I remember it begins by saying there are no monuments at Babi Yar. So that was one of the achievements of the cultural heritage conference: to highlight these matters.

Q: Were there, as you were working on this, what inspired this? Were there concerns that things were sort of getting swallowed up, that- was it more for forgetfulness or were there political motives of not- I mean, you know, the Holocaust, of course, was a big driving force but there are certainly other things.

EVANS: Oh yes, absolutely, there were other things as well, and there was a fear that because under Soviet domination so many historical issues were taboo there was a feeling that this was a moment when we had to try to make sure that the totality of our cultural heritage was not sacrificed.

There were also some difficult moments for us. There were questions about indigenous people and the question of American Indians came up, and the importance of preserving autochthonous groups and even threatened language groups. And we had quite a rich mixture of outside experts and scholars who came and talked to the conference. So it was a very...although the final document was not earth shaking it did break new ground on the question of places of memory.

Now, I got myself into a difficult situation on the last day of that conference. We knew that there would be a call for objections to the final document; that's the way the consensus was achieved, it was done by...if somebody had an objection then there was no consensus. Otherwise a consensus was assumed. And I had been repeatedly and urgently asking the State Department for instructions on whether we joined the consensus document or not. And of course there's a time difference; I found myself sitting in the auditorium there with the clock ticking towards the end of the conference and no instruction from Washington. Now, it was the office of Bob Zoellick, who was then the Counselor of the Department, that was the deciding party on this. Finally the moment came when we had to either withhold or give assent to this document, and I had no instructions. And I did something I very much did not want to do; I did not object to the document, I allowed it to go forward with the implication that there was agreement on the U.S. side. I felt it would have been not only churlish but it would have made the United States look like a laughingstock had we withheld agreement on a document that we had gone over many times. But I was then, within the next 24 hours, rapped on the knuckles very hard by Bob Zoellick and they got the term "doing the Evans thing," or "pulling an Evans" meaning to act without instructions. Now, I don't for a second believe that the State Department would or should have withheld consensus but...

Q: No. I mean, something like that just- you don't play with.

EVANS: ...but they had adequate time to give me an instruction. All I needed was one word in a cable saying... or two words saying "signal consensus" or something like that.

Q: Were there any points? I mean, these things can, you know, I mean, we weren't putting up a big enough monument at Wounded Knee or something like that?

EVANS: If there were any objections I don't recall them. Now, there was at that time, there's always been in Washington a suspicion of this fuzzy sort of moveable conversation (the CSCE); it doesn't really have legal status, it doesn't have troops, it's just sort of a moveable talking shop, and with so many lawyers in the State Department I'm sure one could always find a nit or two to pick. But basically this was a good document that didn't incur any budgetary costs for the United States, another thing that we always had to consider, and I felt that I should have had instruction and I felt that I just had to make the call and give consensus.

Q: Well that's the way- Of course the other side was why don't you, Mr. Zoellick, get off your ass and-

EVANS: Well, I would never put it quite that way.

Q: No.

EVANS: Nick Burns was Bob Zoellick's chief staffer at that point and I think Nick did try to get Zoellick to focus on it but was not successful.

Q: Well then, so, did you feel yourself, I mean, you had been ____, as you might say, fuzzy type thing of, you know, writing up things which actually, looking back on it, became quite important, particularly the election thing but many of the other things that have happened have brought about, you know, probably a better world.

EVANS: I think you're absolutely right. I think that the Helsinki process starting even before '75 but particularly after the Final Act was promulgated with its 10 important principles and with its Third Basket of human rights or the human dimension. I think that it is really the unsung hero of bringing the Cold War to a close. Now, we often hear it claimed by people on the Republican right that Ronald Reagan won the Cold War by using Star Wars and military budgets to pressure the Soviet Union, and of course there was a lot of pressure on the Soviet military budget, which was very high as a proportion of their national budget. But we tend to forget that there were lots and lots of people in that part of the world who wanted to be Europeans, who did not believe that the reigning communist ideology was history's true direction. It started, of course, in Eastern Europe, it started in places like Prague in the Prague Spring and very much so in Poland in the 1980s and the appointment of John Paul as Pope, the first Polish Pope; all those things had their effect but I think the publication in all of the participating states, in some cases on the front page of the newspapers, of the Helsinki Final Act and of the succeeding documents produced by the Helsinki process, was important. People in those countries sometimes wept when they read those words. They pasted the documents on their refrigerators, they cited them when being arrested by the police and in the case in 1989, in the fall of '89, the Hungarian authorities quoted the Madrid document to the East Germans in justifying their opening of the border to East Germany.

Q: Well- No- And, and also the process afterwards has worked quite well. I mean, I go back to my Bosnian experience; I was in, one, in a Serb dominated area, before that I was in a Muslim dominated area, went to two. And you know, we were well trained and I watched them count the votes and they came out as you might expect but they were real votes.

EVANS: They were real votes and by having observers from a number of different states go to those elections, it was a way of both teaching and ensuring legitimacy for those votes. In addition, in the 1990s the OSCE, as it then became, the Organization for Security and Cooperation, acquired a little bit more of an administrative core, still very light, still staffed almost entirely by secondments from national governments which paid the salaries. The conflict prevention center was very adept at sending OSCE missions to troubled areas to try to bring about peaceful reform and change and prevent conflict. The record is mixed on that, for sure, but at least the OSCE responded to the demands of the moment in a way that other bigger, richer organizations did not or could not because of their own theology or procedures.

Q: And you know, it certainly proved its worth. Well what happened to you? I mean, it's all very nice but you know, as a- myself as a child of bureaucracy at the State Department, you're off on one of these fuzzy things and all that and it's all very nice but you know, sort of John, okay, it's time to come back to the real world and I mean, had you been distanced from the Russian world? I mean, the Russian world was falling apart. I mean the Soviet world was falling apart. Where was your home?

EVANS: Right after the conference in Krakow I had an ongoing assignment, by this time to be deputy chief of mission in Prague, where Shirley Temple Black was ambassador. Of course I had been in Prague in the old days under the communist regime. The regime had changed in the Velvet Revolution of 1989 and by this time it was my old dissident friends who were running things in Czechoslovakia. Vaclav Havel was the new president, a number of my dissident friends had emerged as...one was deputy defense minister, another one was running a major institute, so it certainly made sense for me to go back to Prague again. My Czech was still serviceable; I did a little bit of brush-up and then I got to Prague for Fourth of July of 1991.

Q: And you did that until when?

EVANS: For three years, until '94, when I went to St. Petersburg as it by then was, as consul general.

Q: Okay. Well let's talk about- In the first place, what were relations like when you got there in '91, into Prague?

EVANS: Relations had just changed completely from what I remembered. We had an excellent rapport with the foreign ministry. We were ginning up assistance programs, we had an AID office by this time. Prague after the Velvet Revolution became something like the Left Bank in Paris during the '20s for young Americans, many of whom were writing poetry and novels.

Q: Go over and supposedly teaching English, you know.

EVANS: Yes.

Q: Seemed to me kind of a way of, you know, I was over there drinking coffee or something like that, I don't know.

EVANS: Well, yes. It was something of that atmosphere. Things were opening up. When we first arrived in Prague I think there was literally one restaurant that was not an old state-run type of restaurant, one entrepreneurial restaurant where one could be sure that the food was fresh and served in an up-to-date way. But no, it was a very happy time for me; working for Shirley Temple Black was also very good experience. Although she's more famous as a child actor the truth of the matter is that she had spent a lot of time in government; she had worked as Ambassador to Ghana, previously she was Chief of Protocol for a time, and she...

Q: She was in the UN, I guess.

EVANS: That's right; she was at the UN as one of our representatives there. And so she actually spent more time in U.S. Government service than she had spent as a child star.

Q: Well I happened to be born the same year she was, 1928, and I lived in- at one point in Beverly Hills so- but all you have to do is look at the old movies to see that this is an extremely bright young kid and bright young kids end up as- You know, I mean, we're talking about, I would think at the genius level almost.

EVANS: She definitely was a very smart cookie and she was very good. If one gave her a set of talking points she could deliver them with more pizzazz and conviction than almost anyone. And, as she said to me once, "I've been working with scripts since I was three so give me a good script." And we did that and she was very effective and people would take her phone calls; nobody ever turned down Shirley Temple, and she was good at cultivating her many contacts. There were lots of visitors and I think I helped her quite a bit with the local scene. She had gotten into a little bit of difficulty in her first semester, first six months of her ambassadorship, because it was beginning in 1989 and the Velvet Revolution a little bit caught her by surprise, and she had been trying to cultivate some of the old regime types and then the tables totally turned and so she had a little bit of difficulty getting in with the new group. And she was also, I have to say, haunted by one of her predecessors, Bill Luers, who had been there previously as ambassador and had done a fine job and had cultivated the dissidents. Bill and Wendy Luers reappeared on the scene after the Velvet Revolution. They were very close to Vaclav Havel and at Havel's inauguration they were more the stars than the current ambassador, and I think this wrong-footed her to a certain extent.

Q: This is always a very difficult thing. Luers later- or was he the head of the Metropolitan-?

EVANS: Yes, he was the administrative president of the Metropolitan Museum.

Q: Which gave him also that extra clout, I think, in the U.S. as sort of- not to be dismissed.

How did you work around- or how did she and you work around the Luers? Were you able to- Did they leave and do time or-?

EVANS: Well, you know, I had also been quite close to the Luers and so my job was to try to cool things down and make sure that there weren't incidents. I was not there during the inauguration, I was still working on the CSCE, but eventually this sorted itself out and eventually Shirley Temple Black became very popular in Czechoslovakia.

The one difficulty that I had there was that it was clear already that the Czechs and the Slovaks were drifting apart. They had changed the name...they had inserted the word "Federal" or "Federative" was actually what it was into the name, the formal name of their country and this was a sign that there were some differences between the Slovaks and the Czechs. And Shirley Temple Black, Ambassador Black and the State Department did not want to see Czechoslovakia divide. That would be seen as a failure of American diplomacy. We had been involved in the birth of Czechoslovakia under Woodrow Wilson. Tomï¿½s Masaryk was the founder of the first Czechoslovak Republic and so there was a deep bias against any splitting up of Czechoslovakia.

One of my political officers, Eric Terzuolo, and I saw very clearly that we somehow had to get the word back to Washington that the split was coming. Now, this would have been in 1992, and I remember we did a little bit of a tricky thing. We waited until Ambassador Black was out of town on a trip, I think to the United States, and we had to wait also for the political counselor at the time to be in Germany, and then with the acting political counselor we sent the cable that needed to be sent, entitling it "Thinking the Unthinkable: If Czechoslovakia Splits." And in that cable, which would have been, I think it was in September, late August or September of 1992, Eric Terzuolo was the political officer who mostly wrote it and I authorized it, we got the word back to Washington that they should expect this to happen, and why it was not the Balkans and why we should not overreact to it, that this was something that could be accommodated, that it was not going to be a violent event, we should brace ourselves for it and not get in the way of it.

Q: Well you say it's tricky; was this that your political counselor and the ambassador were- didn't want to say it? I mean, because if you said something it might happen, you know, a sort of keeping your fingers crossed and your eyes shut?

EVANS: I think that's right. They didn't want to face the mounting evidence that this was going to happen. They felt that it would reflect badly on her ambassadorship if this happened while she was there and the political counselor, who's a fine fellow, but he had strict instructions from her that this was not something we were going to get into.

Once the cable had gone, of course, it had gone and it was out there, and before too long I got a call. I was Chargï¿½ still and I got a call from Deputy Secretary of State Eagleburger, and he said "John, don't you think I ought to come out there and knock some heads, I mean between these Czechs and Slovaks?" And I had to, as patiently and politely as I could, explain that Czechoslovakia was not Yugoslavia, that in our view both sides were moving in the direction of a peaceful divorce, a velvet divorce; in fact they were having frequent meetings between the two sides, usually in Moravia, which is kind of in the middle, and they were talking about a cooperative divorce. And of course in the end that is what happened. It gained steam and momentum. President Havel had a little bit of a blind eye for what was happening in Slovakia; he was very much a creature of Prague, a Czech through and through. He made some efforts to woo the Slovaks but it didn't work. They saw him as a Czech and they didn't like the kind of... I mean, the Czechs and the Slovaks speak a slightly different language and when they heard Havel it just sounded so Czech to them and they didn't like it. On the other hand, Vï¿½clav Klaus, who today is the president of the Czech Republic, his wife was a Slovak, is a Slovak, and an economist, and she had a connection to the Slovak premiere, Meciar, who was a populist and we didn't very much care for Mr. Meciar, he was of the old school, but the Klauses to some extent... Klaus was then the prime minister... coached Meciar and helped Meciar and both sides wanted the split to happen. The Slovaks wanted their own capital, Bratislava, to be on the map, to be a place that people, foreigners, visited in its own right, not as a weak sister to Prague, as an afterthought where people spent half a day after spending two days in Prague. And the Czechs, for that matter, wanted to spin off Slovakia, which was less developed economically. The Czechs felt that they were more industrious and could make it better on their own.

Q: Sounds like Italy and the Mezzogiorno.

EVANS: Very similar in some ways.

Q: Well why, I mean, it always struck me that why wasn't there a plebiscite? I mean, you know, this thing, it almost sounded like the politicians cozying up but you know, if you split up a country it means double jobs. I mean, the politicians have got more jobs in Slovakia and all and-I don't know.

EVANS: Well, strictly speaking the velvet divorce was probably unconstitutional. But the politicians wanted it; the political classes of both parts wanted this split. There were some who got caught. For example, after the Prague Spring in 1968 a number of Slovaks had been brought by Gustav Husak, the Slovak party chief of communist Czechoslovakia, he brought a number of Slovaks to Prague and they were called "federal Slovaks." And so they had their homes in Prague, their families in Prague; many of them had married Czechs and they were really Czechoslovak and for them it was very difficult because the country they had served, Czechoslovakia, no longer existed. At the same time there were new people coming up in Slovakia who didn't have this affinity for the Czechoslovak experiment and really felt themselves Slovak. There are also religious differences involved and you can trace the differences back into history. Slovakia was always under the Hungarian crown in the dual monarchy, whereas Bohemia and Moravia were under the Austrian crown. So there were differences that emanated also from that.

Q: Did we have a consul general in Bratislava?

EVANS: We did indeed. Paul Hacker was the man at the time and Paul was an excellent consul general; he worked his contacts, he knew everybody in Slovakia, it seemed. I went down frequently - I was his supervisor on paper although the ambassador did his review - and I frequently visited Paul and used to joke that he was not so much generalni konzul as genialni konzul, because he really was a genius at his work there and ran a good consulate. There was a big security problem; we had taken as our chancery or consulate building an old Austrian or German bank and it was discovered at one point to be riddled with microphones. And so we had to send a technical team to Bratislava to pull out the microphones and they insisted on doing it on a non-working day without alerting the consul general, which I thought was a mistake. I thought the consul general should have been told that his building was going to be assaulted by our security types.

Q: Did you find yourself having to, in a way save Hacker?

EVANS: I tried to be as fair as I could and as loyal as I could in both directions but when it finally came down to the crunch I had to pass on the ambassador's instructions to Hacker.

Q: Well what about the personalities? Havel, I remember he came to the- he addressed Congress and they were applauding the most incomprehensible thing. I mean, he was working on a different, almost intellectual plane. I mean, I would think he would be a difficult person, not that he wasn't a nice guy but just he thought differently here. Or not?

EVANS: Yes. Vï¿½clav Havel was a playwright, of course. He came from a, what the Soviets would call a bourgeois family, a fairly well-to-do family, and therefore was under a black cloud from the beginning in communist Czechoslovakia, had a very hard time of it, and was repeatedly in and out of prison. I had a couple of encounters with him back in the mid '70s during the height of the neo-Stalinist regime there and he was one of the signers of spokesmen of Charter 77, which was the premier human rights document and movement of those years. But he was very popular with the Czech populace and of course he was elected by a landslide and yet he had some...as a manager and as a statesman he did have some shortcomings. I have always found him more anti-Russian than the facts warranted, although for a Czech that's pretty understandable. I mean, I can well appreciate the origins of that anti-Russianism. But also, as you say, he was an intellectual, he had very strongly held moral and philosophical views which he was not terribly willing to compromise or see compromised, whereas Vï¿½clav Klaus, his nemesis, was of a very different cut. He was a conservative economist, market economist of the Milton Friedman school and you could see at every step their different approaches to things.

Q: Well what about on the Slovak side?

EVANS: The big character at that time was Vladimir Meciar, a populist, a big, almost frightening, kind of man who had a way of staring at you, who had you almost wondering if he was a psychopath or something. He was...but he was beloved of the little people because he helped them out, he met with old grannies, he never turned anybody away and he had quite a following. But we saw him as a kind of a borderline fascist. Now, I didn't view him as...I think I had a less negative take on Meciar than many people did because I saw that he was a product of a different political culture, I didn't mind his staring and I found a way to sort of banter with him. But Ambassador Black didn't like him at all and when she was then succeeded by Adrian Basora, who came in, must have been in '92, and there's a whole story there too, that I have to tell.

Ambassador Black came to Washington with Vaclav Havel; I believe it was for that triumphal visit when he spoke to the Congress. And somewhere along the line, at the White House, during the meetings with President Bush, she said some things that weren't in tune with the rest of the conversation, apparently, and then she went on after the Havel visit, she went out to California for a little bit of a holiday and during that time I got a call saying that the White House had decided to replace Ambassador Black and would be nominating Adrian Basora, who was on the National Security Council staff and had been in that meeting with General Scowcroft and President Bush and Vaclav Havel. I was informed by the European Bureau of this impending change and the first thing I said was that somebody needs to call Ambassador Black and tell her that she's to be replaced, because she imagines herself as the Mike Mansfield of Czechoslovakia, she expects to stay on for as many years as possible. Mike Mansfield at that point was in his seventh or eighth year in Tokyo. And so she needed to know this. And I implored the European bureau to have Larry Eagleburger or somebody at that level call her and tell her.

Well, she arrived back in Prague having been approached by no one from the State Department. And I said to her, assuming that she'd been told, I said "Madam Ambassador, I'm so sorry to hear that you'll be leaving." And this came to her as a thunderbolt, completely from the blue. We went into the "tank" and I said "yes, didn't anybody tell you about this?" And she said no. And her first reaction was that maybe I was attempting some shenanigan as DCM to, you know, push her out. Nothing could have been further from the truth. So she wouldn't talk to me for a day or two until she had made telephone calls back to Washington and indeed ascertained that that was the case. It was a very unfortunate bit of mismanagement.

Q: Well Basora, what was his background?

EVANS: Adrian Basora was a...and is, he's still very active, a very intelligent Foreign Service officer, economic officer. He had graduated more than summa, ex egregio summa, whatever that is, of Puerto Rican extraction, but he never wore that as a chip on his shoulder at all, very intelligent fellow with a good understanding of economics and world politics. He replaced Shirley Temple Black in 1992 and he came...he was rushed out to Prague just at the time when Vï¿½clav Havel was about to resign in protest over the impending velvet divorce, because Havel said that he had never sought the presidency of Czechoslovakia to reign over its collapse. So in the summer of 1992 Havel was about to step down, Washington rushed Basora through his paces so that he could meet Havel, present his credentials to Havel and then take over.

And coming back to the Czech-Slovak split, Ambassador Basora took very poorly to Mr. Meciar. I don't know exactly whether there was something personal, but he did not like Meciar and although Basora went many times to Slovakia to see if there was any way to prevent the split from happening it was too far gone by then and on New Year's, between '93 and '94 it would have been, the countries split.

Q: Had there been talk of a plebiscite?

EVANS: Oh, there were many things that were talked about, yes. But that option was rejected; the politicians wanted to keep control.

Q: I mean this is a political fait accompli or something by the political class.

EVANS: That's right, that's right.

Q: Was there a- What sort of a component did the communists have within the political class? Were they there or-?

EVANS: Yes, and that's a good question too. There had been a Czechoslovak Communist Party and a Slovak Communist Party but no Czech Communist Party, so there was a little bit of asymmetry there. Communism was far less popular in Bohemia and Moravia, the components of the Czech lands, than it was in the more backward, more rural and agrarian Slovak part of the country. And it was no surprise that the Prague Spring was in Prague and the Charter 77 was written and designed primarily in Prague with only a few Slovaks adhering to it. It was a pretty easy thing for the Czechs to get communism pretty much out of their systems; they very quickly took to business. After all, private business had existed in Czechoslovakia until after World War II and people actually remembered how things used to work; they remembered that the Czech crown was a strong currency in Europe and that Czech goods enjoyed a very high reputation and so on. So the transition...the preconditions for returning to a market based economy and also a democratic political system, the memories of the first Czech Republic were not that as far removed as they were in, say, Russia.

In Slovakia it was a bit of a different approach. Slovakia is primarily Catholic, the political system is more corporatist and based on personal loyalties. So the two parts of the country clearly were on different tracks and there was no real violence. There might have been a fight or two in a pub and some words issued in different directions. But there was no major clash or violence.

Q: Was there any residue of a Sudetenland at all?

EVANS: Well, this question of the expulsion of the Germans after World War II...I mean, first of all there was a question of Hitler's having occupied the Sudetenland and people forget that Poland at that same moment in 1939 seized a bit of Czech territory in Tesin in the north. But after the war it was by the Benes Decrees that the German population of what was then post-war Czechoslovakia was expelled and every summer down around Munich the organizations of the Sudeten Germans had their rallies, and there would be news reports of their singing old German drinking songs and talking about the day when they would come back to Karlsbad and other places that had been in their possession for generations.

Just this year, recently, in the last few weeks this issue has been back on the agenda because Vï¿½clav Klaus was the last holdout on signing the new European treaty. After the Irish approved it it was the Czechs who didn't want to do it because they are apparently fearful that the Benes Decrees, which basically made those lands permanently Czech and dealt with the property claims also, that those decrees might be challenged under the new European order and that settlement unraveled.

Q: Well then, with Ambassador Black were you able to get, I mean had she- she found out by- what, she called Washington, I guess, and what the hell's this all about?

EVANS: Yes, she did find out and she didn't hold it against me, that I had been the bearer of the bad news. We continued on working very closely together. One of the things we did, we... the Czechs were looking to finish a nuclear plant at Temelin in south Bohemia. It was originally a Soviet-designed nuclear plant but the Czechs actually, being very good at nuclear engineering, had improved it in several ways and the two bidders to take the work to completion were Westinghouse and Siemens. And so together, Ambassador Black bearing the main burden, we lobbied hard for Westinghouse to get this contract. And then one day, to our horror, we discovered that Siemens was actually Siemens of New Jersey which was bidding on this work! It was an American company with as much a right to our representation as Westinghouse.

Q: Absolutely.

EVANS: So we had to drop that like a hot potato.

Q: Were you there when the split came?

EVANS: Yes, and I must say it was a very strange feeling to be watching the equivalent of the ball coming down in Times Square in Prague and to realize that one minute you were in Czechoslovakia and the next minute, right after midnight, you were in the Czech Republic. And of course it was a very happy night for many and a sad night for others.

Q: Well what happened embassy-wise?

EVANS: Good point. The word came out from the State Department that new posts were to be created using the existing resources at embassies. Now, I guess we were affected by that as much as Moscow Embassy was affected by having to spawn the posts in the newly independent states. And it was hard because - and ultimately not tenable - because one found that demarches need to be delivered in every capital and there are certain things that you have to do. We did manage to identify positions that could be reprogrammed to Bratislava but in the end Bratislava grew beyond, I think the term then was a "SEP" post, one of these, I can't remember what that stood for but meaning a very...it was a minimal formula for staffing.

I should also mention something going back to 1991: right after I arrived in Prague in August of 1991, there was the attempt to unseat Gorbachev. I remember getting up on that day, it must have been, I think it was August 16, getting up that day, turning on the BBC at 6:00 in the morning and the news of the coup against Gorbachev was just coming over the airwaves. And I remember calling Ambassador Black at her residence at about 6:15, which was early. She was up and we both agreed that we had to go straight to the chancery, and I remember as I went out the door of my house our Czech house manager came in grinning from ear to ear and she said "now you'll see, everything will get back to normal." Now, this Czech house-manager - we were under no illusions - this Jarmila, our house manager, was definitely a secret police operative but she ran the house well, so we appreciated that at least. And the Czechs did something eventually; they had what they called a process of "lustration," in which they went to the files of the old secret police, found the names of all the secret agents and published them in the press. And, sure enough, the name of our housekeeper appeared in that list under her code name, which was "Madam," and that rang true to us because that's the way she addressed my wife, always as "Madam."

But back to the August events for a second, all of the Russian diplomatic establishments were thrown into a tizzy by the news that there was a coup underway in Moscow. What happened at the Russian Embassy in Prague was that the ambassador and the number two, who was my main contact, Alexander Lebedev, stood firm on the side of Gorbachev and rallied the Russian community of Prague to that banner and it was a risky bet...

Q: Really courageous of them.

EVANS: Very courageous of them. In the end the ambassador, for his loyalty, was made, briefly, foreign minister of the Russian Federation. And my contact, Alexander Lebedev, was promoted to ambassador. And this was really the heyday of Russian-American cooperation in Eastern Europe; Lebedev and I tried very much to minimize the distance, perceived distance, between us and we did some things together. I remember sitting very visibly at the foot of the Charles Bridge with the Lebedevs, drinking Moravian white wine just as a way of letting the plotters know that we were working together, that this old division of the world into East and West was a thing of the past.

Q: How much time did you have with the new ambassador?

EVANS: I had more than a year with Ambassador Basora. He was very energetic, very organized, very driven. He had already come to us with the reputation...his reputation had preceded him, that he was kind of an overachiever. He worked very hard at learning some Czech and I was absolutely astounded when he stepped off the airplane after just a few weeks of initial Czech training and he actually gave a statement, haltingly, but in quite serviceable Czech, on his arrival. And he continued his Czech lessons.

I did find myself caught in some dilemmas with the ambassador because he had a rather draconian approach to dealing with people who seemed to have been...particularly local employees of our embassy whom I had known in other circumstances, and in one case I differed with him over whether an employee of our cultural section should be fired. She had been accused of spying on some exchange students and it may well have been true but I did not feel that what she had done warranted dismissal. So we did have a conflict on that. And of course a DCM always has to be ultimately loyal to his ambassador but also loyal to the people below him, and at one point I believe that Ambassador Basora felt that I was being too protective of the staff, vis-ï¿½-vis some of the things he wanted to do.

Q: What was the problem with the staff in his eyes?

EVANS: Well, in one case...in that case of the local employee I think she had apparently not shown proper respect to Mrs. Basora, who was Harry Barnes's daughter, Polly Barnes, a very fine woman, an accomplished writer. I don't remember the specifics but he had very high standards of performance for his staff and there were a couple of the Americans who were not, in his view, quite up to the mark, and I perhaps was a little more protective of them than he would have...or I may have made excuses for them more than he felt was warranted. Again, I found myself as the kind of fulcrum between a very hard charging ambassador and a staff that was good but maybe not quite up to the ambassador's standards.

Q: Well then, how did relations go with the new Czech Republic?

EVANS: They went swimmingly. They went from strength to strength with new Czech ambassadors named here. One of the first was a close collaborator of Vaclav Havel's, Rita Klï¿½movï¿½, who'd also had her troubles with the secret police, and there was really kind of a love fest for quite some time which in many respects continues.

Q: What about the Left Bank Americans? You know, I kept running across- I was at Georgetown at the time and all the kids were talking about, well let's all go to Czechoslovakia and get a job there and live easily and teach English and all. I would think that they would- as a good professional consular officer I would think oh my God, all these young people having their moment.

EVANS: Well, it was a moment like that. There was very quickly...there were two English language newspapers established, and one was called "Prague-nosis," the other was "The Prague Post," and there was a lively nightlife. Of course beer has never been in short supply in the last six or seven centuries in Bohemia and the young people were in the beer gardens and beer halls, having a fine old time. Yes, teaching English, and there were also quite a few American companies that came to Prague in those days. My wife, at the suggestion of Ambassador Black, became the first executive director of the American Chamber of Commerce in Prague, and they set up an office and had a number of big companies, Citibank and Procter and Gamble and various other American companies were there and so buildings were being refurbished and companies were opening and it was a very exciting and vibrant time and a lot of fun for the young people, including our daughter, who was living with us at the time and had a wonderful experience mixing in the half Czech and half American social life of those days.

Q: I was just thinking, with Ambassador Black I had heard at one point that she was very conservative and came out of the, sort of the conservative wing of the Republican Party, and Bush was not of that ilk. I was wondering whether that was any part of the problem.

EVANS: You know, I think it was even more personal. I think actually she had been more of a Bush Republican than a Reagan Republican, and it was during the Reagan years that she was kind of at an arm's length from the White House. It was in those years that she was over here running the ambassadorial seminar, for example. She considered herself close to the Bushes. I think this may have gone back to old Hollywood days and Mrs. Reagan and Ambassador Black were not seeing eye to eye. So it was when President Bush Senior came into office that she was named to Czechoslovakia, and I think it really was more personal than a matter of political principle.

Q: Well then, did you- was Klaus- he's still president, isn't he?

EVANS: Yes.

Q: Was he much of a figure while you were there?

EVANS: He was prime minister at that time and a very powerful figure. He ran the Civic Democratic Party, Civil Democratic Party, which was one of the main progressive parties, and he was a force to reckon with, very well spoken and a tough operator.

Q: Did- How about the sort of relations with, you know, everybody- all the neighbors of the Czechs ganged up on him in '68 and invaded him. I mean, that had to leave a certain amount of- there wasn't an awful lot of solidarity there, was there?

EVANS: True. The only one that didn't join that invasion was Romania.

Q: Yes, that was way off.

EVANS: And so certainly there- those memories faded, I think, fairly quickly. It was clear that it was a Warsaw Pact thing and the impetus was coming from Moscow, so I don't think there was lasting damage done. But the stereotypes in Eastern Europe are still there, I mean, Poles make fun of Czechs and Czechs make fun of East Germans and everybody makes fun of Slovaks and so on.

Q: Well one of the sad consequences of the end of the Cold War is the jokes have gone pretty much.

EVANS: "The Jew died." I mean, I say that as a jocular rejoinder to you. One of the most famous strains of political jokes in the Soviet Union was Armenian Radio, and the current joke is "why are there no longer any Armenian radio jokes?" And the answer is, "the Jew died."

Q: Yes. Because they were inspired by the Jewish Soviets.

EVANS: Well, who knows, really, where they came from but that was...

Q: But they did have that flavor.

EVANS: Yes.

Q: You know, that we even in our own humor, I mean, you might say the Jewish, Yiddish humor is a very strong strain, which goes from Hollywood and vaudeville and all that.

EVANS: Yes, there's a certain black side to it as well.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: Yes.

Q: Well I think this is probably a good place to stop.

EVANS: Okay.

Q: Alright, and if you think of anything more, otherwise we'll pick up in '94, you're off to St. Petersburg.

EVANS: Yes, that would be a good transition point. I will just add that if Shirley Temple Black publishes her memoirs you may read about the day I saved her life but maybe I'll leave that for her to tell.

Q: Well why don't you tell it now?

EVANS: Well, very briefly, we one day in the old chancery in Prague the fire alarm sounded and we frequently had fire drills so we all thought it was a fire drill, and we all did what we had to do, which was go back into the garden behind the chancery. But at the time there was scaffolding on the...there was work being done on the faï¿½ade and so as Ambassador Black charged up the staircase to access the garden, but she hit her head very forcefully against the bar of scaffolding that was just at her level. I was right behind her and she fell back right into my arms, otherwise she would have taken a more-than-90-degree spill and, who knows, she might have cracked her skull at that point. But I did catch her and she later sent me a little note saying "thank you for what you did today," and I do believe I saved her life.

Q: Okay. Well then, back to '94, St. Petersburg.

EVANS: Okay.

Q: Today is the 30th of November, 2009, with John Evans. And John, you have left Prague and you're on your way to St. Petersburg. How did this come about? And do you have anything more about Prague that you might want to say?

EVANS: No, just to say that being in Prague for the second time but under radically different conditions when I was there as a younger officer was fascinating. Just to see the world turned upside down, to see the dissidents now running things, Havel president instead of being in jail, and various others of my former contacts now running institutes and ministries and so on was a remarkable experience. And it was something that could only have come about with the total overturn of the European system.

Q: Did you get any feel for Havel as an administrator, you know?

EVANS: We all saw that he was a far better philosopher, playwright and speaker, in particular orator, I would say even, than he was manager or administrator, and that's precisely where his weaknesses are, and in those areas of actually governance he was rather out-shone by his archrival, Vï¿½clav Klaus, who after all today is president of Czechoslovakia.

Q: Were we seeing Klaus was- got on a lot of people's wrong side recently by being opposed at least for awhile to the European Union, new constitution and all. Was he always sort of a contrarian or do you think he has a- was he flying through on a sort of a basic political philosophy?

EVANS: Well, I think he does have a consistent philosophical standpoint. He's an economist by training, a disciple of Milton Friedman, the Chicago School, a great admirer of Margaret Thatcher. And like many of the other East European leaders who emerged after the Wall fell he's enjoying the sovereignty of the nation and the state that he heads. And whereas Western Europe is moving in the direction of giving up sovereignty to a multinational pooled sovereignty, really, the East Europeans are still in the first flush of enjoying their regained sovereignty.

Q: Yes, one can see that and one is not impressed with the EU. It looks like, well anyway, there's no point getting off on that. But tell me, when you left Prague, we talked about the problem of Shirley Temple Black being sort of summarily, basically dismissed. You must have picked up some stuff when you came back to Washington of what the hell was this all about.

EVANS: Well, it was the strangest thing. She really didn't want to leave and she hadn't been properly informed that she was to leave. Then came the question of requesting agrï¿½ment from the Czechs for her successor, Adrian Basora. And what happened was the telegraphic request for agrï¿½ment arrived in Prague and Ambassador Shirley Temple Black, with the cable in her hand, went to see Havel at the Prague Castle. She went alone with no note taker and when she came back she told us all that Havel did not want her to leave and had said "we'd be happy for you to stay here forever." And so that was reported back to Washington and Washington was in a fix, in a bind, because the request for agrï¿½ment had in effect been stymied. And what happened, and this may be the only time it's ever happened, the then Foreign Minister of the Czech Republic, was...actually this was still Czechoslovakia, was Jiri Dienstbier, who was a former dissident journalist. And Dienstbier was here in Washington for a program at the Wilson Center and we arranged for him to call on Larry Eagleburger, the deputy secretary, during his visit to Washington, and it was at that meeting with Eagleburger again presented the request for agrï¿½ment for Adrian Basora and Dienstbier took it back to Prague.

Q: Well now, you know, I spent five years in the- well actually nine years including Greece and the Balkans, so I can't help but- Basora was on the National Security Council and you mentioned that the sort of the Shirley Temple Black got on the wrong side of the National Security Council. Was there any thought that Basora had anything to do with that?

EVANS: Well, I wasn't there but I understood that when Ambassador Black came through Washington with Vï¿½clav Havel when they met with the President and others at the White House that she had not said precisely the right things by someone's likes, maybe General Scowcroft and of course Ambassador Basora was his right- hand man there for Eastern and Central Europe. So it seems to me that Ambassador Basora was well placed to take advantage of an opening that was clearly coming.

Q: Well that will be one of the- That will remain a mystery.

Okay. Oh, one other thing before- I'm not going to let you get out of Prague for a minute here- I, actually I met both the Blacks back in '75, I think, when the Senior Seminar met in San Francisco. Her husband was a prominent part of a fish brokerage or something like this and how did he operate while you were there?

EVANS: Charlie Black was from a fairly wealthy background in California. When he first encountered Shirley Temple - to his credit, in her eyes - he didn't know she was a star. Shirley Temple had had other people...her first marriage ended badly because it was another actor who was trying...

Q: And a Hilton heir.

EVANS: I can't remember his name.

Q: Well maybe it wasn't.

EVANS: It was Jack somebody. And she was always worried that people were going to take advantage of her and here comes this scion of a fine California family who's never heard of her acting career and he was a fine man. He was involved in things oceanic for sure; at one time he owned Howard Hughes' big aircraft.

Q: The Spruce Goose.

EVANS: The Spruce Goose, and I think he also was somehow involved in the efforts by Howard Hughes to lift a sunken Soviet submarine...

Q: Oh yes, which actually worked.

EVANS: Which happened, right. And then, if I'm not...

Q: The Glomar Explorer.

EVANS: Yes, the Glomar Explorer, that's right. And then somewhat later, working out of Woods Hole, his firm got involved in some of the Titanic... whether it was the discovery of the Titanic or efforts to salvage parts of the Titanic, I don't quite remember. He was...he had had quite an interesting career and he came to Prague and he was a very fine addition to the scene there. The only thing that somewhat upset me as DCM is that I did discover at one point that he had been chipping in material on people's evaluation reports, if not writing portions of them himself, and of course that was not entirely correct for a spouse to be involved in the evaluation reports.

Q: Not at all unknown but it's not correct.

EVANS: That's right.

Q: Okay, St. Petersburg. It's a very practical, I mean, it makes sense; you're a part of the Moscow Mafia, I guess.

EVANS: Well. if one thinks of when this was, I was finishing up as DCM in Prague in 1994 and it had been fascinating. We had President Clinton come through at one point for a meeting with all the Visegrad states, so we had presidents and prime ministers of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovak Republic and Hungary all in Prague together, and in each case the presidents and the prime ministers didn't get along so you can just imagine the complications they faced and all the multiple motorcades that were going around Prague. But it was an excellent visit and President Clinton, to his credit, did a fine job, not only in his meetings with the other leaders but in reaching out to the Czech Republic.

Now, I had a...I'm glad you mentioned this because I had quite a set-to with Vï¿½clav Havel at one point. At one point I was basically put in charge of the arrangements by Ambassador Basora who wanted to be free floating. The White House was insisting that this was a visit with no bilateral component; that is, it was not a visit to Prague or the Czech Republic, it was a visit to all the Visegrad States.

Q: Why do you say "Visegrad States"?

EVANS: Well this was a shorthand for the states which had taken part in a kind of a mini summit meeting at Visegrad, further down the Danube...I guess that's in Hungary, and it came to be a kind of a grouping in Central Europe of the more advanced of the Central European states.

Q: That's Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany-?

EVANS: I don't believe it included the East Germans because already the reunification process had started to work there. But it was the first three that came into NATO: Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic; Slovakia came in on a slightly later schedule because of political problems there. But that was the grouping...

But back to my main story: the White House was insisting that this was a visit to all of those leaders and they were resisting the idea that there was a bilateral component, but Havel was equally strongly insisting that this was also a bilateral visit to the Czech Republic and he wanted to receive President Clinton at the Prague Castle. And at one point I had a real set-to with Havel in his office with a press release in front of us which we were working on and fighting over individual words. In the end Havel said "you are opposing the will of the Czech nation," and I said "well, those are my instructions." And in the end the Czechs did capture Clinton for a short bilateral component, and of course Clinton had no problems with it at all.

Q: Well it's a battle you couldn't win.

EVANS: You couldn't win it on their territory.

Q: You know, the White House, I mean somebody, you know, you get into these things, this is somebody who said well I don't want to get too involved and so they take it from there and you know, there you are, the point man on this-

EVANS: My greatest fear during the Clinton visit was that...they had planned that President Clinton would proceed across the medieval stone bridge of Prague, the Charles Bridge, with his limousine and all the Secret Service and my greatest fear was that the weight of all this would collapse the Charles Bridge and I would be truly an enemy of the Czech nation at that point. But it held up and I must say that President Clinton did a fine job and it was during that visit that he was given a saxophone by President Hï¿½vel and they descended into a jazz club and sure enough, President Clinton performed fully adequately on his new saxophone, and it became a kind of a hit number.

Q: Well actually Saxe came from Prague- or from Czech- or not?

EVANS: You've got me there. The inventor was a certain So-and-So Saxe.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: But I don't know the precise derivation.

Q: Okay. Well okay, so anyway you're off to St. Petersburg.

EVANS: Yes. Well, I had lobbied, you know, that was a period when things were getting awfully interesting. The Soviet Union by this time had broken down into its component republics and I remember the one job that I coveted out in that area as an ambassadorship or even to be DCM was Tajikistan because I still could manage in Persian. That didn't work out and then I realized St. Petersburg was open and I called Ambassador Pickering to lobby for that job.

My interest in St. Petersburg went back to college days when I'd written a thesis about the student revolutions that had taken place in St. Petersburg in 1861 so I was interested in the history of the city and I had visited there during my earlier Moscow tour and I just thought it would be fascinating to be involved in the new democratic Russia. So I won the assignment and was headed off there in the fall of 1994.

Q: And you were there from when to when?

EVANS: From '94 to '97.

Q: Alright, Let's take St. Petersburg and it's Russia by this time, '94, yes. What was sort of the relationship and how were things going both in Russia and in particular St. Petersburg?

EVANS: Well, St. Petersburg has long been considered by Russians the second capital of the country and we had had a consulate there since the early 1970s. And it was a place that was in some respects more advanced along the road to democracy than other parts of Russia, largely due to cultural factors, St. Petersburg having been the window to the West for Russia for centuries, the presence of many educational institutions and so on, and also the mayor of the city at that time was a true Russian democrat of the new free Russia, Anatoly Sobchak, and it was Sobchak who had actually pushed through the reversion to the name St. Petersburg, discarding Leningrad.

Q: Had that been a battle?

EVANS: It had been a battle largely because of people's emotional investment in the siege of Leningrad.

Q: Four hundred days of siege.

EVANS: Nine hundred days.

Q: Nine hundred, excuse me.

EVANS: Harrison Salisbury used that as his title. The surrounding oblast or district around St. Petersburg is still called Leningrad district but it was in the forefront of Russian democracy, democratic politics at that time. For example, Mayor Sobchak supported Yeltsin during the attempted putsch by the conservatives against Yeltsin and, very notably, Sobchak was joined in that support of Yeltsin by Vladimir Putin, his deputy. So the administration of the city of St. Petersburg was considered to be - the term isn't precisely right - but considered to be liberal or progressive in the context of Russia at that time.

Q: How- When you arrived there in '94 how was the economy?

EVANS: Well, the Russian economy was on its knees, I would say. The old system had died and the new system had yet to be fully born and, for that matter, the economy of the State Department was not great. Posts were being closed, budgets were being cut. These were the Clinton years. It was during my time in St. Petersburg that we actually experienced the shutdown of the government for several weeks and there was tremendous pressure on our budget. I found the post in very poor shape. Somebody at the time said, before I went out, "they are good people but they are not doing well." And this was for a multiplicity of reasons having to do with various personalities. So when I first met with my staff I remember giving them a very tough talking-to, saying...asking them what they thought they were doing such that St. Petersburg as a post did not enjoy a good reputation and that we needed to pull ourselves together, take account of the budgetary pressures and realities, improve our teamwork, improve our communication with the embassy, become integrated into Ambassador Pickering's team, and just put a much better foot forward than had been the case up until then.

Q: Well how was this manifesting? I mean, before you went out I'm sure if you're getting this you had a pretty good idea what the problems were or not? I mean, but how was it manifesting itself?

EVANS: Well, I knew that there was great discontent on the desk in the State Department with the post and I knew that there was discontent also in Moscow, at the embassy. And I had heard some other things. There were some quite senior members of the consulate staff who were at each other's throats, staff meetings had been going on far too long with everybody talking over each other the way they do on modern day television, and it was just a troubled place and you could feel it when you got there. But I already had the sense even before...

Q: Had you had a chance to talk to Tom Pickering? I mean, was he saying go clean it up or the equivalent?

EVANS: The DCM was more...

Q: Who was the DCM?

EVANS: It was Jim Collins. And Collins had tipped me off to the difficulties and did tell me that we needed to try to tighten things up, and we did.

Q: Well let's see; how did you go about it? I mean, you know, one of the ways is just go fire everybody.

EVANS: Well, you know that in the State Department that's not usually the way we do things. But I did have some very tough conversations, both with my deputy principal officer and the administrative officer, who were two of the...I don't care to mention their names but they were clashing all the time to the extent that the entire consulate seemed to be in one camp or the other, and it reached down to the level of children in the school, who realized that they were in one camp or the other. And so this division of the consulate was largely dictated by this personality clash and it was never truly solved until both of the officers eventually moved on.

Q: Well okay but I'm just pass- I mean this is something that happens from time to time at a post and so can we get into not names specifics but specifics of what did you say? I mean, how does one deal with this sort of thing?

EVANS: Well, I think that any leader has to call on people to rise above what they think they can do and to follow a vision for the post. And I think...I'm not the best one to judge this... but I think that we were able to minimize those problems by, first of all, I tried to be scrupulously fair, I gave everybody a hearing, but I also gave feedback and immediate feedback in most cases when I thought that something was going the wrong way. And there were others besides these two protagonists, there were others who deplored the situation we'd fallen into and welcomed leadership that would try to mend the post back together and I think we were able to do it. But it took about a year.

Q: Okay now, St. Petersburg covers what?

EVANS: Well, St. Petersburg had a very large consular district, stretching from above the Arctic Circle in the north, Murmansk being the most important city, port city, in the north, down to Pskov and Novgorod, one of the ancient Russian princely cities in the south, an enormous territory. And I, of course, had to try to get around to visit all those places.

One of the things that slowed me down at the beginning was that it took 54 days for me to be given the equivalent - the modern day equivalenof an exequatur. The Russians had a procedure for shopping the name of a proposed foreign consul around to all the capitals in the district and it took them something like 54 days before the word came back and I was technically allowed to begin my official duties. Now, as a matter of fact I did begin my work for all intents and purposes right away, certainly within the consulate and within the consular corps. I even was presented to Her Britannic Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, on board her yacht Britannia, which made its last official visit to St. Petersburg in the fall of 1994.

Q: Did the Marine band get out and play "God Save Me," while she stood on the wing bridge and-?

EVANS: You know, Queen Elizabeth's visit to Russia in 1994, and that meant a visit to Yeltsin, was the first visit of a British royal family member to Russia since 1917.

Q: Before they-

EVANS: Before they-

Q: -murdered their- Victoria's grandchildren.

EVANS: Exactly, Czar Nicholas being their relative. And the yacht Britannia was moored in the Neva River. It was October and it was cold; there was a cold wind blowing off the Baltic Sea and Stuart Jack, who was the British consul, knew that I hadn't received my exequatur but nonetheless included me and my wife in the reception aboard ship. My wife, fortunately, had a fur coat and I had my warmest overcoat. We waited in a reception line, receiving line, where there was a kind of a barker who announced each of the guests, and so we were announced as "the U.S. Consul General and Mrs. Evans" and then presented to Her Majesty, who promptly asked me, "and what do you do?" having maybe missed what the barker had just said. I had thought that it was taboo in the British upper classes to ask what anyone did for a living, but then I got it right from her.

Q: Yes. My wife and I went through the sort of same procedure but under more auspicious circumstances in the Bay of Naples, a full moon, balmy.

EVANS: That was also Queen Elizabeth?

Q: Oh yes.

EVANS: Yes. Was she with her yacht, Britannia?

Q: Yes.

EVANS: Yes.

Q: This was '79, just before we had a major earthquake; she got out in time.

Well now, what were the politics of both the city and your district?

EVANS: Russia was changing rapidly at that time and the main concerns were economic. People had lost their previous livelihoods in many cases; a lot of the old factories were sputtering to a halt. There were new investors on the horizon, some of them American, and one of the biggest parts of our work there, and I say "our" because my wife was also involved. She had been asked to head the northwest Russia office of the International Executive Service Corps. That doesn't sound right. IESC: International Executive Service Corps, sometimes called the "paunch corps." This was a program for retired executives of various U.S. companies who were paired with concerns, industrial concerns, or companies, in Russia and would typically go for two to six weeks to advise those companies on how to gain market share, how to repackage their products, redo their advertising, tighten up their bookkeeping; things like that. And at the same time we at the consulate were trying to organize useful seminars and useful programs and we were working with various groups that came in to help with all kinds of social and political and even architectural problems.

Q: Well now, around this time, when was the siege- when were they shelling the-

EVANS: The parliament?

Q: -the parliament?

EVANS: That must have been '93.

Q: Well I was in Bishkek for three weeks sort of during this- part of this period to help- as sort of an advisor on setting up a consular service for the Kyrgyz. And you know, I was struck by not only the volunteer groups, or not so much the volunteer but at least non-governmental organization groups but also the missionaries were all over the place, and it struck me that, you know, it's one of the hardest things in the world to go to a very sophisticated group of people; I mean, after all, this is a very proud nation of going longer than we- for a hell of a lot longer than we had, one way or another, you know, full of advice. I mean, this must have been a problem, wasn't it?

EVANS: Well, in those earlier days the Russians were very receptive to our advice and later I think they became less so, but at the time they were quite pleased to have the interest that we were showing. St. Petersburg and the surrounding districts had always been characterized by heavy defense industry spending and so a number of the big firms there had found that with the end of the Cold War they really needed to think of other things to do, and there was even...for example, there was an optical factory that had been making optical scopes and things for the military, and they were persuaded to make some equipment for sportsmen. There was another old factory going back to the time of Peter the Great, known as Arsenal, and they managed to use some of their equipment that had been designed to make naval mines and they started turning them into samovars. And you can see these samovars; they looked like little mines. So there was a lot of defense conversion underway and a number of...We had the Trade Development Agency, TDA, coming in to do some useful work in the shipyards, for example. One of their programs was to see if it would make sense to take old ships from the West and have them brought to St. Petersburg and broken down for scrap. So there were a number of innovative ideas, and there were quite a few young American entrepreneurs who had come; there were American lawyers, and they were all in this mix trying to both help the Russians and make some money themselves.

Q: How did you deal with this group?

EVANS: Well, I hope that they felt that I was open to them and I had frequently had groups of people to our house over lunch and for various other events, and I was very much involved with a group that was trying to develop a charter of good business practices, a kind of a code of ethics for Russian businesses. I mean, Russian businessmen were emerging from the Soviet past with very little sense of how this new game was played, and some of them played by very unscrupulous rules, and the idea was to try to at least get agreement on what some of the rules of the game ought to be.

Q: I mean, were you up against- this is the heyday of the oligarchs, wasn't it?

EVANS: Yes, I guess 1996 was the real spike of oligarchic power, coinciding with Yeltsin's election in 1996. That was also the year in which Mayor Sobchak ran for reelection in St. Petersburg; Vladimir Putin, his deputy, ran his campaign, and another one of the deputy mayors bolted from the Sobchak camp and opposed him. This was Vladimir Yakovlev. He was accused by Sobchak and Putin of stabbing Sobchak in the back but in the end Sobchak lost and it was that loss that precipitated Vladimir Putin's eventual move to Moscow.

But back on crime, when Putin was deputy mayor - and he was first deputy mayor in St. Petersburg - one of the things he did was to deal with the very serious problem of organized crime in St. Petersburg. We had a young officer who was very good at getting just one degree away from some of these criminal figures and finding out what was going on, and there was a big battle among crime groups in the St. Petersburg region for control of territory and assets, and during Putin's time that was at least controlled and brought to a tenable position. Putin emerged as very much a crime fighter in those days.

Q: Well did- How did- During the first part of your time, before there was the election, there was a close tie between St. Petersburg and Moscow?

EVANS: I would say there was more of a rivalry between the two cities. The Petersburgers used to say "Petersburg may not be the first city of Russia but it's not the second," and that was their way of expressing their disdain for Moscow. So there was rivalry and there was also a movement which accelerated very much under Putin of star officials in St. Petersburg being taken to Moscow and ending up in high level jobs. The most famous of these was Anatoly Chubais, who at one point was prime minister under Yeltsin.

Q: Did- What was happening sort of with the military, because you know, one has pictures of the Soviet nuclear sub sort of decaying and you know, letting out God knows what, you know, into the water and all? I mean, was there the feeling of- I mean, was this something that was a concern to everyone?

EVANS: Absolutely. And St. Petersburg is overwhelmingly a naval city. Now, on one of my trips up to Murmansk, which is an important port because it's a warm-water port even though it's above the Arctic Circle...because of the influence of the Gulf Stream and the salt water...

Q: And during World War II it was a- the convoys of Murmansk were critical.

EVANS: Exactly. And on the occasion of one of the anniversaries of the convoys, in fact, we were invited there and we called on local officials, but as we steamed out the...it's an estuary, really...as we steamed out in order to throw wreaths on the waters to commemorate the victims of the convoys, we passed all these rusting hulks of submarines and other vessels just lying alongside decrepit old wharves. It was really, for anyone, I mean, leaving politics aside, it was just the saddest sight.

Now, about the military in St. Petersburg. We had frequent visits to St. Petersburg by the naval attachï¿½ at our embassy in Moscow and partly because of that I got to know very well a lot of the naval personnel; the commandant of the St. Petersburg region and various admirals and so on. Now, when I arrived in Russia the Pickerings were having difficulty in Moscow with Russians drinking too much hard liquor at their receptions, in particular, of course, their favorite, vodka, although they liked whiskey too. And Alice Pickering, whom we greatly loved and admired, had prevailed upon Ambassador Pickering not to serve hard liquor at the Moscow embassy, Spaso House, receptions. Now, this was partly a budgetary measure; we were all suffering from tight budgets at that time, but it was also a sobriety measure and when I got to St. Petersburg and discovered that we would not be allowed to serve vodka at our functions I got in touch with Ambassador Pickering and I said well, you know, up here in St. Petersburg that won't do. We have two constituencies that absolutely must have vodka, and that's the navy and the Russian Orthodox clergy. So we engineered an exception providing that whenever naval officers or Russian Orthodox priests were at our receptions we could serve vodka, and we made sure that they were always represented on our guest lists.

Q: Was there- Did you have the problem of too heavy drinking?

EVANS: I sacrificed a certain amount of my liver in St. Petersburg, yes. Mainly, I have to say, with the clergy. Because I made an effort to get to know the Russian Orthodox clergy. The Church was experiencing a resurgence in those days. It was the only belief system left after the collapse of communism and I felt it was important to engage with them. Although, I have noticed that we Americans, with our strong views about separation of church and state, we tend to have a tin ear overseas for religious matters, and I thought it was important to develop those contacts and I did so.

I have to tell in this connection one story. When I arrived in St. Petersburg the Metropolitan bishop was known to be an old xenophobic, anti-Semitic cleric by the name of Ioann. He had a very bad reputation, had made some anti-Semitic remarks, and I put off as long as I could meeting...calling on him. I was uncomfortable calling on this disreputable person and I put it off as long as I could. I finally decided to call on him on Halloween, figuring that my friends back in the State Department would understand that if I called on him on Halloween it sent a certain signal. So I did that and - conveniently - it also was St. John's Day in the Orthodox calendar and I was able to make the connection between my name and the priest's formal name, Ioann.

About a week later we were at a blessing for a newly opened hotel and Metropolitan Ioann was there. Before our very eyes he fell over and died, a week after I had met him. Now, he had just been introduced to my wife, who was wearing a somewhat low-cut dress and she claims that he was overcome by her dï¿½colletage but there's no real evidence of that.

Q: Well what- I imagine we're looking rather closely at the role of the Church at this period, weren't we?

EVANS: Well, I certainly was, and there were things afoot in the Russian Orthodox Church at the time. We were coming up toward the millennium, of course, and there were people in the Russian Church who wanted to...there were some ecumenical forces at work. Others were very conservative. The number of priests was slowly rising; it had gone down to almost nothing under communist rule and so they were...some of the oligarchs were endowing churches, churches were springing up, people were returning to the churches. And for example, the American Episcopal Church was working with the Russian Church to try to help them better understand the role of a church in a parish, how to run a parish, how to serve the people better. So there was an engagement from the side of American churches.

You mentioned missionaries. We also did see missionaries in St. Petersburg and there was a bit of a backlash, I must say.

Q: Well these were not- some of them were not the most sophisticated people. I mean, they were good solid primitive Baptists out there peddling their stuff.

EVANS: I also recall that there were representatives of some very recently minted denominations which had gotten their credentials as churches in Texas in 1993, that kind of thing, and those people did not enjoy a warm welcome in Holy Russia.

Q: Did you find that, I mean, one of the things I think that struck all of us that served in the Slavic countries under communist rule is, you know, you have a vibrant city center and you go 10 miles out and you're back to the ox plow and the woman with two buckets on her shoulder at the village pump. Was this- Did you see sort of a- the modernization process moving out or was it during your time there?

EVANS: Well, it was starting and in St. Petersburg, for example, some of the old buildings were being renovated and new apartments were going up. There was quite a bit of construction. But indeed, if you went out into the countryside you stepped back several centuries and it was even possible to step back a good number of decades just by going through the doors of some of these buildings. I mean, people were living in terrible conditions in many cases. St. Petersburg still was characterized by many, many communal apartments, big old apartments that had been broken down into...sometimes with just curtains into sections for several families sharing kitchens and baths.

Q: What were sort of the political dynamics? I mean, was the Communist Party discredited? It represented one of the, you know, a lot of people had put a hell of a lot of time into the organization and all this and how are things going, party-wise?

EVANS: In Russia in those days the Communist Party itself was splitting up into different factions and some were outright Stalinist and others were to different degrees closer to Social Democrats and so on. And these groups were in evidence on particular anniversaries and around particular issues. But it was definitely a graying segment of the population of Russia. I mean the younger people tended not to be sympathetic to the communists and at the time Yeltsin was popular in Petersburg and Mayor Sobchak was a very popular leader.

Q: How come Sobchak lost?

EVANS: Sobchak was a law professor and he was a very fine speaker. He gave long winded but essentially very erudite, reasoned political speeches. But we did notice that during the course of his reelection campaign he systematically alienated some very important support groups. He made a disparaging comment about the intelligence of the military. This was not a smart thing to do in a big navy city like St. Petersburg and on Election Day of course we saw naval cadets being marched in formation to the polling stations. And curiously he also alienated another important group in any Russian city and those are the so-called dvorniki who take care of the courtyards. And he made a passing comment about how the dvorniki were overpaid and so that group was instantly alienated and his opponent ran a better, more modern campaign and Sobchak went down in disgrace in the '96 election.

Q: How did you get along with the replacement?

EVANS: Actually we had been at a dinner early in the year when it had just become know that Vladimir Yakovlev was going to oppose his erstwhile boss and we were sitting, in fact, at his table, and my wife popped up and said "I'll vote for you."

And we had a decent relationship with Sobchak's successor. He was not the kind of towering intellectual figure that Sobchak had been but he was much more down to earth and I think ordinary people could relate to him better. Unfortunately his wife had important economic interests and there was a whiff of corruption around his administration and he was later moved off to do various jobs, including working on the big issue of housing for the whole Russian Federation.

Q: Was there any feeling towards the United States of, you know, sort of the old believers, you know, the United States is not your friend? I mean, was that pretty well died during your period?

EVANS: No, the one issue that was getting to be a problem for us was the issue of Yugoslavia and the Balkans, and there was...Now this was before hostilities, that is, before we engaged in hostilities in Yugoslavia but already those tensions and the pressures that were being applied on the Yugoslav leadership were having a resonance in Russia.

Q: Well Serbia was always part of the Pan-Slavic movement and Croatia and Bosnia would be seen as basically alien forces.

EVANS: Yes. No, the strong pro-Serb sentiment was definitely palpable there.

But I want to mention another thing. The most interesting Russian politician to come out of St. Petersburg, of course, was Vladimir Putin. As deputy mayor I mentioned that he was primarily a crime fighter and on one occasion we had some young Americans from California who had invested in a restaurant operation at a very nice location on the Nevsky Prospekt in St. Petersburg and their Russian partner, after a certain time, decided that he didn't need the Americans, he had learned how to run the business, had all the know-how and locked the Americans out and then threatened them with serious harm. These Americans fled, literally pursued by a Mafia SUV and found refuge in our consulate building. And that was one occasion when I had to call Vladimir Putin on the phone and ask for his intervention, and he did intervene. But it was interesting; the first thing he wanted to know, when we told him about this problem: he wanted to see the contract. He was trained at the legal faculty at Leningrad State University, where Sobchak had been professor of law, and his instincts were very much those of someone trained in the law, despite the fact that he had spent a good bit of his life in the KGB; he had this legal mindset. He didn't resolve the entire problem but he, at least, by the end of that day, had stabilized the situation to such an extent that the Americans were safe to leave, they went to Finland, and eventually the legal tangle was straightened out.

Q: Well then, were American businesspeople coming to you and saying should I invest here or not?

EVANS: Oh, yes. There was a steady stream of Americans coming through, looking at various possible investments. Coca-Cola made an investment there. I know some of the car producers, manufacturers, were there. And there was Ben and Jerry's, who opened an ice cream store in the city of Arkhangelsk up to the north. So there were investors small and large.

Q: What would you tell them?

EVANS: I tried to be as objective as possible, of course. I mean, we had no interest in an American businessman losing his shirt over there. We wanted to warn them of difficulties. One of the main difficulties for all investors involved the high social costs that were expected to be met by any investor, because the Soviet system had tucked the costs of kindergarten, schools and various other social spending into the budgets of big factories, and so anyone looking at an enterprise as an investment had to figure out how he was going to meet those costs.

Q: Well were there many investments?

EVANS: There were fewer than we had hoped but one of the - not too surprisingly - one of the biggest investment areas turned out to be real estate. There are some beautiful old buildings in St. Petersburg with beautiful vistas and it turned out to be quite a profitable market for people who were able to come in and organize the refurbishing of some of these places.

Q: What about the city itself? Were they doing much to revive the city, the beauty of the city and all?

EVANS: The typical Russian moment for fixing potholes and roads is before an important leader visits the city, and we did have a visit by President Clinton during my time there. And sure enough, they scurried around and did a lot to prepare for his visit. St. Petersburg, although it sounds terribly old, was only founded in 1703, so, as I reminded many Petersburgers, New York and Philadelphia were older, and Boston, too.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: But because it was built in a certain style, largely by Italian builders, it does have a very historic charm and they were gradually, as the budget allowed, they were reopening old spaces that had fallen into desuetude. The Stroganoff Palace, for example, the family that opened Siberia and invented Beef Stroganoff, that palace was being reopened and various other, gradually bits of old Russia, of old St. Petersburg, were being reopened.

Q: Well was there a water level problem or something? I think, you know, when Peter the Great went he had to use piles to, you know, in a way it's like Venice or something.

EVANS: That's right, that's exactly right. St. Petersburg was built on a marsh. It was largely to project Russian power and to provide a window to the West and a port, and indeed the water level...Pushkin wrote back in the 1830s about one of the terrible floods. And there were some floods in our time, fortunately not affecting our house, but parts of the city would become... would turn into...would be inundated.

The UN was also involved there in trying to preserve the central core of the city. And I remember getting the chief architect of the city and several of the deputy mayors and so on together with the UN people at our dacha outside town and we'd spend a whole day talking about the renovation of the city and how various things could be done to combine commercially useful space without affecting the appearance for the tourists.

Q: Well what was your and your officers' opinion of Yeltsin?

EVANS: Of course we were not the closest observers of Yeltsin; it was the embassy that had the most contact with national politicians. During the visit of the Queen I personally met Mr. Yeltsin and I must say I was...the Queen is quite petite; but the next person in line was this bear of a man with huge hands and he was over six feet and really just an enormous fellow. By the way, Prince Philip looked positively dwarfish next to him. But we of course let the embassy be our guide on what to think. In those years of the Bill and Boris meetings where Bill Clinton was frequently, fairly frequently, getting together with Boris Yeltsin there was definitely a good feeling about U.S.-Russian relations and that was reflected all the way down to our level where we took part in all aspects of the city's life.

Q: Was there, I mean were you getting your, you might say Russian contacts' concern about well, I guess the stability of Yeltsin?

EVANS: It wasn't so much an issue in St. Petersburg, I think. There were, certainly there were people who would shake their heads at the latest occasion when Yeltsin wasn't available because presumably he'd had too much to drink, that kind of thing, but generally the city was very busy with its own life and that revolved around museums; of course the navy had things going on but St. Petersburg also runs to a pattern, a kind of annual cycle, because Petersburg is very close to the Arctic Circle and so the "white nights" in the summer are when thousands of visitors come to Petersburg and there are all manner of concerts and fireworks displays and people...it never gets dark during the white nights, really...the light goes down but it's never totally dark. And then of course the other end of the year, near the winter solstice in December, you have the opposite effect when the sun only gets up at 10:30 and is down by 3:00. And that's when foreign tourists and other visitors generally shun the northern latitudes.

Q: You say the navy was- What the hell was the navy doing? Do they have the feeling that, I mean I see shots of these, really the Russian navy has- the Soviet navy has some beautiful ships. I mean, as a kid I grew up in Annapolis and you know, learned to appreciate a beautiful ship and they really did in their navy and then to see these things lying sort of on their sides became- I mean what were they doing?

EVANS: Well, the last big cruiser that the Soviet navy had started and was being built in St. Petersburg in those years, that was the Peter the Great. And because of a TDA (U.S. Trade and Development Agency) grant that we had made for that particular shipyard, I was invited there and was - I think, probably in contravention of security regulations - I was taken aboard the Peter the Great, which was about three-quarters complete at that time. And it was a massive ship, still not comparable to vessels in our navy by any stretch of the imagination but it was quite a vessel with clearly more modern equipment aboard. It was a guided missile cruiser, I believe, and it has since been launched and turned up in South American waters last year to the concern of some.

Q: But was the navy doing much?

EVANS: Well the navy...You know, the first U.S.-Russian agreement in the '60s that started to take the tension out of our relations was the agreement on Incidents at Sea...

Q: Yes.

EVANS: ...struck between the two navies, basically.

Q: Keep place and buzzing each other and-

EVANS: That's right.

Q: -and playing, they were playing games.

EVANS: It was mostly in the Mediterranean. That's right. And the officers on both sides, the navies of both sides realized that some day somebody was going to get badly hurt and that this needed to be regulated. So there had always been a connection between our navies. We shared some interests as great naval powers. We saw treaties like Law of the Sea very much in the similar way. We were in favor of free passage through various straits of the world. And we had a lot of U.S. naval ship visits to the port of St. Petersburg and to other ports in northwest Russia. And I was, as consul general, I was involved in those. We visited the naval base at Kronstadt which previously had been totally off limits.

Q: Old Kï¿½nigsberg.

EVANS: Well no, Kronstadt is the port, the military base at St. Petersburg. I didn't get to-Kï¿½nigsberg, which is now Kaliningrad. We pushed very hard for that to be included in our consular district but the embassy, because of the naval attachï¿½, wanted to keep that under its territory.

Q: That's in, is it Latvia?

EVANS: It's what used to be East Prussia.

Q: East Prussia.

EVANS: Kï¿½nigsberg had been the capital of East Prussia in earlier days and then has remained a kind of Russian exclave since World War II.

Q: How stood relations with the Baltic States? Because you abutted on them.

EVANS: We did abut on them and there was some tension, in particular along the border with Estonia. Since that had, in Soviet days, been an internal administrative border they had never bothered to demarcate it very carefully and that process was underway at the time. There was also some tension on the Latvian border but it was mainly with Estonia, and at times there were, as tensions between Tallinn and Moscow would rise there would be a reflection of that in St. Petersburg that the Estonian consul would feel and we in the consular corps of course were protective of each other and would find ways to be sure that the Estonian consul was getting our support.

Q: Well was there much of Russians going to the Baltic States to shop?

EVANS: Yes, there was, but an even more attractive destination for Russians who had got hold of some money was Finland, and what we saw was that the little Finnish town of Lappeenranta on the Finnish/Russian border became a mecca. It happened to have some very nice hotels and spas and resorts and when my wife and I visited there we found that it was full of Russians by that time.

Q: Was there any thought about, what is it, Karkkila or whatever it is, the, you know, house thing, the Finnish composer-?

EVANS: Sibelius?

Q: Yes, doing as one-

EVANS: Karelia Suite.

Q: Karelia Suite and all that. Anyway, I mean, you know, this is lost territory in a way.

EVANS: Well, that's right, and of course one of the few examples of a state desisting from pressing claims on a territory was that Finland after World War II, having effectively been defeated by the Soviet Union but having a chance, perhaps, to press a claim for Vyborg and other parts of Karelia did not do so, thinking it wiser, knowing that Russia would always be there and of course Finland had - not wholeheartedly - but had sided with the Axis powers.

Q: What about-

EVANS: I should mention something in this connection because the consulate general in St. Petersburg had the use of a wonderful dacha up in that former Finnish area along the Baltic Sea and reputedly the dacha had been inhabited by General, or I guess he was Field Marshal, Mannerheim's mistress, and it was a lovely place very close to the shore.

Q: Well actually the Finns during the winter war of 1940, I think, had given the Soviet army a bloody nose.

EVANS: Yes, and then there was the Continuation War and the Finns fought very heroically but also had to retreat into basically what their borders are today.

Q: Speaking of troops, this is a time when the Russians or maybe they'd already done it but they had all these troops in East Germany and elsewhere; what did they do- I mean, were you affected by this?

EVANS: We were certainly aware of the problem of Soviet officers and their families being withdrawn from primarily East Germany and there was a program of vouchers designed to enable returning Soviet officers to purchase or build houses or apartments in northwest Russia. So we were very much aware of that; I remember visiting one of these places. The program didn't work as well as it might have; when there's a government subsidy the price tends to go up and it was still a problem and really I think that one of the biggest continuing problems for the Russians or for the population as a whole is this inadequate housing.

Q: The housing there, were you taking a look at it and, I mean, were they still these massive apartment buildings and-?

EVANS: In my time in St. Petersburg the most interesting thing was perhaps an American builder, Ryland Homes, which had come in and secured a fairly large area and was putting up single family houses in the American style, which were selling. And of course in the frigid conditions of Russia there are many economies to be found in huddling people together in large blocks for heating purposes and so the individual house of the sort that we're more accustomed to is not necessarily the best choice in Russia. Although, when they have the means, Russians do like to have their own house and some land around it.

Q: Well you know my impression is that the Russians, probably more than almost any other group really, maybe it's because of the Soviet system or something, love their backyards because they, you know, they have fruit trees and they're growing all sorts of things. You get a great produce out of a very small yard.

EVANS: Well, that's right. The institution of the weekend house or dacha has been going strong for years in Russia. It had a very important economic meaning in the Soviet Union where people indeed grew their turnips and potatoes and cucumbers and whatever they could eke out of their little garden plot, whether it was in the city or out in the suburbs. And there was an enormous push by urban Russians in all the cities to develop dachas, bigger and better, and some of the dachas that sprung up around St. Petersburg, not to mention Moscow, were really quite palatial in these conditions where some people were doing very well.

Q: Was there much of a tie between Russians who had gone to Coney Island? I'm kidding but I mean-

EVANS: Palm Beach or...

Q: Yes, but you know, I mean who were going to New York and other places, you know and settling there but keeping ties? Were you aware of much of it?

EVANS: There have been different waves of emigration. There were certain waves before the Wall collapsed and after the Wall collapsed it became much easier for Russians to travel, and so many Russians did either visit New York and a certain number of course came to the United States and they're still here, many of them by virtue of having married Americans and of course some of those cases turned out to be marriages that didn't last but others have lasted. There also were Russians who wanted their children to attend schools, either in England or the United States and so we saw a certain amount of that happening, Russians who could afford to send their children to either boarding schools or college. And there was more and more connection, I think, socially. Mayor Sobchak made a big visit, for example, to New York. The little boat ("botik") of Peter the Great was at one point allowed to be shipped to New York and it was displayed in the World Financial Center during a celebration of St. Petersburg that took place in probably...it must have been the fall of 1995.

Q: As an old consular officer, what were your consular operations like?

EVANS: Well, we had a busy consular section. The issue of non-immigrant visas as always was a difficult one and we had pretty much a line of people out in the street in early days but during my time we rebuilt the consular section, making the flow better, rationalizing the use of space, making a more comfortable waiting room so that people weren't out in the elements and our consul went on television and explained what the procedures were. So we were able to improve the situation somewhat. We were in a downtown building with limited space.

Q: You know, one of the things that's been mentioned about democracy in Russia and all, you know they never really had a real democracy until you know, they've had little outcroppings of it but basically until very recently, how did you see the democratic process working there?

EVANS: You're right in your general observation. Russia's political history is one of...going back into the days of the tsars and really going back to the Mongol yoke, which for four centuries Russia had to deal with, it has not been fertile ground for democracy. It's a big place of open spaces with a lot of different groups and the strong hand has been what Russians have looked for in their leaders, by and large, including well through the 20th century. The kind of hesitation and weakness and perhaps debate that characterizes liberal thinking in other places has been a very fragile flower in Russia. There have been liberals; there was a strong liberal tradition. Strong is too strong a word but there were liberals even in the late tsarist period but then of course when the Bolsheviks came in in '17 and did away with the others, the Mensheviks and so on, that sealed their fate for a very long time and liberals have often been a target of derision. But in the '90s there were people like Boris Nemtsov. Boris Nemtsov is from the city of what used to be Tver, now called Gorky. That's not right, it's not Tver (ex-Kalinin) but he was from Gorky (now again Nizhiy Novgorod), I think, and he was one of the deputy prime ministers. There were others on Yeltsin's team who were seen as liberals. They didn't do terribly well at the polls but nonetheless the non-communist ruling parties and in our time it was Our Home is Russia, Nash Dom Rossiya, the party of Yeltsin and Chernomyrdin, at least kept the communists at bay and that was seen as the main struggle.

Q: Wasn't there Party Yabloko too?

EVANS: Yes. And it was Yavlinsky, that's where the "ya" comes from, and those were in fact a combination of politicians from St. Petersburg who started Yabloko.

Q: Well did you get the feeling in St. Petersburg that, you know, we're the real intellectuals and those uncultured collective farmers in Moscow are uncultured collective farmers?

EVANS: Yes, there was a kind of a Petersburgian disdain for Moscow and other parts of the country. They felt in St. Petersburg that they really were something like Boston in the sense of being the intellectual center of Russia. And with their ballet and theater and museums and so on they really did have a certain claim to be at least on a par with Moscow.

Q: Did you have much of a problem with the influx of visitors during the summer or- These were pretty much tour groups; I guess they took care of them.

EVANS: Well, in those days we had not only tour groups who were a constant feature but we had a large number of U.S. officials traipsing through and prominent Americans who needed to be tended to; the chairman of American Express and so on and various cabinet rank officials. What I found was that they nearly always timed their visit to St. Petersburg on the weekend. They would either go to Helsinki on a Friday and then descend on us from Helsinki for the weekend or, if coming from Moscow they would time it so that our weekends were almost always taken up by wining and dining official visitors. And I must say we must have had five or six cabinet secretaries and undersecretaries and so on.

Q: How was social life there?

EVANS: For me and my wife it was extremely busy. We were out almost every night, usually invited to more than one event, either an opening or a vernissage or a national day reception plus a dinner. It was non-stop and I was very much of the opinion that one needed to show up at these things to make the American presence known, in the case even of small consulates, to show respect for their national days. The only consulate with which we had no relations was the Cuban but there was a South African consulate at the time and many other countries had opened consulates so we were in full swing.

Q: Did the Germans play much of a role there?

EVANS: Yes, they did. There was an aristocratic German diplomat by the name of Eberhard von Puttkammer, whose family had owned large properties and castles in East Prussia in the old days, and he was the German consul general and the dean of the corps. And this was an interesting thing because Vladimir Putin, the deputy mayor, had served in Dresden in his days in the KGB. So he was quite fluent in German and whenever one went to a German reception almost undoubtedly Herr Putin would be there speaking his fluent German with the German consul general.

At the occasion of - this would have been in 1995 - the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II...

Q: Yes, '45, yes.

EVANS: Yes. Right. ...there was a Europe-wide commemoration of the end of the war and in St. Petersburg we came into a difficulty because there was one of the Western consuls, the Dutch consul, who objected to the dean of the consular corps, the German, being allowed to speak at the commemoration of the end of the war. And the rest of us were of a firmly different opinion, that by now it was 50 years later, it was inappropriate to deprive the dean of the corps of his rightful place in these festivities. And so the British, French and I got together and disarmed this proposal to relieve von Puttkammer of the doyenship at that event, and we stuck with it.

Q: Did the speech go off all right?

EVANS: The speech went off. There was a lot of tension around that moment but we felt that that was entirely proper under the circumstances and the Dutch diplomat was later exiled to somewhere in the Persian Gulf.

Q: Did- You left in '97?

EVANS: Yes. But before I left, Vladimir Putin migrated to Moscow, and that was because his mentor, Anatoly Sobchak, the mayor, had lost the election and Putin in the meantime had become acquainted with people in the Kremlin because Boris Yeltsin had sought to secure for himself and his daughter a villa in St. Petersburg. They had their eye on a beautiful piece of property on one of the islands in the Neva River where there are some beautiful properties. It was occupied by the Scandinavian Airlines representative and there was quite a buzz about Yeltsin's wanting to occupy that dacha. He didn't succeed in dislodging SAS (Scandinavian Airlines System) but in the meantime there were a lot of negotiations with Vladimir Putin who in addition to being deputy mayor was in charge of the property committee of the city, and on the strength of those connections he was invited to move to Moscow and to work in the administrative division of the Kremlin. That's the story of how Putin ended up going from Petersburg to Moscow.

Q: What was your impression of, particularly the St. Petersburg-centered media and how it operated and how the U.S. is portrayed?

EVANS: We had very good relations, first of all, with the local press and television and radio. And I was very accessible to them, frequently met, gave interviews, sometimes on television, sometimes in print. They were, compared to Moscow they were a little bit provincial, but they were independent of Moscow and so there was a separate milieu for the press, a little bubble of independence, and the readership was high but declining because many Russians in those days couldn't afford subscriptions, and what was popping up at that time were little handout papers that you didn't pay for, similar to the ones you get in the Washington Metro, where there's a lot of local news and want ads and buying and selling, that sort of thing.

Q: Sort of like the samizdat.

EVANS: In a different way, yes.

Q: In a different way.

Were there- were political jokes still being developed or had they kind of died down?

EVANS: I think they pretty much died out. There weren't so many jokes. What started to take the place of political jokes was jokes about the rich, nouveau riche oligarchs, and that became the rage for awhile, jokes like "two oligarchs met in Paris and one said I spent $400 on my necktie, and the other one said, oh, you fool; I spent $800 on mine." That sort of fairly lame jokes.

Q: Well then, is there anything else we haven't covered, do you think?

EVANS: Well, I think the most important thing about St. Petersburg in those years was that we did know Vladimir Putin and although he had no pretensions, no hopes, no plans to ever become prime minister or president of Russia, it was really this...the fact that he had to leave St. Petersburg, he was taken to Moscow, and came to the attention of Boris Yeltsin and that's what led Putin to be named prime minister in 1999. And then of course we all remember on New Year's Eve of the millennium Boris Yeltsin abdicated and asked Vladimir Putin to be candidate for the presidency of Russia.

Now, the fact that we knew Putin in St. Petersburg, the embassy...I remember taking Ambassador Pickering to visit him once and probably DCM Jim Collins as well. But we knew him; we had a much better impression of Putin than other people did because he had helped us out in these situations where the Mafia was going after our investors and we saw him as a crime fighter. He was not one of those who had lined his pockets, so far as we knew, by his involvement in official affairs. He had a very modest dacha; actually, his dacha burned down during those years but he was not seen as one who had robbed the state treasury on his own behalf. He was very modest. He also was a fanatical adherent of a Russian form of judo and there's a whole philosophy that comes with this type of judo; it's a philosophy derived from Eastern rituals and so on in which the contestants are very respectful of each other, they always bow to each other, and the trick is to use the weight of your opponent and the strength of your opponent for your own ends. And it also goes with a philosophy of...almost an ascetic philosophy in which one does not drink to excess; one is always in control of one's physical and mental being and so I think these characteristics have come through in Putin's presidency and now prime ministership. I mean, his athleticism, going out to Siberia and anesthetizing a tiger as he recently did, and flying down to Chechnya as he did on the first night of his presidency to thank the troops, going out on a submarine. In contrast to the old sort of bibulous Yeltsin who was seen as a kind of an old fool, a clumsy old fool in his later days, Putin was sharp, he's well spoken, he's focused, he does not drink. My wife observed this very carefully; he is not a teetotaler but he tends to just take a sip. He doesn't mind anybody else drinking but he is not a boozer and he seems to have acquired a taste for beer while in Germany rather than just the Russian staple of vodka.

Q: Yes. Did you have a problem with, at least it used to be during Soviet times when they- you know, you go to a place and they try to drink you under the table.

EVANS: Russians love to drink, there's no question about it. And in the old days there was this kind of pushiness about trying to get Americans to drink. I think a lot of that went away after the Wall fell down. They still...there was never any shortage of vodka, they love to drink. As I said, my main exertions turned out to be mostly with priests because we got into long, philosophical discussions and one thing led to another.

Q: Did you have to go to many church services?

EVANS: Well, yes. We did. We didn't pretend to be Russian Orthodox but for example, in our last spring in St. Petersburg when April came around and Easter services were announced we... I remember attending the midnight Easter mass at the naval cathedral where all the naval officers went, the St. Nicholas Cathedral. I happened to be accompanied by Suzanne Massie, who was the expert on imperial Russia, who had advised President Reagan in his time, and we stayed for the whole service. Putin was there; that was Putin's main church. We knew that Putin was close to a number of the clergy, that he even had his own spiritual advisor who was from a monastery, I think, in Pskov region. But we stayed and the bishop invited us to stay on for the breaking of the fast, the Lenten fast, which took place well after the service; it must have been 2:00 a.m. by the time we all sat down, and of course there was a tremendous amount of vodka flowing at that point because the monks and priests had been abstaining from alcohol.

Q: For 40 days.

EVANS: That's right. And it's at those events where they crack Russian Easter eggs on each other's foreheads and have quite a feast. And when we...when Suzanne Massie and I left that Easter breakfast the sun was already starting to creep up over the horizon, and that very Easter day I remember climbing to the top of the Peter-Paul Tower, bell tower, in the Peter-Paul Fortress in order to participate in the ringing of the first Easter bell, which was about 15 feet in diameter at its base with a clapper that weighed over a ton. One had to make a big run at the clapper and probably two tries to get it to actually resound, after which the churches all over St. Petersburg started to ring their bells, and, it being a flat area, it was like a sounding board with this wonderful pealing of bells, which in Russia is called "perezvon." It was just a remarkable experience. It was also when I got kissed smack on the lips three times by Mayor Sobchak, much to my surprise.

Q: Well, it's probably a good place to stop here. And '97, whither?

EVANS: I agree with you that we should stop and I should just say that my departure from St. Petersburg was not a happy one; first of all because I had loved it, I thought I had done a very good job there in all respects, both within the consulate but also with respect to the surrounding society. I, for example, had been invited to present my thesis on the student revolts of 1861 at the university to the faculty council. I did that. And I traced through a naval archive the visit of one of my ancestors to the court at St. Petersburg after the Civil War when the United States sent a naval vessel to thank the Russians for their support in the war. My ancestor was a naval officer who had fought in the Civil War on the Union side and he and his wife were presented to the czar and there were balls at Kronstadt, so I had gotten quite involved in the history of the city as well.

But what made it a very unpleasant departure was that I was blamed for a presumed security lapse having to do with the repainting of the front of the consulate building. The building belonged to the city of St. Petersburg so we were renting it from the city. The stucco face needed to be refurbished, redone. The Moscow embassy had a facilities management officer who had approved our plan, it was done by Russian workers but under the watchful eye of a U.S. Marine during daylight hours only with no penetrations of the actual wall, and yet a new security officer who arrived at the post apparently wanting to discredit his predecessor sounded an alarm back in Washington that Russians had been granted access to the faï¿½ade of the building and that the whole building was compromised.

Now, I had approved the final plan as presented to me after review by the security officer, the facilities management officer, the general services officer and the administrative officer and my own deputy, and it looked to us like a perfectly feasible plan. We had to shore up the front of the building and yet the diplomatic security people pointed the finger at me as having exhibited malfeasance in this case and worse, they ran up to the Hill, to one of the committees, it was Congressman Gilman's committee, and told them that there had been a terrible lapse of security in St. Petersburg and that it was the fault of the consul general.

I consequently...Two things happened. Madeleine Albright, the Secretary at that time, came through St. Petersburg just a few weeks before my departure and for reasons that I still do not fathom one of her henchmen treated me with utmost disrespect and disdain and I had no onward assignment. And I came back to Washington...I, first of all, had filed a grievance over these accusations. At the end of that summer I won the grievance, a judgment was rendered that I had not been at fault in this matter, but by that time all the jobs were gone. But during my last summer the undersecretary of defense, John White, had come through. I'd had lunch with him and he had mooted the idea of my going on a secondment to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, to Moldova, to head the international mediation effort in Moldova. And so at the end of that summer, with no other prospects left because I had been blackballed, the personnel panels would not entertain any of my bids while this grievance was being adjudicated, at Labor Day, finally, I won the grievance and the only job left was to go to Moldova on the secondment.

Q: On the security thing, it sounds like you got in the middle of an age old power play or something like that.

EVANS: It was really unfair but it was a further example of how these security issues which have come up in these questions of espionage and spying and so on that were so poisonous during the Cold War continued to plague our relationship with Russia. Now, as it turned out, a year or so later, after an interagency team had gone out there and under tarpaulins - the whole consulate was swathed in protective tarpaulins so that no one could see what we were doing - they found out that there had been no penetration, that the post was not compromised by anything that had been done in that repainting job. So paranoia, a combination of bureaucratic considerations, a gung-ho security officer who had not been privy to the planning of this operation...He, by the way, was let go. He was first assigned back to a domestic position.

Q: Also I guess, this is probably about the time Madeleine Albright got very sensitive; I think a couple of laptop computers were taken around that time or was that a little later?

EVANS: That was at INR; I think it was a little bit later but you're right that her last term did see that.

Q: And there was also that railing in a conference room too.

EVANS: There was that, yes. And on the same trip in July of 1997 this same member, close member of her staff, so mistreated the U.S. ambassador in, I believe it was in Tallinn, her next stop, that he resigned. There were some very nasty things going on in the group around Albright.

Q: Well was this a professional member or was this sort of a political appointee?

EVANS: It was a person who had come with her. It was Elaine Shocas, who had come down from New York with Madeleine Albright. It was said of Elaine that in the Philippines she had been bitten by a highly poisonous snake and that the snake had died.

Q: Oh, God.

EVANS: Well we'd better stop here.

Q: Okay. We'll pick this up in 1997 when you're off to Moldova. Great.

Today is the 5th-?

EVANS: It is the 5th.

Q: -the 5th of December 2009, with John Evans. And John, where did we leave off?

EVANS: I had just finished my assignment as consul general to St. Petersburg. I was without an onward assignment because of security problems or alleged security problems which in the end I grieved and won that grievance but I only won it on Labor Day and by that time most of the normal jobs that I might have aspired to were gone. But over the summer the undersecretary of defense, John White, had come through St. Petersburg and we'd had lunch and he had suggested that I put my hat in for an international job, namely with the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) mission to Moldova. And so in September, right after Labor Day when I went into the department I decided that was my best option.

Q: Okay. And we'll talk about the whole process and- I mean, how long were you doing this, from when to when?

EVANS: The OSCE head of mission in Moldova had traditionally been an American. The mandate of that mission and of the individual heading it crept forward by six-month increments in Vienna. It had to be renewed every six months but from the U.S. point of view a secondment was normally for one year. Now, I ended up staying there for 22 months because the State Department had a difficult time deciding on my successor and I felt it was terribly important to have contact with my successor so I stayed on and on until Bill Hill was confirmed.

Q: Okay, let's talk about what is OSCE, what were they doing in general, and then your impressions of the organization, you know, particularly as you got to it. Now, we can talk about other things as they develop but I mean when you got there, what were you getting from the department and you know, I mean sort of in what order was it and all that?

EVANS: The State Department had always had a strong preference, as did the U.S. Government overall, for NATO as its main instrument in Europe, and it was telling that the CSCE, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, which after 1991 became the OSCE, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, was put into the Office of NATO Affairs, EUR-Regional-Political-Military: EUR/RPM. And it had a very small supporting staff there but CSCE and later OSCE were subsumed into that office. Because the CSCE, originally 35 members included all of the European states, included the Vatican, the Holy See, and Luxembourg and Iceland and lots of small countries, and because it worked by consensus effectively, it was seen as unwieldy, it was seen as more of a talking shop than anything serious. But after the Wall came down and the communist empire collapsed, really it was the OSCE that, well, the CSCE turned itself into the OSCE, got a small staff together in Vienna, and where there were problem areas, and it turned out there were several, it very quickly deployed field missions to deal with some of those problem areas, the conflicts that arose as the big glacis of communism melted and these other problems reappeared I think the OSCE was rather quick to respond. Now, one can argue about whether those responses, whether the field missions, had been effective but what they certainly have done, I think, is to prevent further violent conflict. In many cases, not all.

Q: Yes. Well I, as a retired Foreign Service officer I went out twice to Bosnia under the OSCE auspices to monitor elections there. I was impressed. I mean, you know, I had my five years service in Belgrade so I knew the Balkans and I mean this is not an easy place in which- the Balkans deservedly have a name for disorder and all that. But you know, the elections that I observed were held very well, we were well trained, and I'm not sure we'd like to conclude- how they- how the elections came out but I mean that's not our business in a way.

EVANS: The field missions...of course elections were a big part of what was going on as these countries went from being ruled by communist parties and had to get the hang of free elections. But there was a lot more involved as well between the elections, and the job to which I was headed in Moldova had to do with... the mandate involved setting up a negotiating structure between the separatist regime that had emerged in Transnistria, a little sliver on the eastern side, and the main government. It also involved trying to work out a special status for that region which would preserve the territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova and its sovereignty. And then we also had a human rights component and a reporting component to the permanent council of the OSCE in Vienna.

Q: Alright, you were doing this from when to when?

EVANS: I arrived in Vienna September 23, 1997, and after initial meetings with the secretary general and our ambassador, who at that time was Sam Brown, and various other folks in Vienna, the conflict prevention center was the organ that deployed the field missions and supported them. And after just a couple of days of consultations there I headed off to Chisinau, which is the former Kishinev and the capital of Republic of Moldova.

Q: Okay, let's explain what is Moldova. As a kid I used to read about Bessarabia, you know, and the oil fields of Bessarabia at one point were a major focus. I mean, this is before- As a kid I used to look at maps and you'd see oil derricks on the maps and all that. But could you explain what the situation was at the time and why we were concerned.

EVANS: The present day Republic of Moldova is composed of basically two distinct parts; Bessarabia, as you rightly recalled, which between the wars was the easternmost province of Romania. And then the second part is this little sliver of land along the Dniestr River, which between the wars was part of Soviet Ukraine. Now, it gets complicated when you...when the war breaks out, there's the Hitler-Stalin pact at which point things started to change in that part of the world and then there was the war during which the Nazis and the Iron Guard in Romania moved in through the south into Soviet territory on their way to Stalingrad. After the war Soviet power was extended to the River Prut in the west, which was the western border of Bessarabia and so the Soviet Union acquired a territory which linguistically and ethnically was primarily Romanian speaking. It had in distant times past, five centuries ago, it had been part of Greater Moldavia and there is still a province of Moldavia in Romania and that plus Bessarabia was the Kingdom of Moravia in those days. But for our purposes-

Q: Not Moravia.

EVANS: I meant Moldavia, because Moravia's up there in Czechoslovakia.

Q: Czechoslovakia, yes.

EVANS: No, right. For our purposes the problem was this: that as the Soviet Union started to collapse the sliver of the Republic of Moldova - which was more Slavic in its ethnic makeup, about 60 percent if you counted Russians and Ukrainians, even more if you counted those Moldovans who were educated in Russian and were Slavophone, although ethnically very likely of Romanian background - that sliver of land did not want to join the bulk of what had been the Moldavian SSR and at the time General Lebed's 14th Army was stationed there and when clashes broke out between the two sides, the ethnically Romanian side and the more Slavic side, General Lebed used his 14th Army to quell the violence and effectively to create a ceasefire between the separatist group mostly on the east of the Dniestr River and the bulk of the country on the west. So there was a split.

Now basically there was a conflict of two groups, politically important groups, who had different ideas for the future of their state, two different state building projects.

Q: Well wasn't there another dynamic going on? In other words people in the sliver there were between the Ukrainians and they really didn't owe allegiance to the Ukraine, did they? They were more Russian stuck in the middle of this- between the Romanians and the Ukrainians, weren't they?

EVANS: Well, during the inter-war period when Transnistria had been part of the Ukraine, it had enjoyed the status of an autonomous region in deference to its slightly different political history. Now originally, going back to the time of Catherine the Great, this had all been a conquest of the Russian army all the way to the River Prut. So this is an area that had gone back and forth, and you're right that the Transnistrians did feel themselves distinct not only from Ukraine: from Moldova but also from Ukraine.

Q: So the usual. And so the Americans come in or you come in to settle this. What were you up to?

EVANS: First of all, I wouldn't say it was the Americans because this was an operation of the OSCE altogether. I was sent there to head a completely international mission. There were, at that time, seven of us, of all different nationalities, only one American. I had in addition a Czech military officer, a Dutch military officer; my deputy was a Georgian. We had a German human rights officer and a Polish public affairs officer as well. So this was an international group, civil and military, and our lingua franca was Russian. It was the only language that all of us spoke sufficiently well to do our work.

Q: Okay. When you went out, first place, what were sort of- your headquarters, what were you instructed to do and how were relations with the next step up in the chain of command?

EVANS: First of all we ultimately reported to the troika because the OSCE has been governed since its establishment by a troika of countries, something like the EU. There is one country that is the chairman-in-office. When I signed on, the Danes were the chairman-in-office but the previous and future chairs also participate in the troika. So the Swiss were the previous one and the Poles were the next nominee to be chairman. So ultimately my boss was the Danish foreign minister but we reported through the Vienna Conflict Prevention Center to the permanent council and ultimately to the chairman-in-office. And our standing instructions were the so-called mandate of the mission, which everybody knew and all countries had agreed to. But there were, if you will, that was our strategy but there were also, you might say, tactical instructions, and in September '97 the scenery had recently changed because in May of '97 the sides had agreed to something called the "Moscow Memorandum." Under the aegis of Prime Minister, I mean Foreign Minister, Primakov the two sides had agreed to a so-called "common state" and our immediate tactical negotiating challenge was to elaborate what a "common state" would mean, what would be the legal and...it was a division of functions, which attributes of statehood would be carried out by the central government in Chisinau and which functions would be devolved or left with the government in Tiraspol, which was the separatist capital. So that was our immediate focus, elaborating what had been agreed in the Moscow Memorandum.

Q: Okay. What were the various size, the personalities and forces arrayed on all sides that you had to deal with?

EVANS: Well, I got a very fast introduction to all those personalities for the following reason. When I left Vienna I was told that the ambassadors of the troika countries were all going to descend on me the following week; that is, within a week of my arrival in Chisinau.

Q: Oh, joy.

EVANS: Oh joy, oh rapture.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: So I arrived in Chisinau, staying at a hotel. My first day at work I met the members of my mission. The second day I called on the president, the foreign minister, the chief negotiator and several other people in the Moldovan Central Government. The following day I called on President, so-called President Smirnov of the separatist state, which is called the Predniestrovian Moldovan Republic or we just called it Transnistria, and their so-called foreign minister and speaker of parliament. So I, in two days in a whirlwind of calls, met all of these people. President Lucinschi was then president of Moldova; he'd been elected less than a year earlier. And then on the third...on the next day the troika arrived from Vienna, re-enforced from capitals, and they wanted not only a briefing they wanted to look into everything to do with the situation there.

Now, I should say that this posed a major problem because the Moldovan position had been for many months to insist that any official delegation going across the line into separatist territory had to be accompanied by a high ranking Moldovan official, and what typically happened, because of this insistence, was that the foreign visitors would get up to the border and be turned back by the Moldovan, I mean by the Transnistrian, border guards because they did not accept the writ of the Moldovan official who was escorting. And so there'd be a scandal at the border; they would be turned back, there would be news reports and general rancor. I knew that that troika of officials wanted to get over to Transnistria and wanted to meet the separatist officials and hear their side of the story. So the challenge was how to get that to happen instead of just adding another incident. And what I devised was that the Moldovan side would indeed appoint an escort but a lower-level escort than had normally been the case, not a deputy foreign minister who, after all, everybody would recognize, but rather a second secretary. And that the Transnistrians would agree to overlook this person, agree not to recognize him as an official and so the group would be able to proceed. And that's exactly what happened.

Everybody thought this was brilliant; I got all kinds of bouquets thrown in my direction for having figured out this way of getting the meetings to happen. And indeed the troika had a very successful visit.

Q: Well would you say in a way the time was right? I mean, the Transnistrians, you know, wanted to get these people in. I mean, you don't turn down the head of the OSCE lightly over, you know, the usual dispute over papers of one official probably doesn't make it a hell of a lot- It wasn't to anybody's advantage except maybe the Moldovans.

EVANS: You're right that it was a matter of timing and both sides had to be ready for it, they had to cooperate to let this go forward. The Moldovans had to reduce the rank, the Transnistrians had to sort of shut their eyes and admit that there was, to themselves only privately, that someone was there. The surprise to me was I was then invited to, within a day or two after this, thinking that I had done a pretty good job of making this troika visit successful, I was invited to the home of the American Ambassador, Todd Stewart, and his very charming wife.

Q: Whom I've interviewed.

EVANS: Yes. And so he asked me how things had gone and I explained it and he said, "well John, they pissed all over you, didn't they?" I said "Todd, what do you mean? Everybody thinks this was a very wise way to proceed." And he said "you let those sons of bitches, the Transnistrians, get away with hosting an international official; this just makes them more of a presence on the international stage, you know, you're doing a terrible job and you ought to, you know, rethink your approach."

Well, I was rather taken aback but we concluded the evening on...it was a very nice dinner and we had lots to talk about. What had happened in the past, my predecessor there, mostly before the Moscow Memorandum, had taken a very pro-Moldovan stance, that is, pro-central government. Now of course even our mandate spelled out the need to preserve sovereignty and territorial integrity and that's what we were trying to do. But his tone towards the Transnistrian side was one of hectoring, badgering, questioning and generally denigrating the Transnistrian side to the point where, although he was present for the Moscow Memorandum, he was eventually effectively PNGed (declared persona non grata); he could not proceed any longer to visit Tiraspol and deal with the Transnistrian officials. And I felt that it was important as mediator to enjoy the trust of both sides; I felt it was essential to have the trust of both sides.

Q: Also you were wearing a non-American hat-

EVANS: Exactly.

Q: -and your bosses wanted to go there.

EVANS: Absolutely.

Q: And it wasn't your job, you know, in a way one has to, you know, the stance of the American ambassador could be one thing but your job was to facilitate what your organization-

EVANS: Yes, to carry out our mandate. And there's a very good reason why these jobs are entrusted in the main to international or at least internationally-hatted Civil Servants and not left to national authorities. In fact the OSCE had a code of conduct which prohibited members of OSCE missions from accepting national instructions from their own authorities because we were working for all 34...

Q: Absolutely.

EVANS: By that time it was 54 countries.

Q: Yes, yes.

Well how did those talks go?

EVANS: The troika visit was primarily an information-gathering visit and I do believe also that the troika wanted to show strong backing from me as I entered into my duties. And that, in fact, was the way it worked out. With the troika breathing at my back I had to get right into the work and I had to meet all the top people and so it was a very good way to begin the job.

Within a month there was a major event scheduled, mainly a conclave of all the post Soviet leaders from the old Soviet Union, the so-called CIS, or Commonwealth of Independent States, were going to meet in Chisinau on the 22nd of October, and it was expected that there would be some progress made on the Transnistrian issue at that time. So about a week after the visit of the troika the two sides and the three mediators... I have neglected to mention that there were three of us mediating there; it was the head of the OSCE mission plus a presidential representative of Ukraine, a Ukrainian diplomat, and a representative of the president of Russia. So the three of us worked as another kind of troika together, mediating. All the work, all the negotiation was done in Russian; the texts were in Russian; it was the lingua franca.

We were all invited to Moscow in early October for a drafting session that was to prepare an agreement that would be signed on the margins of the big summit. We were taken to a foreign ministry dacha in Meshcherino, a little village near Domodedovo Airport, and we were... we weren't precisely locked in a room there but there were two and a half days of tough negotiations on elaborating these functions...

Q: Well were the various Moldovan parties there too?

EVANS: Yes. Yes, the chief negotiators of both sides were there with supporting staff.

Now, I should back up just a little bit and say that the first weekend I was in Chisinau, on a Sunday - I must have arrived on a Friday and it was the Sunday before the workweek began - I was wandering around the capital, Chisinau; it's not a very big city, and I stumbled onto the museum of the great Russian poet, Aleksandr Pushkin. In my study of Russian at Yale I had read a lot of Pushkin and he's truly a fine poet, and he had spent a good bit of time in Bessarabia, as it then was, in a kind of comfortable exile after he had made some unflattering remarks about the tsar. He was sent and attached to a local military staff. So there was a museum of Aleksandr Pushkin there and I wandered in and met the staff and we talked about Pushkin's stay in Bessarabia and it turned out to be the hundredth anniversary of the Soviet poet Yesenin, and they were having a little concert and program there so I stayed for it. And I must have been asked in my first TV interview in Moldova what I had seen in Moldova.

Well, I'd only been there a week and I said that on my first weekend I had walked around Chisinau and had seen the sights and visited the Pushkin museum. That struck a very raw nerve. The Moldovans immediately complained that I must be a Russophile because I had visited the Pushkin museum. Well, that's all by way of saying what happened in Meshcherino outside Moscow. At a certain point in the deliberations, which were not pleasant, there was a lot of tough talk, and I spoke up at one point and I said, "gentlemen, this is not a court of law where people are accused of things; rather, our purpose here is to agree on dividing the competencies within a common state. So I implore you, please get back to the real business here and let's have less invective and more sensible talk." Something like that; I paraphrase. The Moldovans at the next break came over to me and said "you are totally abandoning OSCE principles, you have changed the entire negotiating approach, we reject this and want you to help us." And I of course said, "well, I am doing my very best," and I had my staff there too, and we talked about what the approach should be and I stuck to my guns. Later in the day the two sides were, I observed, in deep conversation, you know, and ended up hugging each other, the two lead negotiators, so they certainly were communicating and we made progress in that drafting session.

Then came the summit in Chisinau. Yeltsin was on hand for the Russian side, Kuchma from the Ukrainians, President Lucinschi. But by bad luck the summit fell on the birthday of Transnistrian self-proclaimed "president" Igor Smirnov and Smirnov did not show up. So no progress was really made. President Lucinschi said "we're not going to make a tragedy out of this" but it was clear that an opportunity to move things forward had been lost.

Q: Well what were the- what was at stake? I mean, outside of amalgamating this group? My understanding is, and I may have been getting this from prejudiced sources because having been in the Balkans for awhile you realize what you get is where you're sitting. But I understood that the Transnistria was a pretty nice place for Soviet army officers to settle. I mean, this- And they really had a stake in don't screw up things; we don't want to be ruled by a bunch of flighty Hungarians, number one, and number two, they were running a wonderful little smuggling business, and number three, they were selling equipment to whoever wanted it, including the CIA, and they pretty well had a good thing going there.

EVANS: Well, a lot of those points are exactly right. In addition to the legal problem of an unrecognized state having been proclaimed within the juridical territory of another there was another big problem, and that was that, at an old storage facility in Colbasna, in the north of the Transnistrian territory, there was a huge amount of old Soviet weaponry, much of which had been rather hastily deposited there after the Soviet forces exited Eastern Europe after the fall of the Wall. My successor estimated that the explosive power of what was stored in Colbasna might be that of two Nagasakis. No one really knows and there was a lot more besides explosives there. But one of the additional challenges that we faced was attempting to persuade the Russians to remove that weaponry from Transnistrian territory, or, as the Moldovans claimed, Moldovan territory. Right after my arrival as head of mission a big train with about 47 wagons did leave Colbasna carrying a lot of this material and we had reason to believe that another one would go in December. So there was some progress being made on this.

But, as the next part of my story will tell you, bickering over the value of these weapons in Colbasna was a major difficulty underlying these talks. So I might as well come ahead to that. But I think you were seeking a little bit more characterization of the Transnistrian regime and its problems or its differences with the central authorities.

You know, when I first arrived in Moldova the first thing I heard was "the key to this dispute lies in Moscow." Well I found out that that was a gross oversimplification. And while the image of a key opening a lock is a nice simple one, in fact this lock was a combination lock and it was necessary to dial numbers in various locations before it would come open. There were, indeed, retired Soviet army officers and their families who, largely because the climate is warm compared to most of the Soviet Union, had settled in Transnistria. There was a long history of military activity, military production there, and indeed there was kind of a Russophilia in what had been a borderland of Russia for many years. There were also, though, real grievances on the part of completely ordinary people in Transnistria. We once ran into an old granny selling apples by the side of the road and when she found out who we were she said "those Moldovan police aren't going to come back again to terrify us, are they?" And this went back to the most unfortunate decision that was made by a previous Moldovan president in 1992 to try without any preparation or proper training to just send Moldovan security and police forces over to Transnistria and particularly to Bendery, which was actually on the right bank, that is the western bank of the Dniester, to try to just undo the independent stance and to get rid of the leadership there. And it resulted in a...I wouldn't call it a war exactly, but it was a succession of quite violent skirmishes in which about 1,000 people were killed. And so there were memories of this sort of nationalist emotional attempt to retake territory from 1992.

Also the Moldovan authorities, in setting up their new constitution in parliament, had not left any empty seats for the Transnistrians in the future, as a gesture to them, and there were many Transnistrians...in fact on the first day I was there Valeriy Litskai, the so-called foreign minister, said you know, "we don't believe in taxation without representation." There was a great fear that because Transnistria had been the wealthier part of Moldova, with most of the industry...the old Soviet economy had mainly consisted of agricultural production in the Bessarabian part on the western side of the Dniester River, agricultural production was then canned and processed in Transnistrian factories and sent on to metropolitan markets in Kiev and St. Petersburg - or Leningrad - and Moscow. So Transnistria had been the wealthier part and the more urban part of the old Soviet republic. So, in short, there was no single factor; there were many factors. And as time went on through the 1990s the factor of crime and illegal smuggling and trafficking in various products started to become more and more of a difficulty.

Q: Well okay then, let's- How about, what was your impression of Moldova proper? I mean how was it being run and was it a city on a hill or example or what have you?

EVANS: Moldova then, and unfortunately still today, is just about the poorest country in Europe. For awhile there was competition between Albania and Moldova as to which was more impoverished and I think that since Albania is better placed geographically it has edged ahead of Moldova. Moldova, although the people are charming and there are some quite beautiful parts, it was a very sad place undergoing some very difficult transitions, first of all from the old Soviet safety net, social safety net, to a market economy. There was lots of crime in Moldova, as in Transnistria, and there was a political turmoil in Moldova which had to do with a dispute between the pro-Romanian ultra nationalist forces represented most notably by Iuri Rosca, who was a very, I would say, rabid Romanian nationalist who wanted Moldova to join Romania as it had been between the wars, forget to turn completely to the west or to the southwest, join Romania, make Romanian absolutely the language of the state. They rejected the idea of any independent Moldovan identity. And then on the other side there were those who believed that Moldova was something distinct from Romania, that to join Romania would mean...instead of being an independent state it would mean being a second class province of a...as some of them put it, a third class state. And then of course there were the Transnistrians who took a different view altogether. But you asked me about Right Bank Moldova.

So that whole debate was going on. There were rabid nationalists who wanted to rejoin Romania and then there were Moldovans who liked the idea of being an independent state and wanted to keep some of their special characteristics.

Q: What was, would you say, was there a consensus of the OSCE, I mean the European Union- I mean, was the OSCE sort of a creature, had become a creature of the European Union would you say or not?

EVANS: I wouldn't say that it was a creature of the European Union. Until recently, as you know, the European Union had not really centralized its foreign policy thinking and still the United States and Russia and the non-European Union member-states, participating States of the OSCE had - like Switzerland - had an important role. So I think it was really all of... the OSCE belonged to the Euro-Atlantic community.

Q: Well I mean, basically you had these separatist- these various groups in Moldova, Greater Moldova but the OSCE, I mean, sort of was your basic mandate let's get this all together so we have a Greater Moldova?

EVANS: I think the goal was multiple. It was to regulate or bring into conformity with modern state practice a situation that was seen as out of sync, not correct. Now there's an old legal principle, "uti possidetis," we don't need to go into the legalities of it, but basically when we recognized the republics of the old Soviet Union we recognized them in the borders as they then existed. Those borders had been, for all intents and purposes, administrative borders when it was one big Soviet Union; by recognizing those borders we stepped on certain groups' toes because they had different ideas as to whom their allegiances were owed and how they would like to be ruled.

Q: Ukraine being the prime example. I think the borders of the Ukraine had just been manipulated, I mean, back in Khrushchev's time, weren't they?

EVANS: They were and they had been...well, first of all they weren't that important as I was just saying. They were more important, the borders were more important to groups in the Caucasus, for example, where you had something like 52 different ethnic groups in the Caucasus and trying to fit those into nice, neat nation states is a terrible job. Basically, looking at the big picture here, you had an immense multinational, multiethnic, multi-confessional - because there were also religious differences - empire, which all of a sudden collapsed, leaving its constituent parts to try to establish states on the basis of nationality. And the trouble is that those old republic borders did not conform...were not congruent with the actual ethnic and national groups on the ground. You know, it wasn't as terrible as in Africa in the process of decolonization.

Q: But it was of the same thing, well let's freeze it as it is, otherwise it's disaster, I mean, a complete disintegration; it cuts across tribes, it cuts- I mean, anything you could think about.

EVANS: Yes. Well, exactly. Of course we forget in the late 20th and 21st century that at an earlier time in European history these adjustments to borders were much more easily made. It's only in the mid 20th century that we really decided that there was only one model of a state. The statesmen at the Congress of Vienna and earlier thought nothing of tweaking borders and moving Alsace this way or that way, and it was because the principles of what constituted a state were at that time largely the principles of monarchy. So in a sense the international system is less flexible today than it was a couple of hundred years ago.

Q: And you were sitting with your job on one of the major fault lines.

EVANS: Well, it is one of the major fault lines and it was misleading to tell me that "the key to this problem lies in Moscow." There were lots of other difficulties.

Now, fortunately the Transnistrian problem, unlike the problems in the Caucasus - like Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia - the level of violence in 1992 had not been so terrible. It's terrible that 1,000 people were killed but in Karabakh there were more like 25,000.

Q: Well for one thing you didn't have a religious difference.

EVANS: Well. Ha! I didn't think we did. But as it turned out there were. The nominal religion of most of the vast majority was Orthodox Christianity, but some looked to the Romanian patriarch and others looked to the Moscow patriarch and I imagine there were also some who began to look to the Ukrainian Church. But what I also found out was that there...and I had known this from our old friend Paul Goble many years ago but I'd forgotten, that there was a little Turkish Christian group in Moldova called the Gagauz.

Q: Good God.

EVANS: And they were in the south of...to the south of Chisinau. They had migrated from Ottoman lands some 400 years earlier so they spoke a kind of Turkish but they were Christian and their main industry was making sweet communion wines for the Russian Orthodox Church.

There was also a Bulgarian minority group in the southern district of Taraclia and that also came up at one point as an issue, as did lots of human rights questions. And one of our jobs was to keep an eye on human rights issues, you know, on both sides. We had a mandate to report on human rights questions on both sides of the Dniester.

Q: And you have a staff which includes Czechs and Poles- a Czech, a Pole and other; how did they operate together? You know, because I would think that there would be an anti-Soviet/Russian prejudice.

EVANS: Your assumption was not borne out by my experience. What I discovered was that in the main this international group saw itself as serving all 54 participating states, they saw it as an international effort to help the Moldovans and the Transnistrians solve their problem for the good of all of us, to prevent violence, further violence, and to find a way for people to get on with their lives without the difficulties inherent in that unusual situation.

Now there was...It turned out there was one exception on my staff. And I discovered this...well I've told you that the Moldovans were criticizing me for visiting the Pushkin museum; they criticized me for the way I participated in the consultations outside Moscow; and as we went ahead I discovered that the Moldovans really were campaigning against me because I had changed the tactics of the mission from one of siding almost 100 percent with the central government to one that I thought had a better chance of success, one in which I maintained the trust or developed the trust of both sides. And I felt that there needed to be at least something of what the experts call a "parity of esteem" in the process in which one side was not treated as the leper and the other side as the angel in this discourse. There had to be more of a chance for both sides to...

Q: Otherwise it doesn't work.

EVANS: That's my view. I mean, you can beat up on the weaker side but you're not going to... it just creates more of a defensive crouch. So what I discovered was that the Moldovans were really trying to...they felt that I was not doing what Don Johnson had done, not doing their job for them, in fact, and the Moldovan chief negotiator was heard, at one point, boasting that he had never prepared a single document for use in this process. He was going to let the OSCE people do the work for him. And indeed, we worked very hard. We worked weekends and holidays and evenings; there was no rest partly because another aspect of our mandate was to participate in the so-called Joint Control Commission, which was a tripartite body that met every Tuesday to discuss incidents along...in the security zone between the two sides, and various crimes that might have taken place and so on, and we were active participants in that. And one of the things I engineered in my time there was that we were not only observers but we were...we had a voice in the Joint Control Commission. We also got the number of peacekeepers, which had been excessive, reduced from something like 1,500 to 500.

Q: Who were the peacekeepers?

EVANS: Well the peacekeepers were drawn from Russian...the remains of the 14th Army which had become a Russian "operational group," the Moldovan side and the Transnistrian side. So all three, the two parties to the conflict plus the Russians, were actually the ones with peacekeepers on the ground.

Q: Well this brings a, you know, this thing is so damned complicated but all right, you had this Russian with the 14th Army or something; was it a real Russian army or was it one of Caesar's lost legions off in the middle of Romanian steppe or something?

EVANS: Well, it had been, at one point, the 14th Army and that's when Alexander Lebed had been commander...

Q: Who was a major- became a political figure until he was killed.

EVANS: That's right.

Q: Sort of the top Soviet general who flew himself with honor from Afghanistan.

EVANS: That's right. And a book was even written about General Lebed right before he was killed called "The Man Who Would Be President of Russia" or something like that. I mean, he did have political ambitions. But by this time, by '97 when I got there, it was already very much scaled down. It was a Russian operational group and the commander of it with whom I had most dealings was from the peacekeeping division of the Russian armed forces, General Yevnevich, who had been a big supporter of Yeltsin at the time of the attempted coup against Yeltsin, and presumably was rewarded with this important rank and command. The main reason for the Russians being there was, first of all, to guard this large arms depot at Colbasna and also some other facilities, including, most importantly, a military airport near Tiraspol. Now interestingly, when Yeltsin came for that summit meeting in the fall, in October 1997, his aircraft was too big to land at the Chisinau commercial airport and it landed instead at the Tiraspol military airstrip, which was longer.

But it was very clear quite shortly after I arrived there that the Moldovan side, and I think it originated with the Moldovan ambassador in Vienna, Ambassador Dascal, a rabid pro-Romanian nationalist; they caught...he and his fellow ultra nationalists in the foreign ministry, headed by Foreign Minister Tabacaru, found fault with much of our reporting, even down to...it was at the level of nitpicking. But they also seemed to think that I was being too evenhanded; I was trying to be evenhanded and they didn't like that.

Q: Well when you say that they were Romanian ultra nationalists or Moldovan ultra nationalists?

EVANS: You've put your finger on a very important point. As I said, there was this debate among people in Moldova about whether they were more Romanian or more Moldovan. This debate was so sensitive that the name of their language...it was impossible to, or it was dangerous politically, to call the language either Romanian or Moldovan; instead, everyone called it "limba de stat," which means "state language." They knew they were speaking the state language but couldn't agree whether it was Romanian or Moldovan and in the Soviet Union it had been written Cyrillic as part of a Soviet policy to have the languages in the same alphabet as Russian. One of the first reforms brought in was to change the language into Latin letters so that it was compatible with modern day Romanian, except east of the Dniestr in Transnistria where they retained the Cyrillic script for the same language.

Q: You know, you remind me of dealing with Macedonia. I mean, the language, the- God, the Balkans can really do things, can't they?

EVANS: Well, they can but so can the OSCE and I can remember that Bob Frowick headed a special mission in Macedonia at one point which was quite successful in preventing some of these nationalist quarrels from spreading into Macedonia.

In any case there was this little whispering campaign going on among some of the Romanian officials and they didn't come to me to complain about things; it turned out they went to Ambassador Stewart and it turned out also that they had a confederate in my mission who happened to be the Georgian, my deputy, and Georgia also had its problem with separatists and there was a group that had been formed, I must say with some American patronage, called the GUUAM Group, and this was Georgia, Ukraine, at one point Uzbekistan although they dropped out, Armenia, I mean Azerbaijan, and Moldova. So for short they called it the GUUAM Group and it was basically an anti-Russian caucus in the OSCE.

Q: Now of course Georgia has today, I mean they've got almost a little war- they don't have the war going now but I mean it's- they've got somewhat the same situation there; in a way it sounds like a poor choice to put into your group because they've got somewhat a similar situation.

EVANS: Well, as it turned out it was a poor choice and this is how I found out. I came back to the United States...this was an unaccompanied tour; I had to leave my wife behind here in Washington; it was not the kind of place where she would have had anything to do and I wasn't supported by the embassy, I had to find my own apartment and so on, so my wife had stayed behind...but I went home for a holiday at one point, came here to Washington, and while I was here I discovered that there had been a back-channel message from the U.S. embassy in Chisinau using the CIA station as the medium and in that back-channel message I was being criticized, virtually denounced, by Ambassador Stewart for carrying out a policy that was not in the interests of the Republic of Moldova and so on and so forth. Well, this was leaked to me by a friend in, I think, in INR, and the source of this testimony against me was said to be my Georgian deputy. So when I returned to Chisinau I called in my Georgian deputy and confronted him with this criticism, which was way beyond what the facts would support, and I did something I've never had to do before or since: I composed, in Russian, a statement which I forced him to sign and it was a statement admitting his...the impropriety of what he had said to the American embassy and I kept that statement after he had signed and dated it and admitted that he was in the wrong on this; I kept it in my safe in case I needed to blackmail him. Well, actually it was to keep him in line. I did not fire him, I did not want to humiliate him, but I also found out at that time - we'd worked very closely together - but I found out that he was violating one of the chief OSCE rules, which was that one does not take instructions from one's national authorities. He was not only taking instructions from Tbilisi, he was running a little Georgian embassy under the cover of the OSCE mission. And I knew that he would from time to time disappear with no explanation and what he was doing, he was over at the Moldovan foreign ministry carrying out bilateral business on behalf of the government of Georgia on the OSCE payroll, because it was the OSCE that was paying his living expenses in Chisinau.

Now, by this time it was the Polish chairmanship and the good people in Warsaw, when they discovered what a difficulty I was having with my Georgian deputy, they promptly dispatched to my assistance General Roman Harmoza, former chief of the Polish Air Force, to be my new deputy. And with General Harmoza I had a true loyal deputy and we accomplished a lot.

Q: Okay, well let's talk about- Did the Georgian disappear?

EVANS: No, not immediately. He eventually went back to Tbilisi but I basically started to work with Harmoza for everything important and kept the Georgian at...we accorded him every personal respect but we just...I did not trust him with important duties, and I have to say I also had a very harsh conversation with Ambassador Stewart.

Let me say about Todd Stewart that he was a fine bilateral ambassador. If you entered a reception or a public event you immediately knew who was the U.S. ambassador. He had great presence and he was, I think, a superior bilateral ambassador and representative of the United States. He did a lot to help the fledgling Republic of Moldova. But, as has often been said, what you think depends on where you sit and he did not know about how to mediate between opposing parties. I, oddly enough, had learned quite a bit from Michael Young, the legal advisor at that CSCE meeting in Malta on peaceful settlement of disputes where for three weeks, with all kinds of experts present, we talked about the various methods of trying to mediate and solve disputes between various parties. So...and I had done a good bit of consulting on this and talking to experts at the U.S. Institute of Peace, for example, I knew what I was doing and it was not a one-man show; I had an international staff, we always took decisions after long discussion and we had our instructions from Vienna and I was not going to take instructions from the U.S. ambassador who had a different agenda and frankly he talked about trying to "topple," -"topple," that was the word - the Smirnov regime.

Another one of the things I was told on first arriving in Moldova was, "hey, it's just a half a dozen crooks over there, Igor Smirnov and four or five others; if they were gone then the Transnistrians would rejoin Moldova." That was absolutely not true. Certainly by the time I was there the insecurity of the people, the fear of another Moldovan invasion, the distrust between the two sides and, I must say, the support that the Transnistrian regime had among the populace was undeniable. So it was not a question of going and arresting the Transnistrian elite, which was another idea that was broached to me the first fall I was there by the Moldovans: "oh," they were saying, "we'll just go and arrest Smirnov." Well, it wasn't that simple. And in Vienna the U.S. delegation and the Europeans viewed Ambassador Stewart's idea of "toppling" the Smirnov regime as "cowboy diplomacy."

Q: Well did- The OSCE, I mean your mandate was really try- I mean was it to just sort of deal with the situation; in other words not really amalgamate the thing but just keep them from shooting at each other or what?

EVANS: The stated goal in the mandate was definitely to devise a special status for the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova while preserving the sovereignty and territorial integrity of that republic. So our goal was definitely to try to bring the two sides together to regularize the situation, preserving the Republic of Moldova, perhaps with some autonomy for the Transnistrians. But in the process of seeking that goal what we clearly were doing was stabilizing the situation. Absent our work toward that goal, the instability in the situation would have been much worse. The fact that there was at least a diplomatic track stabilized the situation because, absent that, there really would have been no way forward other than some serious moves, such as fortifying the border.

Q: Well you know you are pointing out in a good number of situations, certainly in the diplomatic international field, that you don't really- often you don't really kind of solve something by saying okay, we'll get you all to join together and you'll be a- you manage the situation. In other words you've got this thing and what you do to keep them from shooting at each other and maybe to enjoy a viable life rather than-

EVANS: That's right. And of course these situations greatly impinge on the daily lives of individuals.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: And, as I often expressed it, the Transnistrian so-called state may not have validity under international law or any rights in international law but the individuals living there do have rights that are inherent in them as individuals and we have to do something to improve their lives.

One of the things that happened at the beginning of every school year is that there were disputes about which textbooks were going to be used and which authorities were responsible for the schools, particularly in areas that were...there were some areas of more or less shared competency, for example in Bendery, which was on the right bank, that is the west bank of the Dniestr; it was basically under Transnistrian control but there were...for example, there was a school for orphans there and for mute and deaf children that was under joint supervision and we actually found a way to funnel some funds to support that school. But every year there were... schools were in danger of not opening because of these things and we tried to deal with these very real day-to-day situations.

Q: Well first place, did you see your mission there, I mean technically, looking at it, I mean, it's a temporary position, eventually you'll get out and all that, but did you really see this as a long-term thing?

EVANS: Well, one of the other untruths that I was told when I first arrived in Moldova was that this conflict was ripe for solution and that I should be able to bring it to a solution within a year.Which was very convenient and within about six months I accepted an onward assignment to...I was asked by Intelligence and Research to come and head their division on the former Soviet states and I accepted that as of the following September. As it turned out this conflict was not so simple, there was not one key which lay in Moscow, it was not simply a group of half a dozen leaders who had seized power against the will of the people in Transnistria and it was not going to be solved in short order.

Q: Why had the misapprehension developed?

EVANS: I think the Moldovans had an interest in presenting to the outside world that the Transnistrians were simply crooks and good-for-nothing sorts, that they enjoyed no popular support and that it was all Russia's fault, because it just simplified things and it made it...it put all the onus on Russia and a few other people and I think they thought that would win the world's sympathy. As it turned out the Moldovan side, the central government, made one mistake after another; they failed to show up for various meetings, I mean, as much as we tried to help them they were always saying "oh, the OSCE mission has to do more." Well, we were working ourselves to a frazzle coming up with all sorts of ideas and initiatives and suggestions and textual improvements while they were just sort of taking potshots at the mission and going to Vienna and complaining that we weren't doing enough. And at one point I remember I had... one of the great things about the OSCE is that there is talent in 54 countries that is just unimaginable and one of my best recruitments was of a young Lithuanian, Darius Jurgelevicius, who at the time was serving as legal advisor for the Lithuanian Foreign Minister. He had studied law in Russian, or Soviet, universities, spoke fluent Russian, and he had also studied law at Stanford and so his English was fluent. We brought him aboard our mission and he actually drafted...towards the end of my time there we had him drafting an agreement on dividing the competencies of the state. But I went with him to call on the deputy foreign minister at one point in the Moldovan foreign ministry to be met by a complaint about one letter, literally one Russian letter, in a document that had been agreed to. It was the difference in Russian...I don't want to get into the details but it was the difference between two forms of the verb "to exit," which conveys whether the Russians leave by conveyance or leave on foot.

Q: Oh yes, oh my God, when I took Russian when you're going and coming back and how you're going to go and-

EVANS: Yes, exactly. So-

Q: -aspect; what do they call it?

EVANS: Right, "verbal aspect." By this time I had been heckled so many times, usually not to my face; usually there was this whispering campaign, they would run off and complain to Ambassador Stewart or there would be complaints in Vienna or at one point the Moldovans complained to the Poles about Evans and usually they mentioned that I'd gone to the Pushkin museum and things like that. But on this occasion they complained about that Russian wording and then they said "and we think the OSCE mission isn't doing enough." And I finally had had enough; I got up with my Lithuanian colleague and I said "I don't have to listen to this garbage," and I walked out.

Q: Yes. Well, okay, first place-

EVANS: Let me mention one other thing if I may, Stu.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: It was our job to try to be a sparkplug for this process, to try to throw out ideas that would be helpful. At one time in an interview in my first year there I threw out the idea that perhaps there could be some sort of federal solution. I talked about my own country, the United States, where the way we had found to square the circle between local authority and central authority was through the federal principle, which has a long history going back to the Athenian League. I realized this was a controversial subject but I thought there ought to be some discussion of the possibility of a federal solution. I was set upon in the press and by various officials for using the so-called "f-word," meaning "federalization." Now, as I've recently discovered, there is lots of talk about a possible federal solution in the Moldova case.

Q: Well sort of in the Moldovan body politic was the fact that they had this separate entity they're dealing with, was that taking care of their problem about whether they're Romanian or Moldovan? In other words, you know, sometimes you've got a major quarrel and you pick on-you have something else that you can concentrate on.

EVANS: I think there was a kind of diversionary effect here. The governing authorities in Moldova were able to blame a lot of their problems on the fact that they had this breakaway territory and had to turn a lot of attention to that. The reality was that the Moldovan side was very much in cahoots with the Transnistrian side, at least on the level of business. There were all kinds of scams that were being practiced. One of the most notable was the smuggling of fuel oil and gasoline, which mainly came, in their case, from Romania. You rightly mentioned the oil fields and what would happen is that gas tankers or gasoline trucks would come into Moldova proper with papers suggesting they were going all the way through. So they had transit papers for Moldova but in fact they would get into Transnistria and turn around and sell untaxed gasoline to Moldovan consumers. A similar scam was going on with tobacco products because the border was still...First of all, there was a lot of corruption between the Transnistrians and the Moldovans and so goods went back and forth fairly easily. Also the Moldovans had enacted a VAT tax, a value added tax, but Transnistria had not imposed such a tax so Moldovan consumers gladly went over to Transnistria and bought imported products like German beer in the Transnistrian stores and then returned home. So there was...and the criminal structures, which were clearly evident all through the former Soviet Union, clearly there were criminal connections between Transnistria and right bank Moldova. There were big villas being constructed in Chisinau apparently with money made in Transnistria. And one thing we noticed since we frequently traveled to Transnistria, we noticed that almost every weekday morning there was the equivalent of a Brinks armored truck that would come from Transnistria over to Chisinau. Now, I never had the opportunity to inspect what was in that truck but it was certainly the case that there were financial relations of some sort between the two sides.

Q: Well okay you're there from '97 to '99ish.

EVANS: I have to tell you one more story though because that first summit where Transnistrian leader Smirnov failed to show up because it was his birthday didn't produce a big result but there was another summit that was held in Odessa, and this would have been in the...probably March of 1998 and we understood that Prime Minister Chernomyrdin at that time and President Kuchma would be in Odessa and that both Smirnov and Lucinschi would be there and that a deal would be done. So with my Georgian deputy and a couple other people we went to Odessa and indeed there was a big meeting and there was a final session from which we were excluded. Something was done in that final session and I eventually found out about it.

There was a fourth so-called "secret protocol" to this agreement and it had to do with dividing the proceeds from the Colbasna arms depot. And the formula for dividing these proceeds, which were considered to be in the millions, was a 50/50 formula dividing the spoils between Smirnov and Chernomyrdin or, to put it more charitably, the Transnistrian region and Russia. A couple of days after the Odessa Summit President Yeltsin fired Chernomyrdin. The secret protocol, the fourth protocol, was still unknown but by the time I next reported to the permanent council of the OSCE in Vienna I knew enough about it to be able to make reference to it in my report, my verbal report to the council, and I smoked it out and the Russians had to come clean on what was in it. I finally was shown a copy of it and all the world saw that there was this nitty-gritty monetary issue and furthermore that President Lucinschi of Moldova had been a party to it.

Q: Now when you're saying- sometimes when you talk about presidents or prime ministers you're talking about them as a shorthand for- about the country. But are we talking about personally with Chernomyrdin?

EVANS: Well, I hope not. There was never...the Russian position was that those arms were now the property of the Russian Federation but of course a lot of property of the old Soviet Union - and these were originally Soviet arms - in the end descended to the successor states and what the Transnistrians were saying was that those arms stored in Colbasna, which were Soviet, that they had a right to some of that value as well as the Russians. And of course the Moldovans also claimed that some of the value was theirs rightfully.

Q: Well you know when you talk about arms the Soviets by this or the Russians by this time had no particular call on a whole bunch of rapidly being outmoded tanks and stuff like that. I mean it's all very nice- I mean from our point of view outside of maybe the CIA heading or our army getting some tanks to practice with or something, you know these were concerns that they might end up in Somalia or Afghanis- you know, who knows, Iran; I mean, what was the concern- Well it would have been Iraq too. I mean, in other words what was our concern about what was happening there?

EVANS: Just at this time in the first year I was there it came out that the Republic of Moldova had basically sold its air force of 21 MiGs to the Pentagon, and if you interview Wayne Merry sometime you'll find out that he was involved in doing that while he was working at the Pentagon. And, just as you say, the rest of the world's concern was that these arms not be sold on the gray markets and in fact the impetus for buying the Moldovan air force in toto was suspicion that there was an Iranian attempt to buy those MiGs.

Q: So this was preventive?

EVANS: It was preventive. Purchasing and the idea of...The Russians had agreed to take the arms out of Colbasna and take them back to Russia but the Transnistrians at one point had actually lain on the railroad tracks, and these were old women and ordinary citizens, to prevent those Russian trains from moving, at an earlier stage. So there was a fight between the Russians and the Transnistrians and also the Moldovans over that source of wealth.

Q: Obviously a rapidly diminishing source of wealth or maybe not.

EVANS: Well, how rapidly we don't know. We did know that there were certain items that were...there was some bridging equipment, for example, that had been a big feature of Soviet armies, bridging equipment. But that, there was no need for that anymore; that was taken back to Russia we know, and various other categories of arms. But what the Russian commander told me at one point was that, not in Colbasna but in association with the airfield there were cluster bombs and possibly some chemical weapons, in fact very dangerous stuff was there and it had to be guarded.

Q: Yes. Okay then, 22 months; at the end, what had happened by the time you left?

EVANS: We were going along pretty well, making progress on the documents in the spirit of the Moscow Memorandum. We also brought in the European Union to fund the reconstruction of one of the bridges that had been bombed during the hostilities, the Gura-Bicului Bridge, and we were making progress working with the ministries of education on school issues, so there were a lot of small issues on which we were making progress. But what brought everything to a halt was the NATO attack on Serbia. When that happened...

Q: This was over Kosovo.

EVANS: Over Kosovo. When that happened we had an immediate reaction in Transnistria; the Transnistrians felt that the West had overstepped its bounds, that the Serbs, whom they saw as old allies, were being unfairly targeted, and the first thing that happened was I was told that my military officers were no longer welcomed in Transnistria, in the Zone of Security.

Q: And your military officers were from where?

EVANS: Well, by this time there was still a Dutch military officer, a very fine one, and by this time there was a Slovak rather than a Czech, another fine officer. There was then a...The first thing I was told was neither colonel could visit, then I was told that only the Dutch colonel could not visit because Slovakia was not at that time in NATO. And then I was told that my deputy, the Polish air force officer, General Harmoza, was not free to visit Transnistria, and we were further advised that it would be unsafe for members of the mission to spend time in Transnistria as there might be someone "not wishing us well."

One of the achievements of my time there was to open a proper office of the OSCE mission in Tiraspol. We had been operating in a very substandard office on the road to Odessa on the outskirts of Tiraspol; we found ourselves, though, a nice representational office in downtown Tiraspol and we had been in the habit of having one mission member there 24/7. Every week we took a turn because there was a bedroom where people could sleep and a little kitchen and so we - partly to keep an eye on human rights matters - we staffed that office constantly on a rotational basis. I did my week over there as well. But when the war broke out in former Yugoslavia...or that is the attack on Serbian positions in Kosovo and so on...we ceased dispatching our people to the Transnistrian side and the negotiating process basically ground to a halt.

Q: Well had- And that was more or less at the point you left?

EVANS: Yes. I did stay on in order to give proper introductions to my successor, Bill Hill, who arrived in, must have been June of '99. I introduced him to everybody he needed to know and got him off to a good start before coming home.

Q: Well I mean, okay they stopped you all from doing things but were the things that had been done remain done?

EVANS: Yes. The body of work that we had been doing, and in particular the contribution of our Lithuanian colleague, the lawyer, remained there and they did pick up...Bill Hill picked up the baton and carried it further in his time and it has continued under a couple of additional heads of mission since then.

Q: But you're saying that sort of the federal idea, which, you know, is not unknown, say in Yugoslavia they had the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. I mean they had different areas under- I mean it was not unknown and all.

EVANS: In Canada you have a variation on federalism. You have a sort of asymmetrical federation in Canada. So there...Federalism comes in many shapes and sizes.

Q: Sure. Obviously Switzerland, you know.

EVANS: Exactly.

Q: Well-

EVANS: It's this drive for a unitary state which the Moldovan government had in its mind and its constitution, it was unitarily governed from Chisinau with no provisions for Transnistria and even the Turkish Christian Gagauz had negotiated a kind of slight autonomy and they had found that the autonomy was not being respected by the central government in Moldova, which was a very bad example for the Transnistrians to witness.

Q: Did you have a- What was your feeling towards the central government of Moldova?

EVANS: You know, there were some very fine people in the central government. I always maintained - despite these strains that came out of the anti-Evans whispering campaign and the really puerile complaints about some of the things we had done - I still maintained very good relations with all of the major players and Deputy Foreign Minister Capatina, for example attended our daughter's wedding in Brussels later in 1998 after he'd been reassigned to Belgium.

Q: Well okay, '99 you left there; whither? What did you do?

EVANS: In the summer of '99 I left Moldova and the first thing I did was took my wife for a seafood holiday in Nova Scotia because the one thing we hadn't had in Moldova was any kind of seafood. And then I immediately joined the staff of Intelligence and Research, who had most graciously allowed me to be late in arriving because they realized I needed to finish the job in Moldova.

Q: Okay, so we'll pick it up then.

EVANS: Okay.

Q: Great.

EVANS: Thank you.

Q: Alright. Today is the 10th of December, 2009. Isn't the 10th of December when Hitler and Mussolini declared war on the United States? Somehow that stays with me.

EVANS: It was in December but what I think of is it's the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, I believe, today.

Q: Well, one- I always had a great deal of pleasure whenever I get a- When I was stationed in Italy, Naples, you know, because something about war damage or something, I said you really shouldn't have declared war on us, you know, because the Italians declared war on us.

EVANS: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay. While you were in Moldova, a question; did you get involved in any of the- or get any feel for some of the other, what do they call them, frozen nation?

EVANS: Frozen conflicts.

Q: Frozen conflicts, you know, what's this, Gornikaba-

EVANS: Nagorno-Karabakh.

Q: Nagorno-Karabakh. Did you get- I mean, because you were kind of dealing with one; did that come up, those other ones?

EVANS: That's a very astute question. They did come up in two or three respects. First of all, those four then, as they were...

Q: Georgia was-

EVANS: There were two in Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, then Nagorno-Karabakh, which is disputed between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and then this Transnistrian conflict. There were some connections.

First of all, the representatives of all of those unrecognized little states, separatist states, saw a common interest and got together in a kind of a mirror image of other get-togethers where the states of the titular nationalities, the Moldovans, the Georgians and the Azerbaijanis most notably, would get together in their meetings and the separatists would meet in their own set of meetings. In addition, through the OSCE system, we had meetings with the Chairman-in-Office. I remember one particularly in Warsaw where all the OSCE people working on all the conflicts got together and shared experience and methodologies and so on. So both within our organization and among the separatists there were connections, and of course we watched, and they watched, what was going on in the other conflicts for hints as to what might be the possible solutions available in the future.

Q: Yes. And we'll pick up one of those later, of course.

EVANS: Yes.

Q: The Armenian one but-

Okay. Well you left this OSCE thing and then you-

EVANS: As I mentioned, when the United States got heavily involved in the war in the Balkans the prospects of forward motion in this Transnistrian mediation started to approach zero and we were even told that some of our military people were not going to be welcome in Transnistria, that there was a danger of hostage-taking possibly, and so we basically reverted to doing much less mediation and more working on projects that might involve the two sides. We enticed the European Union to come in and invest in a bridge that had been destroyed and needed to be rebuilt; we played around with some ideas involving a steel mill that might be a source of binding up the wounds. But in the end I left in June of...this would have been1999...and handed the baton to Bill Hill after introducing him to everybody he needed to know so we had no gap.

Q: Things were pretty well frozen?

EVANS: Things were very frozen at that point.

Q: Were you getting anything from the, sort of the Moldovan side on the Balkans; say, were they sort of saying this is- I mean, did they have a different outlook on things?

EVANS: They were pretty much keeping their heads down politically at that point and involved in their own internal politics. They were not active on the Balkans.

Q: Okay. Well then, let's move on to your next job.

EVANS: I returned to Washington in the summer of 1999; INR had been very gracious in allowing me to arrive late to the job I'd been selected for, and I took up my duties in early July at a very interesting time for the region that we were looking at, which was Russia and the former Soviet states (INR/REA). I say that because it was precisely in July of 1999 that Vladimir Putin, whom I had known in a very different capacity in St. Petersburg when he was the deputy mayor, Putin was selected by Yeltsin, President Yeltsin, to be the new prime minister of Russia. You might remember that at that time there were frequent changes of prime minister.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: Every couple of months Yeltsin seemed to find a new one and he finally decided on Vladimir Putin who, after leaving the KGB and serving as a civilian, so to speak, in St. Petersburg, had then eventually come back to head the FSB, which was the successor organization. And at that time there were a number of very difficult things going on. First of all, the Chechen insurgency, which had been quelled early in the '90s, broke out again in a very disturbing way. Chechen forces actually invaded Russian territory, that is, Dagestan. Of course, Chechnya is also technically Russian territory but they went into another part of Russia and...

Now, we had indications in INR at that time that, with an election looming in December, Yeltsin was very concerned about how that election was going to go and some of his advisors, who at that time included the financier Boris Berezovsky, were apparently searching for a way to postpone or even cancel that election in which the combined forces of former foreign minister Primakov and Moscow mayor Luzhkov were appearing to gain the upper hand. So it looked suspiciously as if the Kremlin might be trying to cause some kind of a disturbance which would then require the imposition of martial law and the postponement or cancellation of the election. So that was the background of this, and what then happened? Putin was indeed put into power in- as prime minister, and then there was a shocking event; there were...it must have been toward the end of August, beginning of September, there were two terrible bombings in Moscow in which whole apartment buildings collapsed with great loss of life and that was blamed, whether correctly or not, on Chechen terrorists. And so the war in Chechnya came back in full force and Putin was quoted as saying some rather harsh things about how they were going to track the Chechens down "in the outhouse" if they had to. And in fact that fall of 1999 involved a great deal of fighting in the north Caucasus.

Q: Okay. Sort of from- obviously you picked up some of this while you were in Moldova but when you get to INR what was our view, would you say, of Yeltsin/Putin dealing with the- and of the Chechens?

EVANS: Well, you're right to ask that question because our views were mixed. The Clinton Administration, which of course was still very much in office, had decided that Yeltsin was their man, and there had been these very successful meetings between Mr. Clinton and Mr. Yeltsin; they were both about the same height, they were very big guys, they were "Bill and Boris" and they seemed to get along quite famously. And Deputy Secretary Talbott, who after all was a great specialist on Russia, had a very good relationship with Yeltsin's advisors, and so we were in favor of Yeltsin, I would say to a fault. When Putin was appointed, no one in the State Department really knew who he was with two exceptions, maybe three; Tom Pickering, me, because I had known him in Petersburg and I had actually taken Ambassador Pickering to meet Putin, and my former deputy, Andrew Goodman, who had also had dealings with Putin. So we were very much in demand on the seventh floor and elsewhere around town and since I was at INR I was very much in demand because none of the other intelligence analysts - and I must stress, this was of course strictly an analytical operation that we were running - I was very much in demand and asked to speak at various places about Putin.

Q: Well what were you saying about Putin?

EVANS: Well, what others were saying was that "oh, this is another one of these short-lived premierships, this is transitional, Putin doesn't amount to much, he's never had a national political-level job other than running the former KGB," and so there was a lot of, I think... People couldn't even pronounce his name over at Langley; they kept saying his name was "Puteen." Now, the French had a different problem because "Putin" doesn't work very well in...

Q: It means "whore," doesn't it?

EVANS: Yes. That doesn't work very well in French. But there was a lot of misinformation about him, there was a lot of suspicion because of his past in intelligence, but I knew, for example, that Henry Kissinger had met Putin a few years back in St. Petersburg and had asked Putin where he had gotten his start and Putin had said "in foreign intelligence," and Henry's answer was "well, all the best people got their start in intelligence." So he had maybe a more relaxed attitude. But there was a lot of hostility to the idea that Putin was now going to be prime minister and on the...at the end of 1999, on New Year's Eve, when Yeltsin abdicated and named Putin to be president and then to be elected in his own right as president, the criticism intensified and the concern that we were not going to have good old Boris there anymore but rather somebody who seemed to be sober and was coming out of the KGB and St. Petersburg and whom nobody except a few of us knew. So I think I was fortunate to land in INR with my St. Petersburg connections because Putin brought a whole team from St. Petersburg, finance minister, health minister and various others, and I think I was able therefore to be more helpful.

Q: Well did you find yourself- I mean, you'd been away and all of a sudden you're back in Washington in the center of foreign policy considerations and all, but did you run across the phenomenon of everybody thinking the same way, more or less? Conventional wisdom I think is the term, and that's what was happening with Putin?

EVANS: Yes, I absolutely did, to such an extent that a couple of weeks before the new president, President George Bush, met Putin for the first time in Ljubljana, Slovenia, I found myself writing a memo entitled "Vladimir Putin: a Heterodox View," because all the briefing materials were very critical of Putin for one reason or another, that he wasn't of sufficient stature, that he was transitional, that he was ex-KGB and on and on and on. And I wrote this memo trying to make the point that there were...that Putin was not transitional, that he was a serious figure, that he was a man who believed in keeping his word and that he was well spoken and so on and so forth. Now, I distributed that memo to the White House and CIA and Defense Department; I don't know what fate it met at the hands of the staff people there, but I did get a call from deep in the depths of the CIA's analytical side, from a colleague who said "John, thank you for writing that memo. Over here we wouldn't dare say such things but we think you're right about Putin."

Now, a few weeks later...this would have been, already I've skipped forward to June of 2001, when President Bush had been elected and inaugurated and was meeting Putin for the first time. Now, at that time you may remember President Bush was asked what he thought of Mr. Putin and he made that famous statement that he'd "looked into his eyes and seen his soul." Now, two things occurred to me at that point. First of all, Bush genuinely did like Vladimir Putin, and I think I understood - he and I both understood - why this guy was somebody you could deal with. I had dealt with him perfectly effectively and satisfactorily in St. Petersburg; he had pulled some of our chestnuts out of the fire; he was not anti-American; he was not a communist; he was for a new Russia; and George Bush also sensed this was a guy he could deal with. The other thing that struck me was that that's not the way George Bush from Texas talks about people generally, and that he must have gotten...picked that up from some staffer who might have advised him and it might have been Dr. Rice, somebody had talked about the "Russian soul" and that was the last thing that stuck in his head.

Q: Well, this morning I was interviewing a woman who was a financial analyst in INR during the debt crisis in Latin America during the '80s, and she was saying she was a second tour officer but she was able to write things without going through the whole control process and said, you know, George Shultz called her into office and said I like what you're writing.

EVANS: Yes.

Q: You know, she said here I am a second tour officer, she was nervous as hell but the point being that in INR, unlike almost any place else in the government, you can write things and if you get cleared by one or two people, able to convince them, it goes all over the foreign policy apparatus as opposed to in the CIA you just know the layering is such that it has to come on conventional wisdom almost.

EVANS: Yes. But that's a very good point and one of the things INR prized most of all was its ability to put written product in front of top policy makers every morning because there was this INR daily brief.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: Could be on various different subjects but that was the regular opportunity to do exactly that with a minimum of clearance. Unfortunately, during my time in INR, and this happened between...When I first arrived there Phyllis Oakley was assistant secretary. She did a fine job; she was not a particular intelligence specialist but she was very broad-gauged and very good, ran a happy bureau. Stapleton Roy, greatly renowned in Asia, in particular, who had been in China and Indonesia, came in and did a wonderful job but then quit in 2001 in November or so in a dispute with Secretary Albright. And then came-

Q: It would be 2000 because Albright would have left by 2001.

EVANS: Right. End of 2000. That's right. I remember because I was supposed to have taken a trip in early December with Stape Roy to Moscow. He had served in Moscow way back but I think he was GSO at that time and so he wanted to get back and sort of...there was a lot of attention on this new Russia with Putin in charge and he wanted to get the flavor of it. But the dispute had to do with leaving INR in the hands of his principal deputy at the time, Don Keyser, whom we all thought very well of but who later had some difficulties.

Q: Well it was- The FBI put him on suspension over leaks to the Taiwanese.

EVANS: It was something to do with Taiwan and there was a lady involved as well, so I don't know the details, but Secretary Albright apparently told Stape that he was not free to go to Moscow and leave the bureau in Don's hands and he thought that was inappropriate and he had faith in Don's professionalism and so he quit at that point. But what I was getting to was the next director, Carl Ford, who came aboard in 2001, probably was sworn in in June, decided to abolish the INR daily brief in favor of doing more in-depth reports on particular issues that the seventh floor might be interested in. And this caused a great deal of unhappiness among the old analysts, the veteran analysts, some of whom resigned or took early retirement or maybe they were already eligible to retire. It caused a great deal of unhappiness also in my shop.

Q: Well it was, when you get right down to it, taking away clout. You know, I mean, the whole point of the government in some ways is can your particular branch gain the attention of one of the principles and the long- I mean, it's great, the idea of long studies but that's not the way the government works.

EVANS: And the other thing is that, as we all know, the higher up in the hierarchy you go the less time people have to read. And so the short format had served INR well over the years and this innovation seemed not to work.

Q: Was there any feeling that this was done in a way sort of at the behest of the CIA to get the INR out of the action? Because INR had been essentially right more often than CIA.

EVANS: Well, INR had...If you looked at all the analysts and averaged out their educational attainments, INR was the best educated shop of all the intelligence agencies. And there was certainly rivalry. Carl Ford though was seen...he had worked for a time at the CIA but he was seen more as, and he was known to be, very close to Richard Armitage, and what he told us: that he was trying to tailor our product to the perceived needs of the seventh floor. So that's what we understood was our mission.

Q: Okay, well then you're there; what sort of- what were the currents that were disturbing the atmosphere in INR?

EVANS: Well, talking about the substance of it, what we were keeping our eyes on...the Chechen war was a major issue and the bumpy development of that whole post-Soviet area. For example, in...at the end of October in 1999 four or five members of the Armenian parliament were assassinated and this was right as Strobe Talbott was leaving Yerevan and had just been making some progress on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. So it was linked in the eyes of many to that.

Then there was, as I mentioned, the development of the Putin philosophy of government and Russia's resurgence to some extent under Putin, which was causing some misgivings in certain quarters around Washington. There was a lot of turmoil, also at this period, in Ukraine, with the election of President Kuchma and various...Ukraine being a country that has many, many different political persuasions and regions and so on.

Then, I remember, for example, must have been in the summer, August of 2000, everybody has this misimpression that August is a quiet month and nothing ever happens in August and everyone plans their holidays in August, but when you think about it World War I began in August, famously, and there have been many, many other...

Q: Well World War II was postponed until the vacation period was over; I think it was first of September.

EVANS: First of September, that's right, of '39, that's right. But in any case, I remember in August of 2000 the Soviet submarine Kursk sank to the bottom with loss of life, up in the Barents Sea, and President Putin was on holiday in the Black Sea and was photographed water skiing and was roundly criticized for not proceeding immediately to the site of the disaster. But the interesting thing that was illustrated by all this is that because of our Cold War apparatus from the old days we knew faster than the Russians themselves did what had actually happened to that submarine. We had...I don't...even if I knew exactly what they were I wouldn't be at liberty to say...but we had the ability to track and sense and discover what was going on with the submarine that the Russians themselves didn't have.

Q: Yes. And they were putting out incorrect information anyway, which was, you know, as usual cover up in a way.

EVANS: The story kept changing.

Q: It was a defective torpedo that, I think, that blew up inside the-

EVANS: Yes. But I remember, with another analyst that day and getting this, I guess you would call it telemetry, that was coming in and we were able...we actually told the Sov...not the Soviets, the Russians, what we knew about it. And at the same time there were other things going on in Russia that very summer that we were not equipped to report on. For example, there was a big resurgence in the Russian Orthodox Church with an enormous meeting in the new cathedral that had been rebuilt in Moscow, Christ the Savior Cathedral, and not one of our Moscow embassy people was clued in enough to have gotten there and done a report on that. Now, this was pointed out by Suzanne Massie in an article entitled "The Submarine and the Cathedral." So what it showed was that we still, in the area of intelligence, were focusing on the concerns of the past age; we had not yet retooled ourselves in such a way as to follow that part of the world adequately as the new countries they were becoming.

Q: I mean, did you feel that the criticism was justified?

EVANS: Yes, I did, and I felt that we needed to, for example, do more with open sources, and not imagine that just because information is obtained covertly it is necessarily better than information that we get from open sources.

Q: I would imagine that, particularly dealing with Russia/Soviet Union this would be particularly bad but this is true everywhere. I found that, you know, my- various places that I've been if the station chief was able to say well we have, you know, a contact or something, they paid probably, somehow that intelligence was better than just by talking to somebody who was there, whatever it was or something.

EVANS: Well, as Stape Roy pointed out to a meeting of the directors one day, he said, "imagine you're in Beijing and you get a snippet of a conversation that says something's going to happen tomorrow. The people speaking may then change their minds and the next day it won't happen." I mean, so you...just because of the method of collection you can't assume that it's valuable.

Q: Sure. No, I mean it's part of the process and we pay- collecting this secret information is expensive because one, you pay the person, you pay your sources often who may supply you because it's a commercial operation and you get, you know, they know what you want, or you want to put apparati into various, you know, listening devices and everything, well this is very expensive and so it better be pretty damned- you have to feel it's pretty good.

EVANS: Well, during the '90s and also I think the last decade, the first decade of this millennium, also the technological advances, with e-mail and so on, the information world has changed very much. And to their credit INR and also CIA did start putting more stress on all source information, open source information. What used to be the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FBIS, opened an open source center in northern Virginia and so we were encouraged more and more to use all sources in our analysis.

Q: Well one of the things was that anybody who dealt with the Soviet Union was trained to read-

EVANS: Tea leaves?

Q: -you know, the paper "Pravda Nevska" and to look for changes in syntax, practically, to decide- to say something must be happening. And you know, the old Kremlinologist must be- I mean, you were there and some of them must be having a hard time adjusting.

EVANS: I think that was true, particularly for some of the old timers. One has to say, though, that there are moments when nothing is so helpful as overhead photography, and I do remember we had a case, and I couldn't place this in time, when at the Kerch Strait, which is a waterway in the Sea of Azov... at the Black Sea coast where the boundary line between Ukraine and Russia runs, we started to hear reports and actually see photos of how the Russians were building a point of land out into the strait, presumably with the purpose of claiming more of the water. And indeed, it did turn out that...This caused quite a ruckus at the time; it looked like Russian expansionism and eventually President Kuchma and President Putin had to themselves get involved in it, and it had to do with the dispute over the channel and the Russians were making the point that you can't...this has got to be a shared waterway. But overhead photography.

Q: Oh yes.

Well, what sort of machinery did you find, you know, particularly with personnel and other methods that you were inheriting on Russia?

EVANS: At that time we had 18 analysts. It was one of the good, strong analytical shops in INR. During the days when there was still an INR daily brief we...almost every day we had at least one item to include. As for the physical machinery it wasn't until Secretary Powell arrived on the scene with his strong belief that we needed to use the resources of the Internet, and of course he famously was frustrated that he couldn't take his Blackberry device into his office and pushed the security people to try to find a way to do that. So we did move into the late 20th century in those days, and we also moved, allegedly temporarily, out of what we used to call "Old State," the old War Building, War Department Building, and into temporary quarters, and they're still, of course, in temporary quarters because that's the way it works.

Q: How about, with Secretary Powell, I've interviewed Phyllis Oakley, who said that at one point she was excluded from briefing Madeleine Albright because, I mean, this seemed to be part of the coterie around Madeleine Albright, that she was already getting briefed by the CIA so there was no point in her getting briefed by INR, which, you know, is just, when you think about the implications are really something, I think was probably maybe a clash between Oakley and Albright.

EVANS: I do remember that now and I'm afraid that's right. Obviously the person of the assistant secretary does make a difference in any bureau and it's particularly the case in INR. INR is a special bureau and one of the great things about it is that it is not totally underwater or out of sight and so we also had many contacts with foreign embassies, we had visits from foreign experts, European experts; we even were allowed to have contacts with Russians who came over. And so we had our heads up above water and people knew that and we could talk about the real world.

Q: You weren't jaded with the spy side of things.

EVANS: I don't believe so. We didn't feel that we were tainted.

Q: Well what, then, what were some of the matters that you were particularly dealing with?

EVANS: Well, I've mentioned a few of them-

Q: Before we get there, Chechnya; what were we feeling about the- Russian dealing with Chechnya, because it seemed like the Russian army was- there was something wrong with it. I mean, it just- And who were these rebels and all?

EVANS: Well, you did ask me that before and I didn't give you an answer. The Russian army was set up to do maneuvers on the plains of northern Europe and they went after the capital of Chechnya, Grozny, much as they had attacked Berlin. It was the same sort of heavy armor attack and it wasn't particularly effective because the Chechen rebels, who were highly motivated and skillful at ambush, were able to outmaneuver the Russians. But there was a basic problem and it became a problem between the Russians and the Americans. We've all heard the saying that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter, and certainly the view in Moscow after those bombings in Moscow in the summer of 1999, the view was that these were terrorists, pure and simple. They were terrorizing Russia; they were also separatists.

Now, here in Washington the view was not by any means the same as in Moscow. There was a certain sympathy for the rebels at that time. Remember, this is before 2001 and 9/11. There was a feeling that Chechnya was weakening Russia and maybe this wasn't such a bad thing, a feeling that the Chechens who had been deported in toto by Stalin to Central Asia then they managed to make their way back after World War II, that they had been wronged, that Russian rule was very rough and unfair, that human rights violations were an everyday occurrence and that the campaign against the Chechens had indeed been brutal. What we in INR were able to detect, and at CIA, was that there was a lot of Arab money going to the Chechens. Not Iranian money but Arab money from the Gulf, and there was a very prominent fellow from Syria, whose name was Khattab. Khattab had married a local Chechen girl and he was in charge of the fundraising effort. And I believe it was in the summer of 2000 the CIA's estimate of the amount of money that had been poured into Chechnya from Arab sources was in the environs of $100 million. Now, in a desperately poor part of the former Soviet Union, where people are living perhaps on the equivalent of $1 a day, $2 a day, $100 million buys a lot of fighting among young men who are unemployed by and large, unable to get a proper education, see no prospects, and have been proselytized by a particular brand of Islam, the Wahhabi brand, and inculcated in the philosophy of jihad. And our difference of opinion...The Russians very much wanted to work with the Americans against Muslim terrorists. We were, in that particular case, quite reluctant. We didn't get into any serious cooperation against the Chechens except that we knew the Chechens were coming over into Georgia, into the Pankisi Valley, for rest and medical treatment and training and then going back into Russia. And so our effort to train and equip the Georgians actually had its origins in our concern about the Chechens who have a relative...a tribe of relatives known as the Kists in that valley. So we were concerned about Russia's falling apart. We didn't want that to happen by any means, and Ambassador Pickering had come out and declared at the very beginning that Chechnya was a part of the Russian Federation; we don't support the separatism, and I believe at one point President Clinton had compared Yeltsin to Abraham Lincoln, who was trying to hold Russia together much as Lincoln had kept the Union together.

One thing I discovered as director of this part of INR was that the United States had no capacity...the intelligence community had no capacity to listen to Chechen language intercepts, recordings, and I brought this up with Michael Hayden at the National Security Agency, and told him that I thought it was scandalous that we had no capacity to hear what the Chechens were saying. It was only when the Arabs were talking or somebody was speaking Russian that we were able to tell what was happening.

Q: Well did you find, you know, dealing with this, I would have thought, given the time, this is before 9/11, that some of the Cold War, particularly the, I don't know what you want to call it, the fundamentalist Cold Warriors, I suppose the extreme right of the Republican Party, would think that anything that was happening to the Russians was good, you know, enemy of my- you know, they didn't lose their enemy and so- Did you find yourself getting into this political-?

EVANS: I did. I very much did and in my case I was even more in a sense...I don't say I was marginalized but the fact that I had a different take on Putin, who was the very symbol of what the - as you call them the Cold War Warriors - thought he was the symbol of a resurgence of the Soviet Union, which I do not believe even today is the case, that put me on the outs with this group, and just to make the point one time in a sort of mocking way, I went over to a meeting at CIA, the late George Kolt was the host, and under my shirt I had - Celeste Wallander, a professor at American University had brought back from Moscow - a tee shirt with Putin on it and in the meeting I ripped open my shirt and showed them my Putin tee shirt. There was a serious effort by some, not all of it open, to support the Chechens. There were some, let's call them civil society efforts, by people who went over to Turkey; a number of the Chechens had access to Turkey and there was some training going on there, apparently by Americans and I don't even want to know who these people were or who was backing them up but we had pretty good evidence that that was happening.

And let me just say that I think the people, Americans who had not had the experience of working with Russians in the new Russia, tended to have a very different view of Russians than those of us who had worked in the conditions as I had in St. Petersburg with Russians who were democratic, open, friendly to the West, open to business, trying to restart their national experiment in a different way. Now, some...of course there are Cold War Warriors left in Russia, too, but it tends to be a generational thing.

Q: Well did you- I think there must be another generational thing going on, and that is in the academic world you have a significant number of teachers of political science and of history and all, who really- Marxism is a great academic exercise. I mean, you know, it sounds great and all that and it has a great appeal to youth. And you have these professors, particularly the ones that you're dealing with, who got into the academic world through the '60s, you know, and coming out of that generation that was fighting the Establishment and all; and did you run- INR has strong contacts with the academic world, I understand.

EVANS: Yes, that's right.

Q: And did you run across this conflict going on, of people who didn't really understand the change?

EVANS: Well, in the area of Sovietology, academic Sovietology, there were always gradations and different schools and in the main American academics who were well-versed in Soviet affairs were as turned off by Marxism as most Soviet citizens were. They had been to the Soviet Union, they realized that Marxism was a dying or dead ideology. Not all of them; there were a few Marxists among them. I would say - I would bet - you'd find more Marxists in any academic department of sociology than you would have in the Soviet Studies area. We were more inoculated and that was my experience at Yale in the '60s. Those of us who were in Russian studies were relatively conservative by comparison with the people in sociology and maybe even political science.

Q: Well then, did- You were in INR from when to when?

EVANS: I arrived in the summer of 1999 and was still there on 9/11, and I should tell you how we experienced 9/11.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: Our day began early because an intelligence analyst has to be up and ready to brief principals and various people as they're starting their day. They want their briefings early so we were all accustomed to arriving very early in what was then our temporary "swing space" on C Street. And there was a television there which was appropriately protected to be in a SCIF. And the first plane struck and one of the secretaries called our attention to that and we were all crowding around it and watching and then this second plane struck the second tower. And because our intelligence operation had to be insulated for audio purposes to qualify as a SCIF, in the intelligence community definition of a secure environment, there was no way that the normal State Department public address system could penetrate. And so the only way they could alert us to leave the building was to put a cassette tape into a certain device which then would reproduce the message in our area, and what we were told was "the building is on fire, please leave." So that was the word we got, that the building was on fire; and we had done fire drills so we locked our safes and proceeded to our assembly point which was up near the liquor store over there by State Plaza. And as we were marching over there there was the smell of burning, which of course...by this time the Pentagon had been struck. And there was a loud concussion and the rumor was going around that there had been a bomb in the State Department garage or in the center of the building. And the impression that that rumor was possibly true was reinforced by the fact that none of the guards would let us fetch our cars from the basement. So we all had to make our way home either on foot or by whatever public transportation we could find, and I ended up walking home to AU Park that day. As it turned out the concussion was actually one of the jets that had been launched from Fort Eustis and had broken the sound barrier by the time it got up here.

It was a terrible day. I was considering retiring before 9/11. I had been, I think the day before it happened, I had been attending a meeting of the Coast Guard Auxiliary and I was thinking that maybe I would do some work with the Coast Guard. But after 9/11 I decided I would stay, stay on. I felt that what we were doing was very important. I remember being present in INR meetings for many reports on Osama bin Laden in the year or 18 months I'd been in INR and I also knew about the Arab involvement in Russia. So I saw that there were opportunities after 9/11 for cooperating with the Russians against this form of terrorism and I decided to stay on. I stayed in INR until May of 2002 when I was asked by the European Bureau to come back to EUR and take over what was then the Russia desk. There was a summit planned for June in Moscow and they asked me to come back and help the desk prepare for that summit.

Q: Okay, before we get to that, let's go back to the post 9/11. Was it clear, were you getting- Was it pretty clear that people in INR knew where this was coming from? I mean, was this pretty apparent?

EVANS: I wouldn't be able to say that. There was...I have to say that there was a certain school of thought among the regional people in INR, that is experts on Pakistan and Afghanistan and the Islamic world, that the CIA was exaggerating bin Laden, that actually there were a lot more dangerous folks out there than just bin Laden. Now, the people who focused more functionally on terrorism as such, I think, were more...had bin Laden himself more in focus.

Q: Well did you find there- Did the Chechens all of a sudden cease being freedom fighters?

EVANS: There was a shift in our thinking, a rather dramatic shift. For one thing we got information to the effect that some of the Chechens had applauded the attack on the United States and one of them was even quoted, I think it was Khattab, who was an Arab, after all, saying "right on, hit that big Kansas," apparently referring to the United States. So there was a feeling that maybe we'd misjudged that situation and of course you'll remember that President Putin was the first foreign leader to call President Bush and say "we're sorry and we'd like very much to help" and offered help.

Now, what grew out of that was, in fact, a series of consultations with the Russians on the problem of terrorism. It was...I think it's kind of run out of steam now but for quite some time there were...three or four times a year in alternating places we discussed terrorism with the Russians.

Q: Well then, when you moved to the desk- By the time you left INR had there- was Putin pretty well in place?

EVANS: Yes. Putin moved quite expeditiously to consolidate his power. He started ensuring that salaries were paid, that pensions were paid, that the heavy, clumsy bureaucracy started to do its job and that the machinery got moving again, and he very quickly became quite popular with Russians. One of the reasons for his popularity with Russians became a reason for his unpopularity in the United States, and that is that he moved very swiftly and aggressively against the so-called oligarchs. Now, we should keep in mind that the oligarchs are, in Russia considered to be common criminals who took advantage of their position at the moment when the Soviet Union fell apart to grab state assets, and it shouldn't be overlooked that most of them are Jewish, and that played to a kind of ingrained anti-Semitism in the Russian public, although Putin himself is not anti-Semitic. But Putin basically called in the oligarchs and said look, we are not going to take your property but you've got to keep your fingers out of the business of the state and give some deference to the state and don't try to make our decisions for us. That was basically the deal. He said if you keep at a distance you'll be fine, just don't get too close to our internal workings. But the one oligarch he went after very ferociously was of course Mr. Khodorkovsky, who was the young, brash owner of the Yukos Oil Company, who in his earlier days had had rather sharp elbows and there were even accusations that there'd been some deaths, and he had...I remembered that he had done an American investor, Justin Dart, out of a great deal of money. But he also in his later days, Khodorkorsky had liberally thrown around a lot of money to various think tanks and NGOs (non governmental organizations) and thus was in very good odor with civil society in Washington.

Q: How did this play out? Sort of was official Washington sort of looking at the oligarchs? Because I mean, these were robber barons of- You know, we've gone through our own phase of this and these are not popular people. But did you- Were they- Was it felt that Putin was picking on these poor oligarchs?

EVANS: Well, I think there was a certain sympathy for the...or admiration for the oligarchs, rooted in part in ignorance of how they had gotten their wealth. I mean, in America we tend to admire people who have made money. But what the Russians knew, the ordinary Russians, and we didn't know, was that these people had gotten their start by being, basically, thieves. And some of them, some of the oligarchs - such as Boris Berezovsky - had cultivated Western friends and Berezovsky eventually fled Russia under Putin's aggressive advances and went to London. And there was another one of the oligarchs (Gusinskiy) who had founded a very good television channel which came under increasing pressure. So we liked them for the good things they did; the Russians hated them for the bad things they had done and we still have this difference of opinion that divides us even today.

Q: Well were we getting- Were we concerned about the so-called Russian Mafia that was coming into the United States? Because apparently a hell of a lot of Russian criminals came to the States and set up shop in Coney Island and elsewhere.

EVANS: Well, you're absolutely right. That had been going on, actually, for some time even before the collapse of the Soviet Union, but then there was another wave of these people who arrived when freedom to travel became a reality. And CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies) I remember did a study in the '90s of Russian organized crime and concluded that even if Russia were to sink into the center of the earth and disappear the United States would still have a major problem of Russian organized crime.

Q: But was this something that INR looked at?

EVANS: Yes. And it also came to our attention when I was back on the Russia desk because some of these fellows were not eligible for visas, but with their great wealth they were highly insulted when the consul in Moscow told them that they were not eligible. And I would get calls from various K Street firms saying "what is it about so and so that makes him ineligible for a visa? We want him over here for some business purpose." And that still goes on; there are still some of these fellows who remain ineligible for U.S. visas.

Looking back on it I think what really...There were several things that changed from the days of being on the Soviet desk to the days of being on the Russia desk. First of all we were now dealing with a new state, the Russian Federation, and it was shorn of, most notably, Ukraine, its breadbasket and industrial heart to some extent and then Central Asia, and then of course there were the problems that we've already discussed. So we were dealing with a much reduced power. And some in Washington were sympathetic and wanted to help democracy thrive and so on but some said "Russia no longer matters at all, let's ignore it." That was so different from the days of the Cold War when the Soviet desk was maybe the most important desk in the State Department among the regional ones, and the Soviet Union was our nemesis, our adversary. It was a very different experience with more of the normal elements of dealing with any state. Some more cooperation, of course, on certain issues but still a lot of these difficulties. There were still problems having to do with levels of staffing, whether there were too many Russian spies in the Russian embassy and that sort of thing and the FBI and State would get in to discussions about what ought to be done about so-and-so, that kind of thing.

Q: Did you find that Russia, I mean looking at it from your perspective, without the Ukraine and without its other- some of its- the 'stans weren't particularly adding anything to the Soviets but particularly without the Ukraine and all, that- did you feel that Putin or somebody- I mean there could be a resurgent- a reunification of sort of the key elements to the Soviet empire?

EVANS: Certainly I felt then and I feel now that there are some Russians who believe that in the great sweep of history Russia's borders of today are abnormally modest. Russia over the centuries has controlled far more territory. It really expanded to its largest extent after the Hitler/Stalin Pact if you think of the Soviet Union as essentially a Russian state. And I think the fact...You'll recall that Secretary of State Baker and the first President Bush moved very quickly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union to recognize every single one of the union republics, the 15 union republics, and to say that we would put embassies in each one of those. And no doubt the motivation there was to ensure that the Soviet Union would not be reassembled because there was a good bit of sympathy for reassembling it and President Putin at one point, as president, was quoted as saying that the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century was the collapse of the Soviet Union. So yes, there is that sympathy but what we've seen in the intervening years is that the Ukrainians and the Kazakhs and most of the other republics have enjoyed having their own sovereignty, whether they had it previously or not, and it's not a simple thing at all to put Humpty Dumpty together again.

Q: How did you view- You were there until when?

EVANS: I started on the Russia desk in 2002 and I was there for two years before being nominated to go to Armenia.

Q: Okay. How did you look at Russia during this time? Because you know, it seems to me that one of the major things that's happening and that hasn't happened is in Russia is sort of the rule of law. I mean until they get that together it's not a, in a way a real democratic state.

EVANS: Well, you're right and this is relevant to what we were saying about the oligarchs, as opposed to J.P. Morgan and the robber barons in our own history. The United States essentially was a rule of law state from the very earliest days, even prior to our revolution. And so although income tax laws hadn't been enacted and Teddy Roosevelt had to do his trust busting and so on, but still it was a rule of law state. That was not the case when the Soviet Union collapsed. It was more in the Soviet Union rule "by" law than rule "of" law. The rulers used law as an instrument of their own tyranny. But as to how we viewed it, first of all those of us who had had this experience of working in the new Russia with the new politicians who had emerged, Yeltsin and the others, we saw that this really was something new. It had definitely a lot of baggage but the Russians were trying to find a new way forward. I think the general mistake that we in the West made was to assume that the trajectory of Russia and those other new states would be similar to the trajectory of Western democracies and I felt from the beginning that that was a misconception, that the so-called Washington consensus, that you tax little and you regulate little and you let the market do all the work and so on, that that consensus was not going to fit Russia in the long run, that Russia was already on her own trajectory, which was very different and would not in 10 years make Russia into a new Germany or something of that sort.

The other thing that was very noticeable to me in the two years I was running the Russia desk was the prevalence of other issues, such as 9/11 and its consequences, the war in Afghanistan, the war in Iraq. I'm not saying that was necessarily a consequence of 9/11 but it followed it chronologically.

Q: Well it followed- Well it was consequences.

EVANS: Yes. But my point is that our issues with Russia tended to be subsidiary to those larger world issues. Now, there were a few that were purely bilateral, such as the Bush Administration's rejection of the...or, what is the proper term, renunciation of the anti-ballistic missile treaty and that was a bilateral treaty and we had the legal right to exit it, giving adequate notice, but it did affect the relationship. But then the Iraq war, for example; Russia had an embassy in Baghdad, it had enjoyed quite cordial relations with Saddam Hussein. The former foreign minister, Yevgeny Primakov, was an Arabist by training and had been in Iraq and knew Saddam, so on the...I was with Secretary Powell on the famous occasion when he went to New York to make the case the second time, because the British insisted that we try a second time to get agreement from the UN on how to handle Iraq and this was the time when Secretary Powell talked about the threat of weapons of mass destruction, and the reason that I was along was that right before that Powell met with the Russian Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov, and Ivanov argued very politely, but insistently, that the United States would be making a terrible mistake if it went to war with Iraq, that all sorts of unintended consequences would flow from this and Secretary Powell listened, they discussed the issue, but clearly a decision had already been made, it seemed to me, by that time - his testimony was in February and it was in March of 2003 that we attacked Iraq.

Q: Let's take the- some of the actions of the Bush Administration before we get to 9/11, the repudiation of the rejection of anti-ballistic treaty and there was also something on gas- In other words, I mean, you know, it seemed like- I would have thought the Russians would be asking what the hell was happening here? Who are these guys?

EVANS: Because of the nature, the concentrated personal nature, of the Russian regime, the fact that Vladimir Putin was really in charge at that time, he was a president with very high popularity, and because he liked George Bush personally, they got along well, they both had teenaged daughters. Putin, I think, won George Bush's heart by showing him the cross that he wore around his neck that his grandmother had had blessed in Jerusalem. So there were these connections and I think, despite Russian public opinion, which was getting more and more anti-American and had, during the Serbian war, turned a lot of Russians away from better feelings towards America, that Putin was sure that he and George Bush were going to have a great relationship and I think that made a difference in the case of Russia.

You may remember the famous quotation of Condoleezza Rice - or attributed to Condoleezza Rice - the formula "punish France, ignore Germany and forgive Russia." And what that derived from was the fact that Jacques Chirac had not played it straight with President Bush about France's attitude towards the impending Iraq war. Gerhard Schroder in Germany had made anti-Americanism a plank of his re-election campaign, but Vladimir Putin had basically said "George, we think you're making a mistake but we have no reason to want you to fail, so we will not do anything that will undermine you; we still think it's a mistake." And because Putin was perhaps a bit blunt but at least played it straight with George Bush and George Bush was the kind of man who appreciated straight talk, the Russians came out of it fairly unscathed in that sense.

Q: How about NATO, membership of NATO and all? Was that being played out while you were there?

EVANS: At the time of the fall of the Wall and then the process of reunifying Germany which ensued very quickly - we may have talked about this before - the Russians certainly had the impression that they had been promised that NATO would not expand to the east. If Secretary Baker didn't specifically promise it then Chancellor Kohl certainly did and the perception was clearly on the Russian side that the deal was: Germany may be reunified as long as NATO doesn't move eastward. And they probably assumed that a Germany embedded - even a reunited Germany - embedded in NATO but not moving eastward would not constitute a threat. Americans do not, in the main, grasp the deep fear of Western invasion among the Soviets and the Russians and the others out there caused by World War II. We simply do not grasp what a profound fear they still have of Germany and of the West in general.

Q: Well I mean, while you were on the Russian desk, were any more countries coming to NATO or that had been pretty well set up?

EVANS: You know, it's been a rather long and drawn out process and as recently as 2008 we were talking about Ukraine and Georgia being admitted to NATO, which the Germans and the French ended up opposing, thus saving us from ourselves because the Bush Administration did favor Ukraine and Georgia entering NATO without realizing what a...how that was perceived in Moscow.

Q: Why this fascination with Georgia?

EVANS: Well, you know it's funny that in those days when George Shultz and Eduard Shevardnadze were both foreign ministers and meeting, I know in my time on the Soviet desk twenty-eight times, Shultz got to know Shevardnadze very well. Shevardnadze is not a popular figure these days in Russia, has not been since...

Q: Or in Georgia.

EVANS: Or in Georgia for that matter. But he was very popular with the Americans for his role in bringing the end of the Soviet Union and also helping with the reunification of Germany. I understand that George Shultz, a native Californian, invested some money in vineyards in Georgia at one time, perhaps in partnership with Shevardnadze. I haven't run that to ground but I've heard that. And the Georgians are very engaging, they dance well, they sing well, they have colorful personalities and in the old days of the Soviet Union you could be forgiven for thinking that everybody south of the Caucasus Mountains must be a Georgian because the Georgians were living high and had a great restaurant in Moscow. That's my analysis.

But I also, on a serious note, must say that because Georgia provides an easy corridor for access to Caspian energy, I think that is really the main motive for our support of Georgia's independence and I think also some of these still latent feelings that anything that ties the Russians up or gives them trouble weakens them. And so if the Georgians are causing a little friction there and a little trouble for the Russians, it's not a bad thing. I don't totally discredit the high-flown rhetoric about building democracy and so on. The Georgians, of course, found themselves a leader in Mikheil Saakashvili, who had attended Georgetown and Columbia and spoke American-accented English and knew how to push all our buttons.

Q: During the time you were on the Russian desk, were there any sort of either disasters or moments of optimism?

EVANS: You know, we were always, it seems to me, in an expectation of disaster because with the news from Russia one never knows. But I felt, actually, that we kept things pretty well balanced during those years, that even if it was only George Bush and I who had a positive view of Mr. Putin, that was maybe enough. And that we were getting along alright. After 9/11 when Putin called and offered to help, there was a good long period during which we tried to work together on terrorism. But that effort foundered on, first of all our inability to see the Chechens the way the Russians saw the Chechens. I think we lied to ourselves to a certain extent about the extent to which jihadists from as far away as Afghanistan were participating in the Chechen separatist movement and some of them had been trained in bin Laden's terrorist camps and some of them were clearly terrorists. The worst thing that happened on my watch was no doubt the seizure of a theater in Moscow by Chechen terrorists.

Q: A children's theater.

EVANS: A children's theater full of...with a pretty big audience there, and then the Russians tried a tactic which, had it been...they put some kind of a soporific gas into the auditorium, hoping to put everyone to sleep and then pick out the bad ones and revive the innocent. But it went badly awry with a couple dozen people killed, including the terrorists. But it of course was very poorly received here and we did have consultations with the Russians in which they didn't tell the truth, didn't come clean about what they had done and that of course was very bad for the climate.

Q: Well then, it's probably a good place to stop, I guess. And we'll pick this up the next time when you're off to Armenia.

EVANS: Okay.

Q: And we'll talk about how you got the job and everything else.

EVANS: Okay.

Q: One further question though.

EVANS: Sure.

Q: Did you find, I mean, you say you and George Bush were probably the only people who had a- in the government who had a positive view of Putin. Did you find, was there, did you have a problem, both in INR and on the Russian desk, of dealing with some of the actions of the Bush Administration? I mean, you had Cheney, you had Rumsfeld, the old Europe, I mean, the putting down- I mean, it was a very confrontational time and today we're seeing the fruit of it today; Barack Obama is getting the Nobel Prize mainly for, I mean, he replaced George Bush.

EVANS: You reminded me also of another event that took place during the first weeks of the invasion of Iraq and that was that, one way or another, a column of Russian diplomats trying to evacuate from Baghdad came under fire and in this case people were hurt, and we got in to a big argument with the Russians, with the Pentagon saying that they had been warned not to take a certain road but instead to take another road, they had disobeyed their instructions and that's why it happened and that's all we're going to say about it. Now, the Russians came back again and again and again, asking for more clarification of what had happened and why; we did not give it to them. By this point it was our sense in the State Department that foreign policy had been taken over by the Pentagon. We could not get the answers that we needed to provide to the Russians. And yes, the one personality you did not mention, John Bolton, had been brought into General Powell's State Department against his will, apparently. He was not Powell's pick to be Under Secretary for security affairs but Bolton was advocating policies that put us at loggerheads not only with the Russians but virtually with the rest of the world. They included his advocacy of a very aggressive seizure policy on the high seas, which the Russians did not agree with. We, of course, took our signature back on the statute of the International Criminal Court so as to shield our own warriors and contractors from any danger of being hauled into court by another country, and of course we had taken back our signature also on Kyoto. So altogether the policies of the Bush Administration gradually wore down that initial trust that Vladimir Putin and George Bush had had at the beginning, and, although they still speak kindly of each other, that personal relationship was not strong enough to hold back the resentment that grew at Washington's ignoring of Russia's interests.

Q: John, how did you deal or what was the effectiveness or how did it work out with you and the Russia embassy?

EVANS: I had a very good relationship at several levels with the Russian embassy, particularly the number two guys, Igor Neverov and Sergei Ryabkov, who's now a deputy foreign minister, and also with the ambassador, Ushakov. But it was a new game, very unusual for me compared to the old Soviet days because, for example, one time I was instructed to inform the Soviet ambassador of intelligence we had received to the effect that their embassy, I believe in one of the Middle Eastern countries, was about to be attacked by terrorists. Now, in the old days of the Cold War that was not the kind of thing a State Department person would have done but indeed I went to the ambassador and told him what we knew, with full clearance by the State Department to do that. We had agreed in these talks about terrorism that if we came across information about an immediate threat to the personnel of the other side we would inform each other.

Q: Okay, so we'll pick this up in 2004 when you are off to Armenia.

EVANS: Fine, fine.

Q: Great.

Q: Today is the 20th of January, 2010, with John Evans. And let's start at the beginning; 2002.

EVANS: Two thousand and four.

Q: Two thousand and four, when- how did your- We're going to be talking about Armenia but how did this come about?

EVANS: I was working at that time in the European Bureau, Europe and Eurasia as it now is styled, as director of the office of Russian affairs. But the time was coming up for my rotation to something else and the assistant secretary at the time, Elizabeth Jones, worked very hard to see if she could get me an appointment to one or the other ambassadorship in the former Soviet Union. And as it turned out the best fit turned out to be Yerevan. So in the winter/early spring of 2004 I got private word that I was going to be nominated for that post and I was actually nominated in May of 2004.

Q: Well now, was Yerevan one of these posts that- I would think like some of the Baltic countries where all of a sudden there's a politician who's got, you know, always wanted to go back to the Motherland; was Yerevan one of these? I mean, did the Armenians of San Gabriel want to go back?

EVANS: It has never...I was the fifth ambassador and none of the five, Harry Gilmore being the first, none of the five were political appointees, they were all career people, and in general most of the posts in the former Soviet Union have been occupied by career professionals rather than by political appointees or ethnic political appointees.

Q: I would think though, I mean because Armenians, as we will get to, take their- the Armenian Americans take their country of either birth or of origin very seriously.

EVANS: Well, they do and there's no law against naming somebody of an ethnic background. As we know, there have been Jews who have served in Tel Aviv and there have been Italians who have served in Rome. So it is not unheard of. I think the conventional wisdom among professionals is that it's better not to name someone who might have ethnic ties that would sway his judgment in one way or another at his post of assignment.

Q: Well I, you know, when we've had so many Italian Americans who have gone to Italy usually, at least in the view of the professional, not with- it has not been a very happy occasion. Often what they're doing is they're not speaking Italian, they're speaking a dialect, you know, some patois, you know, and they're not really considered of sufficient caliber by the natives.

EVANS: Well, there certainly are complications and baggage that can accompany a person with a heritage connected to the post of assignment.

Q: Well anyway-

EVANS: I had no, absolutely no, Armenian connections whatsoever; I'd actually never been there. I did have one great advantage which was that my Russian at that time was in pretty good shape and certainly the political class in all those ex-Soviet republics still speak Russian and mostly work in Russian.

Q: Alright, you're named, you're one on the list but since, as you say, this is not a place where the political appointees are trying to get the job so it's fairly sure- What were you hearing about Armenia? You know, because the Armenians play a larger than life role in American politics and all.

EVANS: The Armenians are well organized and they are passionate about Armenian issues but if you're not really looking to see them they're almost invisible to most observers except on occasions when they have street protests about the recognition of the Armenian genocide. Now, I have run across Armenia once before and that was in December of 1988 at the time of the big earthquake when Gorbachev had to rush back from New York to tend to the devastation there, so I had some knowledge of the Armenian community from that time. I had - memorably for me - I had gone to New York to brief all the Armenian church and community representatives on what the U.S. Government was doing to help the victims of the earthquake and I remember, I may have said before, that I never felt so underdressed in my life, faced with all the different bishops of the different denominations in their various robes and headdresses.

Q: Oh yes. Well, was anybody telling you, you know, okay John, you're off to Armenia; watch it?

EVANS: At that point no, although Ed Djerejian, who of course had been in the Foreign Service for years, by this time he was retired, he did say be very careful out there, but I think he was referring more to the local political scene, which he had some disparaging remarks for, than anything else. Now, Beth Jones did say to me, "it's not a very pretty post but it's getting better," or something like that. One of the reasons was that it was known that the ambassador's residence was a shambles and that the embassy, which was in an old Communist Party building, was a kind of a wreck and that we were building a new chancery. So that's what she meant.

Q: Was this all because of the earthquake or was it just general decrepitude?

EVANS: You know, most of those, what became republic capitals, had been provincial cities in the Soviet Union and so they weren't set up to be capital cities, with the possible exception, oddly enough, of St. Petersburg, which was a capital but not a capital.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: It was the northern capital of Russia. It had had embassies and so it had a great fund of wonderful buildings. But the other cities, even Kiev, had a terrible shortage of hotels, so none of these places were really well set up to receive foreign diplomats.

Q: What did you do to prepare yourself?

EVANS: Since I knew very little about Armenia I started reading as much as I could as fast as I could. And I went through such classics of Armenian history as Richard Hovannisian's two volume History of the Armenian People and several other standard histories, and then my predecessor but one, Michael Lemmon, lent me his copy of Ambassador Morgenthau's Story, which is his personal account of being U.S. ambassador to Constantinople during the First World War.

Q: As the- as you get, what is it, Franz Werfel's-"The Forty Days of Musa Dagh" or however you pronounce it?

EVANS: You pronounced it just right. I did not read that at the time. And one of my big frustrations was that because of the State Department's concern about the confirmation process it wasn't possible to get language training until after I was confirmed. The State Department's concern, of course, was not to imply to the Foreign Relations Committee that we were taking for granted my confirmation and to come here to FSI (Foreign Service Institute) and sign up for Armenian lessons would be taking for granted a positive outcome. So I wasn't able to study Armenian and in fact I was advised, "Oh John, you'll never learn Armenian well enough to use it; just go out there and speak Russian." That's a direct quote from Lynn Pascoe, who was the deputy assistant secretary.

Q: What about in preparation before even the hearings, were you talking to either the Armenian communities? I was making reference to San Gabriel because a large- is it San Gabriel-?

EVANS: The biggest center is Glendale.

Q: Pasadena.

EVANS: But there are a couple other places out there, you know. Right, Pasadena.

Q: And also, but also to any particular congressmen or -women who were particularly Armenian-oriented?

EVANS: I stayed very much away from anything Armenian before my confirmation hearing, which was in July. I even went so far as to avoid a talk at the Center for Strategic International Studies given by the Armenian foreign minister, at that time Vartan Oskanian; instead I sent my wife to hear what he had to say. I didn't want to be accused of getting involved before I was confirmed.

Q: Well this is a little bit unusual, isn't it? I mean, with somebody who's sort of on the track to go to, I don't know, Tanzania, to have to play games like this?

EVANS: Well, perhaps I was being ultra-prudent or ultra-careful here but I simply didn't think it was appropriate to be in touch with Armenian Americans at that stage.

Q: Alright then, how did the hearings go?

EVANS: Well, you asked whether I was in touch with anyone on the Hill and I did call on one prominent senator, Senator Sarbanes - a former senator, he's now out of office, now retired. He was known to be interested in Armenia; he had an Armenian on his staff and it was he who, actually during my hearing, said "Mr. Evans, I think you should learn the Armenian language. Please ask the State Department to give you training." And so, armed with that command from Senator Sarbanes, I did come back to the State Department, having been confirmed, and I was given eight half-day sessions at the Foreign Service Institute so I could read the alphabet and say a few short sentences.

Q: Did you, while you were getting ready, did you touch into the Turkish desk?

EVANS: No, I did not. I had, during my Cox Fellowship, done a lot of reading on Ottoman history. I knew people who had been involved in Turkish affairs, of course; I'd known people all along but at that point I did not make a formal appointment at the Turkish desk.

Q: Well then, did-

EVANS: I should add to that, though, that my old friend Eric Edelman, who had succeeded me as DCM in Prague, was then ambassador in Turkey, and in a very casual encounter we had in the lobby of the State Department he said "John, don't forget our position on the Genocide is that it was the chaos and fog of war."

Q: So- Because the genocide or the "g" word was a huge landmine; anybody dealing-

EVANS: It was, first of all, taboo. It was not something we were to discuss. We just learned that; we weren't told it precisely. I knew from my previous study of Ottoman history that there was a problem around this question. I didn't know much about the facts of it and I didn't know much about the definition of genocide, either. But I did start reading about it in the weeks leading up to my departure for Yerevan and I read more about it when I got to Yerevan. I also, before leaving, made a point of calling on the expert in our legal advisor's office who has the unenviable job of thinking about genocide full time, and I asked him point blank, I said "had it been the case that the Genocide Convention of 1948 was in effect in 1915 would not the events of 1915 have been characterized as genocide?" And he said, "yes, of course. It's a matter of policy, not fact; it's a matter of policy that we do not refer to it as genocide."

Q: Okay, why don't we take it why? I mean, at the time, we're talking about 2004, was it? Why was this, I mean, what was the rationale for having a policy not to call it genocide?

EVANS: I was never given a point-by-point rationale for why we did not refer to it as genocide. What I clearly understood, and I think most other people understood, was that it was Turkish official policy to deny that there had been a genocide. Turkey was our good ally, our faithful ally in NATO, had fought with us side by side in the Korean War and so on and so forth. We had big - enormous - strategic interests in Turkey and therefore in deference to Turkish policy we simply did not talk about those times or events.

Q: Did you- still talking about the early days when you were getting ready to go out there- did you chat with anybody else of your colleagues in various positions; did they bring this up or was this sort of-? You know, when you say "Armenia" it sort of- it's hard almost not to think about the...

EVANS: Well, I did not discuss it with very many people but I did discuss the question with a couple. One was a State Department employee of the Historian's Office, a man of Armenian background. We had a furtive lunch one day in which he told me what he knew about the question. He told me about Rafael Lemkin, the Polish legal scholar who lost 49 members of his own family in World War II in the Holocaust but who had been led to the study of atrocities and mass crimes by his hearing of the Armenian massacres in his law school days in Krakow and who had asked his professor at that time why was it that if a man commits murder and he is sent to jail whereas if a government murders a million men, women and children there's no retribution? And his law professor had no answer and so Rafael Lemkin went out to try to find a way to make a crime of these things.

The other person I spoke to before going was, of course, Elizabeth Jones, the assistant secretary. I called on her along with the Armenia desk officer, Eugenia Sidereas. I had noticed that the Background Notes that the State Department furnishes for the use of mostly schools about each country that we have diplomatic relations with said nothing whatsoever about the events of 1915 or massacres of Armenians or anything of the sort, not to mention using the "g" word, but there was absolutely no mention of that period of history, no mention of the fact that millions of Armenians had - or at least some number of Armenians had - fled Ottoman territory and ended up in what was then Russian Armenia. There was no mention of it, whereas our President, several presidents, had made veiled and euphemistic mentions that went quite far. President Bush had talked about "massacres," "forced deportations" and used quite...and there was even... the word "murder" had been used in a presidential statement. But the State Department's Background Notes glossed over it entirely. And I pointed this out to Beth Jones, who's a very smart and sensible person, and I said "don't you think that we ought to revise the Background Notes so they at least convey as much knowledge and sympathy as the White House statements that have been made do?" And she said, "yes, I think any issue that's of interest to our clients," - meaning the people who read the Background Notes - "ought to be addressed." At that point the telephone rang and we weren't able to continue our discussion and we had worked so much together that I felt I had a very good understanding of what she wanted and how she expected her ambassadors to conduct themselves.

Q: Well did you submit, do a draft, or would that have been in your province?

EVANS: First of all, going out as a new ambassador one is terribly busy with all sorts of concerns and indeed in the days after my confirmation I was busy more than...well probably ten to twelve hours a day meeting with people in different departments, getting briefings. INR very kindly scheduled a daylong meeting with scholars from around the country who came to brief me on the politics, the economics, and, to some extent, the history. And so I was very busy right up until my departure on August 23, at which point then all the focus was on getting a grasp of the embassy, staff, of who was in charge of what, what the main problems were, and of course I had to present my credentials to President Kocharian.

So the issue of the genocide was not at the top of my list by any means when I arrived and in fact I did not go out there with any intention of addressing it in any special way. What I did do somewhere in the middle of the fall was to refer to the conversation with Beth Jones in a telephone call to the desk officer and I said, "isn't it about time we see if we can revise the Background Notes so that they reflect some sense of our understanding that something happened back in 1915?" Now, I should say that up until that time the director of the office for Caucasus in Central Asia had been answering inquiries about this issue from Armenian-Americans by saying that there was "no space on the internet to address every issue." Armenian-Americans had shot back by saying "in your background notes on Fiji there's room to talk about the marshland grasses that grow in the shallow water," or something like that. But we were saying that there was no...our explanation of why we didn't mention 1915 was that there was no room or no space on our website.

So I did suggest that we make a careful revision of the Background Notes. The answer came back that "now was not the time" because Turkey had...was in negotiations with the European Union over setting a date for the accession talks and that was to happen in December of 2004 so this was no time to monkey with the Armenia Background Notes.

So, in short, I did try to get the Background Notes amended but I was told "this is not the time" because Turkey is in sensitive talks with the European Union on setting a date for accession.

Q: Yes, well and it still is, I guess.

EVANS: Well, the date came and went and the date for starting accession talks was fixed and after a decent interval I reverted to the question again and I was told "oh, it's too soon after the fixing of the accession talks" and so the clear impression I got, this was... by this time it was January or so...the clear impression I got was that no time was a good time to bring up this issue.

Q: Well in a way, when you're looking at it, you're trying to have relations with an important country and what's the point in pulling the scab off, you know? Now, there are reasons for it but you know, we kind of let the Japanese get almost a free ride on World War II, on the rape of Nanking and its behavior in China.

EVANS: Yes. No, I am fully aware of the dilemma that this issue poses and you've put your finger on it; it is a dilemma. The dilemma is between the truth of the issue, which is now virtually unassailable when you look at what has been done in the last 20 years by historians and not all of them Armenian-American or Armenian. There are some very distinguished historians, such as Donald Bloxham in the UK (United Kingdom) and others who have made it clear that yes, what happened in 1915 did fit the definition of genocide, whatever the...I mean, it was done against the background of World War I, yes, there had been rebellions by some Armenian armed groups, yes, but if you look at that definition, the shoe fits. The dilemma for us is precisely as you said; we have a loyal NATO ally, a good ally, although in 2003 Turkey's parliament did vote against our troops going into Iraq through Turkey and that enraged a lot of people on Capital Hill as well as in the Executive Branch. But still, the dilemma here is between historical truth, which is still disputed by Turkey but by no one else, and our diplomatic equities.

Q: Yes. Well anyway, this will crop up again but let's go on to- What was the, sort of the situation in Armenia when you went there?

EVANS: The most salient fact about Armenia then and now is that it is a very poor country in a very difficult neighborhood with few natural resources and many, many economic and social problems. And so the largest ingredient of our policy there really was our assistance program, which in per capita terms was the biggest in the former Soviet Union and in fact in per capita terms it was exceeded at that time only by our assistance to Israel. Now, Armenia has only about three million people; by the time I got there the cumulative value of our assistance program was about a billion and a half. So it was not huge in dollar terms but in per capita terms it was rather big.

The other concerns we had, of course, besides economic development were stability in the region and the development of democratic institutions and the rule of law.

Q: First place, with Armenia, how close is- is Armenia really the- sort of the center of Armenians or is this sort of an offshoot or what? Because you've got Armenians in Lebanon and Syria and other parts of Turkey and all.

EVANS: Of course the Armenians as a group go way back for thousands of years, probably 3,000 or more years. They're mentioned in the Bible, they consider themselves to be descendants of Noah's - one of Noah's sons - and the real...they were all over the Middle East; in various times they had had their own kingdoms but by the 19th and early 20th century the largest number of Armenians were in the Ottoman realms. The historic dividing line was between those who were in the Persian world, and that included most of the Caucasus and those that were in the Ottoman domains. So when one talks about today's Armenia it is really on the land that way back in the 18th century was under the Persian shah, but then when the Russians moved into the Caucasus it became Russian Armenia. The genocide struck at the community of the Ottoman Empire but about 60 percent of today's population of Armenia is descended from, or related to, those Ottoman Armenians who either fell victim to the genocide or escaped it. So in today's worldwide Armenian community, which is about 10 million, most of those people are descendants of the Ottoman community that was so decimated: they fled to France and the United States and other places.

Q: So they, in many ways they didn't have particular ties to Armenia as it stands today?

EVANS: That's right. In fact, there's an old linguistic division which points up that fact. The Armenian spoken in today's Republic of Armenia is that spoken also by Armenians in Iran and Azerbaijan and places like that, not the...that is, it's Eastern Armenian, whereas the Western dialect is what's used by the Armenians in Turkey and their descendants.

Q: All right. Let's see; you got- you arrived in Armenia when?

EVANS: In August of 2004, and I presented my credentials just before...on the Saturday before Labor Day of that year and had already in effect started working at the embassy and then I began my official diplomatic time there.

Q: What was the embassy like?

EVANS: In terms of people the embassy was great. We had some of the best - I was told, in fact, by Beth Jones - that probably the local staff of our embassy was the best educated in the former Soviet Union. We had people working on assistance who had advanced degrees in economics and so on; we had a very good American staff with the possible exception of one fellow in the Fascell Program who turned out to be selling visas along with a Ukrainian confederate of his. We caught that guy. But by and large it was a very good staff and I was very proud of them.

The physical accommodations of the embassy were atrocious but we were in the process of building a new chancery which was built really to be a fine example of the new generation of chancery complexes.

Q: In the building, I suppose you had obviously security and earthquakes in mind.

EVANS: The building we occupied when I arrived was the former Komsomol headquarters.

Q: Youth group.

EVANS: The communist youth organization. And we owned it. When we took possession of it we found that it was full of scorpions so we had a lot of work to do on it and had shored it up but indeed there was a serious vulnerability to earthquakes and that was one of the reasons we had to build our own chancery.

Q: What activities was the, you know, you mentioned relief and all but what sort of activities was the embassy involved in?

EVANS: Well, right after I arrived, of course, there was, to the north of us, in North Ossetia, there was a terrible terrorist attack on a school at a place called Beslan.

Q: Oh yes.

EVANS: And the Dean of the Corps in Yerevan happened to be the Russian ambassador. And I called...When I started my calls of course I started with the Dean and the event in Beslan had just taken place, and this was in early September. Because the attack as I remember was on the first day of the academic year, which is considered September 1.

Q: Yes. All the children were dressed in their-

EVANS: In their finest.

Q: -in their finest.

EVANS: Exactly. And we were approaching the, let's see, it would be the third anniversary of 9/11. And we had commissioned a group of deaf and dumb actors, and I don't know if that's the political correct terminology but...

Q: Hearing difficulties and-

EVANS: Yes. Challenged.

Q: Challenged.

EVANS: People. We had hired a theater and hired this troupe of actors to do a very evocative kind of a play about...basically about international understanding and the need to avoid violence between ethnic groups and so on. Without instruction but convinced it was the right thing to do, I invited the Russian ambassador to come and share our holiday of 9/11 or our commemoration of 9/11 with us. Now, some members of our staff who had Russophobia in their blood thought this was a terrible idea and wanted to ask the State Department what they thought but I was convinced that this was the right thing to do and Ambassador Dryukov vindicated my confidence by making a very moving address at our commemoration and joining with us in the face of these terrorist acts.

Q: Did you have- You say you had sort of aid programs but what sort of things were we doing?

EVANS: Well, we had a very broad program of assistance. It was not only AID but we had a big Peace Corps program. In fact the first thing I did on arriving in Yerevan in August, even before presenting my credentials, was to swear in the latest class of Peace Corps volunteers who had just gone through their initial training in country. Unlike some other post-Soviet states the Armenians were delighted to have the U.S. Peace Corps there; they worked in public health, in education, in business development, environment, and they were all over the country and a magnificent group of people of all ages.

We also had one of the most successful programs of the Department of Agriculture in Armenia; the Department of Agriculture's longest lasting and largest program overseas, in fact, which was helping farmers develop their crops, find markets for their produce and so on. That was an excellent program. And we had other programs of technical assistance to the police and the border guards and we had, under the NATO umbrella, programs in the Partnership for Peace, so there were NATO exercises in which Armenia took part. And, I must say, that just as I arrived Armenia deployed a unit of 42 military men, unarmed, to Iraq. They were primarily sappers to deal with these IEDs (improvised explosive devices), and there were a few, if I'm not mistaken, a couple of medical people as well. So we had a good bit of cooperation and a lot of assistance going on.

Q: How did the Peace Corps volunteers, what was your evaluation of their effectiveness?

EVANS: I think they were quite effective largely because they really were welcomed by the communities in which they served. Some of them ended up doing many things that were not originally imagined. Most of them were teaching English, whether they were there to teach English or just ended up teaching English. Many of them taught civil society skills. Some of them helped set up Internet cafï¿½s and things like that. Because it was a very personal interaction and they were out, almost all of them, were out in the provinces where it's a kind of a village atmosphere where personalities count and individual contact is important, I think they made a lot of friends, they did a lot for the image of the United States, and to quote Teresa Heinz Kerry, "the best face of America is the face of a Peace Corps volunteer." That's a little bit of a clichï¿½ perhaps but I think the Peace Corps did a wonderful job, still does.

Q: What was your impression of the government?

EVANS: I had been warned by Ed Djerejian already that there was a kind of an old Middle Eastern/Oriental/Semi-Despotism that was still gripping Armenia and I think that was true and to some extent is still true. Armenia has been ruled one way or another for centuries by small groups with anti-democratic inclinations and indeed President Robert Kocharian, who was a war hero from the struggle with Azerbaijan over Karabakh, was a rather fearsome, tough character, though perfectly decent to deal with and intelligent. I dealt with him almost exclusively in Russian. But he was a kind of a tough guy, a sort of a...almost to the extent of being a bully as President of Armenia. People did not cross him lightly.

Q: Yes. I remember at one point I'd been- in the mid '90s I'd been twice an election observer in Bosnia and I talked to somebody who went to Armenia and I said how was that? He said a bunch of guys with big mustaches and leather coats and it reminded you of, you know, you feel like you're amidst gangsters.

EVANS: Yes. No, there definitely was a certain amount of that. Now, some of it, I mean, there are some fashion differences that are immediately obvious; the young men tend to wear leather jackets and pointy shoes and it's...you might see something similar in the very south of Italy, so there was kind of a sleaze factor there, which strikes many Armenian-Americans who aren't used to that also as it strikes us. And the economic structures of the Republic of Armenia are very, are too closely, intertwined with the political structures. So what you really had was a kind of a tight oligarchy with a parliament that was not more than really a rubber stamp, largely.

Q: Was the Church much of a factor?

EVANS: The Armenian Apostolic Church is not a state church; it is a national church, though. and it considers itself to be the canonical representative of the Armenian people. And it does have an influence, a growing influence I would say, in Armenia because it represented the only alternative belief system once communism collapsed. I mean, there is an articulated system of beliefs and how one should live, how one conducts one's life and...although many, many, Armenians in the post-Soviet period are only nominal Christians...the fact that the Armenians took Christianity as their national religion in 301 AD is an important factor. Armenians look at...they see the Church somewhat as the Poles see the Roman Church. The Armenians see their Church as the glue that has kept their community together over the millennia.

Q: The army, the armed forces?

EVANS: Armenia had really the only serious army in the Caucasus in the 15 or 20 years after the fall of the Soviet Union. The Armenians had always done well in the Soviet army, some of them reaching the flag ranks; there were even several marshals of the Soviet Union who had been Armenians. But the more compelling reason that the army as an institution was so respected was that the army had protected Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian enclave high in the mountains of Azerbaijan in the terrible war that broke out, mainly 1992 to '94, between Armenia and Azerbaijan over that territory. I don't propose to get into the history of how this all came about but basically the population of Nagorno-Karabakh was approximately 90 percent Armenian and they wanted to join Armenia rather than be ruled by...from Baku and this came to a terrible conflict in the early '90s with the loss of something like 25,000 victims; nobody knows exactly. And it's still a very serious unsolved conflict in the area, where young men die every year from sniper fire that continues and the mediation effort has not as yet borne fruit.

Q: Did you have any contact with our people in Azerbaijan and were you all trying to sort out this age old problem or-?

EVANS: Well you know, when I had just arrived in Yerevan my counterpart in Baku was Reno Harnish and I thought, of course, that the three American ambassadors in the Caucasus ought to be part of one team. And shortly after I arrived, in probably early October, we were all summoned to a meeting in Tbilisi.

Q: You say "you all."

EVANS: I mean the three ambassadors and accompanying staff. We had a conference about the Caucasus in Tbilisi, and it was very good to meet my opposite numbers, the ambassadors in the other two capitals; Dick Miles at the time was ambassador in Tbilisi, Reno Harnish in Baku. But then I discovered that the attitude of the embassy in Baku was starting very much to resemble the attitude of the Azerbaijan government. The government of Azerbaijan was trying to isolate Armenia in terms of trade and other kinds of contacts. So whenever a NATO exercise was scheduled to take place in Armenia the Azerbaijanis would boycott it. I had an army major on my staff who was doing a program at Garmisch, an area familiarization, program. He requested permission to go to Baku to broaden his knowledge of the Caucasus and the embassy at Baku turned him down, saying "we don't want anybody from Armenia to come to Baku." And it struck me that this was an American, an American Army officer and why should an American Army officer, not in uniform, not be given country clearance to visit our sister embassy in Baku? And my defense attachï¿½ called to question this decision and was turned down again, saying "we don't want to talk to anybody from Armenia." So there was a bad case of localitis in Baku. They were applying the standards of the Armenian government to our embassy.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: I mean the Azerbaijani government. So there was a problem there. I tried very hard to be absolutely neutral on the Karabakh issue. We, of course, never thought of visiting Karabakh, which can only be done through Armenian territory, but our legal position is that Karabakh is part of Azerbaijan and it's...the United States along with France and Russia has been trying to mediate the conflict. But this sense of impartiality apparently didn't apply, so far as I could tell, to our sister embassy in Baku.

I should add, probably, that the mediation effort was carried out totally independently of our embassy. Steve Mann at the time was the United States co-chairman of the so-called Minsk Group, and would fly into Yerevan from time to time, along with his Russian and French colleagues, to conduct talks with the Armenians, but we were scrupulous about not inserting ourselves into his business. His was a separate operation; we simply supported his visits.

Q: Well I was wondering, with this- I have trouble pronouncing Kara-

EVANS: Karabakh.

Q: Karabakh?

EVANS: Yes.

Q: How long had this thing been going on?

EVANS: Well, if you look back it goes back in its modern form to the Bolshevik Revolution. All of the Caucasus, of course, was part of the Russian Empire, the North and South Caucasus, Azeri, Turks and Armenians and others lived side by side but after the Bolshevik Revolution there was a short-lived attempt to create a Caucasian republic. That was effectively squelched by the Bolsheviks and ultimately the three largest groups each got a republic, the Georgians, the Azerbaijanis and the Armenians. Stalin was the commissioner for nationalities and it was he who eventually decreed that this Armenian majority enclave in the mountains would be awarded to Azerbaijan, although it was given the status of an autonomous region of Azerbaijan. So there was even, in the '20s, when that decision was made in communist times, there was a recognition that ethnically Karabakh was not the same as the surrounding territory of Azerbaijan.

But then in modern times the issue came up again in...already in 1988 in the perestroika period, when Armenian nationalists in Karabakh agitated very strongly to be...they petitioned Moscow for the right to be reassigned, as it were, to be with their Armenian cousins in the Republic of Armenia rather than in Azerbaijan. This resulted in counteractions by Baku and there were some pogroms in Baku and in Sumgait directed against the Armenians in retaliation and that set off a whole series of attacks and counterattacks and then it eventually degenerated into all-out war.

Q: Well did this have ties to the Chechnya and other problems in that area or is that too much of a remove?

EVANS: Well, I would say that basically, yes, because what was happening was, in the early '90s, a large multinational, multiethnic, and, to the extent that anyone was religious, multi-confessional empire was collapsing and the new organizing principle of the new states was going to be the national principle. And so whereas everybody could live together in the Soviet Union because the principle was workers' solidarity, solidarity of workers and peasants across national lines, suddenly that whole system was thrown out and what was left was the principle of a national state with a titular nationality, that is Georgia for the Georgians, Azerbaijan for the Azerbaijanis and Armenia for the Armenians, and of course the terrible tragedy is that the Caucasus is a mosaic of nationalities; there are some 50-odd national and linguistic groups in the Caucasus and so if the principle of state organization is nationality there is always going to be somebody whose idea of the state is different. And so Georgia is now wrestling with these terrible problems in Abkhazia; the Abkhaz do not want to be Georgians. They are, first of all, Muslims and they speak a different language. You mentioned the Chechens; they are the biggest nationality in the North Caucasus and they wanted their own state, they are Muslim also and have a long history of resistance to Russian rule. In Georgia you also have the Ossetians. In the summer of 2008 we saw that South Ossetia became a...it was already an issue, whether South Ossetia was going to belong to Georgia or not; our legal position is that it does but the reality on the ground was that they were not acceding to Georgian rule. So there are all these contradictions that were brought to the surface when the old empire collapsed and new states were formed.

I should perhaps add that there are now, after the war over Karabakh, Armenia is probably the most homogeneous of the post-Soviet states because the Azeris, almost all the Azeris, left Armenia. There are a few Kurds and some Zoroastrians a few other odds and ends but Armenia is about 97 percent Armenian at this point and Azerbaijan is also much more homogeneous than it had been before the war caused displacement of populations.

Q: Well did- Was there sort of a meeting of the minds or a sympathy between Armenia and Georgia or between our embassies?

EVANS: Well, I'd say that Georgia as a country and our U.S. embassy in Tbilisi were definitely the most neutral of the three. The Georgians found it useful to have good relations with both Azerbaijan and Armenia and so the usual location of choice for any meeting that involved all three nationalities was Tbilisi because the Azeris wouldn't come to Armenia, Armenians wouldn't get visas to Azerbaijan and so Tbilisi ended up being the place where lots of meetings took place. I hope that our embassies...certainly I tried to make sure that our embassy was simply an American embassy carrying out American policy and we avoided any...we certainly fought against any localitis that might be breaking out. We did have one Armenian-American among the expatriate staff of the embassy, from Pasadena, but otherwise our Foreign Service contingent was pretty much just standard Americans with no hyphenation.

Q: Did you have a city full of visitors from Armenian communities in the States or elsewhere, like, you know, in France there's a big Armenian community.

EVANS: We did have visitors from America, not from France, but we...I remember one of the big Armenian community groups, the Armenian Assembly, sent a large contingent through Armenia, through Yerevan, in the fall, it would have been in October or November of 2004, and I addressed them. And I might mention that that was the only time, in all the time I was in Armenia, that the question of the Armenian genocide arose. It never...I was never asked by an Armenian journalist about the genocide but I was asked a question by a member of this traveling group from the Armenian-American Assembly. The man got up and said, "I know what the State Department position is, that there was no genocide, but then how can you explain to me that I had no aunts, no uncles and never knew any grandparents?" And I explained to him that the United States Government had never denied the facts of what had happened in 1915, and to my knowledge we have not denied the facts, but what is at issue is the characterization of those events. And I probably at that time said that there was a question of whether there was "intent" on the part of the Ottoman officials.

Now, I should say a word about the Genocide Convention, if I may, because it was during this time that I became better educated on what the Genocide Convention really says. And what I discovered is that most of us Foreign Service officers are woefully ignorant about what the Genocide Convention says is genocide. There are basically four conditions that have to be met. First of all, "one or more persons" needs to have been killed. Now, that's not very many: "one or more." The group must be a "national, ethnic, racial or religious group." It says nothing about political groups. There must be "intent" on the part of the perpetrators to do away with the group "as such," to eliminate the group "in whole or in part"; that's the terminology: "in whole or in part." And the fourth condition is that these actions must take place in the context of a "manifest pattern of such actions in the past," of discrimination against the group in the past. So all those conditions need to be met for it to be considered genocide and what had seemed to be missing was the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part" members of the group.

Now, we have never found and probably nobody ever will find, a firman signed by the sultan or orders in cabinet saying, "destroy the Armenians." In the case of the Holocaust we still have no written order by Hitler to destroy the Jews and we probably never will find that, although we do have Hitler's signature on the Nuremburg Laws. That's not the way these things happen. The word gets out there what's to be done but it's not...there's no good paper trail because in the case of such a crime one would be a fool to leave such a paper trail.

But in 2003 and 2004, under the leadership of Marc Grossman, who had been Under Secretary of state for political affairs, there was organized something called the Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission, and that group was an independent, track-two kind of group composed of some well-known Turks and Armenians and it was called the TARC. David Phillips was the executive director of if and this Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission looked at the events of 1915, looked at the Genocide Convention, and came to the conclusion that at least some of the perpetrators of those events did know that their actions would lead to the destruction of the Armenians of Anatolia and therefore to refer to those events as genocide was fully justified, and that journalists and historians and others would be fully justified to continue to use that term. But, at the same time, the Genocide Convention could not be invoked ex post facto to - in a legal sense - bring anyone to justice. So, in short, what this commission basically decided was that historically it was a genocide but in legal terms to press that claim against the government of Turkey would be unsuccessful. And I think that was a fairly wise way of splitting the difference. All the perpetrators of those events are now, by definition, gone, most of the victims are gone. There are only...there are fewer than a hundred very old people now who were small children in 1915 and so it seems to me that's a fair way of splitting the difference, to let the Armenians call it genocide in a historical sense but not to try to pin that crime on the Turkish state or the Turkish people today. And I was...I made myself familiar with those findings, they were brought to my attention; I met with one of the people who had worked on that and I must say I thought this was a very reasonable way forward.

Q: Well then, was sort of the bureau pushing on all this or was this something that you all thought should be done?

EVANS: Well, neither. I mean, the EUR Bureau was just carrying on its daily business as it does every day, driven by the news on the front page primarily. There was no desire to unearth old history. But it was around this time that I was asked to make a speaking tour through the United States, particularly to communities where there was a dense population of Armenian-Americans. So I was scheduled to make a tour, a speaking tour, in February 2005, starting in New York, moving up to Boston and then going to the West Coast to Los Angeles, which is the biggest concentration of Armenians in the United States, and then to San Francisco. And it was right about this time in the beginning of late January of 2005 that my wife flew back to the United States to be with our daughter, who had discovered that she needed to get a divorce from her then-husband and she was emotionally a wreck. So my wife came back to the United States, leaving me in Yerevan with a lot of books to read, and one of those books was the very fine Pulitzer Prize winning book called "Genocide: A Problem from"- no, it's called "A Problem from Hell: America and Genocide" by Samantha Power. And so I had time to read that. And I also read a compendium of essays edited by Jay Winter of Yale University; I think it's called "America in the Age of Genocide." In the same period I read Peter Balakian's prize winning book called "The Burning Tigris," which was also about America's response to the Armenian genocide. So whereas most ambassadors don't have much time to read, the absence of my wife and a fairly quiet winter social season left me in my library consuming these books and becoming more and more disturbed about the dissonance between established historical fact about what happened in 1915 and U.S. policy, which seemed to me to be very much propping up the Turkish official denial of what had happened in 1915. So I became more and more, as the date for beginning my speaking tour in America came closer and closer, I realized that I was facing a huge dilemma here. I knew that I was expected to repeat the tired old message that we didn't take a position on the genocide, that we questioned whether there had been "intent" and so on, and yet I had read enough by this time to realize that the great preponderance of historical opinion was that indeed, there was no question about it, yes, there was a genocide of the Armenians that took place 1915 through '18. So I set off for the United States not knowing how I was in the end going to respond to questions about the Armenian Genocide.

There's something else I ought to add at this point, Stu, about the period we were living in, and that is that our Secretary of State, Colin Powell, who I had huge admiration for, had in September of 2004, after a State Department study of the matter, Colin Powell had come out and said that he thought that what was happening in Darfur in the Sudan did constitute genocide. That was a very brave thing for him to have done. I agreed with him from what I knew of that situation and his action emboldened me to endeavor not simply to be a bystander on a question of genocide but to stand up and say something about it. Even though it was 90 years in the past I felt that someone needed to take a stand on this issue and call it what it was. I knew that this would cause difficulty for me, I knew that it was contrary to the policy of the State Department and yet I felt that I was caught in a terrible dilemma between knowingly distorting the facts of history or coming clean and trying to deal with the facts while explaining the reasons for our policy, and that was the trap that I - or those were the horns of the dilemma - that I faced. And I must say that I really didn't know when I set out on that speaking trip which course I would take.

EVANS: Well it's 4:00. I don't know whether you want to take a break for today and continue another time?

Q: Why don't we?

EVANS: Why don't we? Because I've sort of ended at a point where I was just about to head off on my speaking trip to the United States and that's where the whole genocide question came up.

Q: Okay. So we'll-

EVANS: So we can resume another day.

Q: We'll pick this up on your way and had there been any problems or anything like that? I mean, was this a seething mass of accusation? In other words, you know, I mean, having come out of the Serb-Croat thing-

EVANS: Oh, all of these national issues, whether it's between, well you know the people in the Balkans; I mean, the problems have been there a long time but obviously they're not always at the top of everybody's list. I mean, in modern times in Yugoslavia they co-existed fairly well.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: And the same with the Armenians and the Azeris.

Q: Actually you really have to work at some of these things.

EVANS: Yes. But I don't think that it's inevitable that they're going to slit each other's throats.

Q: No.

EVANS: And of course the extremists on each side in every case tend to drown out the moderates.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: And the extremists stimulate each other.

Q: Well one thing before we move to your trip and we'll do that next time, but could you tell me what was sort of social life and life- I mean, what were the Armenians like?

EVANS: The Armenians that we knew in Yerevan are very similar in some respects to other Soviet or ex-Soviet citizens that we've known, mostly Russians. Mostly educated, not maybe terribly well traveled but a lot of the young people knew English. There was an American university in Armenia where they...this was an outgrowth of the University of California...and some very good teachers. The Armenian culture very much values education, which is one of the reasons why you have so many Armenians in the professions. There are Armenian dentists and doctors and lawyers and so on in the United States. So we liked the Armenians very much; we found them engaging, interesting, there was a lot of talent, there was a lively artistic community, artists creating things, and Yerevan, although it had been a sleepy provincial town was, by virtue of its international links to France and the United States and Italy and Russia and so on, it was a pretty lively place. There were a lot of visitors, a lot of external influences, a lot of cultural things going on and good music and so on.

Q: Did the Armenians have the reputation of, sort of like the Jews and the- of being great entrepreneurs and particularly within the Russian society?

EVANS: I think they...not only in Russian society but in the Middle East generally the Armenians have been known for their business acumen. They've been around for almost as long as the Jews, one might say, and they've always been involved in business and trades and crafts and in particular in those societies that were Muslim they tended to be money lenders and bankers whereas the Islamic or the Muslim families could not, for religious reasons, engage in those things, much as the Jews also carried out that role.

Q: Had the Armenians particularly suffered the way the Jews have? Or have they been able to sort of avoid this?

EVANS: The reputation of being sort of sharp in business?

Q: Yes and you know, which has been used as part of almost, not the Holocaust but you know, it's been used to persecute the Jews.

EVANS: Yes. No, certainly that is a factor. In fact, there's an old saying in the Levant that it takes...I may not get this exactly right...but it takes, let's see, it takes two Greeks to cheat a Jew and three Jews to cheat an Armenian or something like that.

Q: I've heard that, yes.

EVANS: Now, the numbers vary but the idea is that the Armenians are even sharper than the Jews.

Q: How about, I mean, was there, I'm not sure whether it was Armenia but the- where the plane to Moscow was full of Armenians with goods to sell and all that?

EVANS: Oh yes. The Caucasus, the South Caucasus, is quite a fertile area in many respects and so tomatoes and other vegetables and fruits were sought by the Russian markets, and you still, in Moscow, there's still an area where traders, small-time traders from Central Asia and the Caucasus, have their stands and the Armenians were involved in that for sure.

Q: Did, in your sort of normal course of work, did the American-Armenian community bug you or give you a difficult time or anything?

EVANS: I wouldn't say they gave us a difficult time. They were very watchful. In a couple of cases Armenian organizations had fairly and squarely won USAID contracts to carry out some bit of work and what we did find was that, although we were scrupulous about...AID was scrupulous about carrying out tenders fairly and squarely, when the winning party was an Armenian-American group you tended to get a little bit of extra value out of it because they were so committed to trying to help in Armenia. We did have correspondence with Armenian-Americans, but mostly they would simply show up and want to meet and talk about what was going on.

Q: Was there, and I may have the title wrong but the Armenian National Army or something? I remember back-

EVANS: Oh, I know what you're talking about.

Q: -there was a group that, well killed a Turkish consul in Santa Barbara, I think.

EVANS: Yes. That was the first of these assassinations. It goes back really to...well, obviously there's a lot of enmity between Turks and Armenians going back even before the 1915 genocide. Most Americans don't know that under Sultan Abdul Hamid in 1895-96 about 300,000 Armenians were massacred and Gladstone and others of the time railed against this "Bloody Sultan," Abdul Hamid. But in 1965 Armenians worldwide, it being the fiftieth anniversary since the 1915 events, there was much more awareness and there started to be a political movement for recognition of the genocide and some - a very small minority, mainly emanating from Lebanon - formed something called the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia, which is sort of tautological and clumsy, but they were a very deadly group of assassins who decided to publicize the plight, as they saw it, of the Armenians by knocking off Turkish diplomats and officials. And indeed I believe the first case of this was in Santa Barbara when a fairly elderly Armenian who was the son of survivors of the genocide lured the Turkish consul into his quarters in Los Angeles - or Santa Barbara - and killed him. And there followed between 40 and 50 all told, if I'm not mistaken, assassinations. And I remember in my various postings that the Turks always had to have extra security, whether it was Moscow, Prague or wherever, because there were these assassins out there.

Q: When I was in Naples there was a Turkish consul general...

EVANS: Well, there was one in Greece; I think there was another attack that took place in Bulgaria. There was one, I seem to remember, in Paris and so this was a deadly bunch and they ceased their activity at some point in the 1980s but for a little more than 10 or 12 years they were out there killing Turkish officials, who of course themselves had no responsibility whatsoever for what had happened in 1915.

Q: Was there any sort of making joint cause with the Greeks?

EVANS: There was a kind of sympathy for another nationality that had been dispossessed with the end of the Ottoman Empire and the population transfer that took place in the early '20s when really the Turks, again a great multinational empire, collapsed and the new principle was the principle of nationalism. And everyone's a Turk, as Ataturk proclaimed. And so if you were Greek you had to go to Greece; if you were Armenian you were either wiped out or deported. And so yes, there was a kind of sympathy and also because the two churches are autocephalous Eastern Rite or churches of the big Orthodox family. Yes.

Q: All right well we'll then pick this up-

EVANS: Okay.

Q: -the next time when we'll be talking about you went on a- what was it?

EVANS: This was when I...six months into my assignment I was invited to tour Armenian-American communities in the United States and to speak to a number of groups and that's when I crossed the line.

Q: All right. Well all I can say is it's not the only deal- well we'll talk about it more- but dealing with these-

EVANS: Diasporas?

Q: -Diasporas is- you're talking about the most, you know, people- you're treading on an awful lot of toes.

EVANS: Well, you're right. And all Diasporas tend to be a little bit fixated on some moment of the past.

Q: Yes. Okay.

Today is the 22nd of January, 2010, with John Evans.

Q: But first, I'm not sure if I asked you, could you tell me what it was like dealing with the Armenian government, the president and all? I mean, was it a little bit like going back to the 14th century or was it, I mean, was this a Soviet, really, type government? What was your gut feeling?

EVANS: It certainly wasn't like...I wasn't around in the 14th century so I can't say for sure but clearly there were in these ex-Soviet republics only 10 to 15 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the elite were Soviet educated so they'd been brought up in the Soviet system, they thought very much in terms of the old Soviet system and they were affected by the political culture of that old system. But, on the other hand, they had come to grips with the changing realities, the fact that they were now living in a market-dominated world, they needed to care about at least the trappings of democracy. But in the case of Armenia there was an additional special ingredient and that was that the foreign minister, Vartan Oskanian, had been brought up in the United States: although he was born in Aleppo, Syria, he had been brought up in the United States, he had been a United States citizen, had studied at Tufts. In fact, he'd studied at the Fletcher School, spoke fluent English, and he was my main contact as the U.S. ambassador. He was my main contact with the Armenian government. So communications through that key channel were very easy.

Q: I mean, did you find that you were sort of on the same side with Armenia in the United Nations in most things?

EVANS: You know, there were, as there always are, some discrepancies but Armenia pretty much followed the herd in the United Nations, except on the question of Nagorno-Karabakh where Azerbaijan, being a Muslim country and a member of various Muslim organizations, was able to get big majorities in the General Assembly. So on that issue Armenia stood out but mostly Armenia went along with the majority on major issues.

Q: Was there any particular affinity towards Israel in the Armenian government because in some ways they have, I mean the same roots, you know, a Diaspora and a common religion and you know, coming together and all that?

EVANS: I would say quite the contrary. There was some distrust of Israel. There was a kind of superficial identification as a small beleaguered country surrounded by enemies who would like to do them in. Certainly the Armenians shared that with the Israelis. And the two nations have both undergone terrible experiences at the hands of others; in the case of Israel, of course, the Holocaust and in the case of the Armenians the 1915 genocide. But because many in Israel do not accept the Armenian Genocide as anything remotely akin to the Holocaust there's a resentment that Armenians, many Armenians, harbor. In addition, the State of Israel, for quite understandable geopolitical reasons, has long identified itself with Turkey as its one Muslim but non-Arab ally in the region. The defense relationship between Israel and Turkey is very strong; Israeli pilots exercise with Turkish pilots over Anatolia, over Turkish air...in Turkish airspace. So there was not an affinity and there was no resident Israeli ambassador in Yerevan although diplomatic relations did exist.

Q: One last question on this, what were you gathering from your contacts, those in the government and within society, about what was happening in the 'Stans? I mean, you know, in Turkmenistan of course was the prime example of a ruler gone nuts but I mean, did they identify with the 'Stans or were these- they were Muslim and they were sort of traditional enemies? How did this work?

EVANS: Most Armenians, it seems to me, since there was still a common news space based on Russian language, TV and radio, the people in the various post-Soviet republics all knew more or less what was going on in the other republics. But I think they harbored a kind of a feeling of distant relatives and laughed a little bit, perhaps at themselves and at the others. I mean, yes, this is the way we are, we people of the former Soviet Union, and they didn't take it terribly seriously. There were certainly no huge outbursts of feeling about it; it was just something one knew about, laughed about and didn't worry about too much.

Q: Speaking of laughing, one of the great tragedies of the breakup of the Soviet Union has been the political joke. I mean, were political jokes still around?

EVANS: The most famous political jokes in Armenia had always been those involving Radio Armenia. Now, these were...

Q: Oh yes.

EVANS: ...these were a Soviet phenomenon; they were concocted no doubt by various people, who knows who makes up jokes anywhere, but they were very popular in Moscow in the Soviet days and they made fun of Soviet life. And some of the jokes did continue but they changed their focus; they weren't so much any longer jokes about the political system, they were jokes about the...they were bitter jokes about the terrible economic conditions.

Now, I'm wearing a tie today which has a chicken and an egg on it.

Q: Oh yes.

EVANS: One of the jokes was "which came before, the chicken or the egg?" And the answer was, "before, we had both chickens and eggs." It doesn't work so well in translation...

Q: Yes. By the way, Putin was riding high at this time in Russia; how was he viewed? I mean, you know, he was sort of really becoming a dominant figure. Was there concern about the return of Stalinism or anything like that?

EVANS: First of all, the Armenians view Russia as their strategic partner and ultimate protector against Turkey. And so when Russia is strong the Armenians feel safer. And Russia is strong when Russia has a strong leader. So, if anything, Putin was popular in Armenia as he has been up to the present day in Russia. I just saw a popularity poll which had him at about 68 percent approval rating. It's been between 70 and 80 percent for the most part. So whereas we in the West worry about loss of democratic freedoms and some of the other things that happen over there, we tend too quickly to ascribe them to Mr. Putin and it's not viewed in any way similarly by people there, including in Armenia.

Q: Okay, well let's turn to your, shall we call it ill fated or at least interesting excursion into American ethnic neighborhoods.

EVANS: Well, yes. Let me start off in response to your introduction by saying that I was invited six months after I arrived in Yerevan to return to the United States and go on a speaking tour that would take me to New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts and California, which are some of the major areas of settlement of Armenian-Americans. I started the trip after a period in Yerevan that was rather quiet and which had allowed me to do a lot of reading about Armenian history and in particular about the question of the Armenian Genocide of 1915. I left Yerevan with some foreboding, looking forward to the trip, of course, but by that time being thoroughly convinced by what I had read that the Armenian Genocide was not a fiction, that it was a very serious reality which impinged down to the present day on the...it was an existential question for the Armenians; it was a basic issue, and that the United States policy on refusing to characterize those events as genocide amounted to complicity with the Turkish state's official denial.

Now, I left for the United States not knowing how, when this question came up, I was going to respond.

Q: Okay. When did the trip happen?

EVANS: It happened in the second half of February, 2005.

Q: And who had set the trip up?

EVANS: The State Department's Armenia desk had basically set the trip up but my own employee at the embassy, Aaron Sherinian, from Pasadena, Foreign Service officer, made all the local connections. The State Department was funding it, I should say.

Q: But was this a common event for the ambassador to Armenia?

EVANS: It had become traditional in the time of my predecessor, John Ordway, who's from California. He took a similar trip with a slightly different itinerary during his time.

Q: Okay.

EVANS: So the trip began in New York; it involved meeting with, most notably, the Archbishop of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and parishioners. The other Archbishop of the Armenian Prelacy, which is the...basically the Church in exile, and a visit to the Hovnanian School in northern New Jersey, which is a very advanced school for Armenian-Americans.

Q: When you say "advanced"-?

EVANS: I mean-

Q: Is this a high school or is it-?

EVANS: It's K-through-12 and they emphasize sciences and arts and have very good results, is what I mean.

The question of the Genocide did not come up in New York or New Jersey.

Q: I'm surprised because isn't that on everyone's tongue?

EVANS: Well, I think people were too polite to put me in the position of having to answer the question. As I mentioned last time the question was never raised directly to me by any Armenian journalist in Armenia. They knew what the U.S. policy was and I just never got a question on that. There were other issues on their minds.

But the next stop was Boston and in particular Watertown outside Boston, which is an old center of Armenian settlement. The first Armenians to come to these shores in modern times went to Massachusetts, either Worcester or Watertown, places there, to work in various mills.

Q: There were a lot of Syrian mostly, weren't there?

EVANS: Well, most of the survivors of the Genocide in 1915 through '18 had to march through the deserts and ended up in Aleppo, which was then part of the Ottoman Empire but it was an outpost in the desert, and from Aleppo they made their way to Lebanon to various other places, France, United States. But in Watertown, at the corner of Church and Main, there is a very fine small museum, the Armenian Library and Museum, and one of the activities that had been scheduled was a visit to the museum, which has a beautiful collection of illustrated manuscripts, chalices, other church regalia and artifacts of hundreds of years of Armenian history. A very impressive small museum. At the very end, almost as a codicil, or even afterthought, there is a small exhibit of children's shoes and an explanation of the Genocide.

Q: Somewhat akin to the collection at the Holocaust Museum.

EVANS: That's right. And I toured the museum and was very much, I must say, touched by that. I then went into a community discussion and the question did come up and it was there in Watertown that I first said, "yes, I do believe that your people suffered a genocide." And I went on to try to explain U.S. policy and to say that this event took place 90 years ago, the United States has broad and deep interests in the Middle East. Turkey is a nation of some 70 million, of enormous strategic importance, economic importance, political weight and particularly now, after 9/11, when our relations with the Muslim world are fractured. And so I was honest about my conviction that this event had taken place but I clearly had stepped over a policy line; the State Department did not use the word "genocide" although President Reagan had used it in 1981, for example. And, as I later found out, in 1951, in a formal filing at The Hague, the United States had referred to the Armenian massacres as a prime example of the crime of genocide. So there the line was crossed in Watertown.

I next flew from Boston...Oh, I should say that the reaction of the crowd was subdued. First of all, I wasn't telling them anything they themselves didn't already know. We continued our discussion over dinner, a very intelligent crowd in Boston, as you could expect, very well informed. And the next day I flew to Los Angeles.

I expected that perhaps the word of my transgression would have reached Los Angeles but it hadn't and I continued with my program, which involved a very large student/faculty group at UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) where the issue came up again, and again I repeated the same thing, basically, that yes, I did believe that there had been a genocide in the terms of the Genocide Convention of 1948, and then I proceeded to explain the equities involved in U.S. policy, why we needed the cooperation of Turkey. And so there was some debate and discussion about that.

I should add that accompanying me, in addition to Aaron Sherinian, our Foreign Service officer from Pasadena...

Q: She's the desk officer?

EVANS: No, Aaron was a member of the political section of the embassy. But in addition Eugenia Sidereas, who was the desk officer, was with me and the head of the USAID mission, Robin Phillips, and a lot of what we talked about was assistance to Armenia because, as I've mentioned, our assistance to Armenia was the highest on a per capita basis in the entire former Soviet Union. So we had a big program there and I shared the podium with Robin and we both talked about assistance and about the various challenges facing Armenia.

We then drove from Los Angeles to Fresno, which is another one of the old centers of Armenian settlement; it's where William Saroyan hailed from.

Q: Yes, yes.

EVANS: And I remember being impressed by the fact that in one two-hour period one afternoon we visited four different Armenian churches of different, what do you call them, different denominations, Protestant, Armenian, Gregorian and so on and so forth. And we also stopped at California State University in Fresno and had a very good discussion there, which also included the issue of the genocide. And that evening, I was giving my normal talk about conditions in Armenia and a young man in the back stood up and he said, "Mr. Ambassador, are you going to give us that same cock-and-bull story that the State Department always gives us about how there was no genocide?" And somebody was taping this, which I hadn't realized. My wife, apparently, had noticed this, but the tape has since been recovered and so I know exactly what I said at that time. To paraphrase it, I said "I accept your challenge to talk about this, and let me say what I think. I do believe it was a case of genocide." And then I went on in the same vein and talked about U.S. equities, why U.S. policy was so attentive to Turkish public opinion and so on and so forth. But again, I had crossed over that line.

In none of these cases up to now had anything been reported in the news media but that wasn't to be the case in San Francisco, which was our next stop. We got to San Francisco and there was a big dinner. First of all, we visited a school, an Armenian school, where the question of Nagorno-Karabakh came up and I was asked if the United States wasn't prepared to sell out the Armenians in Karabakh. And I said that's nonsense, we are mediating between...along with Russia and France we are mediating between Armenia and Azerbaijan to find a peaceful and lasting settlement to that conflict. I mention this because later on I was accused of having violated U.S. policy on that question too. But the main event was the big dinner and...I'm sorry, it wasn't a dinner, it was at Berkeley and it was again a student and faculty meeting. And there again, in addition to...after talking about the assistance and the economic challenges I was asked about history and once again I said the same thing, that I believe that there had been a genocide and I tried to put that in the context of modern diplomatic challenges. That got reported by a young reporter in the audience and I don't know how quickly it got back to the East Coast but it was definitely by this time on the public record.

The next day, with Robin Phillips and my wife, I flew back to Washington and the next morning I went directly into the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, to the deputy assistant secretary, Laura Kennedy, and I said Laura, "you won't be happy to hear this but I have breached the taboo on the word 'genocide'." Laura was quite upset, said "I wish you'd told me first," but then invited me to take part in a meeting with the State...what was he? Something equivalent to a State Secretary from Ankara, a Turkish, high-ranking Turkish official, to talk about U.S.-Turkish relations and about the Caucasus, and I was instructed not to say anything about the genocide. And I agree to that. So we...it was about a half a day of discussions with this Turkish official, his name was Akinci and I should get his title. Unexpectedly, towards the end of the session, Ambassador Akinci said "by the way, I just want to tell you all that there never was any such thing as the Armenian Genocide. You know, people make up the history they need and the Armenians need the Genocide to be Armenians. And besides, if we had really wanted to kill them all we would have used bullets and so this is hogwash" and on and on in that vein. The American side of the table was dumb-struck; I certainly was dumbstruck. This was a rant on the part of the Turkish official and it contained, within itself, such questionable assertions that, if anything, it only redoubled my conviction that this was an active process of denial. I parted with the Turkish ambassador by saying that the best thing that could happen...that we in Yerevan would love to see a Turkish ambassador accredited to Yerevan. Now this was my way of saying, really, you've got to establish diplomatic relations.

Q: There wasn't-?

EVANS: No. There was recognition but no relations, at least no formal relations.

Q: This is all action on the part of the Turks? The Armenians were quite willing to accept an ambassador?

EVANS: The question really is what preconditions there might be and that's what the discussion today is about, these protocols that were reached last year, whether there are preconditions for the establishment of relations and the opening of the border.

Anyway, just to finish up this story, I left Washington...Oh, I had been...The Turkish ambassador at the time had requested to meet with me and that request was cancelled by him. I guess he had gotten word that I had used the word "genocide." The request had preceded that news. I proceeded back across the Atlantic; I had a conference to attend in Stuttgart, Germany, so I was there for a couple of days, and then got back to Yerevan, where I found on my desk two telegrams, one of which was a dictated apology for my words, written by the State Department, which I was instructed to post on the website of the embassy; in fact, it was already being put on the website by the time I got there. The other telegram was a fierce, very harsh excoriation of me for my actions written by Beth Jones, the assistant secretary, instructing me to respond on my first day in office, to explain my actions and to apologize personally to her for what she termed my "willful behavior." And so I did respond and I apologized for having upset her but I did not retreat on the substance and I pointed out that Ronald Reagan had used the term as president and I don't remember the exact...I basically apologized for my breach of my diplomatic duty to her but I did not apologize on the substance or I did not recant on the substance.

There followed a little hiccup in the placing of the apology on the website. In the process of transcribing the dictated apology, which used the term "events of 1915," the transcribers putting it on the website, who were Armenian, substituted the term "Armenian genocide." And so when it went up on the website the term "genocide" was there and apparently the Turkish ambassador or some member of his staff, in checking the Web, found that, called the State Department and said your ambassador is still using the term "genocide." Well, as bad luck would have it, our power went off and I couldn't get any...or the e-mail went down, more properly speaking. I couldn't get an e-mail back to the State Department to explain what had happened and I didn't really know what had happened. I called in my public affairs officer and said "how did this happen?" And he claimed that in the Armenian language version of the apology it had correctly used the euphemism but that in the American - the English - version it had used the term "Armenian Genocide," and that it was an inadvertent mistake. Well, it certainly wasn't I at that point who wanted to compound this difficulty but it happened and the fact that the e-mail was down meant that everybody in Washington was absolutely livid until I could...they could get my e-mail. They were still mad but at least they saw that it was a screw-up and not me again.

So this made life very difficult. For the rest of that week I contemplated - this was the beginning of March now of 2005 - I talked to a number of people on my staff and I came within, what would you say, within inches of resigning over this issue. And then I got a call from my wife who had stayed back in the United States and she said, "look, you haven't told a lie, you haven't said anything that the world doesn't believe. The State Department is wrong about this; just stay there and do a good job." And she had been talking to a lot of people too, and I said well, I think that's what I'm going to do. So I did not resign.

Now, this was the Bush Administration where almost nobody ever resigned for doing things much worse than what I had done. So I decided to just stay there, see what would happen.

Q: One question while you were on this trip. You had your desk officer and the political officer with you; there must have been- because, you know, even I who's been away from this know what the ookahs or whatever it is in the State Department is on this, though shall not use the "g word." I mean, wasn't somebody tugging on your coattails?

EVANS: Well, no they weren't, and of course I knew perfectly well myself. I mean, this was a...I was rebellious, frankly. I was faced with this dilemma of whether to honor what I was intellectually convinced was the historical truth of the matter; the dilemma was to honor the truth or to go along with stated policy.

Q: Well, I mean, being the devil's advocate, could you possibly say look, you're asking for this, this is the situation. The facts are there; you read them, you make your own interpretation, we all have. However the thing is we've got another ally that we don't want to upset too much, they've got to develop the facts and live with it so I'm not going to give you ammunition.

EVANS: Well, that's essentially what I was saying but I was saying that I believed that the events of 1915 did amount to genocide.

Q: Well they were. I mean, you know. I read the consular reports.

EVANS: We have a mass of material in the archives of the State Department about this. Now, I did, on returning to Washington, I suggested a way for the State Department, that is, returning from California, I suggested a way for the State Department to handle this, which would have been to say "Ambassador Evans was using the term in a purely historical sense, not in any legal sense," and I do believe that you can use a term in an historical sense without having a verdict of a court. You can say that "the little princes were murdered in the Tower" without having a conviction of Richard III. You can say that Peter the Great murdered his son without taking Peter the Great to trial and so on. And we can now say that Keats died of tuberculosis when earlier that wasn't known. Or various other things. And I made it clear, in talking to the Armenian-American groups, that I did not believe that the 1948 Convention could be retroactively applied or used against Turkey, that the people of Turkey...First of all, it was another regime, a regime that no longer exists, and it was 90 years ago and none of the perpetrators are alive any longer.

In any case. Sorry; you had another question.

Q: Well it raises another question, knowing the Foreign Service. You were part of the Soviet Club.

EVANS: Yes.

Q: I belonged to the Belgrade Club. Was there- I mean, these are groupings of officers who served in a place, begin to identify with the policies and you know, get very immersed in this. Was there- I'm sure there wasn't an Armenian Club but what about a Turkish Club? Was there one and were you butting against that or did you feel if there was such a thing its hand?

EVANS: I would use the word "mafia" instead of club.

Q: Okay.

EVANS: And including the ones that you and I belonged to.

Q: Yes, they're there.

EVANS: They're there. And indeed, in our last session I described to you my frustration at not being able to get the European Bureau to align its own Background Notes with the President's much more forward-leaning statements on the Armenian Genocide. The President had referred to those events as "massacres," as "murder," as "forced deportations;" that is virtually using the definition of genocide without using the word genocide, whereas the State Department lagged behind the White House. The Background Notes suggested that the...said nothing about the year 1915 and suggested that the skies were blue and there was nary a cloud in the sky. And it was indeed the Turkish Mafia in the State Department, which is strong. We have a big contingent at all times in Turkey; we have consulates, we have people assigned there and coming back to the Turkish desk and, quite frankly, Laura Kennedy, the deputy assistant secretary, an old friend, had served in Turkey, and it was she who basically said "no, we're not going to rock the boat at all." And so when I did this it was out of frustration that we could not put our best foot forward on this issue as the White House had done; we the State Department were behind the White House.

Q: I would have thought there would have been a certain amount of, to use diplomatic terms, screw you, in the State Department policy towards Turkey, because it wasn't that long since the Turkish, because of parliamentary- anyway, they refused the Fourth Division going into Iraq from the north.

EVANS: Well, the effects of that event in 2003 when the Turkish parliament vetoed the entry of American forces through the north into Iraq had an effect in the Congress. Tom Lantos, who was the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, switched his longtime vote against the Armenian Genocide Resolution to support that resolution because he was so angry with Turkey over that parliamentary vote. But still the taboo, and I have to keep calling it that, this was not an issue that was in play, it was not something where decision memos were being written back and forth or policy planning was discussing it, this issue was off the table, not to be discussed, taboo. And so you know...

Well, I need to continue my story because the next thing that happened was that, quite out of the blue, the American Foreign Service Association, through its awards committee chaired by Bruce Laingen, a combination of retired and active members of the American Foreign Service Association, tapped me for the award for senior officers for constructive dissent; it's called the Christian Herter Award. This happened in late March, early April. And I was asked would I accept the award and I said I would not decline it. The news of this went out in a cable signed by Condoleezza Rice to the whole world. I mean, our posts. And I started to get congratulatory messages from many colleagues as far away as China and Africa and so on.

This was a time of change in the State Department. I had made my remarks right at the cusp when Secretary Powell had left and Secretary Rice was just coming in and Beth Jones was ending her tenure. In fact, the Monday on which I sent my apology, my cable response to her was her last day at work. The new team that came in with Secretary Rice was composed of people who had been at the White House, and they apparently came in with a mandate to straighten out the State Department after the Powell days when they thought that the State Department was soft on Bush Administration positions. And I believe I got, to some extent, caught up in that.

After my apology had been published on the website in the correct version, not using the term Armenian genocide but the euphemism, I of course did not return to that subject as ambassador in Armenia. But then the award came through, the Christian Herter Award nomination, and I was asked would I come back in June to receive the award and I thought no, better not do that but I will send a statement. And in the statement that I composed I said "in all fairness this award should be given posthumously to President Ronald Reagan, who was the first American official to correctly term the events of 1915 a genocide, and not to me." And then I said that the monetary award should be given to the AFSA scholarship fund.

Well, the next thing that happened was we were in the midst of a visit by a senator and a cable came in summoning me immediately to Washington. And I said I've got to finish this congressional visit but I can be there such and such a day so I came back to Washington on that day, arriving late in the day at Dulles; I was immediately asked to go see Dan Fried, the new assistant secretary of state for European affairs. When I got there it was clear this was a hanging court. A representative of the director of personnel was there, somebody from the European management bureau and Assistant Secretary Fried excoriated me in the harshest possible terms. What I particularly remember is he said, "how dare you jam the President on this?" And my answer was I had no intention of "jamming the President"; I simply was not going to continue in this misleading of American citizens. And he said, "well, what are you doing about the Christian Herter Award? Did you reject it?" And I said "no, I didn't." And he said, "well, you had better arrange that they don't give it to you." It turned out the following week the Turkish prime minister was to be in town and had meetings at the White House.

So I called my friends at AFSA and I said "look, I very much appreciate this award, it's very kind of you to think of me. I know you probably felt you were throwing me a lifeline but maybe you ought to rethink it." So the AFSA people went back and scratched their heads and came up with a technicality and rescinded the award, which they'd never done before. So that year, 2005, the Christian Herter Award was not awarded to anyone.

And the other thing that came out of my meeting with Assistant Secretary Fried who, by the way, previously had worked for me on the Soviet desk, he said "well, you're going to have to leave." And I said "well, it'll take you a year to get another ambassador out there. Why don't you at least let me finish up. I'm doing a great job." And nobody disagreed that my work there in Armenia was fine. And he sort of mumbled and grumbled and I went back to Yerevan. We were just about to celebrate July 4 and I got a cell phone call in which Dan said "your job will be listed as a vacancy in this cycle and you will be leaving a year early." I said, "okay." But now, nobody else on my staff knew that; I was the only one who knew that I was to be replaced a year early.

So I continued doing my work and I, if anything, knowing that I only had another year, I was hyperactive, probably. I traveled all around, I did everything I could and packed a lot into that final year and then, sure enough, in the spring of 2006 it was announced that the President intended to nominate Richard Hoagland to be my successor. And I conveyed that to President Kocharian and obtained the agrï¿½ment of the Armenian government.

But what happened back here in Washington was that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, when it came time to confirm Dick Hoagland, who's an old friend, as my successor, picked up on some things he said about the, I think it was that he said the "alleged Armenian Genocide" or the "alleged genocide," and the committee did not confirm him. It was split not along party lines; there were Democrats and Republicans on both sides. What I didn't know at the time was that one of the senators on the committee wrote a very strong letter to Secretary Rice saying that when U.S. policy compels an ambassador to distort the truth or at the very least to engage in convoluted reasoning it's time to think about changing the policy. That senator was Barack Obama. I had, however, to comply with the...Well, when Dick was not confirmed I asked the State Department if they wanted me to stay and they said no, come home, and then of course it was clear that I had to retire. So I came home in September 2006 and retired even though I still had time, theoretically, on my clock and the post was vacant for another year until a new nominee was put forward, Masha Yovanovitch, who handled the question rather more adroitly. I think also the State Department had learned something by then. Dan Fried had gone so far in testimony in March of 2007 as to term the events of 1915 "ethnic cleansing." Ethnic cleansing is a euphemism for genocide. It is what the perpetrators call genocide but it is considered in international law to be a crime. So the State Department had moved a long way and it was felt that it was time for there to be another American ambassador there. I also think that Masha was better in her...she conveyed a sense of sympathy, a sincerity about the tragedy that befell the Armenians, which helped her be confirmed.

Q: Were you getting any reflections of your statements and all in the United States in Yerevan, from the government, from other people because was this played up or was there- Well anyway, was there recognition?

EVANS: Yes, it did become controversial in Yerevan although I continued not to discuss the issue publicly. I was mute on the issue publicly with one exception. After the AFSA award was given to me, my wife organized a birthday party for me in the middle of May, 2005. And to my surprise she got up at to make a toast and she told the guests at the dinner...there were about 18 people there and I guess some of them were Armenian officials, the deputy foreign minister was there and there were some ambassadors and my own deputy, Anthony Godfrey, and she read the citation for the Herter Award and said she was so proud of me for having won this, and I had to respond and I said, I made a kind of joke of it, I said "you know, having spent so many years in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union now I know what it feels like to be a dissident." Now somehow that remark got back to the State Department and they were not happy. But there was controversy in the Armenian press; I mean, they were very complimentary of me for having said what I said but there were also conspiracy theories that you tend to get in that part of the world. Some of them may have been Iranian, instigated from Iran, I don't know, but there was quite a swirl of controversy, and of course the Armenian-American newspapers were full of this news as well.

Now, perhaps...There were two things that happened. Because it was 2005 - the ninetieth anniversary of the genocide - there was a major international conference that took place in Yerevan and the foreign minister invited all ambassadors to attend it. I was told by my staff that I had better ask the State Department. I requested permission to attend and permission was denied - but my wife went.

And the other thing was that on April 24 of 2005...I'm sorry; it was on April 24 of 2006 now, when it was clear that I was going to be replaced and everyone understood the reason by this point or they guessed at the reason, I went to the commemoration, the annual commemoration of the Genocide, to lay a wreath, as the American ambassador has done since Harry Gilmore first did it without instructions, our first ambassador to Armenia. And when I got there, first of all there was an enormous display of yellow ribbons that had been put up by Armenians during the night. There was a long string of wires to which thousands of Armenians who go to the top of the hill to pay their respects, there's an eternal flame there, there had been some American Armenians, "repatriates" as we called them, had gotten these yellow ribbons and they had...the Armenians, children, old people and so on, had put them on this enormous yellow wall in support of me and against my being recalled. I had been instructed to say absolutely nothing at the event, the commemoration event. When we were filing up towards the eternal flame with our wreaths, I had my defense attachï¿½s with me and the rest of the embassy staff, in fact, there was a small group of Armenian students with bells wearing yellow tee shirts, tolling their bells, and they had a big poster of some sort saying, quoting Martin Luther King, saying "in the end what we will remember is not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends." And that was in both Armenian and English. So I couldn't say anything, but I noted this group of young people. And then I laid my wreath. My wife was with me and the staff. And then as we exited there was a huge group of television cameramen and reporters and the way it works is you emerge from a kind of a staircase and there was this phalanx of reporters but I had instructions to say nothing. But there were about 10 microphones in my face and I said "God bless you all" and then went to my car. I'm told that people cried, viewers of the television that day broke into tears, at that point.

Q: Well. Did you, when you came back and you were going through your retirement, did you find you were shunned or patted on the back or did it split or what happened?

EVANS: First of all, after my trip, when I was in Washington, having reported to the State Department what I had done, I called Ed Djerejian, who you know was a former Foreign Service officer, now at the Baker School down at Rice, and I said "Ed, this is what's happened: I've breached the taboo on the Armenian genocide, what do you think I should do?" And he said "John, the first thing that's going to happen is that the whole system is going to turn against you and cut you out." He said, "try to get in touch with Beth Jones just as fast as you can." But Beth Jones was unavailable; I had not succeeded in getting a meeting with her scheduled beforehand and I couldn't reach her then, and indeed the whole system did, pretty much...I mean, they had to deal with me because I was still ambassador but I discovered that a lot of things were, a lot of questions were going to my DCM, they were coming in by e-mails that I didn't get and it was as if the system was trying to isolate me. Whether they viewed me as no longer reliable or whether it was just a natural reaction, I don't know.

I have to say that, despite this revolt on my part, the State Department, in handling my retirement and so on, treated me with full courtesy and in a very proper way. I was not treated as a pariah. And a lot of people quietly told me they were glad I'd done what I did. And although they said they might not have done it themselves they were glad somebody had stood up on this issue. I got a lot of sort of furtive handshakes, particularly from younger people.

Q: What have you done since?

EVANS: Because we came back a year early we had renters in our house and couldn't reoccupy it. We had to wait for the lease to expire; unfortunately we didn't have a diplomatic clause in the lease so we were sort of forced into exile for a year and I did a certain amount of public speaking to Armenian groups, Armenian-American groups. We basically spent the winter of 2006-2007 out on Long Island where our daughter has a house, very much off-season, and that's where I wrote a book about the issue and about my own experience of confronting it.

Q: Okay. Well, I guess we'll end at this point here, and I want to thank you very much.

End of interview