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

AMBASSADOR DAVID L. MACK

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is the 24th of October 1995. This is an interview with Ambassador David L. Mack. It is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Can we start at the beginning? Can you tell when and where you were born and a bit about your family and early upbringing?

MACK: I was born in Oregon to a family of farmers and school teachers. Dad taught school in order to pay taxes on the farm. He always said that some people have ranches, some people have farms, farmers make money, ranchers lose money, and we had a ranch. It was a small cattle ranch with some other livestock. My mother also taught elementary school. I grew up in rural environments and went to public schools in Oregon and Colorado.

Q: In the high plains area?

MACK: A rural community, actually right in the Colorado Rockies for a few years. I was born in the Willamette Valley and lived in southern Oregon from the time I was in the sixth grade through high school. I was an aggie, a 4H-er, and studied vocational agriculture in high school to become a farmer. The great influence on me was my grandfather, who wanted me to be a lawyer. Grandpa Mack had wanted to be lawyer himself. He was an Oregon pioneer. He read law without a salary in a law office in Portland. He left the law and got a real job to marry my grandmother and to support his family. Eventually, he had three sons. He wanted one of them to be a lawyer; but none of the three was the least bit interested. My dad just wanted to go back to being a farmer, so Grandpa settled his ambition on the grandchildren. When I got a scholarship to Harvard, he was sure that I was headed for Harvard Law School and at least the Senate of the United States if not the Supreme Court.

Q: Coming from a small town, and getting a scholarship to Harvard was quite something, wasn't it?

MACK: I was a beneficiary of affirmative action, which in those days for Harvard meant geographical distribution. I was what they called a diamond in the rough. I was very rough. I soon discovered that my preparation for college probably put me in the bottom five percent of the class. But I was a diligent, hard-working student. I had a full scholarship so I didn't have to work to put myself through. I started off in political science - they called it government at Harvard - with the full intention of becoming a lawyer. In my senior year, I decided I would take a course of area studies. I audited the opening lectures for Far Eastern Studies, and Russian Studies, and Middle Eastern Studies, and on the basis of those first lectures I decided the Middle East was really something I was very interested in. Sir Hamilton Alexander Gibb, a very famous British Arabist, was giving his last course on Islamic history. Gibb was very inspiring, and after a couple of months I knew I didn't want to go to law school. I had already begun to decide that law school might be a bad idea in view of the expense. I had no idea where the money would come from. You don't get a scholarship to got to law school.

The year was 1961, and I would graduate in 1962. It was after Sputnik, and we were trying to catch up with the Russians. I learned of what they called the National Defense Language Fellowships. The Federal government granted a full scholarship to those who had good grades and were prepared to study a hard language such as Chinese, Russian or Arabic. That's how I got into Arabic studies and did a two year Master's program in Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard.

Q: Was there any focus, or pitch or what have you, on Middle East studies at Harvard at that point? Obviously the Arab-Israeli conflict was going as it had been going since '48, so were you absorbing this conflict there, or was this very academic?

MACK: Well, no, I became aware of the very high emotional pitch on both sides. Like most Americans I was imbued with the stories of valiant Israel, and I would say pro-Israeli in my views. But my first Arabic teachers were Palestinians. From them and from my studies I developed quite rapidly a more balanced view of the conflict. I could see the rights and wrongs on both sides and the very high degree of emotions that were involved in that conflict. At that time, together with most of my fellow students, I was looking for something that had a high pitch of emotion and excitement in it.

Q: This was the Kennedy era wasn't it? Of course coming from Harvard, but it really raised the hair on the back of your head.

MACK: We were all turned on by that idea of going out to the corners of the world and achieving something for the United States. I think there was a very high degree of commitment and also a very great desire to somehow be of service. I think this was doubly true for me. I was getting six years of education paid for in full - the first four years by Harvard and the last two years by the Federal government. I really felt I had something to pay-back. I remember toward the end of my first year of the graduate program, I started thinking of joining the Foreign Service and taking the entry examination. Later on in my second year, I had an economics professor who took a shine to me and at one point said, "What are you planning to do when you finish here? I can get you a job in a bank or an oil company." I said that I had taken the Foreign Service exam and was planning to go into the Foreign Service. I'll never forget his response. He said, with a pitying expression, "Oh, you don't have to do that." But, in fact, I think that I and the other students wanted to do something like that. We wanted to somehow have some part in saving the world, whether it was saving it from godless communism, or saving it from hunger, but in some sense we wanted to be part of a greater mission. The idea of leaving and just going to work for money seemed unbecoming.

Q: One of the things I'm trying to recreate as we do these histories...I felt the same thing. I was a slightly earlier generation but a sense of mission. The United States, warts and all, really could do something and make a difference for the betterment of people. This was an attraction which very definitely had an impulse, I think, at the time.

MACK: It was, and not simply from idealists of both the left and the right in our own political system. One of my teachers at Harvard was Henry Kissinger, and he had a realpolitik perspective. He saw the United States as the last best hope of the world, even if we could use a greater dose of cynicism and reality. Yes, I think that was very much a part of what was pushing all of us.

Q: Was the National Defense...

MACK: A language fellowship.

Q: What does that mean? Where were you taking your language?

MACK: I was taking language at Harvard, starting with a summer session between my graduation in June 1962 and the beginning of the Master's degree program. It was an intensive Arabic class that summer and the first year. In the second year, the Arabic was at a more normal pace, allowing more time for other Middle East regional studies classes.

Q: Did you find you had an ear for languages then?

MACK: Not particularly, and I haven't. I had gotten into Harvard with two years of Latin and managed to just pass the language requirement. I did not take any language classes until my senior year, when I became interested in international affairs and started to study French. But I had only had a year of French. Therefore, I went through six years of university with a single year of French and two years of Arabic, and those are the only modern languages that I've had in my whole life. Maybe because I started too late in life, or maybe because I haven't got such a great ear, for me a language requires a lot of application. It doesn't come easy. By American standards, I'm now known as a linguist, but I've always felt it was an up-hill struggle, although something that I felt was very important.

Q: As you went for a Master's degree, did this include politics?

MACK: Oh, yes. It was a regional studies program where you had the language but you also had a full set of economics, history, politics and culture, etc. in the area. There was a Middle East center at Harvard which was pretty good. Later on, I found that they did a terrible job of teaching languages. They used a very old fashioned approach. In fact, we started out Arabic using a French grammar because the head of the Arabic program had his doctorate from the Sorbonne and felt that it was the only place where they really knew how to teach Arabic. The Foreign Service Institute would not believe that anybody would make a native speaker of English study Arabic via a French grammar. But that's the way he did it, and it was a very stilted kind of Arabic at that.

Q: Again, because of the Arab-Israeli attention and Harvard being a university which has always had, at least certainly in recent years, a large contingent of Jewish students and professors. Did this enter into the studies?

MACK: I envied the Jewish students in the class only because most of them had attended Hebrew school, so Arabic was a easier for them than it was for me.

Q: They could do it backwards.

MACK: That's right. And I also had a lot more Jewish friends than Arabs. Indeed, very few Arab or Arab-American students were enrolled in Harvard at that time and none I personally knew in Middle East Studies. I recall, for example, one of my girlfriends from Long Island inviting me down to spend a weekend at her home with her family. While we were there we went to a pre-wedding party - I guess an engagement party for one of her friends. I can remember at one point a lady coming up and offering me a plate of some hors d'oeuvres, and I had one and said, "Oh, these are good. What do you call these?" And she said, "You don't know knishes?" Coming from a small rural community, I had met no blacks, no Jews, and relatively few Catholics. We used to focus our prejudice on Catholics! Until I arrived at Harvard I had very little sense of ethnicity and diversity. There, I was in a freshman dorm and from the first week, I became acquainted with a lot of Jewish classmates. In fact, I visited some of them in New York City and stayed in their homes. We were very much aware of Jewish attitudes toward Israel. Until I began my studies, I had only a vague awareness of the attitudes of the Arabs and the history of the conflict.

Q: You got your Master's?

MACK: I got my Master's degree in 1964. I was admitted to the Foreign Service and remember the oral exam as being a very memorable experience. I was quite excited at the end of the oral exam, which lasted about two hours, and felt I had done well.

Q: Can you remember what some of the things were?

MACK: The only thing I really remember clearly was that one of the examiners asked me what I did for recreation. I said that I played tennis poorly but enjoyed the exercise. And he said, "Well you know, this is a very social job. You have to develop social skills." That made me feel a bit uncomfortable, so I added that I played a very reckless kind of bridge. I immediately thought that admitting my lack of social graces was a misstep on my part. In any case, I remember going home from the oral exam and sitting down and writing out very full notes on what had taken place. I didn't know at that point whether I'd passed, but I thought it had been kind of interesting and exciting to go through the oral exam process. I didn't feel intimidated by it particularly, as I remember. In those days, in contradiction with the actual situation, there was quite a demand for college graduates; I felt no real concern about finding some kind of employment. I wasn't as anxious perhaps as I should have been.

By the time I got my Foreign Service acceptance, I had also been accepted for a Fulbright Fellowship in Cairo. I decided that I really didn't want to go straight out of my university years into a career without getting some sense for the reality of what I'd been studying for the last three years. I was very pleased when the State Department told me that I could accept the Fulbright Fellowship and go on an unpaid leave for a year. That was precisely what I wanted to do at that point after having spent two years studying about the Arab world. But the closest I had gotten to the Arab world was to watch the film "Lawrence of Arabia" three times.

Q: You could go down to the Syrian part of Boston.

MACK: I did go to several of the Syrian restaurants, but I was really looking forward to getting out into the region itself.

Q: Then you took your Fellowship from Cairo from '64 to '65.

MACK: That's right.

Q: What does that consist of?

MACK: We had studies at the American University in Cairo in colloquial Egyptian Arabic. To this point all my Arabic had been very literary Arabic. They now call it modern standard Arabic, but it was even a little more classical than that. You took lessons in colloquial Egyptian Arabic, and you could take other classes, or you could work independently, do independent research. In fact, you could simply travel around. There was quite a large group of us at that time because the U.S. Government was working down a huge pile of surplus Egyptian currency and we were all supported by these surplus Egyptian dinars. I arrived in Cairo via Beirut, spent a couple of days in Beirut which I found very exciting. I stayed in the older part of Beirut, and it was quite an attractive place in many respects. Then I arrived in Cairo, I think in late August. I remember that the Nile was in flood. In fact, it was the last year of the full Nile flood before the high dam began to fill.

Q: The Aswan, yes.

MACK: It was historic to see it, and many streets near the river were flooded.

It was a real set back and blow to my ego when I tried to speak any Arabic. For the first time I had really tried to speak Arabic. Well, we vocalized in our studies with our teachers at Harvard the modern standard Arabic, sort of the official newspaper language and radio broadcast language. But I remember the first time I went out on the streets in Cairo and actually tried to speak Arabic. I went up to a newspaper vendor and told him in my best formal literary Arabic that I wanted to buy a copy of al-Ahram, the main Cairo newspaper. And he looked at me and responded with a couple of monosyllables in what I later learned was Egyptian colloquial, which I had not studied. I had this strange feeling of being able to read the front page of a newspaper, but not being able to buy one. It took me a very long time to begin to feel that I was communicating orally in Arabic.

Q: Were you using your Fulbright to further this?

MACK: Well, I was trying to spend as much time as possible with Egyptian students and others speaking Arabic. Of course, they wanted to practice English with me. I had one American friend who was there on a different kind of fellowship. She had studied colloquial in a very scientific manner, primarily at Georgetown, but had relatively little formal Arabic. Therefore, she could speak but couldn't read, except with great difficulty. I could read but couldn't speak, and she made very fast progress compared to me. I realized that Harvard had not provided me with the best language preparation. Meanwhile, in a rather desultory way, I was working on a project connected with the activities of North African independence movements in exile in Cairo. It was a good project, but I didn't put as much effort into it as the Fulbright Foundation might have liked. I spent a lot of time traveling around the country, mixing with people. I really visited Egypt in some depth.

Q: While you were doing that, this was still high Nasser wasn't it?

MACK: Yes.

Q: What were you gathering from these travels about Nasser, Arab nationalism, and the United States and Israel?

MACK: Just to mention a couple of experiences. When I arrived our relationships were actually rather good, but they soon deteriorated and reached a very low point. Our ambassador at that time was Ambassador Lucius Battle. I got to know him in an unconventional way. Although I was very rich in terms of the Egyptian dinar, it was a non-convertible currency. I was flat broke as far as dollars were concerned. I desperately wanted to earn some dollars so that I could travel back to the United States at the end of my academic year via North Africa, since I was working on this North African research project. Someone from the embassy - I think it was the cultural attachï¿½ - recruited me to be a tutor to the children of Ambassador Battle; he had a son and a daughter. I was to tutor them in their basic studies, math and English, but also to try to enrich their lives by taking them to museums and teach them a little bit about Egypt, etc.

I got to know Ambassador and Mrs. Battle, and I had a sense of what the embassy was going through in its relations with Egypt. It was very, very bad in that dialogue was virtually cut off. At one point in late 1964, we had a serious rupture with Egypt over an issue that most Egyptians don't even remember. It was over the assassination of the then Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba, for which we were blamed. African students were allowed to enter and trash and burn the Cultural Center. Egypt was then very much of a police state, and such a demonstration would not have taken place without the acquiescence of the Egyptian police. Our relations were in a steady spiral downward after that.

At one point I was taking a train up to Alexandria, and I was trying to read the Arabic newspaper text of a speech that Nasser had given. This is a famous speech in which he says to the United States to go take its foreign aid money and do what it wants with it. Speaking to the United States, he says to go drink from the Mediterranean Sea, and if there's not enough water in the Mediterranean Sea, to drink from the Red Sea. Nasser's speeches were typically in very colloquial Egyptian Arabic. He'd start off in literary Arabic and then very rapidly go to the colloquial, speaking to the people directly. I was reading through this and asking for translation help from some of the Egyptian students on the train, and they saw that I was very unhappy with what I was reading. They said very reassuring things like, "Oh, he doesn't really mean it. We really like Americans." You know, Egyptians are very friendly, sociable people, and they were trying to reassure me that it wasn't really as bad as it sounded. Of course, I had difficulty understanding anyway what "drink from the Mediterranean Sea" meant. I didn't realize at the time that it's the equivalent of "go jump in the lake."

So I was there during this period of deteriorating relations over what seemed to be a side issue, and I realized based on conversations I was having, etc., that it was really kind of an excuse for their unhappiness over our relationships with Israel and the whole Palestinian question, which were the central things on their minds.

In any event I had a very good year there, and I really got to know Arabs on a person to person basis. I'd travel on third-class railway cars and rickety buses, or hitch hike on trucks down along the Red Sea with an Egyptian student friend. I went to parts of Egypt that few tourists ever see and became very fond of individual Egyptians, even if our governments were locked in a lot of bitter disputes. I was beginning to get a sense for where the Egyptian government was coming from on these issues, even if I did not always sympathize with its policies.

I was sick most of the time I was there. After the first month, I had diarrhea for the following eight months. From the start, I planned to live like an Egyptian. I would eat fruits and vegetables fresh and unwashed from street carts and other very foolish things. I remember once I had a buffalo milk and banana milk-shake made on the street brought around by someone with his donkey. I could have gotten much sicker than I did, but I did get very serious dysentery and long lasting problems with parasites. I went from 155 to under 130 pounds by the end of my time in Egypt. By the end of my stay, I felt weaker if wiser, but was sure that I would eventually get over it.

Cairo now looks very different. In those days there were few cars, and I never saw a traffic jam in Egypt. There was a lot of animal traffic, as well as over crowded trains and buses.

Q: What was your impression of Nasser's government? Was it delivering things down to the village level, or was this pretty much confined to an upper class?

MACK: Well, I don't know. I knew some upper class Egyptians, particularly Egyptian girls that I was currently dating and sometimes their families, and they certainly felt that they were being replaced by a class of bureaucrats and bourgeois. I could see that certainly there was clash and certain struggle and tension at the top. I was also very aware of the grinding poverty of the country, but I knew from my own studies that that was nothing new. It was something to which I probably became over-tolerant. For example, I remember after about six months of being there, simply walking around a body on the sidewalk and only thinking afterwards that it was somebody who was possibly dead. The poverty was everywhere, very apparent, and it was easy to begin to take it as being something that couldn't be changed, just sort of one of the givens of Egyptian life. I sensed a lot of popular enthusiasm for Nasser, certainly among college students, which in retrospect I think was very misplaced. I even marched with some of my Egyptian college chums in demonstrations for Nasser's reelection, chanting various slogans like, "Gamal Abdel Nasser is our father." I could see the hold he had on people, a sense that he embodied Egypt's nationhood.

Q: You then came back in '65, is that right?

MACK: Right.

Q: What? Right to the...

MACK: Yes, I came back to Washington, and entered the Foreign Service. I'd been sworn in, of course, the previous year but I entered my class I guess in June of 1965.

Q: Well, being sworn in, did you get any feeling while you were in Egypt that you were considered a spy, or something like that? It could be a little tricky at that time.

MACK: Oh, sure. It was. I didn't talk very much about my career plans with the other Egyptian students, because I realized that it could be misunderstood. I just made it clear that I was finishing my university years.

Q: What did your family...particularly your grandfather feel about all this by the way?

MACK: Well, my grandfather did come to my graduation, my Bachelor's graduation at Harvard. I remember this was a major trip for him because he was old at that point and not in good health. I took him for a walk on the campus and as we walked past the law school I remember him saying to me, "David, are you sure you don't want to go through law school? I said, no, no, grandpa, I've really made up my mind. I want to go on studying Arabic. And he said, well, I guess that's all right if you become an ambassador." Grandpa Mack had a very definite idea of my career! At that point, I hadn't even at decided to take the Foreign Service exam, but he had already decided. If I was going to study Arabic, there was only one thing to do and that was to become an ambassador.

Q: So when did you start your Foreign Service career?

MACK: I started in June of 1965 in the FS-100 class.

Q: Could you give a little characterization of the class. Who they were and maybe how you all felt about whether you're going and doing in the Service, and America's role, etc.

MACK: Yes. My memory on this has sort of been refreshed because we had a reunion recently. I don't know that there were any members of the class whom I would call careerist. Everybody was very idealistic in some way or another. We had about three Vietnam War veterans, as well as Peace Corps volunteers that had served their Peace Corps time. We had a fair number of women, since it was the Lyndon B. Johnson administration and they were increasing the number of women that were coming into the Foreign Service. It was also joint State-USIS officers. So it was a pretty diverse class, more diverse than the class of maybe ten years earlier. But the one thing that bound us all together was this very high level of idealism. There were very vigorous political debates within the class. People were enthusiastic about their careers. Everybody felt it was something they would be doing for the rest of their adult life until they retired. It wasn't that the people were just going to try this out.

I remember then being very impressed with the people who had actually had some real life work experience. We had one who had been in Treasury; another had been in the Department of Labor, and a couple who had been school teachers. They seemed to be ahead of the rest of us, having one step up on us in terms of maturity and responsibility.

Q: Looking at it at the time, and later, how well do you think it prepared you?

MACK: Oh, I don't think it was too bad a preparation although there was probably not enough attention given to the inter-agency bureaucratic process. Certainly there was not enough attention given to relationships with the Congress. Maybe a little bit too much focus on formal diplomatic protocol which, for most of us, turned out to be quite irrelevant to our careers. I didn't have a lot of money to spend. I remember being quite short, and yet one of the things I felt obliged to do was to go out and buy not just a tuxedo, but also a white dinner jacket. I've worn the tuxedo mostly at Marine Corps balls once a year, and I wore the white dinner jacket for my brother's wedding, and I don't think I ever wore it in Foreign Service life. Several of the people in the class were married, and there was a lot of stress on the role of the spouse. It was the expectation that a wife would be supportive, that nearly any kind of career outside of diplomatic life would not be allowed, certainly not allowed if there was any perceived conflict of interest. Our women classmates were all single. The idea of having male spouses, nobody could have conceived of it.

I remember also the director of the course making it very clear that when you had a representational function, it was important to present American food, and he specified apple pie. One of the former Peace Corps volunteers, who was married to a girl from Latin America, took very strong umbrage at this approach. So there was this kind of generational conflict already beginning to come in.

FSI was over in Rosslyn down near what's now Theodore Roosevelt Bridge area, and it was a very dingy building.

Q: It's the Arlington Towers. We were basically in the garage.

MACK: Yes, right. Returning from Cairo, I had very little money left. I had an unfurnished apartment at the other side of Rosslyn, and when I say unfurnished, I mean it remained unfurnished. I had an Egyptian-made sleeping bag and an air mattress that I had also bought in Egypt for camping purposes. I bought two lawn chairs, two plates, glasses and cups from Dart Drug, and two Safeway stainless steel settings. My then girlfriend, later to become my wife, was doing a summer internship in Washington, and I would have her over to my splendid apartment from time to time for a date. With my first paycheck with a loan from the Credit Union, I made a down payment on a second hand Austin Healey Sprite, my first car, a little convertible.

Q: I imagine you joined everyone else as soon as you were sworn in, at least when I was sworn in almost my entire class went down, the first step was to join the Credit Union so we could get some money because you didn't get paid for about a month.

MACK: Exactly. It was really touch and go from one week to the next. This was the first big splurge of my life to buy this car. Getting ahead of myself, but I remember during the consular course, which followed FS-100, I'd taken my girlfriend on a long weekend trip down around Skyline Drive, etc., I'd been driving all day, and I took her home to the house where she was staying at north of Georgetown. Then, driving home from that house to my apartment in my sleep, I had a head on collision just in front of Georgetown Hospital. Totaled out the car. So, for my first couple of years in the Foreign Service I was making payments on a car that I no longer had.

Q: The consular course, how was that run at the time? Was Alice Curran doing it?

MACK: I don't even remember, but I think that's right.

Q: It was a kind of a horror at the time, sure.

MACK: I should probably mention, of course, at the end of the FS-100 class we had that memorable day when everybody is given their assignment. I very much wanted to go back to the Arab world. There were two Arabists in the class, myself and a person who is still a very close friend whom I had met in graduate school.

Q: Who is that?

MACK: Steve Buck, he's still in the Service. I was later best man at his wedding in Beirut. Steve and I were the two Arabists, and of course we very much wanted assignments in the Arab world. Fortunately, when the available posts were announced, there were two Arab world posts, one was Baghdad and one was Algiers. Steve, who had decent French, as well as basic Arabic, got Algiers and I got Baghdad. We were both pretty satisfied.

Q: I was wondering, looking at your career, I don't think I've run across anybody who has been in the Arab world as completely as you have. Usually, at least for their sins, an Arabist is tossed into Madras or some place like that, or a time in London to be the resident Middle East expert, or something like that. Was anybody even at this time saying, okay, you've got to get out and find out what the world is like? I mean was anybody in Personnel giving you this early on, or not?

MACK: I know it was an issue. I remember being impressed by one speaker who said he'd spent all of his time in the Arab world and he didn't think it had hurt his career. Because, of course, there were a lot of Arabic language posts as opposed to Thai language posts, for example. It became a much greater and institutionalized issue at the time of the global outlook program, or GLOP under Kissinger. By that time I very much wanted to have an assignment out of the Arab world and desperately tried very hard to get one. But I was turned down. Following Cairo, I had passed the Arabic test at entrance, barely meeting the minimum requirement of 2-2+ for one of the hard languages. As a result, even when I was trying to get assigned out of the Arab world, it didn't happen. Even in Washington, with the exception of a couple of brief assignments, my jobs were primarily connected with the Arab world.

Q: So you went to Baghdad?

MACK: To Baghdad.

Q: When did you get married? This came later on or...

MACK: Yes, it came later. My wife and I said goodbye forever for the second time. The first time was when I went off to Cairo, and the second time when I went to Baghdad. We continued to correspond, but it was not at all clear how this story would come out at that point.

Q: When you went out to Baghdad, if you could tell me a bit about. This was '65, you'd had your nastiness of July 14th, 1958, but Iraq was in pretty much of turmoil. What was the situation there?

MACK: I should mention one thing first just to finish the story of my car. My Austin Healy was totaled out. I had no automobile to take with me. One of my classmates, who was married, had an old Ford Falcon that was on its last wheels. He was planning to abandon it on one of the streets in Washington. I said, don't do that. I'll pay you $25.00 for it. And he said, well, okay, but only if you drive me and my wife to the train station when we leave. So I drove them to the train station, paid the $25.00, they signed the title over to me, and I had a $25.00 car which the U.S. Government shipped to Baghdad. So I did have a vehicle. But at any rate, I got to Baghdad with this $25.00 car and air freight. I had no household effects, just air freight, that's all I had at that point.

Actually, our relations with Iraq were pretty good at that point. We had a very large embassy, including on the military side, and even the remnants of an AID program that was winding down. There were no longer any AID personnel, but we just sort of ran a few residual programs out of the economic section. Relations were not close, but they weren't bad. And as I say, we had a full range of activities.

Q: Correct me if I'm wrong, but we were all working out of a text by Walter Rostow in those days, and the whole idea was nations reached a certain point of takeoff. And as I recall, Iraq was one of those that was right on the forefront. This is really going to start going places, and we were kind of enthusiastic.

MACK: There was a feeling that Iraq could make it because it had oil, vast agricultural areas, and a population with a reasonable level of education, etc. Oil prices were still very low. We talked almost as much about their date exports, as about their oil exports. And they had, by all accounts, a poor government.

Q: Who was then?

MACK: When I arrived it was Abdul Salam Arif.

Q: Abdul Karim Kassem had already been killed.

MACK: Kassem had been killed. So it was another military dictatorship under Abdul Salam Arif. While I was there, Arif was killed in a helicopter crash and his brother Abdul Rahman Arif succeeded him. There was also an attempted coup by an Iraqi air force officer, who is still alive. There was a lot of political turmoil, and they weren't making the economic progress that they could be making. Their relations with Iran were improving a little bit. I arrived during a brief window in which they had a fairly farsighted Prime Minister who was trying to make economic reforms and improve Iraq's relations with Iran and other countries, including the United States. This was Abdul Rahman al-Bazzaz. It was a brief period. You think of the Prague Spring. By contrast with most of Iraq's history, the Bazzaz cabinet was the Baghdad spring, but it didn't last very long. In fact, he was subsequently dismissed, and subsequent to that assassinated in London, I believe.

I remember the coup particularly because I was in the embassy when it started. This was an officer who had previously tried to overthrow the government. So this was the second time. I can remember being in the embassy which was then in this big compound next to the presidential palace. I remember the Air Force jets screaming overhead to bomb the presidential palace. It felt like they were coming right at us. My job was to maintain contact with our Consulate in Basra, and we were doing that on a single 5-band radio. I was on the floor trying to communicate with Basra about the coup that was going on down there. We discovered later that the coup had started from the Mosul garrison. That turned out to be a bit of luck for me, because I had previously arranged a trip up there. I was at that time in my rotational tour in the embassy with the commercial section. I had this previously arranged trip up to Mosul. I was very excited, as a would-be political officer, and was given instructions by the ambassador and the political section on what to look for. So I did a little bit of political officer work while I was in Mosul on this commercial trip.

Mind you, I was only in Baghdad for nine months.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

MACK: The ambassador was Robert Strong. He was very good with me and the other junior officer. He took a lot of time with us, would have us over to his house once in a while and could chat about our careers, about the Foreign Service, and about Iraq. He would invite us to functions. He once invited me over for tennis and a casual meeting with Foreign Minister Adnan Pachachi, who I got to know very well decades later, and the foreign minister's young doubles partner. I felt very much a part of the whole operation in Baghdad, and thought it seemed to be a pretty well run embassy. It functioned together and had good mission esprit.

I was supposed to have a full rotational tour but because my tour was cut short by a reassignment, I only had the segments doing economic-commercial work, and doing consular work. I found the consular work very interesting because it really got me in touch with a lot of Iraqis, mostly Christians, who were trying to emigrate from the country. I had this real contact there with Iraqis, and used my Arabic. I had a lot of frustrations with the economic-commercial work. We were not doing much business in the country, and it was a big economic section so I got the less interesting job assignments.

Q: I was commercial officer in Dhahran some years before the Arab world was sort of relegated to the very bottom by American business. Somebody from Geneva would drop by. In Saudi Arabia they'd drop by, arrive on Thursday night and arranged to leave Saturday morning, which wasn't very useful.

MACK: Iraq had kind of been left out of the early oil boom because under Kassem they had nationalized the oil companies. As a result the international oil companies, which then had dominant role in international petroleum affairs, tended to give Iraq the cold shoulder. Even though they had a certain level of oil exports, they didn't really get in on the early oil boom. Things were very stagnant in the petroleum part of their economy, and there was not much interest by U.S. business. We had three full-time economic officers, and one full-time commercial officer. So when I was put in as a rotational officer, I got not terribly interesting work.

I had a very social existence while I was in Baghdad. I was single, there was this brief period of detente in our relations with Iraq and I knew a lot of young Iraqis. We helped westernized Iraqis. I socialized with them often, and would see them in their offices as well. I found it pretty fulfilling but not so much because of what I was doing in the embassy.

Q: Did you get any feel for the Iraqi character? They have always struck me as being a different type than most Arabs. For one thing, their mobs seem to be more vicious when they get going.

MACK: Well, yes, taken individually they are extremely loyal to their friends, extremely sociable individuals, great party givers, and very smart, highly educated people. But, yes, I always had the understanding that an Iraqi mob was something to avoid, but that was more by reputation than anything else. It was nothing that I actually experienced firsthand during my time there. Overall, I found being in Iraq an exciting and fulfilling learning experience. I wasn't able to travel in the country as much as I wanted because there was a Kurdish insurgency going on in the north. Large areas of the country were off-bounds for travel. In fact, the most interesting month I had there was when I was sent down to Basra where we had this little consulate. Gosh, that could be a whole story in itself.

Q: Well, let's tell about it.

MACK: Yes, this was towards the end of my time in Iraq.

Q: So we're talking about '66-ish?

MACK: Yes, right. . I went down to Basra, it was May-June of 1966. Basra was already very hot and steamy, gulf-like as you know from Dhahran. There were three Americans at the post, consul, vice consul and an administrative assistant-communicator. The consul was Tom McAndrew. Vice consul Jim Bumpas was on leave, and I went down to take his place for a month as vice consul.

Basra was a real sleepy post, virtually nothing going on. Probably our main reason for being there was to watch the Russians, the Soviets. It was a major port for bringing in Soviet military equipment. The Soviets had a very close military relationship, or at least a well developed military relationship. They did a lot of things there. It was a small consular corps, there were maybe 15-16 consulates down there, and the old remnants of the British empire, the British community. I remember the British Club, where the US Consul was an honorary member. He invited me there several times, and made the mistake of inviting a bunch of Americans from some project up the Tigris at Amara where there was a big sugar plantation. It was a Hawaiian-American agri-economic company that was putting in this big sugar plantation. He invited them down to the British Club. When this group of Hawaiians of all shades and hues arrived, the children were just running toward this miserable little crummy pool. I remember the British moms going out plucking their children out of the pool so they wouldn't be contaminated by these children who obviously looked alien. This was such a miserable little remnant of the British Empire, yet there was still a sense of exclusivity. Afterwards there was a notice to all members that they could only bring non-members one at a time to the Club. So it was that kind of provincial atmosphere. Lots of little tempests in the teapot, including those I was involved in.

I'll tell two stories. First, Consul McAndrew took me for a call on his Soviet counterpart about 10:00 o'clock in the morning. He served whiskey, Scotch whiskey. He said, only in winter vodka, and whiskey at 10:00 o'clock in the morning. Then the conversation was going on about and things locally, and then toward the end he started saying, Tom, I have a dream that someday our two peoples will be allies again, as in the Great War. He went on and on in this vein. I was very excited, and afterwards I said, well, what will you do? Will you send a cable? So we'll have to get back and write up the telegram on this? And the consul said, no way. The first time I had that conversation, I was very excited and I sent a telegram. The second time I had the conversation I realized that it might not be so important, so I sent an airgram. He said the Department never paid the least bit of attention to the reporting. Obviously, McAndrew concluded, this has nothing to do with Soviet policy. The guy is just going off on his own tangent. That was one example of the Basra I found in 1966.

The other example: the Soviets invited us over to the embassy along with other members of the diplomatic corps, and some local dignitaries, to a showing of the Bolshoi Ballet's production of Swan Lake. This was a big event in Basra, a movie of the Bolshoi Ballet. It was a very scratchy film, as you might imagine. This was by now early June, and Basra was steaming away in sweltering heat. During the intermission, I turned to these two guys next to me, thinking that they were local security people who had been invited or invited themselves to keep an eye on the foreigners. I said in Arabic, well, it's very high humidity today which probably means the wind is coming off the Arab Gulf instead of from the desert - because in Arabic you always refer to it as the Arab Gulf. Even the local newspaper referred to it as the Arabian Gulf. One of them said to me in English, what do you mean Arab Gulf? They turned out to be two Iranian vice consuls. The two largest consulates in Basra were headed by the Iranian consul general and the British consul general. The next day there was a call from the Iranian consul general to my consul to ask whether this indicated some change in U.S. Government policy. I had to go over and pay a call on him, apologize, and have the history of the area explained to me. There was this kind of constant tempest in the teapot kind of atmosphere there.

Q: Sounds like it would make a wonderful British comedy setting.

MACK: Yes. There were other events like that that made Basra kind of a memorable place, but not at all important to U.S. foreign policy.

Q: You had this nine months and a spattering of a couple of interesting places, but at the same time you weren't really getting your teeth in anything.

MACK: I was looking forward, of course, to being in the political section. But then with new US immigration laws, they established a new vice consular position in Amman, Jordan to deal with the increased visa work

Q: This is the opening up of getting away from the quota system.

MACK: Yes, and getting to major preferences for relatives. There was a very high demand, in Jordan which then included the West Bank and East Jerusalem. So I was sent over there as vice consul. I was rather disappointed actually. I had been looking forward to the rest of my tour, and by that point I had proposed by mail to my wife, who agreed. She was going to come out to Baghdad and we'd be married in Baghdad. Among other things, I had decided after a certain amount of covert dating with Iraqi girls that the Foreign Service was not a place for a single man.

Q: You mentioned covert dating with Egyptians and covert dating with Iraqis. What was the situation?

MACK: Well, you know, you would meet during the day at a friend's house, or at the school, or at a workplace, take them home, stopping in a park for tea, maybe even going to your apartment to listen to some music. There was always a sense that this was something that was certainly forbidden for them, and something that could get you in trouble too. And I'm not so sure it went very far, but it was the sort of thing that is memorable in retrospect more than anything else.

Fortunately, I ended up getting married in Jordan. I arrived in Jordan in late July of 1966, and my wife came out shortly thereafter. I took her down to Jerusalem, and we were married at St. George's church, an Anglican church in Jerusalem with just a few people from the embassy in Amman and consulate in Jerusalem. They included my boss, who was the head of the consular section in Amman, and the DCM, who had been with me in Baghdad as DCM, along with their wives. The DCM was in effect my best man.

Q: Who was that?

MACK: J. Wesley Adams. He's now dead. I think his wife may still be living here in Washington, Frances Adams. My wife and I started our married life in Amman. I had an extremely busy tour in the consular section, really getting deep into consular work. My boss soon left, and I was in charge of the consular section for lots of the time. It was the beginning of a new two year assignment, and once again it lasted less than a year, perhaps eleven months. I was very busy, we had a heavy workload. I was in charge of the consulate for about four months. I remember a young rotational Foreign Service officer named April Glaspie, who many years later became the US Ambassador in Baghdad. She was sent over to be my number two while I was in charge. The first efficiency report I ever wrote on an American was the one I wrote on April. That was one of her first reports.

Q: What was the situation in Jordan? I mean we're talking really just before the disastrous '67 war if you want to think in terms of the Jordanian perspective.

MACK: The Jordanians were extraordinarily likable people. To this day I consider them the nicest Arabs I know, both Palestinians and the East Bank Jordanians. And it was very easy to liken them. Clientitis was an occupational disease for diplomats in Amman. They were all very sympathetic with the Jordanians, who they felt were caught in an impossible situation, squeezed between Syria and Israel and Egypt. In the beginning of my time, Jordan's relations with both Egypt and Syria were poor. On the other hand, their relations with Israel were far worse. There were cross-border attacks from Jordan into occupied portions of Palestine, and infiltration. Sometimes they weren't hostile crossings so much as people going back to visit their home village, etc. Some of the incidents were probably sponsored by the Syrians, but it was the Jordanians who felt the brunt of the retribution from the Israelis. I remember there was an Israeli attack on a town near Hebron called Samu' in December 1966, that was followed by major Palestinian riots in the West Bank protesting against the government for not doing anything to protect them from the Israelis. The Jordanian authorities used force to put down the demonstrations.

There was a lot of tension between the Palestinian community and the Jordanian government, between Jordan and Syria, Jordan and Egypt, and Jordan and Israel. I remember one of the ways the Jordanian government dealt with it was to kind of taunt the Egyptians for not doing more to confront Israel. In the Jordanian media there would be lots of criticism of the Egyptians. I think this was part of wider Arab world pressures on Nasser that prodded him to break the status quo in the Sinai, a development which led to the June 1967 war. I knew that relations had gotten very bad between us and Egypt. When our official contacts were broken off in Egypt in June '67, we sensed that there was a war coming. We organized an evacuation of our dependents and non-essential personnel before the June '67 war began. And we also believed that the Arabs would get beaten by the Israelis if there was a war.

Of course, being in the consular section I was only on the outskirts of any political discussions, but I read some of the traffic and talked to people, so I was kind of aware of what was going on. I was aware of the fact that US relations were in a very bad state with Egypt, and our two embassies were not talking to one another. I asked the chief of the political section if there would be any problem if I called on the Egyptian consul. I may have checked with the DCM. The answer was positive. I was able to call on the Egyptian in late May 1967 to see what they were thinking about the situation. I took April Glaspie with me. We went together and called on the Egyptian consul. I had met him socially and as acting chief of the consular section I'd called on other consuls, so this was my excuse. I remember him assuring me that they knew war was coming, and they would win. I felt a tragic sense of the inevitability of what was going to happen.

One of the reasons why the consular work sometimes seemed irrelevant to what the rest of the embassy did was because we were in a separate building, and we were very much the poor relations. When the War began on June 5th, I remember packing up all the files, the sensitive files, in a big box and carrying them across the parking lot as the Israeli jets were swooping over to attack the Amman airport. We went through quite a tense period during the war. As a young Arabist friend, April spent some time at my house. We listened together to the broadcast from radio Cairo and all the talk about how the Arabs were knocking the Israeli air force out of the sky. Meanwhile, we saw the Israeli air force over Amman. We had evidence of our own eyes that it wasn't going very well for the Arabs.

Afterwards, with Jordan having been, in effect, cleft in two, we were very worried about the reaction of the Palestinians. In addition to the Palestinians already in and just outside Amman, Palestinian refugees were streaming up from the Jordan valley from where a lot of them had been pushed out of big camps in Jericho on the west side of the Jordan River. We had reports they were coming to Amman where there were other refugee camps. We knew it would be a very tense situation. The embassy was given very good protection by the Jordanian army, but we were worried about the wider American community. We organized another evacuation, this time for those people who had been left behind and who hadn't taken advantage of the permissive commercial aircraft evacuation earlier. My job in the consular section was to gather and organize temporary shelter for American citizens for this evacuation. It became apparent that once that was done there wouldn't be anything for me to do because three-quarters of my consular clients were now under occupation. The bridges were cut, and they couldn't come up to Amman.

The decision was made to transfer me to Jerusalem, where we had to establish a visa office. We had not had a visa office in Jerusalem since 1949, only passport and US citizen protection services. If you lived in West Jerusalem, you went down to Tel Aviv to get a visa. In East Jerusalem or the West Bank, you came up to Amman. So I would be sent down to Jerusalem to organize a visa office.

In the meantime I was helping with the evacuations out of Amman. After taking care of the last of the evacuees on the C-130 American C-130 flights with markings of the International Red Cross, I got on as well. We were evacuated via Tehran, and eventually to Athens where I hooked up with my wife, who had been evacuated earlier by commercial means with the rest of the civilians. Everybody else who arrived seemed to be met by somebody. My wife had taken advantage of being in Greece and was off traveling in the Greek countryside. She didn't realize that I was arriving, so there were a few lonely days before our expected reunion

Q: I'd like to cut it off at this point, but a couple questions before we stop. Who was our ambassador in Amman at that time?

MACK: Findley Burns.

Q: How did he operate?

MACK: Well, Findley Burns had been sent out there because, of his administrative skills more than anything else. He took a pretty narrow view of his job which was to maintain official contacts with the King and other top leaders. On the other hand, he didn't have the personality for really establishing rapport with the King. I would have to say he did not have a close relationship, or certainly not a warm relationship. He was a person of a real skill and talent, brains, but he hadn't managed to establish much rapport. I don't know whether this made any difference or not. There was nearly a Greek tragedy about what was taking place and Jordan being pulled into this war. But certainly Burns was not in a position to exercise much in the way of counter-influence.

Q: Which essentially was to say stay out of it.

MACK: Yes, we were trying to tell Jordan, to stay out. The King for whatever reason wasn't listening to us. I certainly wouldn't lay it all on his relationship with the American ambassador, which was at most a small part of it. But I don't think Burns was able to have much effect in that regard. Burns was not the right personality for establishing rapport with the Jordanians.

Q: What was the impression at that time of King Hussein? Let's say before the war and when it happened when Jordan went in.

MACK: He seemed very likeable, very down to earth, very much a king of the people. I remember bumping into him on a dance floor, for example. We felt it was a happy little kingdom, and we were probably misled. I'm sure we were overlooking the internal problems. We felt that Jordan seemed very promising compared to Syria, which seemed under such a repressive regime, or to Egypt with its grinding poverty that seemed to offer no kind of hope for progress. It seemed very tragic that Jordan was drawn into this conflict.

Q: Then we'll pick this up the next time. And I like to put on the end so you were going from Athens to Jerusalem, and there I'd like to talk to you about your first real look at Israel. And also explore a bit being now pretty much a full blown Arabist, the Arabist view of Israel, which is also a point of controversy. We'll pick it up then. That was excellent.

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Today is the 10th of November, 1995, with David Mack. We've got you in Athens with your wife, this is when?

MACK: This is after the June 1967 war, and a decision was reached that it was pointless for me to remain in Amman at that point since about three-quarters or four-fifths of the people I was dealing with were under the occupation of the Israeli forces in the West Bank or East Jerusalem.

Q: So what did Personnel of the State Department in all its wisdom decide to do with you?

MACK: Well, Personnel reached the conclusion that after a brief vacation I should go back to Amman, pack up, and be transferred to Jerusalem where we had a consulate general, and it would be my mission to reopen a visa office in Jerusalem. The visa office in Jerusalem was closed after the Arab-Israeli war of 1948-1949. The office was closed and visa applicants either had to come up to embassy in Amman, Jordan or go down to the embassy in Tel Aviv, Israel. After a period of Israeli occupation, the Department was besieged by request from the relatives of Palestinians, and Palestinian Americans living in Jerusalem and in the West Bank, and also, of course, letters from their Congressmen asking us to do something to help these people. Their numbers were 1500 to 2000, and the decision was taken to open a visa office in Jerusalem to take care of their needs.

When I arrived in Jerusalem I could see that the needs were pretty great because the consulate was besieged by huge crowds of Palestinians who were seeking some kind of word regarding their visa applications. There had been a breakdown of mail delivery to the Arab population, and they were feeling very cut off. Some of them had gotten word from relatives in the US that they should make their way down to the consulate general where they would be able to have their visas taken care of.

In consultation with the consul general at that time, who was Stephen Palmer, it was decided that we should open the visa office and make it available to people without regard to whether they came from East Jerusalem or West Jerusalem. In other words, this would also be an office that would care for the needs of the people in West Jerusalem, most of whom were Jewish. This was consistent with the U.S. Government policy that recognized that Jerusalem was and should remain a united city. The consulate general was always a single consulate general to the city of Jerusalem. It simply had offices on both sides of the former cease-fire line between Jordan and Israel, but the offices were under the direction of the consul general for both sides, and members of the consulate general would move back and forth as their duties required. From the time of the 1948 war, we had questioned the occupation of Jerusalem by the Jordanians and by the Israelis, and we did not accept that the status of Jerusalem could be determined by unilateral acts. It had always been U.S. government policy that the city of Jerusalem should be a united city, and that this was the goal that we should strive for. The question of sovereignty was being left for negotiations between the Israelis and the Arabs.

And so consistent with that, we opened the visa office and dealt with the public without discrimination. I take it as a matter of some pride that the visa office was one of the first to be opened by any government to the citizens of both sides of Jerusalem. We recruited personnel who spoke not only Arabic and English, but Hebrew. This meant Israeli Arabs, for example, from Haifa or from Nazareth, and it also meant Israeli Jews who had emigrated to Israel from countries such as Iraq and who were native speakers of Arabic. So it was a genuinely unified office, and remains to this day one of the few genuinely unified operations in the city of Jerusalem. Although most of our clients, at least initially, were from the West Bank villages as well as East Jerusalem, you would also see orthodox Jews as well as secular Israelis sitting in the waiting room. The locally hired Arabs and Israelis worked together with the Americans as a team.

Q: Staying with the visa side for a bit, did you get a feel for the spread of Palestinians in the United States. Usually if you're the visa officer, you get a feel for where people go and the types of things they end up doing.

MACK: Well, of course, I had already been doing this work in Amman, Jordan. I had already become quite familiar with what you might call the Palestinian diaspora in the United States. There were large concentrations of Palestinians in New Jersey, in Michigan, in California. It was obvious that many of the Palestinian immigrants to the United States, even those who had very little formal education and may not have spoken English when they arrived, soon managed to become quite successful, mostly in private sector business activities in the United States. As people became successful they would petition to have their close family members join them. This was a big escalation in the flow of people between the United States and both Israel and Palestinian areas, the West Bank.

Q: What was the atmosphere? This is really right after the capture of the West Bank by the Israeli forces. What was the political atmosphere, both in the West Bank and in Israel - the Arab and Israeli side?

MACK: There was a great deal of tension, of course. There was a feeling of euphoria initially on the Israeli side. There was a feeling of great bitterness and frustration on the Arab side. Initially, the announced policy of the Israeli government had been that they were prepared to give back the occupied territories, although there was some imprecision about exactly which territories, and whether it would include East Jerusalem. But as the situation hardened between the Arab states and Israel, it became quite clear that most Israelis intended to stay for a good long time. There was not, initially at least, a strong peace movement in Israel. The Arabs for their part tended to respond rather inflexibly, simply waiting for the UN Security Council Resolutions to be implemented, as if this was somehow an automatic process that would take part. The Israelis were obviously never prepared to see that happen, nor was the U.S. Government. It was our view that the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions would require direct talks and negotiations. Unfortunately, at that point the Arab states were unprepared to enter into such negotiations and there was no Palestinian representative organization that was prepared to do that either. There was a stalemate, and this was frustrating to some far-sighted Israelis, but to many other Israelis they were perfectly content that it remained that way.

Let me jump back for a minute to your extremely good question about the Palestinians in the United States. It was clear that Palestinians, who had immigrated to the United States, as was true also in an early time for many of the Jews in the United States from Eastern Europe and Russia, assimilated quite well in American society. For example, as I would examine the papers for immigration and look into the financial records of a sponsor who was petitioning for his brother to come to the United States, I would get a sense of how they were doing economically. Often after only five to ten years they would have established themselves sufficiently so that they could actually sponsor a relative.

I remember one visa sponsor named Abe Gold, who lived in New York City. That was his American name. When I asked the intending immigrant about the sponsor, they knew him as Ibrahim Dahaby, which is a very proper Palestinian name and it had been literally translated into English as Abraham Gold, or Abe Gold as he called himself in his New York business activities. So he had assimilated to the point where he not only appeared to be an American, but he appeared to be a New Yorker.

Q: And not only that but he appeared to be an American Jew because that's a quintessential an American Jewish name.

MACK: That's right. This was a particularly interesting example of the degree to which Palestinians were assimilating rapidly and doing quite well actually in the United States.

Q: A reverse of this, had the settler movement from the religious right in Israel begun at all during the time you were there?

MACK: I don't recall that it had. I do not recall that settlements had been established. There was discussion of settlements beginning but this was an Israeli Labor government. Their idea of settlements was much more in terms of security outposts in the Jordan Valley which would have essentially a security function as providing eyes and ears for the Israeli armed forces. It was very different from the ideologically motivated settlements that grew up later in major Palestinian population centers in the hills of what some Israelis were starting to call Judah and Samaria, the historical place names from Biblical times.

Q: You were in Jerusalem from when to when?

MACK: I was in Jerusalem from August of 1967 through May of 1968.

Q: What was your impression of the Israeli rule in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem?

MACK: Well, occupations are never pretty. Although the Israelis did try to make their military presence fairly low-key and not overly visible, they were prepared, to use military force whenever they felt that it was necessary for their security. One of the things that started happening were reprisal demolitions of Arab houses if a family member was accused of a terrorist act, and early on there were beginning to be some acts of terrorism. While we were there, there was a bombing in a supermarket in West Jerusalem, in the Jewish side of the city. You already had incidents like this beginning, and the typical Israeli response was not only to try to apprehend and arrest the perpetrator, but also to demolish the house of family members. This was a way of trying to bring it home to the Palestinian community that it was not in their interest to let these things happen. There was a lack of solidarity within the Palestinian community, which had been under Jordanian occupation since 1948, and before that under British occupation, and before that under the Ottomans. They had very, very weak internal structures. So there was no sort of organized and coordinated resistance to the Israelis. That had not begun while I was there. But as I say, there were low level and individual sporadic acts of terrorism as a means of protest.

Q: Were there many communications of people going across the line between Jordan and the West Bank?

MACK: Well, very few during this period of time. During most of the time I was there the bridges were cut. I can't remember the point at which they began restoring traffic across the bridges, but it was very gradual and there were no large scale movements of people across the Jordan River while I was there.

Q: How did the consulate deal - in the first place how did Stephen Palmer operate as Consul General? I think this would be a very tricky time.

MACK: Yes, and he tried to meet with Israeli municipal officials. They tended in most cases to hold the consuls in Jerusalem at arm's length. Early on, the Israelis would have preferred that consulates be changed into embassies recognizing their historic rights to Jerusalem as their capital. With a couple of minor exceptions, Central American countries, this had not been done and the consuls tended to be viewed as being a little bit alien. The Israelis saw them as remnants of the Ottoman Empire, people who thought they had special privileges, and people who were not dealing directly with the Israeli state, but only with municipal authorities. The reaction of the municipal authorities was to deal very little with the consuls. Arab dignitaries, on the other hand, were obviously very keen to deal with the consuls general of the various countries including the American consul general. Consul General Palmer spent a great deal of time visiting Arab dignitaries. When he had functions at his residence, which was on the western side of the city where it still is, I think he would invite Palestinians. Sometimes a few of them would come. Non-official Israelis would come; very few Israeli officials would come to his home. Relations seemed to be touchy.

I didn't do much political work. On the basis of contacts I made with Palestinian mayors and other Palestinian dignitaries, I would write the occasional report for the political officers in the consulate general which they generally seemed to welcome. Jerusalem was a place that had a great hold on people's emotions, and you could tell that both sides felt very, very emotional about it. It was an exciting time to be there. It was also a time that was fairly stressful because the bombings were beginning, and there was a feeling you could never make either side happy. My wife and I had both Israeli and Arab friends. Most of them were not very keen on mixing. There were a few Israelis who wanted to do so and were energetic about trying to mix with Arabs. However, they were rare exceptions, and the Palestinians did tend to shun them and make it difficult for them to develop social or cultural relationships.

My Jerusalem assignment was for less than a year, and I had already been assigned into Arabic training in Beirut. Toward the end of my time I switched places with another one of the vice consuls, and I did protection work while he did visa work. While doing protection work I got more into the Israeli side of the town, both visiting Israeli authorities including jails, etc. I also intervened in the cases of American Jews who fell afoul of the law. I remember one particular case where a couple of young American Jews were swept up in a seizure of hashish. The drug dealers on both sides seemed to feel less constraint than other Israelis and Palestinians in dealing with one another. I remember that incident very well, and visiting and trying to assist the American Jews who had gotten into this problem.

Q: Did you get any cases of American Palestinians caught up in arrests?

MACK: Yes. A number of cases of Palestinian Americans arrested. One case that I remember quite well was a reprisal bombing of a Palestinian American's home. It was demolished by the Israeli forces in reprisal for an alleged terrorist act by a close relative of his. The Palestinian brought a case, sought the good offices of the American government to support his claim for compensation. I remember, as I was told I should do, I made fairly energetic representations on his behalf. This came to the attention of the American ambassador, or the American embassy at least in Tel Aviv. The Foreign Ministry wondered why we were pushing this case quite so hard and named me by name as somebody who was maybe a little bit too eager in pressing the case. But to the credit of our embassy in Tel Aviv they said this was an entirely appropriate function for an American consular officer.

Q: What was the relation as you saw it with the embassy? Who was the ambassador? This Jerusalem-Tel Aviv relationship has sometimes been excellent but often strained.

MACK: Yes. The relationship was not particularly good at that time. Our ambassador in Tel Aviv was Walworth Barbour, who had been there for a long time. He had become a fixture of Israeli-U.S. relations. Both his political assessments and those of the U.S. military attachï¿½ in Tel Aviv were often at sharp variance [with reports from Jerusalem].

Q: ...of the reports from Tel Aviv at variance with what you all were observing I think.

MACK: Well, yes. Although I was not doing political work and don't in any sense have a detailed memory of what the major disagreements were, there was a tendency on the part of the embassy in Tel Aviv to assume that because there had been no organized resistance to the Israeli occupation the U.S. Government could be fairly comfortable with the course of developments. This was not the view of the Jerusalem consulate general, which felt that there was a simmering discontent which would eventually boil over if there was not progress toward resolving the problems of the occupation.

Q: Was there any us versus them spirit between the officers in the consulate in Jerusalem and in Tel Aviv?

MACK: There was some of that. I'm not sure where the responsibility for it lay. There was a tendency on the part of people in the consulate general to assume that the embassy in Tel Aviv was inclined to parrot what they were getting from the Israelis, and too readily accept Israeli assurances that they knew how to deal with this situation. At the same time, I'm sure that the people at the embassy in Tel Aviv felt that we were unduly influenced by our Palestinian contacts. It was true that while we had both Israeli and Palestinian contacts, there was relatively little official dialogue between the consulate general and the Israeli government. It's fair to say that sometimes people at the consulate general would get bogged down in details of Palestinian life which were interesting and colorful, but perhaps were not really as significant as we felt at the time.

Jerusalem is a fascinating city, and it's easy for people to focus on the frictions within communities. Rivalries of the different Arab-Christian groups were one of the things that we reported on extensively from Jerusalem. I'm not sure how important that was in the long-range of history, but it was certainly fascinating. Similarly, the problems between secular and religious Jews in Jerusalem were a major issue of focus. People in Jerusalem tend to get pretty passionate, and the passions don't always run on Arab-Israeli lines. More often than not the passions were internal to the communities when I was there. Even though the physical barriers in the city had broken down, there really remained two very separate communities, a Palestinian community and a Jewish community. The consulate general really made efforts to try to bring people together from both communities, and they found resistance from both communities to that.

Q: Theodore-Teddy Kollek was...

MACK: Teddy Kollek was the mayor, and recognized as a very, very skillful conciliator and leader.

Q: Was there much contact with him with the consulate would you say at that point?

MACK: Yes. I mean he was more open than some of the people who worked for him in terms of seeing people from the consulate. I can't honestly remember whether he would come to the consul general's house for a Fourth of July reception, for example. I think he probably would have not done that on principle. There were some differences of principle between us and the Israelis at the time.

Q: Was there a problem for you with American Jews coming over? Now the Wailing Wall was open, things of great religious significance, and I would think that this could arouse tensions with the Palestinian community.

MACK: I don't remember that that had become a serious problem at that point. The Israelis had proceeded quite rapidly to demolish various structures that had grown up in order to keep easy access to the western wall, and as a result, there were huge numbers of people who were coming there to worship, both Israelis and tourists. I don't recall that there were any serious problems. There were more problems involved with both Israelis and tourists trying one way or another to get onto the temple mount, which at least was controversial among Jews as to whether that was an appropriate thing to do. And there were controversies about that.

Q: Have we covered pretty much...

MACK: I think so. I might just mention a personal thing. During this period of time my wife, who had suspended her graduate work to come get married to me, resumed plans to do a doctoral thesis. That involved her leaving for three months during my assignment of roughly nine months. She went to Rome to do research for her doctoral dissertation. I remember that other personnel in the consulate general were sure that this meant we were going our separate ways permanently. But my wife did this at a number of succeeding posts, as well.

Q: What was her field?

MACK: Her field was Italian Renaissance Art History. So obviously she couldn't pursue that very actively while she was in the Middle East with me.

Q: So you left there in...

MACK: Yes, June of '68.

Q: And you went where?

MACK: To Beirut. I had been assigned into language training in Beirut back when I was in Jordan. In effect, I finished out the second year of my assignment to Jordan in Jerusalem. I think that's the way the Personnel people looked at it. So I went to Beirut on schedule for intensive Arabic language training. In my case, that did not mean the full two-year program, since I'd had a fair amount of Arabic previously. In Beirut I was able to start at a fairly advanced level.

Q: You were in Beirut at the language school from when to when?

MACK: The academic year, let's say August of 1968 to June of 1969.

Q: Could you describe the school a bit? How the training was done and the setting?

MACK: We had a small language unit in the former U.S. embassy building, the one that was subsequently destroyed by a truck bomb much later. But the Foreign Service Institute field school was located on about the fourth floor, as I recall, of this big office building. We mixed as well as we could with Lebanese trying to use our Arabic as we learned it, but unfortunately many Lebanese speak English, so it wasn't ideal. But the program had very good teachers who tended to be either Lebanese or Palestinians who had been living in Lebanon. It was a very intensive program, a very tough program, and very much occupied our time. We were not integrated into the embassy to any great extent, although we took our rotation as duty officers at the embassy. We got to know the ambassador and other embassy officers, but we were clearly there to study the language. We could also take classes in politics, etc., at the American University in Beirut, which I did for a while. We could travel around the country. You were still able to travel to most parts of Lebanon, although the extreme southern part at that point was under the control of Palestinians and not really a safe place for American officials.

While in Beirut I really got into the major political controversies of the Arab world. Our classroom conversations usually focused on political issues. Our teachers, I think, were keen to see that we not only learned Arabic, but that we gained understanding of the Arab perspective of issues. And to the extent that there's any truth about the Arabist myth, there is some truth to the fact that you tend to develop a sense of commitment to learning the language and understanding the human side of Arabs and why it is that they take the political positions they do. Obviously you're interested in their culture, as well as their political attitudes.

I think most of us coming out of the school felt that U.S. national interests were often ignored because of the very strong relationship between the U.S. Government and the Israeli government, and the great deal of political influence that Israel could exercise on U.S. domestic politics through the American-Jewish community. That's not to say that some of the students did not remain pro-Israeli in their views. Most of us, myself included, felt great impatience that the Arabs were so reluctant to enter into direct talks with the Israelis. I argued at great length with my teachers that the Arabs made a terrible mistake in dealing the way they did with the Israelis because the Israelis tended to come together, and to have a very great solidarity when faced with Arab military threats or the Arab economic boycott. But based on my own impressions in previous assignments, and particularly when I was in Jerusalem, the Israelis, if offered a possibility of peaceful relationships with their neighbors, would not only take the offer but would probably be inclined to quarrel among themselves and end up being a lot less awesome as an enemy than the Arabs assumed. And the idea of the Israelis dominating the Middle East seemed to me to be very unlikely. I didn't feel that they had that kind of economic base or those kinds of political and cultural abilities. A few Arabists become very enthusiastic in a kind of a naive way about the Arab world. Most Arabists, as is true of most American diplomats who served in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, tend to view both Arabs and Israeli attitudes with a great deal of skepticism. As one of my colleagues put it, he felt he was becoming an anti-Semite in the broadest possible sense, including antipathy to both Arabs and Jews. However, we did try to maintain a sympathetic understanding for the attitudes of both sides.

Q: Here you were concentrating on Arabic, you have to identify to a certain point, you make a commitment to this. And the Arabs have been losing rather steadily and rather badly, and you're getting involved with a loser. Did that make any impression with you at all?

MACK: I don't think that was it so much. Most people who had gone into Arabic did so because they felt that over time the Arab states were going to become stronger. Not that they would be able to eliminate Israel, as some of the extremist Arabs said they wanted to do, but that they would certainly become stronger societies, more economically prosperous, and would have a greater weight in world politics. And I think the reason why most of us were prepared to spend as much time as we did learning the language is because we felt that these countries were going to be more important in the future than they are now. I don't really think there was a feeling that we were being identified with people who were losers and being picked on so much as a feeling of real concern that the U.S. Government was going to alienate permanently countries that would be in a position to harm U.S. interests unless we found some common ground with them.

Q: On the more practical side, again because I'm trying to capture the spirit of an Arabist of your generation, what were the career considerations? Not just you, but the others. You'd sit around and everybody sort of keeps a figure on their number where they're going to go.

MACK: Well, mind you, after the June 1967 war the career considerations looked pretty bleak. Our diplomatic relations had been ruptured in roughly half the states of the Arab world.

Q: We're talking about the career considerations, they were looking bleak.

MACK: As I say, with diplomatic relations broken in roughly half the states, there were no U.S. diplomats present in Baghdad, Damascus, and a couple of other places. There was a U.S. Interests Section in Cairo, but it was very small. So as a result I guess we were all focused on the near term. Would we have jobs as Arabists at the end of this very tough course of training? And there was a certain amount of competition among the students to scramble for available jobs. In the end I think everybody got placed in an appropriate job. This was a period when to be an Arabist you had to have a fair amount of confidence that things were going to get better. If they had not, the career opportunities would have been very, very limited.

Q: Who were some of the people with you taking it about the same time, do you remember?

MACK: People were already there when I arrived, because many people had been doing the full two-year program. People like George Lumsden, Nicholas Murphy, Stephen Buck, David Ransom and his wife Marjorie, both of whom were studying Arabic. She had been in the U.S. Information Agency and was able to return later. Arthur Houghton was there and a number of other officers including officers from U.S. Information Agency. I was very close to Arthur Houghton and David Ransom, both of whom arrived at roughly the time I did, both of whom having had a fair amount of Arabic. The three of us were quite close. David Ransom is still in the Service, he's our ambassador in Bahrain, his wife Marjorie is Deputy Chief of Mission in Damascus. Arthur Houghton retired fairly early and has gone on to other careers since then. Stephen Buck was the person to whom I was closest probably. We had known each other back in college, and had been in the FS-100 class together. We shared one Arabic class, and I remember how ill prepared he was for most of the classes because Steve was spending most of his time as a young bachelor in the company of a young Lebanese girl, whom he later married. In fact, I was best man at their wedding in Lebanon, and we still see each other periodically here in Washington. It was a time when people did develop a close bond because of the shared experience of studying Arabic together, the shared career concerns, and concerns about the future of the Arab world, and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Q: Looking ahead a bit did you find that you were able to call on friends in other Arabic embassies at various times in your career, and say, give me the real story of what's happening here or there?

MACK: For me developing advanced Arabic skills made the difference between having a successful career, and one that I would have found very disappointing. I came out of the course with a 4-4+ in Arabic...

Q: ...which is very high.

MACK: And I'd done so after having been there for only 10 months. I was able to go off to other assignments where the Arabic was absolutely essential. In my next post, I was the interpreter for our ambassador. Aside from being able to gain information from Arab contacts, both other Arab diplomats, Arab businessmen, and Arab university professors I was able to convey very effectively U.S. Government policies in a language that had a direct and immediate impact. And, frankly, I had a lot more fun. I had reached the level where even people who had good English, although maybe they hadn't had university studies in the United States, would prefer to speak Arabic with me because my Arabic was at a level where that seemed to be the most sensible thing to do. So this made life a lot better and a lot more enjoyable for me certainly.

Q: What about the people you went to train with, the Arabic network? These are in large terms but later in your career were you able to tap the various people whom you've mentioned and others.

MACK: Among diplomats who have taken the trouble to learn a language there's kind of an immediate bond. It's easy to strike rapport with somebody, even people who are much senior to you, and have been in the Service for 20 years, or 15 years. There was an immediate rapport based upon having taken the trouble to learn a hard language and gotten into the culture of the area. And that's made a big difference. I've always taken an interest in the training of younger Arabists. In a subsequent post, after the Arabic language school had been moved to Tunis, I was the Deputy Chief of Mission and I worked very hard to make sure that the Arabic language school was a full part of the mission and was given all the necessary support. I keep meeting people from that period. U.S. military officers who were studying Arabic there at that time remember me with a lot of appreciation for that. So there was this kind of brotherhood, and sisterhood. Later on we began to train women in Arabic. At the time I went to the school we were not training women in Arabic, and I think it was a mistake. I know for a fact that April Glaspie was kept out of the school on one assignment in part because there was skepticism about the desirability of women diplomats in the Arab world. That has been changed.

Q: Should we stop here because I know you're under a time pressure. I just want to put on the end we will pick up. You have left Beirut in 1969 and where you go after that.

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Today is the 12th of December, 1995. David, 1969, where to?

MACK: I arrived in Tripoli, Libya, in the latter part of July, as I recall, around the 20th of the month. I was coming to what was then a very large American embassy, coupled with a very large U.S. military presence at Wheelus Air Force Base next door. The government in Libya was a very traditional monarchy. The constituents of King Idris were basically his tribal connections in Cyrenaica in eastern Libya along with connections that had been formed in later years with leading families in Tripolitania in western Libya. The members of the Idris government were by and large older people. At that time, I was 29 years old, and they seemed ancient to me. Many of them were not very well educated.

Q: There had not been a tradition of educating Libyans in Rome prior to World War II?

MACK: The Italians were certainly the worst of all the European colonialists in terms of preparing the people of the colonized nations for independence. It had been very much the Italian theory that they would populate Libya with Italians. It would become Italy's fourth shore, and provide an agriculture hinterland for Italy, if you will. It was a place to which there could be a substantial immigration, as there was, of generally poor Italians from southern Italy. There was a very large Italian community still present. Remember that even after the end of World War II, at the end of Italy's empire, the 1952 agreement by which Libya obtained independence provided very substantial concessions for the Italian residents. They had a lot of privileges that other foreigners did not enjoy. They continued to have quite a strong role in Libyan economy up to the time that I arrived. Our own embassy also seemed to me to be fairly hide-bound in many regards. It was, large with lots of very senior people. I was a mere second secretary.

Q: Your position was what?

MACK: I was a second secretary in the political section, but my major responsibility was to be the American interpreter for the ambassador. However, soon after I arrived it was made clear that I was only one of several interpreters, because there were also two locally hired Palestinians who did interpreting chores. I had a brief overlap with my predecessor. Those were the days when you still occasionally had overlaps. He explained to me that the ambassador from time to time might prefer to have one of the Palestinians as his interpreter and go with him to meetings rather than me. This was a matter of some discouragement. I was beginning to feel that I would never break into and be able to do meaningful work in a place where the senior people in our embassy seemed to have all the important ties with senior people in the government. It wasn't even clear that I was going to be accompanying the ambassador to key meetings.

Q: Just a couple of things. In the first place, you were in Libya from when to when?

MACK: I was in Libya from July 1969 to June 1972.

Q: And who was the ambassador?

MACK: I arrived during an interim between ambassadors. David Newsom had left and returned to Washington to become Assistant Secretary for African Affairs. The newly appointed ambassador, Joseph Palmer II, was coming from having been Director General of the Foreign Service to what most people regarded as his final embassy. He was a very senior officer at that point.

Q: Libya was obviously considered somewhat important within the Foreign Service.

MACK: It was. Libya at that time was in the Bureau of African Affairs. And in the Bureau of African Affairs the three most important countries at that point were probably South Africa, Algeria and Libya. Libya because of its air base plus its very large and rapidly growing oil production. A lot of the oil was extracted under concessions to U.S. companies and a fair amount actually went to the United States, and certainly a lot of profits were repatriated to the United States. Libya was an important country, and a rather attractive country in some respects because it had supposedly stable politics. You had not only the embassy in Tripoli, you had a large branch of the embassy in Benghazi. Benghazi was the second capital, and the Libyans were at that point building a third capital at Al-Baidhah up in the mountains. That was the home area from which King Idris had come, and where he had his most loyal tribal constituents. That was also a particularly beautiful area with a nice climate, ancient Greek ruins, and it seemed to me like an entirely nice place to have a capital. Some people, however, considered it to be really in the sticks. This included most Libyans, particularly the Tripolitanians, who thought this was a backward, not a very cosmopolitan part of the country.

Libya was really an odd combination of disparate parts, and didn't have much unity to speak of. There was mostly tribal and traditional Cyrenaica, with strong religious influences, speaking an Arabic dialect that was much more akin to standard eastern Arabic. Then you had Tripolitania, which was more urbanized with a greater degree of education, even though under the Italians they did not receive much. I believe at independence they had something like three university graduates. I'm probably off on that, but it was very low. The Italians had put in a lot of nice physical infrastructure. Tripoli was a very attractive city, as laid out by the Italians. The Italians had also built many roads, and even railroads, but they clearly had not done much to bring the people up so that they could in any way participate in running their own affairs. It showed in the sense that Libyans tended to have an inferiority complex toward other people and to resent outsiders. There was a third part of Libya in the south called Fezzan, which was much more Saharan, much more akin to Berber societies in the Sahara. All told, it was not an easy and natural national entity.

As I noted I was taken in charge by my predecessor, who was Roscoe Suddarth. Rocky was an extremely talented, highly regarded young Foreign Service officer. In fact, I was told I would have an extremely difficult act to follow, that he was almost too perfect as a Foreign Service officer. I remember colleagues in Beirut telling me those things. And he certainly did his best to get me started, introducing me around. For example, he took me to the palaces to call on, people in the diwan protocol sections of the palaces for the King and the Crown Prince. He taught me proper protocol in the royal presence, and how one backs out of the room at the end of a meeting, letting the ambassador be the last one out. It was all very interesting arcane information, which turned out to be totally irrelevant for what I eventually did.

The first six weeks were outwardly very uneventful. Most of the prominent Libyan political leaders, including King Idris and the Crown Prince, were outside of the country taking vacations. Many of our senior embassy officers also were taking some vacation. They gradually began trickling back in late August, and I was briefed on a lot of arcane issues, the relationship between the embassy and Wheelus Air Force Base, for example. Part of my job seemed to involve how to go about dealing with requests from prominent Libyans for admission to the Wheelus Air Force Base hospital, and lots of things of that nature.

Q: But overall what was the feeling towards the stability and the personality of King Idris that you were getting during this time?

MACK: King Idris had the reputation of having been a highly regarded figure, a fatherly figure, but increasingly remote from the process of governing, completely uninterested in governing, much more interested in the here-after, and having not a very high regard for the Libyan people. His government had the reputation for being incredibly corrupt. This was the reputation of the formal structure, cabinet members, but also the informal structure of leading tribal sheikhs who were very important in the affairs of Libya. The departing ambassador, David Newsom, had very gently and discreetly raised issues of corruption during his parting calls. But basically relations between the United States and Libya were considered quite good, and there was a lot of concern that there might be political changes that would impact unfavorably on U.S. interests. There was an understanding that there would very possibly be a coup, a military coup. It had almost become the accepted wisdom that there would probably be a military coup, led by senior army colonels, and I guess there was a brigadier or two at the top of the hierarchy. These senior officers were very well connected, of course, with people like the Crown Prince, and there was a feeling that there would be basic continuity. There would be a military coup, a lot of the old tribal leaders would be tossed out and their relatives in the army would take charge. There was concern that it take place smoothly, and there was not a lot of concern that when it happened it would necessarily impact badly on U.S. relations. The British also had bases there, in their case in the eastern part of the country, in Cyrenaica near Tobruk. And, of course, the international oil companies, predominantly American oil companies, had these major economic interests in the country.

I was at that time still staying with my wife in a temporary apartment adjacent to the embassy, which was very close to the Royal Palace in Tripoli. I am a light sleeper, and early in the morning of September 1st, 1969, I was awakened by the sound of gun fire. I walked out to investigate and saw the armored cars. At that time there were no tanks in the Libyan military inventory. Seeing armored cars drawn up in the area around the palace, I rushed back to first of all call the ambassador, and he instructed me to call Wheelus Air Force Base, which I did, and other personnel, who gradually assembled in the embassy. The Libyan revolution was on. Shortly thereafter there was a curfew in this interim period of extreme confusion following the revolution. We had a chargï¿½ d'affaires, James Blake, now also retired from the Service. My immediate boss was the head of the political section, Holsey Handyside. Both went on to be ambassadors later - Handyside in Mauritania, and Blake in Iceland - and they're both still living here in the Washington area. They were both tough, rather assertive, hard-charging Foreign Service officers.

Q: I came into the Foreign Service with Handyside. Relaxation is not a word that would ever apply to Holsey.

MACK: Handyside could be faulted by micromanagement, but he was always very supportive of me. He did seem to recognize that I had special things to bring to the job in terms of my Arabic language abilities, so he tended to tell me what my sphere was and let me do my thing. I had only the most distant kind of relationship with the chargï¿½ at that point. We hadn't really gotten to know each other at all well before September 1st, only he had been very kind and had pleasant words when I met him and had me to his house, along with my wife.

My wife and I were right there in the center of action during the Libyan revolution, since our temporary apartment was in the adjacent building. In fact, there was a courtyard connecting our building with the embassy and we used that courtyard for people to pass back and forth between embassy offices and temporary bunking accommodations where they would stay during this period of several days in which there was gunfire around, etc. I didn't go back to the apartment that morning after having gotten up, it was much too exciting. I was glued to the radio listening to the various communiquï¿½s coming out from something called the Revolutionary Command Council, and we were all trying to figure out what these so-called free officers were up to. This language of free officers and a revolutionary command council was very reminiscent of Nasser's Egypt.

Q: Did you start rummaging through your files because of Egypt's Lieutenant Colonels and the like?

MACK: Well, there was a lot of speculation that this had been the long awaited coup, and people were talking about the colonel who might well be behind this. But the members of the Revolutionary Command Council remained anonymous, in most cases they remained anonymous until the subsequent January when the names were finally announced. There were a lot of misunderstandings and false assumptions about what was taking place. I remember the Central Intelligence Agency came out not too long thereafter with a list of people that were "very probably" in this Revolutionary Command Council, I think those were the words the CIA used. None of them had the slightest thing to do with Revolutionary Command Council. The U.S. Government was very prepared for a military coup, but what happened was a revolution, a very fundamental change in Libyan politics. As it turned out, the new leadership was composed of men who were first of all, about two generations younger than the old leadership. Secondly, they were much better educated in a technical sense, and quite sophisticated about the uses of modern communications, for example. Third, they were for the most part from lesser tribes or very unimportant tribal backgrounds. They didn't have the kind of connections that were thought to be absolutely necessary for success in Libyan politics. They were people who had been brought up to feel they had little stake in the Libyan political system. Of course, they had grown listening to Radio Cairo and felt an attachment to a larger Arab nation, and a great sense of resentment against the United States for our alleged help and support of Israel and its treacherous attacks on the Arabs, etc.

Anyway, at some point during the first day a few Land Rovers with Libyan soldiers came to our embassy. We were told by a sergeant who seemed to be in charge that he wanted to talk to us. I went down with Handyside. The Libyan introduced himself as Sergeant Mohammed, and said that the Revolutionary Command Council wanted the U.S. chargï¿½ d'affaires to come to the radio station where they were meeting, and they would explain what they were trying to accomplish, etc. He was polite, even deferential, and trying to be reassuring. He had already collected the chargï¿½s d'affaires of France and Great Britain. At this time there were no ambassadors from the major powers in town, as it was still too early for ambassadors to be back from their vacations. When Handy and I consulted with the charge, there was some skepticism on the part of my boss, but it was decided we'd go along with them. So the chargï¿½ and I piled into one of the cars, along with Sergeant Mohammed, and we were led to the Soviet embassy. At that time, there was no Chinese embassy. The Soviet charge was extremely skeptical, particularly when he saw this mini-convoy of Land Rovers arriving with the chargï¿½s d'affaires of the U.S., France and Great Britain, and myself as an interpreter. But the French chargï¿½ rather eloquently suggested to him that he come along. I remember the Soviet said: "who are these people, why should we go with them?" The Frenchman said: "Why, alors, they have zee guns." So we went off with them to the meeting with a spokesperson who turned out to be the same Sergeant Mohammed who had picked us up. As we later found out, he was Abdul Salam Jaluud, often considered the number two in the revolution. We met with him for a while, then we met with Muammar Qadhafi, but neither one revealed their names. They provided us with all the reassurances one could expect in terms of security. Under instructions from Washington, our chargï¿½ asked whether they would continue to respect agreements to which the Government of Libya had entered. They replied positively, assuring our delegation of foreign diplomats that they would protect property, foreign property and lives. Then we were delivered back to our embassies.

Over the succeeding days we met more and more of these young officers.

Q: Just a quick question. When you had this revolution, and gunfire, was there much, or was it pretty much over rather quickly as far as the seizing of power?

MACK: There was a lot of gunfire that continued for at least a couple of days.

Q: Firing at whom?

MACK: It was quite hard to say. There were people who had held out at the palace, palace guards initially. Since we were very close to the palace, I believe some of the soldiers who had been given orders to take over the palace perhaps thought they were being fired upon from some of the buildings around the embassy. So there were some shots that were fired through the windows of embassy apartments in that area. Unlike me, who had a job to do, it was very scary for my wife, for example, who was there in this temporary apartment with nothing to do. She got violently ill and called me up at one point. I crawled back over there through the courtyard and found that she'd gotten sick, although it was just nerves. With good reason, particularly since she didn't have a clue as to what was going on. In those days, of course, no effort was made to inform spouses. There was no effort to counsel people. If you didn't have anything to do, you were supposed to just remain calm and bite your lip, I guess.

I remember coming up with the idea that maybe she could make some cookies or sandwiches which I could take back to the embassy personnel. That gave her something to do, which made her feel much better.

Over time, as I say, we gradually began to meet more of the young Libyan officers. We had extensive files on young Libyan officers who had been trained in the United States. We were working closely with the British embassy, where I had a young counterpart, David Gore Booth, whom I had originally met in Baghdad when we were both first tour officers. David was in the same situation as I was, although both his chargï¿½ and subsequent ambassador spoke Arabic, while mine did not. But we were in a somewhat parallel situation, and they had a set of files on Libyan officers who had been trained in the UK. Between the two of us, we gradually built up quite a dossier on people we were meeting with. Months later, by the time the names of the twelve members of the Revolutionary Command Council were announced, the British and ourselves had come up with a list of about eleven that David and I felt pretty confidently were members of the Revolutionary Command Council. But along the way it was an interesting intelligence problem. The CIA, obviously under pressure to produce and show that they had something came up with a list that was totally irrelevant, lots of interesting biographical material and pictures, etc., which had nothing to do with reality.

After a few days a small operation was set up at the Foreign Ministry. I might mention that the Foreign Ministry had officially been moved to Al-Baidhah, which was to be the new capital. So there was only a very large office in protocol in Tripoli that was still dealing with the diplomats, and it was a awkward situation. We had a person up in Al-Baidhah who would receive from us by cable copies of diplomatic notes, which he would then deliver. But a figure with whom everybody had been dealing in the Tripoli Office of Protocol was assigned to deal with diplomats. (He was Mansour Kikhya, and he later became Libyan Ambassador to the UN before defecting to the opposition.) Having the urbane Kikhya as a familiar point of contact reassured a lot of the diplomatic missions. It was at that point that our government decided to go ahead and send Joseph Palmer II, to take up his job as ambassador.

Q: Was the air base operating and oil companies proceeding?

MACK: Yes. The Air Base at that time was under the command of, something that was very unique at that time, a black Air Force colonel, Chappie James. If I'm not mistaken, he later became a three-star general.

Q: Well he had actually fought in the North African campaign. Wasn't he one of the Tuskegee airmen? I'm not sure, and they fought in the North African campaign.

MACK: He was a somewhat controversial figure in the Air Force at the time. He was a person of undoubted military virtues, who also could be rather loud and profane. There was a combination of personal and racist antipathy toward him, some of which was based on his failings and shortcomings as a human being, and others that were simply prejudice. There were tensions out there [among the Americans], but those weren't my problems. My problem was trying to help settle Libyan-American disputes that would arise out at the Air Base. I was the one who would be called in the middle of the night by the Libyans, because they very soon became accustomed to dealing with me as being an intermediary, a person who was always there in meetings with the chargï¿½ or ambassador.

When we had our first call on the Chief of Protocol at the Foreign Ministry Protocol Office, he informed the charge that he can deal with him in English, but when dealing with the young officers Arabic should be used. Furthermore, the charge was informed to always bring me as his interpreter, not one of the Palestinians. Suddenly, from being a very marginal person, I became very central. As a young and ambitious Foreign Service officer, this was all important to me and tended to give me a very upbeat, optimistic view of what was going on. The country had been taken over by people in their late twenties. Not entirely a bad idea, I thought. Maybe the embassy should be taken over by people in their late twenties!

Q: What rank were these officers?

MACK: They were all lieutenants, except for Qadhafi who was a captain. Qadhafi was 28 and the others were 26-27. I was 29. And they saw me as peer plus somebody who spoke Arabic. I would get called by them in the middle of the night when crises arose. They called me up one time to say there had been this altercation out at the air base. We later found out that Colonel James, arriving late one evening or in the early morning hours from a party somewhere, and having had a fair amount to drink, was considered to be disrespectful. Well, I had these kinds of emergency relationships with the base but did not get into their internal affairs in any great degree at that point. I remember also that I had a very different view of what was going on than the chargï¿½ did. Both of us were trying to figure out what was going on, but for me it was a kind of an intellectual game. For him it was obviously something very different. At one point, I remember, I had written something that maybe was a little bit too witty, or light-hearted, in a cable. The charge came storming down to the political section, and he said, "you're having a good time, I can tell it. Well, I want you to know that I'm not, this is a very dangerous situation." And then he turned around and walked out of the office.

Q: It's really very true, there's nothing more fun than having a tremendous amount of responsibility during a coup or something. All the adrenaline is going, you feel important and people farther up have a real problem on their hands, where you've got adventure.

MACK: Exactly. I also remember that the chargï¿½ and myself were once told that we were going to have a meeting with a lieutenant colonel. Now we had not met with any military people above the level of captain at that point. We went to the meeting with this lieutenant colonel. He was quite civil, basically pro-American, although he expressed some strong anti-Semitic viewpoints. He had studied in the United States, had very warm memories of the United States, and it was basically a very pleasant kind of meeting. On the way out the chargï¿½ said to me: "He's the one, he's the one, he's the chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council." I was pretty sure he wasn't because he was first of all, too old, and secondly he spoke to us in English. And the chargï¿½ for the same reasons, I think, felt that he was the kind of person who would be leading the country. This was the kind of person the US government had anticipated would come to power in a coup d'etat.

Q: At a lieutenant colonel level was at that point, particularly after Nasser, was kind of where we looked.

MACK: Exactly, and as I said, they had a couple of brigadiers, but they had very few high ranking people in the Libyan military at that point. So colonels, lieutenant colonels, were who were viewed as being ambitious, and dissatisfied enough to take action, and take over. As it turned out he clearly had been brought out as a figurehead for the Revolutionary Command Council, and he was sent off to a diplomatic job of very little importance to the Libyan revolutionary regime, I don't even remember what it was. I think he was sent as an ambassador somewhere.

When our new US ambassador arrived it was Joseph Palmer II. Although he was very senior Foreign Service officer, he was also a person who had a rather youthful outlook and a progressive view of this situation. He had a career mostly in Africa, dealt with countries coming into nationhood, and he recognized that this was what was happening there.

Early on, in one of the discussions the chargï¿½ had, I believe it was with Abdul al-Mun'im al-Huni, one of the officers, we raised the question of whether they would accept the new ambassador knowing that we had a letter of agrï¿½ment with the previous government. After conferring with a diplomatic aide, the officer said if you want to send Palmer, that's fine. It will be fine with us, I'm sure he will be very good. They were very reassuring. So Palmer came to Tripoli. Palmer, obviously, had taken the job under one set of circumstances. He could have been expected not to go off to a place that was probably going to be fraught with problems, instead of a fairly pleasant assignment. However, he was very much committed to service, and took it as a challenge, and came ahead. He was a remarkable contrast to the young officers who were young and sometimes seemed rude. Palmer was a very polished gentleman, but he also had an underlying toughness and commitment to U.S. interests. It was very interesting to watch him work, and I learned a great deal from him. I continued to go with him to all the meetings. My additional duty was to always have extra cigarettes in my brief case, since he was a chain smoker. But basically my job continued and became increasingly interesting as we began to get into substantive issues between United States and Libya, such as the presence of Wheelus Air Force Base, our military and security, military supplies, security relations, issues involving oil companies. Basically, the U.S. Government by this time had taken the decision that it was going to find some way to work with this government.

The U.S. Government had not yet confronted the issue of whether it was going to be possible to maintain an Air Force base there. There was a lot of division within the government. I think it was because of the division that Ambassador Palmer felt it was necessary to have a second sort of policy planning group in the embassy. In addition to his country team, who as I say were very, very senior people, he privately reached out to three young officers, myself, Jim Placke, who was second secretary in the economic section, also an Arabist, and Chris Ross, now our ambassador in Damascus. Chris was, I believe, a first tour officer in the U.S. Information Service at the time. All of us were Arabists and young. The ambassador met with us and asked us to take a fresh look at a zero based policy for the country, what were U.S. interests, and how we should proceed.

Q: I might add that knowing the time, this was the time of the young generation coming in...the Kennedy spirit, there was an organization called JAFSOC, a Junior Foreign Affairs, but as director general he had to be comfortable with dealing with sort of the young Turks and almost establishing young Turks as being a new force to be reckoned with. There were a lot of things going on in the Department and he must have been part of it.

MACK: Certainly as Director General he'd been aware of how it might be necessary for the old system to adapt to this. He sort of gave us our head. All of it done without telling our immediate superiors. We had meetings after hours, we were all at the office until endless hours, but then we would get together separately, the three of us, usually at Jim Placke's home, and we came up with a policy toward Libya. We reached the conclusion that our interests were to assure access by the west and our industrial allies to the oil of Libya, and that the price would be far less important than having the access to the oil. It might be nice to have a military relationship, but we had to look at the realities in that regard, and the military relationship was of far lesser interest to the United States nationally. The implication was that we should be prepared to subordinate military concerns to our economic interests, which are the larger and more strategic interests for the United States in regard to Libya. In addition to access by the industrialized world to Libyan oil on commercial terms, the paper advanced two other interests. One was a cold war interest in Libya denying military access to the Soviet Union. The other was a U.S. regional interest that Libya maintain its independence from Nasser's Egypt, a country with which we did not have diplomatic relations at the time. The ambassador took this paper and never told us what he did with it. But I subsequently learned that when he went back to Washington on consultations where he was trying to get some kind of inter-agency agreement on the negotiating scenario for the bases, he made use of this paper. In fact, subsequently of course, word got back to Wheelus Air Force Base where they were outraged that some young striped pants weenies at the embassy had suggested that there could be any alternative to just continuing business as usual.

Q: A question here. In the early stages you and the other two men in this group who were Arabists, were you getting any feel just by being at meetings and whatever dealing with you, about the thrust of this revolutionary group, anti-western, anti-American. What were you getting from them? Did they like dealing with young people, were they comfortable with that?

MACK: Yes. It seemed to us as if these people were very much a part of the nationalist, pan-Arab, movement. While they acted as they did because of Libyan reasons, and they had not been instigated to take action by external forces, they perhaps had been inspired by what had taken place in Egypt and elsewhere. We thought there might be a relationship between them and the Baath party of Iraq, particularly when the Iraqi ambassador showed up at an initial meeting that some of the Revolutionary Command Council members had with the whole diplomatic corps. There was the Iraqi ambassador, not sitting in the audience but sitting up with the officers. That seemed to imply some kind of strong link to the Baath party of Iraq which had been in power for a little over a year. It turned out subsequently not be the case. However, there was a feeling that, one way or another, they were connected to other Arab movements by sort of a common ideology. We didn't believe they were organizationally tied, but they were tied by a common ideology, and a common sense of Arab nationalism, resentment against the west because of the establishment of the state of Israel, of the June 1967 war, and that these were things they shared with the eastern Arab nationalist forces. We did not have a feeling that they were going to turn their back on the west in a cultural sense. There was a feeling that they were going to want to continue strong educational links to the west, and to go to universities in the UK and the U.S. They would want to have close relationships to western companies in order to develop Libya, which remained a very underdeveloped country.

The oil boom hadn't really gotten underway. Oil prices were still very low, set by the international majors, a little over $2.00 a barrel. There had been a trickle of oil money that was beginning to come into the society. You hadn't really gotten a flood of it yet. There was a lot of poverty and need for development in Libya. It was felt that they would turn to the west to find this.

Q: When they talked to you saying, oh, you Americans this, you Americans that, which usually is a sign of distaste for the United States.

MACK: There was some of it. Jaluud himself, for example, related a personal incident when a friend of his was killed or badly injured by something having been thrown from a car by some American military person who was driving along the road, just threw bottles out of the car and hit a friend of his. There was a feeling that we had run roughshod over Libyan rights in some areas. But it was more, initially at least, they seemed to show a grudging respect for us, and wanted to continue relationships. There was no sense at that point of the degree to which Qadhafi would turn his back in a very emphatic sense, culturally and politically, on the west. But we recognized that there was this strong pull toward Arab nationalism. Nasser was still president of Egypt at that point, and interestingly enough one of the major U.S. Government concerns that emerged was that somehow we had to prevent Libya from becoming unified with Egypt. The motto of the Revolutionaries, like the Baath party motto, was unity, socialism and freedom. As it turned out that had less to do with the Baath than some people had thought. But the attitudes of young Libyans certainly suggested that Nasser, who was greatly admired by the young officers, probably could have arranged for unity at that point, if he had wanted. Qadhafi early on began looking for possibilities of unity with Egypt and Sudan. That was the first big scheme that he came up with.

Nasser, who had been badly burned by the unity experiment with Syria, and had also had a very unpleasant experience trying to spread Egypt's influence down into Yemen, was much less enthusiastic about this. But it was interesting that for the U.S. Government this was the thing that was most feared, as I recall, that somehow they would become a part of Egypt.

Q: We tended in those days to see everything in light of the Cold War and the Soviet Union. How did we feel about Soviet influences in this whole thing?

MACK: We did not think that the Soviets were likely to have much influence in Libya if we maintained a minimum of security ties along with our strong economic position. That was one of the reasons why, for example, it was eventually agreed that we would try to negotiate an orderly withdrawal from Wheelus Air Force Base. But it was agreed that we would also be prepared to talk about continuing arms supply relationships, the F-5 program. We were providing F-5 fighters and C-130 transports. It was decided to continue that partly because it was felt the Soviets would benefit if we did not. What we didn't know was that they were obviously having some very serious discussions with the Soviets about arms supplies. But this did not become apparent until after the conclusion of the base negotiations.

Here I should probably talk about the base negotiations which started, as I recall, soon after the beginning of the year in 1970. I had two roles, I was an interpreter for the base negotiations along with Chris Ross; we were sort of an interpreting and translating team. But I also was the head of a committee to deal with labor and property disputes between our Air Force base and the Libyans. We had more than one physical location for our base facilities, including the important air to ground target range of Al-Watia. As interpreter in the meetings, I am to this day given a far more important role than I actually had because when the Libyans every year run the television tapes in celebration of the U.S. military withdrawal, they show me reading in Arabic the opening statement of Ambassador Palmer, the head of our delegation. He made a statement in English, then I read it in Arabic, and they show me delivering the statement as if I had made it. I remember one of the things I said in there. Palmer wanted to say something toward the outset like, you are Libyans, we are Americans, but we are all human beings. And I changed it in the Arabic version. Instead of doing it absolutely literally, I said, you are Libyans, we are Americans, and we're all sons of Adam, which I remember got a very good kind of response.

Washington sent out a large team to back up the ambassador. The ambassador would be in charge of the negotiations. He had managed to obtain that concession from Washington, but they would also have a general officer from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I think he was a one-star, he may have been a two-star, I don't remember at this point, and a lawyer from the State Department, and a senior official from the Secretary of Defense side, I think he was a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense in ISA. It was a strong delegation. The lawyer was a woman, Elizabeth Bergen, and to this day she talks about it, because when she arrived the ambassador drew her aside and suggested that she should have a skirt with a lower hemline.

The Libyans created a bit of theater for our opening negotiating session in mid-winter of 1970. For this opening negotiating session they had big demonstrations down where we were to meet. It was very cold. I remember I took precautions, knowing that the Libyan offices were usually unheated. I wore long-johns and wool socks and therefore was much more comfortable than some of the other American negotiators. But we had arrived in the midst of this very stormy demonstration and proceeded to have our discussions. In the first meeting that we had at the radio station the previous September there had been guns all over the place. I remember our charge suggested that we would feel more comfortable if they didn't have guns on the table where we were having our discussion, so they put them on an adjacent chair. By the time we had the negotiations at least there weren't a lot of guns in the room, although there were always bodyguards for the Revolutionary Command Council members. Qadhafi came to the first session and delivered a very tough speech about the unacceptability of bases in an Arab country and we should have known this all along. It was very uncompromising, very tough, lots of rhetoric, and then he turned the negotiations over to Jaluud. Jaluud had a much more pragmatic manner. He was a deal maker. Negotiations went much better. The negotiations were conducted by English on our side, Arabic on their side. Everything had to be interpreted, making it awkward and at times difficult to have normal communication. I felt a lot of strain although it was interesting professionally because as well as doing the interpreting when we got back to the office I remember the ambassador, or the chargï¿½ or somebody, would always do a quick summary cable which they would let me look at before they it was sent to Washington. But then I would have to do up a full reporting cable, virtually, not quite verbatim, but with a lot of detail, and that was the way we were reporting. It was a very heavy workload and I would usually be totally exhausted by the time I got into bed for a few hours sleep.

Q: How did your wife, after the initial thing.... You're, I assume, still in a temporary apartment?

MACK: No, we moved into a house, the downstairs of a rather pleasant Italian-built house, which was near to the embassy. I was able to continue walking to work, and my wife adjusted to the routine of things out there, although she was never very happy with life in Libya. For one thing, the Libyans early on decided that there should be no signs in foreign languages, no radio broadcasts in foreign languages, and no foreign newspapers, or at least no Libyan newspapers in languages other than Arabic. I was totally oblivious to this. To me this was great fun and everybody was coming to me and asking me to tell them what was in the news, etc., and it just made my position more central. For people who didn't speak Arabic, and even for people who spoke a little Arabic but didn't read it, it was very disorienting, and seemed very alien and hostile, which I never really focused on.

Qadhafi reinserted himself several times during the base negotiations, although basically most of the negotiating was left to Jaluud.

Q: Were you figuring by this time Qadhafi was the man?

MACK: Oh, yes, when the Revolutionary Command Council had been announced in January Qadhafi had been named as the chairman. We had learned earlier that he was the number one. Even before Libyans named the membership they did make it clear that he was the chairman, not just the spokesman as earlier announced. I realized for the first time that he was the number one when we went into a meeting with Qadhafi and Jaluud. Jaluud, a chain smoker, put out his cigarette going in and did not smoke during the meeting. Afterwards I asked him, why weren't you smoking? And he said, oh, Muammar does not like us to smoke. And that's when I realized...in fact, I think I did a report for Washington, that this was a clear indication that Qadhafi was the number one. From the beginning you could see he had a certain charisma. He could speak extemporaneous but literary Arabic that was really quite eloquent, although sometimes the ideas were totally screwy. He had eloquence with the spoken word that we could see would be very important in terms of Arab political leadership, whereas Jaluud spoke a very dialectical version of Arabic that was rough, that got his point across substantively but was not emotive. But it was also clear early on that Qadhafi was a bit mercurial. I remember noting at one point that he had recalled verbatim in a meeting we'd had, a long discussion that we'd had a month earlier. So I realized he was extremely intelligent, a very high IQ. But at the same time from time to time he would seem to be totally disengaged from the conversation. I even wondered if he might have epileptic fits, because he did seem to be a strange person. Unlike most Libyans who don't smile easily, he had a brilliant smile. He was very photogenic. He's a homely person. Even as a young person he was homely, but he had a presence on camera that was quite remarkable. We saw these things as being attributes of somebody who could be a leader in the new communication age. It added to a certain personal control and magnetism he seemed to have over the other young officers.

The negotiations over the base gradually came to an end that was almost predictable, a full withdrawal, with no continuing mutual security relationships other than the possibility of continuing arms sales. We were able to satisfy claims issues for the most part in the favor of the United States, and that involved very complicated calculations as to why we wouldn't owe any more base rent, despite having been in arrears in paying it. From the point of view of the U.S. Government, we got out of the negotiations - it was thought at the time - without serious damage to our overall relationship. That was not the view of some of the people in the U.S. Air Force who had felt that the single most important thing was to be able to do the flight combat air training. They had a bombing range at Al-Watia.

Q: It was a well used air base and not a... (overlap in conversation)

MACK: That's right. I have been told that earlier we even had some nuclear weapons there, but I don't think they were there during my time. It was no longer a SAC base, but it was a very important base for training tactical aircraft. But they lost all of that, and they couldn't use the bombing range, which they had hoped would at least be possible. On the other hand, the rest of the relationship seemed to be intact. I misunderstood the degree to which the Libyan government was determined to make a more radical transformation in its relations with the west.

Q: Did you feel this at that time, or as you look at it? Was this an evolving thing, or was this where they were coming from right from the beginning?

MACK: I think they were from the beginning. There was a high degree of resentment against the west over the Arab-Israel issue and the colonial issue. It was as if they had an agenda but they only unfolded it one step at a time. Once the base negotiations with us were finished, they finished them with the British. Then they moved on the Italians, did away with the special treatment of Italian residents, and a lot of Italians were expelled. Told they could come back but just as ordinary foreign workers, not with any privileges. There were personal tragedies for many of the Italians, who had been greatly hated because of the colonial past. Even though as individuals some of them probably had good relationships with their Libyan neighbors, and co-workers. Then they moved on the oil companies to renegotiate the terms of the oil concessions. I recall a conversation that I had with an officer once out at Wheelus Air Force Base when he confronted me and said, "you people at the embassy are giving away everything that is important here". I said, "what do you mean?" He replied, "well, in my view what we ought to do is just bring in the Marines and have a much stronger perimeter around this base and keep doing our business as usual." I said, "what about all the American civilians in the country?" He said, "move the embassy on the base if you want." I said, "how about the oil companies?" He said, "the oil company people can move on the base, too." I said, "how about the oil fields?" Well, he didn't have an answer for that. On the other hand, in retrospect, I feel that Qadhafi and the other RCC members probably had a long-term plan for gradually decreasing their dependence on the west. But they started off with the base as being one that they had to get out of the way first.

After the end of the base negotiations, one of the next things that happened was the move on the Italians and also a sudden and surprising arrival of Soviet tanks. A shipment of Soviet tanks arrived, and I don't believe there was any advance warning from U.S. intelligence sources. They just showed up one day at the port of Tripoli. That was a serious indication that there was going to be a new orientation of some kind. I think people at the time thought it was going to be towards the Soviet Union. It was more kind of copying what the Egyptians had done to free themselves of reliance upon the west. The Soviets continued to be not particularly popular. They never did succeed in having a very close relationship with the Libyans, even though they did end up being the major arms supplier to them.

The oil company negotiations started off with the oil companies determined that they could raise prices a nickel or ten cents, and eventually their common front was broken by Occidental Oil Company, which had been a kind of an outsider from the very beginning.

Q: Armand Hammer was the head of it and always enjoyed tweaking noses.

MACK: They treated him as not a member of the club, so he fixed their wagon when it came time to do a deal with the Libyans. He did his deal first, and got what was marginally a better deal as a result. That worked initially, although eventually the Occidental holdings were nationalized as well at a later stage in the game. But Occidental was the one that broke the common front first.

That happened in the second year of both the Libyan Revolution and my Libya assignment. My time in Tripoli came to an end less than a year after I'd arrived. We were informed in Tripoli of an order by the RCC member Mustapha Kharubi, the military governor of Benghazi, that the head of our embassy office in Benghazi was no longer welcome and that we should withdraw him. The head of our embassy office was Joe Montville, who was a friend and a peer of mine. We had been together briefly in Arabic language training at Beirut.

We saw this Libyan move as partly a consolidation of Libyan authority in Cyrenaica. The Libyan revolutionaries had been suspicious from the beginning of the loyalty of the major tribes in eastern Libya, and Montville had gotten to know some of these personalities. We saw this not to be an objection to anything that Joe Montville had personally done, but an effort to break down any associations that we may have had with constituent elements of the old regime. There was a feeling that we wanted to protect Joe's career. I remember when we discussed it in Tripoli, after I had picked up the note and mentally translated it on my way back to the Embassy. I suggested we take them literally that he's not welcome in Benghazi. Why don't we bring him here to Tripoli? Therefore it won't be on his record that he was declared persona non grata. We just made a decision to switch him from Benghazi to Tripoli, and somebody could go down and be in charge. Everybody thought that was a good idea. Then someone suggested that I be the person to replace Joe in Benghazi. As it happened, within 48 hours my wife and I moved to Benghazi, and we switched places. In order to maintain the fiction that this had been an internal embassy decision, we didn't immediately move one another's household effects. The idea was we would say we were doing this on a temporary basis, and then we would find that it seemed to be good cross-training for these two young officers, and it would just become permanent. The Montvilles moved into our house, and we moved into their house. Joe had my wine cellar, I had his wine cellar, which was a good deal better than mine, and then only eventually did we actually move our household effects. I became the head of the U.S. embassy branch in Benghazi, sort of like a consul general at a constituent post, which was sort of a promotion for me. By this time we had closed the Al-Baidhah office, which was one of the first things that the new regime asked us to do. So this would be a U.S. Government presence in the eastern part of the country. I'd have my own little post, and it seemed like a very desirable career move even though my wife was beginning to wonder whether we'd ever stay more than a year in any given place.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point. So we're going to pick up... You were in Benghazi 1970 to...

MACK: 1970 to 1972. Actually there's a lot less to say about this particular time.

Q: All right, then we'll move on to other things. But a question would be at the time, where did you all feel the embassy in talking to the ambassador, that Libya was going, and American interests there. What was the impression you were getting from the oil company people, because they often were very plugged into what was happening.

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Today is the 23rd of January. Okay, we're going to Benghazi now, is that right? There were two questions I mentioned in the last thing, one was at the time you went to Benghazi where did the embassy feel that Libya was going? And then also was there a discrepancy between what the oil companies you were plugged into felt at that time?

MACK: At the embassy there was still a very strong desire to try to keep a productive relationship between the United States and Libya. By this time there was an understanding that that relationship would not include any significant military cooperation element beyond, for example, the possible supply to Libya of transport aircraft for their military.

Q: Weren't there some C-130s that were sitting for years...

MACK: The C-130s that had been ordered by the Libyans, and the U.S. Government was holding up on delivery. I'm not sure the Libyans had been formally told at that point that we were going to hold up delivery. The idea was to see how things developed on the ground and to use this as a carrot. The Libyans also had U.S. F-5 fighters, and it was the belief of people in the Pentagon that we had a considerable amount of leverage to get some kind of maintenance and continuing supply and training contract. If the Libyans were prepared to be cooperative in those areas, and if the Libyans were prepared to continue a good relationship with U.S. oil companies, then that would be a basis for future development. The economic section, headed by Lannon Walker, was convinced that the answer lay in transfer of technology and that we have to make this the theme of our relationships with a new independent more assertive Libya. Because of Libya's interest in economic development, it would be tied to the west and to the United States. The views in the political section in Tripoli were much less optimistic. A new political chief had arrived.

Q: Who was that?

MACK: Charles Marthinsen. After his arrival, I gave Charles a fairly downbeat briefing on what I thought were the prospects for continuing movement of Libya in the direction of Cairo and possibly a decision to rely upon the Soviet Union for arms rather than the west. Gamal Abdel Nasser was the model for Qadhafi and the other free officers. Just as he had made that same critical strategic decision, it looked to me like the Libyans were moving in those directions. Their fundamental political relationship would be with Egypt, and their fundamental military relationship would be with the Soviet Union. I remember Charles remarking to me acidly that he didn't know about this transfer of technology stuff, it looked to him as if we should spend our time trying to make sure the emergency and evacuation plan was kept up to date. There was already a strong divergence of opinion within the embassy as to the prospects for any kind of meaningful cooperation.

Q: Did the economic side reflect their contact with the oil company people. It sounds to me, going back to my time, because much of the oil thing coming out of the ARAMCO experience which is you go along, you get along if you go along, and don't get involved in politics.

MACK: In the secret review that the ambassador had directed three of us young officers to make, we concluded that the access to Libyan oil was the critical strategic interest of the United States. There was a great deal of optimism that some kind of arrangement would be reached between the U.S. oil companies and the Libyan government. There were some other major oil companies involved as well, like BP, but primarily American companies. There were some concerns there as well. The very shrewd number two in the economic section was Jim Placke, who was following oil issues and had previously had an assignment in Kuwait. He was really into the lore of oil politics. Jim was fairly dismayed at the views that he was hearing from the U.S. oil companies. These companies had indicated that it was absolutely out of the question to increase more than marginally the prices for Libyan oil, which at that time were still being set by the major oil companies. They were setting posted prices for everybody's oil around the world. And it was absolutely out of the question that there could be an increase of more than a few cents, maybe at the outside five to ten, and that was from a base of around $2.00 at the time. There were some warning signs, but I don't think even Jim believed that it was likely that there would be a total breakdown in talks between the major oil companies and the Libyans. In fact, that occurred over the course of the summer, and the stalemate was only broken when Occidental, which had been frozen out of negotiations by the major oil companies, cut its own deal with the Libyans. The Oxy deal then became a precedent setting mark, and the other companies in the end fell in line with it.

The other thing that was going on that was a very serious indication of Libya's drift, as soon as the evacuation of the American and British bases took place, was a decision by the Libyans to move against the Italians and to do away with the treaty rights under which Italian citizens in effect had special privileges in Libya. This was a hangover of the colonial period. It had clearly been imposed upon the Libyans as the price of early independence, and it was something that rankled very, very deeply. Perhaps even more deeply with most Libyans than the presence of the British and American bases. The British and Americans, after all, had not had a very profound or deep affect on Libyans at the time, whereas the Italians were very much hated as the former colonial power. A combination of all these things made it pretty clear to me, at least, that the drift was quite negative.

We also were of the view that the prospects for Libya remaining a united country were perhaps not very great. At least there were significant possibilities that Libya, which had been sort of an artificial invention of the Italians, might well fall apart. There could be a rift between the eastern Cyrenaican province and the western Tripolitanian area. Obviously the balance of political power had shifted from Cyrenaica to Tripolitania. But it was still thought that there were strong tribal loyalties in Cyrenaica, and that there might well be coup mounted out of Cyrenaica against the Libyan regime of Colonel Qadhafi. It was with this in mind that a lot of my work in Benghazi was intended to try to ferret out indications of either Libyan unity or disunity.

Q: Benghazi was essentially the capital...

MACK: Benghazi had long been the second capital of the country. Our office there was technically a branch of embassy, not a consulate general. Although, as part of the internal political arrangements of the Libyan revolution, it was made clear that Benghazi no longer had a status as the second capital, it was merely an important economic and cultural center. The Libyan University had its main campus in Benghazi, and a lot of the oil production was in Cyrenaica.

Q: Where did the officer corps come from? Any particular area?

MACK: The senior officer corps under the monarchy had tended to come originally from Cyrenaican tribes. However, the country was manpower short. One of the things that became clear as we analyzed the Qadhafi revolution was that the junior officer corps was loaded up with young men from Tripolitania and other parts of Libya who had previously not been considered in this kind of a power center. There was quite a geographic shift in that direction. As I recall only one of the 12 Revolutionary Command Council members was a Cyrenaican.

Q: One of the things behind this I guess was basically a regional...

MACK: It's a mistake to refer to the revolution of September 1969 as a coup. It was a revolution, with new geographic centers of power. The old tribal elites had been shoved aside by a new technocratic elite. Youth, instead of experience, was the order of the day. This was reflected by their politics.

Q: You were in Benghazi from when to when?

MACK: I was in Benghazi from the summer of 1970 through the summer of '72.

Q: What was the situation when you got to Benghazi in '70? The revolution had come, obviously there were new boys running the show who were not local boys. How did you find the climate in Benghazi?

MACK: Benghazi was, as was most of Libya, in the middle of an economic boom. All this time, Qadhafi and the other free officers were in a sense riding on the crest of an oil boom, and they could afford to get away with some fairly outrageous things because Libyan oil was selling at a premium. Production had been greatly increased by the major oil companies under the royalist regime. And then on top of that, through some very shrewd and tough bargaining, the new regime got a major increase in prices without losing volume of production. In effect, the oil companies felt they didn't have any choice, and they stayed in the game at a much higher price for the oil they were taking out of the country. In the whole country there was a lot of economic prosperity during this period, a sense of economic boom. This tended to keep people relatively content with the politics of Qadhafi and the other free officers. Even though the new regime might have seemed peculiar to some Libyans, it seemed to be working. They managed to get the British and French out with no great problems. They managed to send the Italians packing. Despite all of the predictions the economy had not tumbled down, and in fact seemed to be doing better. In retrospect one could say that this was the result of the work of the previous regime and the oil companies, but certainly at the time to most Libyans it looked very good. They viewed the new regime with a fair amount of favor.

Whenever Qadhafi came to Cyrenaica to make a speech, he was mobbed and there was a lot of enthusiasm. At the same time, it was obvious that Qadhafi had installed non-Cyrenaican officers in charge of the situation in Benghazi and the rest of eastern Libya. They tended to be pretty no-nonsense about any kind of non-official political meetings. They were cracking down pretty heavily on any independent activism.

The other thing that became obvious is that if the relationship with Egypt was mostly a political one in Tripolitania, in Cyrenaica it was a demographic one. Huge numbers of Egyptians were coming into the country for all manner of employment: from agricultural laborers, to school teachers and advisers in the various government offices. Libyans were taking Egyptian wives, very often Egyptian second wives. Egyptian servant girls were suddenly seen all over Benghazi. You never saw Libyan women out on the street, but you began to see lots and lots of Egyptian women in addition to Egyptian men. The demographics of the country were changing very rapidly. At one point in one of the political reports, I suggested that while there had been concern earlier that Nasser might take over the country and enhance his political power in the Arab world by having Libya as a part of Egypt, it looked to me like a growing possibility that over time, with or without Nasser, Egypt was going to swallow up at least eastern Libya. One day, the Libyans might just wake up to find out that they were vastly outnumbered in the eastern part of the country and couldn't hold on to it.

Q: Sort of like the United States and Mexico with Texas.

MACK: Yes, exactly. In this connection it was very interesting. We did not have diplomatic relations with Egypt at the time, and I couldn't have a formal relationship with the Egyptian consul general, but I met him informally at other people's gatherings. During the time I was there, Gamal Abdel Nasser died, and the Greek consul general who was effectively the dean of the consular corps, called me up. He informed me they were arranging for the consular corps to pay a call on the Egyptian consul general for condolences and then to march in solidarity with him in a procession to mourn the death of Gamal Nasser, and he didn't want to embarrass me but wanted to know what I felt. I said I would certainly participate, if nothing else in my capacity as a former student in Cairo. For that matter I did not really believe that Washington would have any objection, and in any case I didn't intend to ask them in advance.

Q: Of course, Nixon went, too, didn't he?

MACK: It was a fluid situation, and I just decided that it was the right thing to do. That was, as I remember, very well appreciated by the Egyptian consul general. As we marched together in that procession, large numbers of the non-official Libyans and Egyptians along for the march became quite emotional. I remember that I was walking with the Soviet consul, who was uniquely unqualified to represent his country there, not speaking Arabic and speaking very little English. His name was Bishkof, and he got terribly frightened. He thought that we were going to be torn up in an Arab mob.

Q: I think this was also the feeling of many of the people who went with the American delegation to Egypt.

MACK: It was a pretty wild scene.

Q: And the Arab mob, particularly at that time, had a reputation of being very dangerous. I think misunderstood.

MACK: Yes, it was a pretty wild scene. I pulled Bishkof off to the side of the road at one point to calm him down, and told him we'd be okay as long as we minded our own business. The whole period was a little unreal, as I said. Benghazi was not at the center of things. It was of course central in my thinking. I'm not sure the embassy felt the same possibilities that I saw of the country re-dividing again. I was not over working. I had plenty of time to travel around the area. I wrote a lot of interesting pieces based on travels in eastern Libya. There was a lot of interest about the growing Soviet weapons inventory of the Libyans, and lots of questions about the Soviet personnel who were there, which was the reason I had been encouraged to be cordial with Bishkof. A couple of times I managed to get into Libyan military areas, in retrospect something that was a little too daring, but at the time it seemed to me like a good idea. Washington showed a lot of interest in my reports. This was the point when Badger bombers were being delivered.

Q: These were medium-range Soviet type bombers.MACK: Right. This was of great interest to NATO, and I was able to get into a Libyan airfield, at some distress to the host government when they found me there, but I had a ticket to fly on a commercial flight which was also using that same airfield. So after I was interrogated a little bit by a Libyan official, they let me continue on the flight with my wife from out of the old Tobruk air base. We had traveled by land up to Tobruk and took a flight back. From Tobruk I was able to verify from the ground the rough number of bombers present, something we had also verified by other means. They had been put out of the way in Tobruk, rather than in any of the air bases near Tripoli or Benghazi.

I occupied myself with a lot of this political reporting, but it was also my first chance to be in charge of a post. I had a lot of administrative and management duties. A small post, but it did have a full communications section, and it was a multi-agency post. It gave me a chance to get involved in some of the inter-agency management issues that I had been shielded from previously.

I also recall it as a period of time when rapid changes were taking place in the United States that surprised me. For example, we had a young vice consul assigned to the post. Actually, he was only two years my junior in age, but it was as if a generation separated us. He arrived and made no secret of the fact that he had been a drug user in the past. He told me that he would have a visit from his girlfriend, a German national at that time, a very shocking idea in a very conservative town. I was very upset by this. I remember the inspectors were even more upset when they found out about it. In retrospect it seems like a tempest in a teapot. I was in a position where I was required to discipline him, and I told him that he would have to send his girlfriend back. I only found out later, as we both were about to leave the post, that he'd merely had his girlfriend move in with a Libyan-American family. I had perhaps been the only person in town that hadn't been aware of what he'd done. Of course, these days it would be nobody's business, I suppose. But in those days I'd been formally directed by the inspectors in the embassy Tripoli to resolve this situation. I shouldn't have been surprised when I was visited by my father-in-law. I remembered him as somebody who complained that I had long hair, and he wasn't sure whether I was perhaps too much of a beatnik to join with his daughter. I scarcely recognized my father-in-law when he arrived in Benghazi. He not only had long hair but also a beard. That's how much things were changing. We also had a lot of American hippies who were coming across country. Towards the end of this period, relations between Libya and Egypt turned very bad. Gamal Abdel Nasser was gone. Relations quickly turned bad between Libya and Egypt. The border was shut to land traffic, or at least to normal land traffic. We had these American hippies who would start in Tangier and work their way across to Nepal, sort of the hashish route. They would get to Benghazi and find that they couldn't go by land any further, and then they would have to either shell out money for an airplane, or wait for a ship to come in so they could proceed eastward. We had a number of protection cases, people without money, people ending up in the jail in Cyrenaica. I recall at one point talking to a couple of these young men in my office. One of them turned to another and said about me: "He's like Rip Van Winkle." I came to realize there were cultural changes going on in the United States that I was out of touch with.

Q: How did you operate, getting around, meeting people and all that at this time?

MACK: It was perhaps a little looser than Tripoli. I had more contact with Libyans, although not as much as I would have liked. I was still under surveillance by Libyan secret police. I am sure that the servants in our house were reporting to them, etc., who would come to the house. I had to be fairly circumspect, and I had to do a lot of my reporting based on surmise rather than precise information from Libyan sources. It wasn't an ideal reporting situation. In the end, as part of the inspection, the inspectors recommended closing the post. Interestingly enough, we had kept the embassy open very much against the wishes of the Libyan government. They had tried to get us to close the post.

Q: Had the East German, the Stasi, the secret police achieved... Later, they ran things in Libya, didn't they? Was this a pretty much home grown surveillance thing at this point?

MACK: At this point, yes. I'm not sure we were aware of East German activities in the country at that time. We were very wary of the Soviets, and one of the things we did from Benghazi was to track the activities of Soviets in eastern Libya. But we were still focused primarily on the Egyptians, up until the time when Egyptian-Libyan relations turned very bad. Qadhafi kept switching his alliances in variance parts of the Arab world, as he sought to maximize his own leadership and as he looked for yet another scheme for Arab unity. It also was becoming clear that the Cyrenaicans, who are pretty conservative religiously, were very put off by some of Qadhafi's speculations about Islam. It became evident to me that there could be a lot of resistance from conservative religious circles to what was even then beginning to appear as Qadhafi's heretical views.

In retrospect, however, it's pretty clear that Cyrenaicans, like other Libyans, were doing well economically. A few of the senior business people felt aggrieved, but for most people the economy seemed to be moving along.

While I was there, the Italians came back. Italian nationals had left in the summer of '70, after the Libyans abrogated the Italian-Libyan treaty. But then the Italians came back in huge numbers on the same basis as other expatriates, as employees of construction and oil drilling companies. It became quite clear that Italy and Libya had a very close and special economic relationship which was going to persist throughout this period of political difficulty. In this respect I was spending a lot of time with some of the American oil company executives, and to some extent also with some of the British oil company personnel. They saw the Italians as the real threat to U.S. interests there, and in a sense they had a pretty good understanding of the ultimate strength of this Libyan-Italian economic relationship.

Q: We're talking about the troubles between Libya and Egypt at that point. What were the concerns and were the Egyptians doing things, or were the Libyans doing things that did this?

MACK: Well some of the Egyptian advisers had behaved in a very heavy handed way trying to treat the Libyans as their younger brothers, people needing to be tutored in how to run a country. The Egyptians overplayed their hand, just as they had in Syria and Yemen in earlier stages. But it's also true that Anwar Sadat did not have the same kind of charisma and leadership as Gamal Abdel Nasser projected. Still and all, however, there was a strong sense by most of the younger Libyans in Benghazi, such as those I came in contact with through the university, that their destiny was a part of the Arab world, not as a close partner with the west. This wasn't just a narrow little military elite that had these notions. It was much deeper than that.

I might just end on a curious note about Libya and Egypt. One of the things I did while I was down there was to redo the emergency and evacuation plan. The political chief in Tripoli, Charles Marthinsen had suggested that was probably our primary job. And you might remember in those days among the annexes was an annex on safe haven. I wrote that the one thing one could say for sure about Benghazi is that it would never be a safe haven for an evacuation from another country. I guess it was a good lesson for me: never say never. In the October 1973 war a major evacuation from Egypt was staged through Benghazi. By that time, we had closed the post a year earlier, and they had to send personnel down from the embassy in Tripoli in order to receive the incoming Americans and put them in Benghazi hotels, which had been underutilized before that point. Surprisingly, the Libyan government was quite cooperative. This indicates the depth of their unhappiness with the Egyptians.

Libya's leaders felt terribly miffed that they weren't brought into the planning for the October 1973 war as the Syrians had been. They would have wanted to participate. As it was, since they hadn't been allowed to share in any of the glory, they refused to go along with the Arab oil boycott. If I'm not mistaken, Libya was the only Arab country that refused to go along with the oil boycott that followed the October War.

Q: Do you think at this time, from what you were getting from talking with other people from other embassies...was the feeling, not just Qadhafi because Qadhafi was not yet the man, was he? Or was he the man by the time we're talking about?

MACK: By then he had clearly emerged as the number one.

Q: Was there the general feeling that the other Arabs, and maybe the western powers, still considered him to be a real light weight in the business. Because I don't think Nasser was ever considered...he was considered dangerous, but he was never considered a light weight. But you had the feeling that Qadhafi, and even today is considered somewhat of a lightweight.

MACK: I think certainly the other Arab diplomats considered Qadhafi to be certifiably crazy and very dangerous. This was true particularly true for Tunisians, Egyptians, and Algerians. Arab states adjacent to Libya were very, very nervous about this guy, and considered him capable of doing very foolish things. I never considered him a lightweight; I always considered him to be a very serious contender for political leadership. And were it not for Libya's very small population base, he could have been a successor to Nasser. But as it was he simply was not in a position to impose his will over any country other than Libya. Having gotten to know some of the other free officers, I'm frankly surprised that one or another of them didn't take steps to eliminate Qadhafi at some point. But they were in a sense all aware that he was the only one among them who had the capability for keeping the whole show together. Even though he might be inclined to do dangerous things, nobody else had the charisma, speaking ability, and so on, to keep their ranks unified against the outside.

Q: When did you leave Libya?

MACK: The summer of '72.

Q: And whither?

MACK: I went back to the State Department. At that time Libya was still part of the Bureau of African Affairs. I was assigned in the Bureau of African Affairs. I had specifically asked not to do an Arabist job; I wanted to do something else. I was assigned to the Office of Regional Policy. It was a little S/P, only a three officer, five person office, headed by Nancy Rawls. She later went on to be an ambassador a couple times over. Nancy had put together the office as kind of a brain trust for Assistant Secretary David Newsom. A lot of what we did was the traditional regional affairs work, but with a focus on policy planning, country policy plans, speech writing for the Assistant Secretary, and that kind of work. Nancy and I had an arrangement, I would work on the sub-Saharan countries, and she would work on the North African ones. So I stayed away from the Arab issues as much as I could.

Q: Excuse me, but when you got back obviously you came back from this place that undergone coup revolution. Did you get a feeling of understanding in the AF Bureau of what had happened in Libya, or not?

MACK: I think David Newsom understood very well. He had been ambassador in Libya, he had followed very closely the reporting from the country, and I think he had a very good understanding of what had taken place in Libya. And pretty much was the same for the new director of North African Affairs, James Blake, who had been the chargï¿½ in Libya at the time of the Qadhafi revolution.

Q: He's the one who wasn't having fun.

MACK: Between Jim Blake and David Newsom, they were both quite aware of the significance of what had happened, and did not take it lightly. At one and the same time, it had been a great blow of certain kinds of U.S. political-military interests, but paradoxically our main economic interests had flourished. Even though the oil was less lucrative it remained a very lucrative relationship. As I mentioned, Libya was the only Arab country that didn't go along with the Arab oil boycott after the October '73 war. As a result, there was a sense that this was a country where we had a stake, where the U.S. had a relationship, even though our official relationship was pretty bad. By the time I left, for example, the Libyans had imposed a very draconian limit on the number of our personnel, reducing the Americans [including any Marine guards] down to 16 or something like that. That, probably more than the inspectors' recommendation, was the reason we closed the embassy office in Benghazi.

I found there was pretty good understanding also about Libya among the intelligence community where I debriefed. Nobody really had a good idea of what could be done [about protecting our interests], other than try to maintain our economic stake until such time as we could have [a more normal] political relationship. There was an understanding that you couldn't go back to the old relationship with a military base. There was no doubt anywhere in the State Department that those days were ended.

There's not a lot to be said, I think, about the period where I worked in the AF policy office. I did get pulled back into Arab affairs in one regard. I was asked to put together a conference on Israeli relationships with Africa, and that gave me a chance to get back into Arab and Middle Eastern affairs in a small way. It made me realize that while it was nice to have the break to work on sub-Saharan Africa, my career was going to be centered on the Middle East. As a result, when they suddenly had to curtail the tour of the Tunisian desk officer, they asked me if I would move to that office. Blake remembered me and wanted me to move to that office as the Tunisian desk officer. I readily agreed to do so after having spent less than a year in this little policy office.

Q: You were on the Tunisian desk from when to when?

MACK: I was on the Tunisian desk from the summer of 1973 to the summer of 1975.

Q: During this period were there any major issues between Tunisia and the United States?

MACK: Yes. We had a very strong relationship with Tunisia, including a large AID mission and a military assistance program. Tunisia was in many respects a favored partner of the United States, because of Habib Bourguiba's modernizing reforms and his generally moderate attitude toward the Arab-Israeli crisis. We also saw Tunisia as being threatened by Libya, and potentially by Algeria, in other words by more revolutionary states. We understood that Bourguiba was getting old and that his time in power would eventually come to an end, and we were interested in trying to build up the status of his chosen heir as prime minister. On the internal side, we tried to support economic reforms. I spent a lot of time trying to get some additional money approved for economic aid programs, trying to come up with a few additional military credits, and scrape up a little more cultural exchange grant money. I worked very closely with the Tunisian embassy in Washington, as well as our embassy in Tunis.

Ironically, one of the great successes was when we were able to come up with a surplus U.S. destroyer escort, the Geary, which we could provide to the Tunisians. This was militarily a foolish thing, but Bourguiba wanted to have a flagship. They were totally unequipped to maintain, service, and provide personnel for such a ship. It was a very high profile issue in our relationships, and we were able to arrange it. I believe it was a grant, but it could have been a no-cost lease.

Thus it was that the Geary, with an American crew and Tunisian trainees learning from the Americans, proceeded on its way across the Atlantic, setting off in late September 1973. The Geary had entered the Mediterranean before the October 1973 war began. I was sent up to the Task Force area, and by this time Kissinger had come over to the State Department as Secretary of State. Joseph Sisco was the Under Secretary for Political Affairs. It was an exciting atmosphere. While on the Task Force, I became aware that they were talking about the arms re-supply to Israel. The Tunisians were one of the countries that had sent token forces, medical forces, but they had sent token forces to the Suez front. I realized that paradoxically, while we were going to have this major supply of weapons to Israel, we would also be having a U.S. destroyer escort arriving in the port of Tunis at the very same time. I went to Assistant Secretary Newsom and said: "Sir, I think we better bring this to the attention of the Secretary." Newsom agreed. He didn't actually go to the Secretary, he took me to Joe Sisco. I suggested we could present this as an example of the fact that we're not anti-Arab. It surely will come to public attention, but it needn't be considered a bad thing. It would show that our re-supply to Israel in Israel's hour of need not to be overrun by the Egyptian army was not an anti-Arab move. Sisco asked me to write a memo to the Secretary, so I did. I don't know quite how the decision was made, but the decision was made to allow the ship to proceed. So along with the U.S. re-supply of Israeli armed forces this transfer took place. Of course, it was irrelevant in terms of the Middle East arms balance. It has been the bane of the Tunisian navy ever since. They could never do anything except on special occasions like Bourguiba's birthday, or the national day, when they would sail it around in circles in the Bay of Tunis so that he could see it, but it was never an effective fighting ship.

Q: How did the Tunisians react to this what was called the Yom Kippur or October war of '73? You were on the desk by this time.

MACK: The Arabs call it the Ramadan War, whereas for the Israelis it's the Yom Kippur War. I think the term October War is appropriately neutral. I was not so much aware of general Tunisian attitudes as I was of Tunisian government attitudes. Bourguiba certainly was appalled by the scale of Egyptian losses when the Israelis successfully counter attacked across the canal and cut off the Egyptian third army. Bourguiba presumed upon his good relationship with us to ask if we couldn't intervene to stop the slaughter. The Tunisians were grateful that the war did not continue any longer than it did. There had been no great sympathy for Nasser over the years, and there had been a lot of antipathy between Bourguiba and Nasser. However, Bourguiba had done the politically shrewd thing by sending this medical unit during the course of the war so the Tunisians were well placed to pose as they liked to as being the bridge from the United States to the rest of the Arab world.

We reciprocated in many ways, with military assistance, with a large AID program. And we also would have had a visit of President Bourguiba to Washington, but he was too ill at the time to travel. He asked us specifically to receive his Prime Minister as head of state, and we did everything but receive him as head of state. We had a very lavish official visit for Prime Minister Hedi Nouira. It was kind of hard to find things to give substance to the visit, but the Tunisians badly wanted to establish a joint U.S.-Tunisian economic commission. This is a kind of European way of conducting foreign relations by having these joint commissions, and they wanted one with the U.S. Kissinger is probably the only Secretary of State who was ever enamored of the idea, perhaps because of his own European background. It was easy enough to get a decision from the Secretary that we should establish this joint commission, headed in practice by the Deputy Secretary. Officially, I think it was headed by Kissinger himself. For the first inaugural meeting, I believe Kissinger joined with Nouira to kick it off, and then it was delegated to us. It was delegated down to the desk to try to find some substance for this, and it was really hard. We had tried to scrape up and give some kind of core of meaning to all the little foreign currency grants. At that time we still held a lot of surplus Tunisian dinars, which were provided by law of Congress to various agencies such as the Smithsonian, and the Department of Commerce, etc. All these agencies had their little bit of appropriated Tunisian currency. They didn't like to be told by the Secretary of State or the U.S. ambassador, let alone by the Tunisian desk officer, how to spend their money, but it was politically useful to coordinate expenditures in the context of the overall relationship and resented by the Tunisians if they were not consulted in the process. One of the things we used the Joint Commission for was to establish in principle that use of these excess dinars would be coordinated between the two governments at the level of the U.S. ambassador and the Foreign Minister of Tunis. There was a lot of window dressing like that to make it look like this was a great success for Prime Minister Hedi Nouira.

I got drawn into other matters too in the Office of North African Affairs. I substituted for a while for the Libyan desk officer and for the Moroccan desk officer. I was even working on Mauritanian-U.S. affairs at one point. But most enjoyable in a sense was working on the Libya desk, because I savored one of those delicious little ironies. You know they say revenge is a dish best when eaten cold. I mentioned our economic relations had continued and flourished, both in the oil sector and American agri-business companies, etc. We had quite a booming trade with Libya. But we continued to suffer under this fairly artificial restriction on the size of our embassy in Tripoli, and political relationships were not at all good. At the time of their restriction on us they had maybe an embassy of six diplomats. Their embassy was taking care of hundreds if not thousands of Libyan students in the country, and was very active in commercial work. Libyan diplomats were also scurrying about the country, very much into Arab-American politics and trying to make sure that Qadhafi's green book got appropriate notice among the Arab ï¿½migrï¿½ community in the U.S. While I was substituting for the Libyan desk officer, I asked the State Department protocol office to tell me the size of the Libyan contingent. I was informed that it gone up to something like 25 people on the diplomatic list. I had the pleasure of reminding the Libyans of the reciprocity of the agreement under which we had curtailed our numbers. They were shocked that we would apply that to them as well. For a time, it looked like they might remove the limit on the number of our personnel, which was my objective. We would not have been prepared to re-staff our embassy to any great degree, although the Department of Defense would have liked to have sent a military attachï¿½ back. There were plenty of other agencies who would have liked to have sent people to Tripoli. In the end the Libyans bit the bullet and reduced their numbers to the ceiling of sixteen persons with diplomatic status. This procedure gladdened the heart of the FBI and others who had to keep tabs on them.

The mid-1970s was an interesting period at the State Department. I attended a number of meetings when Secretary Kissinger met with visiting Tunisian officials, including Prime Minister Nouira. I was just a note taker in best Kissingerian fashion. Desk officers were to be seen and to take notes, but not be heard. Still, it was great fun to go to a Kissinger meeting, and Kissinger impressed very well. I had remembered him as a somewhat eccentric professor at college and was really impressed by the degree to which he fit very well into the role of Secretary of State. I was one of those who were enthusiastic about having Secretary Kissinger as Secretary of State. It was quite obvious to me that, even as a fairly junior State Department official, I had much more influence with other agencies under Kissinger than I had enjoyed under William Rogers. As long as Kissinger was Secretary of State, other agencies knew that he could take an issue to the President. If they failed to settle a matter with the desk officer, at some point further up the line it would be settled in favor of the State Department anyway. This gave me, as a desk officer, a considerable amount of influence within the inter-agency community which I enjoyed using. I think I used it for the furtherance of Secretary Kissinger's and the President's policies.

Q: During this '73 to '75 period that you were dealing mainly with Tunisian affairs, were there any threats to Tunisia coming from Algeria or Libya? Did you see any problems?

MACK: Yes. It was during this time that Bourguiba, who was becoming increasingly eccentric, received Qadhafi on a visit to Tunis and agreed to unify Libya and Tunisia.

Q: These unification things keep...

MACK: They had a meeting in Djerba, and this resulted in the Djerba Declaration. Qadhafi was always seeking unification schemes. And, of course, Qadhafi appealed very well to Bourguiba's vanity, flattering him with the notion that he would be president of the union. Tunisians and Tunisia's friends were appalled. Once Bourguiba got back to the capital and the Tunisian establishment started working on him, he soon started back-peddling. As a result, this led to a very sharp deterioration of Libyan and Tunisian relations, and the Libyans engaged in some serious subversion. To some degree, [the Libyans may have acted] with the complicity of the Algerians. The Tunisians believed the Algerians knew about the subversion, but it's a little ambiguous. This led to a brief insurrection in the Tunisian town of Gafsa, which is a phosphate mining area with a very deprived working class. Some people in Gafsa were very easily subject to Libyan blandishments, and the Libyans spent quite a lot. The insurrection was put down fairly effectively by the Tunisians. But for a while it looked like Libya might try to intervene. There were shows of force both by the French and the U.S. The French participated directly, I think, in helping the Tunisians suppress the insurrection. The U.S. was involved in a show of force out in the Mediterranean in order to warn Qadhafi from trying to actually intervene with force across the border. This, of course, only made relationships between the Tunisian government and the U.S. all the closer. At the time I left the desk relations were really at a very high level.

Q: As usual, I want to pick up where... We're now in when in '75?

MACK: In the summer of '75 and I'm about to go on a one and a half year assignment as a senior watch officer, [a position in the round the clock State Department Operations Center.]

Q: Okay, we'll pick that up then.

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Today is the 6th of February 1996. All right, David, you're back in Washington as a watch officer. You were watch officer for a year and a half. This is from when to when?

MACK: This was from the summer of 1975 to December of 1976.

Q: Was this a straight watch officer assignment dealing with everything?

MACK: The senior watch officer, or SWO, as they call them, really deals with the whole world. It's a job that is boring and clerical during the day, but as soon as people leave at night, or on weekends, you in effect become the Department of State. At least, the watch office or Operations Center is the first line in dealing with messages of immediate and higher precedence that come in, particularly NIACT, FLASH or CRITIC messages. The SWO also supervises the preparation and signs off on the morning summaries for the Secretary. It's a job that is very desirable from a career point of view, since it involves supervisory responsibilities. You have watch officers working for you, who generally are among the brighter and more energetic younger officers. It also gives you insights into the way the Department works. A SWO gets to talk to lots of senior officials, including at least once in a while the Secretary of State. You have the chance to deal with some very sensitive matters without being pigeon-holed in a narrow part of bureaucracy.

On the other hand, a lot of time working on the watch can be plain boring, and it's physically very difficult. It was physically hard on me. I thought shift work would be really interesting because I looked forward to having days free when I could play tennis with my wife. I remember the first couple of months I seemed to manage the trick of getting to sleep after a night shift by having a dinner with wine and then going to sleep during the day. Toward the end of my assignment, or the last year of my year and a half, I found I would go the whole week without getting sleep during the day because I lost the ability to do it. This would mean two day shifts followed by two evening shifts, followed by two graveyard shifts, and minimal sleep for the six day week. It can be hard on family life [especially] for people with children. One of the things they used to say on the watch was that since you're out of phase with your family, you go to bed hungry, and you wake up horny. It's that kind of a life. But if you're a current events junky, which I certainly was at the time, it's great because you're one of the first people to find out about what's happening. Sometimes you're on the inside, and particularly during the Kissinger years it was very exciting. You got insights into how the Secretary managed, and particularly on trips when you would see a lot of the very sensitive messages back and forth.

Q: This is the period when Kissinger was the Secretary of State.

MACK: Kissinger was Secretary of State during this whole period. Particularly during his trips, he would communicate by NODIS cables with the State Department and with other posts. One of the senior watch officer's responsibilities was to handle the NODIS traffic. It enabled you to get a sense of how this man worked, the relationship that he had with other people in the State Department, particularly the very strong relationship he had with Larry Eagleburger. It allowed me the possibility to see the degree to which Kissinger had come to rely more and more on the career Foreign Service, and his increasing lack of confidence about some of the political appointees working in the foreign affairs area. This was reflected [later] in his memoirs. It was apparent to me that Kissinger had learned he could depend on the Foreign Service to be reliable, to keep secrets, to be supportive of him, but he certainly couldn't depend upon Ambassador Silberman in Yugoslavia, Ambassador Moynihan, first in India and then in the UN, and some of the other lesser known political appointees whom he was constantly trying to keep under control with greater or lesser success.

Q: Did you get any feel as you were doing this about some of the dynamics within the Department. A little later I'll ask you for incidents, but as you were looking at this, was there a rating system for the various bureaus, ARA, NEA, AF, at that time?

MACK: Well, I tried to be non-parochial, but certainly it was the general feeling in the Secretariat, of which the Operations Center is a part, that the best bureaus in the sense of effectiveness in taking actions and getting work up to the Secretary and other principals were the European bureau and NEA-EUR and NEA. There was less respect from the 7th floor for some of the other bureaus. During the time I was there, in fact, the East Asian Bureau did not seem to figure greatly in a lot of the work that we were doing. It wasn't a period of real crises as I remember it.

Q: This is the aftermath of the Vietnam War?MACK: Yes, and attention had shifted to other parts of the world. Besides the East Asian Bureau had an extremely capable Assistant Secretary, Philip Habib, in whom the Secretary did have a lot of confidence. The Secretary worked very closely with the Assistant Secretaries for both Europe and the Near East. It was our impression in the watch that he relied very much on them, and that he didn't cut them out of matters that were of particular importance to their parts of the world. The same may not have been true for Latin America, for example, or Africa. This was during the period of Angola. It was quite clear that there was tension between the people in the African bureau and the Secretary over Angola. Although I wasn't as aware of it at the time, I think there were similar tensions between Kissinger and the people in the Latin America bureau.

Q: Over Angola, this was a time when the Soviets were fishing in troubled waters, you might say. I mean the Cubans were there as surrogates. Did you get any feel for the way the AF bureau was approaching Angola, and the Secretary was approaching Angola?

MACK: Little tidbits, and I'm not enough of a specialist to really understand what I was seeing, but for at least part of the time it seemed AF Assistant Secretary Nathaniel Davis disagreed with the Secretary about the degree to which we were relying upon Mobutu in an effort to counter what the Secretary saw as Soviet surrogates. I think there was a tendency for the African bureau to judge their problems as sui generis, and the tendency for the Secretary was to see them as part of the East-West conflict. At least that was the impression we got. As I recall, during the time I was there, Nat Davis left the job and was replaced by a new Assistant Secretary, who had been the senior Deputy in AF. He at least was acting for a long period of time and was perhaps more in line with Kissinger's way of thinking. As I say, a lot of the focus was on European matters, dealings with the Soviets, and also this was the period of some of the most important shuttle diplomacy involving Kissinger, the Arabs and the Israelis.

Q: Moving on to the European side, did you get any feel for the Soviet ambassador, Anatoly Dobrynin's connection with Kissinger at that time?

MACK: Yes. One thing that was clear was that if there was a foreign ambassador in Washington that Kissinger liked to deal with, Kissinger might conduct our relations with that country primarily in Washington, sometimes cutting our ambassador in the field out of the action. Not only the action, but sometimes leaving our ambassador in the field uninformed. This seemed to be the case with the Soviet Union. As Dobrynin had been in Washington for a long time, he was extremely skilled. I had met him at some of the Tunisian diplomatic receptions and had been really impressed by his intellect, charm, and self-confidence. He saw a lot of Kissinger. This was during the period when he would be brought into the basement of the State Department by his vehicle, a rather rare exception to the rule for foreign ambassadors, and he worked very closely with the Secretary. The counselor of the Department at that time, Helmut Sonnenfeldt tended to be Kissinger's deputy for a lot of the relationships with the Soviet Union. Sometimes one had the feeling they left the Assistant Secretary for European Affairs a little bit in the dark as to what might be going on.

On the other hand it was clear that there was also an important aspect of U.S.-Soviet affairs that was conducted in Moscow. If that wasn't at Kissinger's choice, perhaps it was at the choice of the Soviets. They seemed to continue to use our Moscow embassy perhaps more than might have been the case if Kissinger and Dobrynin had had their way totally. Without knowing a lot about U.S.-Soviet relationships, I was impressed by the kind of dialogue that Kissinger had developed both with the Soviets and with the Israelis. The latter was another case where Kissinger had a very well established relationship with the Israeli ambassador, and conducted a lot of sensitive discussions on the Middle East directly with him.

Q: Was there concern within the Secretariat about the security of information dealing with Israel? Its always been said, anything dealing with Israel, any communication ends up on the Israeli's ambassador, or at least the Israeli Foreign Minister's desk the next morning.

MACK: Well, frankly, yes. From my perspective, I could see a justification to handling a lot of sensitive discussions with the Israelis in Washington simply because it did minimize the chances of leaks from the bureaucratic establishment that's more likely to see cable traffic between Tel Aviv and the State Department than they would the NODIS or very exclusively held memos that were generated in Washington from these discussions. Sometimes one had the impression that it enabled Kissinger to speak more frankly to the Israelis than could have been the case if he had to communicate through an ambassador in Tel Aviv with a lot of the Washington establishment privy to the communications.

Q: Often a group such as the Secretariat felt a tightknitness, and also takes on many of the aspects of their leader, in this case Henry Kissinger. Did you find every once in a while, oh, don't inform Assistant Secretary so-and-so, Henry doesn't like to deal with him. Did you find some of this going on?

MACK: Generally speaking, the rule was for an EXDIS cable was to make sure that everybody who might conceivably have a need to know gets to see it. On a NODIS cable make sure that nobody who isn't clearly authorized sees it. And on NODIS we would be given tight distribution patterns that we were committed to use during the course of the night or the weekend. These were patterns for distributing the message or for alerting people by telephone. When the Executive Secretary or one of his deputies came in the next morning or on Monday, and in those days Sundays and Saturdays were pretty normal work days for Executive Secretariats, they might well broaden the distribution, but that was their prerogative and something we were told not to do. We were quite conscious of the need to maintain the confidentiality of what was the Secretary's channel. NODIS was not to be used for idle chit-chat between staffers. I remember some of the Secretary's immediate staff being admonished for using NODIS as a channel for chit-chat between themselves.Q: During the time you were there can you think of any developments and crises that you got involved in?

MACK: Yes, one in particular. Let me tell one because it's a story about Henry Kissinger. During my time there I only personally briefed him a couple of times. The rule was not to wake up the Secretary in the night unless we first talked to one of his staffers and they asked us to brief him. By contrast, we were always waking up the Assistant Secretaries. I remember one time there was a coup in Bangladesh and I had called one of the Secretary's staffers who told me he thought I should brief the Secretary. It was about 1:00 o'clock in the morning. I got the Secret Service person and they relayed the call into the Secretary. The Secretary obviously awakened by my call, listened to the briefing, and then asked me to get in touch with Mr. Habib, who was the Assistant Secretary for East Asia, and to make sure that the East Asian bureau provided a summary and recommendations to him at opening of business. I remember responding, yes sir, I will call Mr. Atherton, the Assistant Secretary for NEA and ask him to do this. I realized Bangladesh was in the NEA bureau at that time. The Secretary said, oh yes, oh yes, NEA. It was an example both of his hands-on way of dealing with issues, but also the real difficulty of maintaining an attention span for the whole world.

Q: Bangladesh is sort of betwixt and between.

MACK: That's right, and I must say I admired the adroitness with which the Secretary picked up on the fact that it was in NEA, not in the East Asia Bureau.

I'd like to talk about another episode that took place during period in the Operations Center. This is connected with Lebanon. You might recall that in the spring of 1976 our ambassador in Beirut, Frank Meloy, along with the economic counselor of the embassy, were killed by terrorists when they tried to cross the green line from West Beirut where the embassy was at that time, to the eastern half of the city which was controlled by Christian militias. It was quite obvious that Secretary Kissinger felt to some extent personally responsible for this because he had instructed Meloy to make this trip to talk to the new elected president, Elias Sarkis. We had had a very difficult relationship with the president of Lebanon, Suleiman Franjieh, who was technically still president at that point, but there had been a new president-elect with whom we thought we would probably have easier dealings. As we later found out, because of a leak from the ambassador's driver to his son, who was connected with a terrorist organization, an ambush was set up at the green line crossing. They killed not only the ambassador and economic counselor of the embassy but also the driver himself, presumably much to the dismay of his son who had tipped off the terrorists.

Kissinger's response was to say that nobody from the embassy should cross the green line until further notice. Well that situation lasted about six months. During that time, the embassy continued to have pretty good relationships with PLO representatives, at least their security officers since the area of the embassy was under de facto control of the PLO security people, as well as with Lebanese Communists, Druze, and various Muslim groups. It had virtually no relationship with the Christian parties, who thought of themselves as our friends. In the minds of many they were our friends. We had contacts neither with the president-elect nor with the former president, nor most other senior Christians in or outside the government. It was a very ironic situation.

Kissinger felt a need to reestablish a dialogue with the Christian leaders. This was before they had established the regular ferry traffic from East Beirut to Larnaca in Cyprus. Kissinger asked NEA to nominate somebody to go out and have discussions with the Christian leaders, and the person nominated was Ed Djerejian, who at that point was on Mr. Sisco's staff, the Under Secretary's staff. Djerejian got as far as Paris and then turned around and didn't proceed. Ed's wife had become quite agitated, and he felt that he couldn't continue because she was so emotionally distraught about him going to Lebanon. Ed would have been perfect for this because he'd been the ambassador's aide in Beirut, and he knew these individuals. Even if he'd known them only as a junior officer, at least a personal relationship had been established.

I happened to be the senior watch officer when the cable came in from Paris, and as I passed the cable over to the staff assistant for NEA, I said, you know the Secretary is going to probably start chewing the rug when he finds out about this. It would reinforce the view he came here with that he couldn't depend on the State Department, that they're a bunch of wimps, and this will be very bad for the Foreign Service. I volunteered to go, since I had been in Lebanon, and I had been following the sensitive traffic on Lebanon matters and on the Arab-Israeli issue in general. Word came back that NEA accepted to send me to Lebanon. I had a talk with Roy Atherton, the Assistant Secretary for NEA. It was agreed that I would go but not by myself. I would go with a more senior officer, Bob Houghton, who had been DCM in the embassy and knew the individuals. I didn't know the individuals personally. He at least knew the individuals that we'd be meeting with personally.

Bob and I went out as a team. We had a briefing with Secretary Kissinger before we left, quite an extensive discussion in which he talked to us about what he wanted us to do, and then he debriefed us when we came back. I was very impressed by the extent of his knowledge about what was going on, but also his reliance upon the Foreign Service in this case to carry on fairly sensitive discussions for him. The discussions included the nature of the relationship between Lebanon and Syria, the nature of the relationship between Lebanon and Israel as well as U.S.-Lebanese relations. Our instructions were to go to Cyprus, to find some way to get into Lebanon, have a round of meetings, come back, report from the embassy in Nicosia to the State Department, and then get instructions to go back. In the first round we were supposed to be in a listening mood, the second round we'd be conveying assurances of various kinds or views from Secretary Kissinger. That's what we did. We traveled to Cyprus with a couple of security people. We had help from the embassy in Nicosia - I believe the charge d'affaires was Ed Dillery at that time. We arranged for passage on what was really a Greek Cypriot tramp steamer that was smuggling cigarettes, liquor, and probably guns into the Christians in the port of Jounieh just north of Beirut. It was a 1916 converted ice breaker, seaworthy, perhaps, but not much of a craft. We were all aware of the security problems. In Cyprus you couldn't help but be aware. This is not too long after U.S. Ambassador to Cyprus Rodger Davies had been killed, plus we were aware that it was the middle of a civil war in Beirut, so we'd in effect be going into a war zone. And the ship was truly miserable.

Q: Sounds like something out of The Mask of Dimitrios by Eric Ambler.

MACK: When we got aboard the ship we found rather primitive conditions, and there was a storm at sea. Because of the storms and the rough water, it took us 23 hours to take a trip which should have just taken a few hours. I was unbelievably seasick, and the worst was when they brought the food that the ship provided. I remember chicken sandwiches, and the chicken was green. I felt pretty green and didn't want to eat in any case. All I wanted to do was get to land. I didn't care whether they were fighting, I just wanted to get on firm land. Finally, we reached Jounieh.

For security reasons, the Lebanese didn't know we were coming. We quickly made contact with a former senior official of the government of Lebanon who later became head of the Central Bank, Michel Khoury. Sheikh Michel was a very debonair, very Lebanese guy, and he was quick on his feet. He sized up the situation, arranged to put us in a hotel that was not too far from his own residence, put us in touch with the militia in the area, and managed to come up with some security from another one of the militias. It was the Guardians of the Cedars, a very right-wing fascist militia, but they provided security to us in liaison with the other armed groups. We were sort of handed off from one militia to another, as we traveled about.

Then we proceeded to have our discussions with President Suleiman Franjieh, with the President-elect Elias Sarkis, with former President Camille Chamoun, Phalangist leader Pierre Gemayel, Maronite religious leaders, really all the Christian establishment there was. They were like mafia dons. It was very exciting, and frankly I was totally oblivious to the danger. The two American security people with us were not so relaxed. I remember at one point we were driving down a mountain road and got to a little village where a wedding procession going through town, and we stopped. Having been in that part of the world, I wasn't too surprised when suddenly the men in the wedding party, who obviously were from one of the militias, started firing their guns off into the air. The two security people with us almost went out of their skins. But I was more afraid of having an accident on the twisting, mountainous roads in Lebanon.

It was a great opportunity to get deeply into Lebanese politics. After we got our instructions from Kissinger, it became more and more apparent that he was relying quite a lot on the de facto cease-fire that he had brokered between the Syrians and Israelis. It was an informal understanding that the Israelis would not object too strongly to an extension of Syrian influence into Lebanon, as long as the Syrians managed to tame the Palestinian armed groups. The Palestinian militias were obviously a threat both to the Israelis, and also to a lot of Lebanese groups, including the Lebanese Christian groups. It was a curious situation where the U.S., without being pro-Syrian, was certainly getting some credit for having brokered a detente of sorts between Israel and Syria. The dï¿½tente allowed the Lebanese to reestablish control in their own country, control which had been gradually lost to the various Palestinian militias.

It was also apparent there was a lot savagery on both sides among the various Lebanese militias. Often you had fighting between rival Christian militias or Muslim militias, as well as the fighting between Christians and Muslims. It was a unique opportunity to see the degree to which the Lebanese were both immensely civilized and quite savage. They were immensely civilized in what you might call the savoir vivre. I remember some of our Lebanese hosts providing wonderful Lebanese and Franco-Arabic cuisine, and conversations alternately in French and English. I tried to have as many Arabic conversations as I could, but very often the conversations would be in French or English.

At the same time, politically it was clear that it was one group against another. Indeed, often one individual leader against another individual leader, with very little sense of Lebanon as a community. We did meet people like Michel Khoury, who was trying to organize things for us, and a few other Lebanese who seemed to be committed to the idea of Lebanon. I think Elias Sarkis, the president-elect, fell into that category and the former Foreign Minister and journalist, Ghassan Khoury. Generally speaking, however, a lot of people were just looking after their personal interests, family interests, and small group interests as opposed to the interests of Lebanon as a whole. We could easily see both the physical destruction of Lebanon, but also the disintegration of the idea of Lebanon as a nation.

I might add a personal note. It was during this period when I was the senior watch officer that a couple things happened in my personal life. For one, my father died. For another, very early in 1976 we adopted a three and a half month old daughter, and that changed my life a lot. One of the reasons I wasn't getting much sleep, I suppose, was because I would be up all day when I was home with the baby and then would go off to work the night shift at the Operations Center. It was a reminder of both the challenges the Foreign Service offers, but also the sacrifices, because I remember how wound up I was in the life of our baby. I was kind of a modern father, very much involved in everything from diapering to feeding. My daughter learned to walk when I was away in August and September of 1976 on this mission into Lebanon. It was a great adventure, great for me professionally, but I missed watching my only child learn to walk. That is the kind of Foreign Service story that will be familiar to a lot of people.

Q: Back to this mission that you took, what were we trying to convey to these people? Was it really to find out what they were thinking about, or were we conveying the Syria angle, if you can work it out with Syria we're not going to be too unhappy.

MACK: Kissinger had a good idea by splitting the mission into two trips as he did. It involved some logistical complications for us, but it enabled him first of all to get our direct reports from the Christian Lebanese leaders regarding their concerns, anxieties, and their appreciation of the situation. We could ask them what they thought about the Syrians and what they were doing [about it], without taking a position ourselves. Then after that was absorbed in Washington from our reporting cables, the State Department framed instructions to us which seemed to respond to some of the concerns of the Christian leaders, and at the same time get across our own view of what the mutual interests between U.S. and Lebanon were in the matter. As a result it very much enhanced the U.S. role in Lebanese affairs. It's fair to say that the U.S. had been marginalized to a high degree in Lebanese matters by its inability to have a full diplomatic dialogue for a period of six months. Kissinger had been very aware of the degree to which we seemed to be losing influence over the situation.

It was clear to me that for Kissinger the number one strategic goal was to prevent the instability and turmoil in Lebanon from touching off another war between Syria and Israel or a general Arab-Israeli war. At the same time he was skillful in conveying a U.S. concern for Lebanon based upon his appreciation and understanding from Foreign Service reporting of what were the concerns of the Lebanese. There was never any doubt in my mind that Kissinger's number one concern was to avoid a general Arab-Israeli war boiling up out of this turmoil. There were obvious dangers for it with both Israel and Syria having the ability to engage very forcefully, which subsequently happened.

Q: One of the hardest things, I think, in the Foreign Service context is for you to sit there and say these are a bunch of mafia dons, and realize they're split up. Go back to Washington where people are used to these are Democrats, these are Republicans, these are Muslims, these are Christians, and no matter how you do it, their mindsets, they never really got away from this. It was Muslims against Christians as far as the basic American public and Congress and everybody else was concerned in Lebanon. How did you find Kissinger and his staff?

MACK: By the end of my time in the Operations Center, I felt that Kissinger and certainly [Under Secretary Joseph] Sisco, who worked a lot on Middle East affairs, had a pretty good appreciation of the complexities out there. They were not people who would buy a simplistic explanation of what was going on. They liked to hear about the complexities. I think part of Kissinger's way of doing business, and I could see this even when I was the Tunisian desk officer, would be lean forward to a visiting foreign minister, and say, I know what's really on your mind, it's not what people are saying in the media or what might first appear, it's actually thus and so. Kissinger was very good at using the kind of things that we in the Foreign Service report, that try to provide the subtleties. He was very good in using those in his diplomatic contacts to develop a rapport with somebody. Kissinger never seemed to lose his sense of what U.S. strategic goals were in a specific situation, but in order to develop the right kind of rapport to get people to go along with U.S. strategic goals, he was prepared to get very deeply into the complexities of their particular situation.

Q: You left the Operations Center when?MACK: In December of 1976.

Q: So a new administration was coming in. By the way, just for the record...Djerejian, how did that come out?

MACK: I think that Larry Eagleburger probably was instrumental in protecting him and saving his career. And Larry did that a number of times with Foreign Service officers who had done one or another thing that caused Kissinger to say, that's the most idiotic...who is this nitwit. And Larry was very good in explaining that one incident did not reflect the totality of an officer's career. He did protect Ed, who later became an Assistant Secretary for NEA, and ambassador to Syria and to Israel. The same thing happened with other people, such as Parker Borg, an FSO classmate of mine, who became ambassador to one African country and later to Iceland. Parker had been for a while on Kissinger's immediate staff. He and Kissinger had had a big set-to, and Parker was removed from the immediate staff but was protected in the rest of his career. I had a very high regard for the way Eagleburger acted as a buffer between Kissinger and the rest of the Foreign Service. Some people say that Eagleburger was the Secretary's hatchet man. I didn't find that was the case. It seemed to me that Eagleburger did a lot to educate the Secretary about the Foreign Service, and also in key situations to protect the individual Foreign Service officer from the Secretary's wrath. Kissinger was quick to reach judgments, and sometimes on the basis of very little exposure, he would get a negative opinion about a person.

Q: Where did you go in '77?

MACK: In the early part of January 1977, I arrived in Baghdad where I was to be the number two officer in the U.S. Interests Section, nominally part of the Belgian Embassy. We had not had diplomatic relations with Iraq since 1967 when relations were broken as the result of the June '67 war between the Arabs and the Israelis. We had established an Interests Section in Iraq run by the Belgians from '67 to '72. In '72 the first U.S. personnel went out to the Interests Section. By 1976 the head of our Interests Section was Marshall Wiley, and Marshall asked me to come and fill a new position, to be the number two person and the political officer. Our office was in the former Romanian embassy building, but it was well located in town. The office was very small, still under the Belgian flag with a picture of King Baudouin on the wall. My identity card described me as a Counselor of the Belgian Embassy, and in smaller print it said Section for the Protection of U.S. Interests. We dealt directly with the Iraqi government, albeit below the ministerial level. Lacking diplomatic relations, the Iraqi Foreign Ministry told us that we were not to deal with government cabinet rank members, and I suppose we were also a little more suspect than everybody else. During my time in Iraq in the late 1970s, I found that the Iraqis suspected everybody, including Arab diplomats. We were maybe a little bit less trusted and less well treated than the other foreign diplomats.

Q: You were there from when to when?

MACK: I was in Baghdad for a total of two and a half years. This, of course, was my second assignment there, but I was in Baghdad from January of 1977 to the summer of 1979. I believe I left early in July 1979, shortly before Saddam Hussein took full control.

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

MACK: Iraq was a genuine hardship post, and relations between U.S. and Iraq were quite bad. My goal was very modest really. In fact I didn't go there with the idea that we would restore diplomatic relations necessarily during my time there. I merely wanted to turn our relations into something that would be a little bit more proper, and for there to be a degree of confidence on both sides. It was only a couple of years after the U.S. had conspired or colluded with the Shah of Iran to destabilize the Iraqi government by supporting the Kurds in the northern part of the country. As a result, the Iraqis had very good reason from their point of view to be suspicious of us. I felt I was under surveillance virtually all the time I was there. Any diplomat had to get permission to go out of Baghdad to other parts of the country, but it was clear that permission was a little more difficult for somebody from the U.S. Interests Section in the Belgian embassy.

I had Iraqi friends from my previous assignment. Occasionally, I would meet old friends in a government office or in somebody else's diplomatic function, and they would whisper, "You know I'd really like to get together some time, but I can't". And they couldn't. Everybody was subject to interrogation by the secret police for having contacts with foreign diplomats, let alone American diplomats. Outside of official contacts, mostly in the foreign ministry, those Iraqis who did have regular contacts with us were probably authorized to do so by the Iraqi intelligence, and we generally primed that into our understanding. It's fair to say the Iraqis were not overjoyed at having a political officer at this point attached to our little office, but they did accept it in the end. After I'd been there for some months, they also discovered - it was right there on my CV - that I had served at the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem. I remember this led to not one but two very difficult conversations between me and the chief of protocol, until he was satisfied that my assignment in Jerusalem had not made me a Zionist spy.

We had to be very careful. I made it a point to always go out of my way to telegraph my movements. Since our local employees could be depended upon to be interrogated, I would tell them that I was going down to the foreign ministry to see so-and-so. When I was in the foreign ministry itself I might drop into another office, but I would always have a reason for everything I was doing. I also made it a point to raise international issues like the Law of the Sea and global disarmament issues, to try to get the Iraqis used to the idea that the U.S. was prepared to deal with Iraq seriously and openly on international issues beyond bi-lateral or regional concerns. I would raise Arab-Israeli matters with them, of course. Our policies were radically different, but rather than avoiding these issues I thought it was best to get them out on the table. Gradually, they came to appreciate that they could have a genuine diplomatic dialogue with us. In the foreign ministry I met with under secretaries and other fairly senior people. I also developed a pretty good rapport with Iraqis in some of the economic ministries, since American business was gradually developing in the country, and they were interested in getting access to American technology. In some of the economic ministries we had fairly useful discussions. In fact, on issues like the Arab boycott of Israel, we made more progress during this period with Iraq than we did with most of the Arab countries.

Nonetheless, it remained a very touchy relationship. A lot of the reporting I did came second hand from other diplomats, particularly the Arab diplomats. I drew shamelessly on their perceptions. Because I spoke Arabic fairly well, I was almost a part of the Arab diplomatic corps in Baghdad. I spent a lot of time talking with them, and once in a while they would come to my house to see me. I think they found it a break from the Baghdad. Iraq was not an especially pleasant place to be for an Arab diplomat seeking a more relaxed environment. During the oil boom, a lot of people were coming to Baghdad from all over the world. It was very much on the third world and Arab-Islamic world circuits. So there were a lot of senior visitors. I remember after one of these high level visits an Arab ambassador arriving at a reception, grabbing an alcoholic drink with great gusto and saying, you don't know how lucky you are that you don't have diplomatic relations with Iraq. If I have to go to another one of these airport receptions and stand out there for three hours with nothing but warm Coca-Cola...

Q: Again, who was the big enchilada, who was the top man in Iraq at this time?

MACK: The president was President Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, a former general, distinguished, older. I had a lot of respect for him, but clearly the strong man of the regime by this time the man everybody called "His Excellency, the deputy," was Saddam Hussein. He was Bakr's number two in various positions, but not all. Bakr was president of the Iraqi Republic, but that was not his most important position. His most important position was chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council. His second most important position, probably, was as chairman of the Regional Leadership of the Baath Party. The Arabic title for all three positions was ra'is. The President of the Republic was a government position where Bakr's deputy as vice president was nominally a Kurd, Taha Mohieddin Marouf. Bakr's second position was head of the Revolutionary Command Council, which was mostly military but included also non-military Baath Party civilians like Saddam Hussein, Bakr's deputy for this body. And then third was the Regional Command of the Baath Party. By regional they meant Iraq. There was a national Baath Party Command which had its headquarters in Baghdad, but that was for the whole Arab world. This Pan-Arab organization was headed by a Syrian Christian ideologue, Michel Aflaq, one of the founders of the Baath Party. They were one of the groups that were the Iraqi regime considered off-limits to people like me. I wasn't supposed to talk to them. It was interesting, because there was another Baath Party regime in Syria. They had their own national command that was at odds with the national command in Baghdad, and the rivalry between the Iraqi and Syrian wings of the Baath Party was very intense.

American diplomats were not the only pariahs in Baghdad. The Syrians, most of the time I was there, were probably less trusted and more under surveillance than we were. Moreover, the Syrians were subjected to a lot of active harassment like having their cars bombed at one point. The Iranians were not in particularly good grace. So for starters there were two diplomats who always welcomed seeing me, the Iranians and the Syrians.

Most of the foreign diplomats in Baghdad appreciated the strategic importance of Iraq and its economic potential, since it was clearly becoming an economic power house in the area. They respected the political strength of the regime, but they were dismayed by the social and political difficulties that Iraqis had to undergo, and to which diplomats also were subjected to a greater or lesser degree. For example, you had to request travel permits out of Baghdad two weeks in advance. You never knew until the last whether you were going to get your travel permit granted or not. Some people with more secure relationships probably ignored the travel permit requirement, but I knew that personnel in the U.S. Interests Section should not. This would be like doing an illegal foreign currency transaction. These were the sort of things that could be grounds for blackmail and pressure, if you tried to play fast and loose with the restrictions. So we were pretty careful to mind our p's and q's. Occasionally, I would take some risks. There was an Iraqi neighbor, for example, a woman who had a man visiting her from time to time, probably her lover. He was an Iraqi physician who treated a number of very high ranking people in the government. I could slip over to their house for tea and have interesting conversations. There were a few other occasions where I was able to have the sort of conversations that we as Foreign Service officers all delight in. But most of the time I was in situations where I had to assume that my conversation was being recorded, that it would be listened to by Iraqi intelligence, or might be listened to by Iraqi intelligence, so I was fairly cautious.

The working environment was difficult in other ways, and we had to run the Interests Section in a manner that was often not by the book. It was not easy to get qualified local hire personnel. The economy was booming. There was a very low level of unemployment in Iraq, and the U.S. Interests Section in the Belgium embassy was not a prestigious work address. So our employees tended to be a mixed bag. A lot of our employees had been with us for years, if not decades, going back to the time when we had diplomatic relations. They were usually from the minorities - Christians and Kurds. We benefited by hiring women, because some very capable women were not as employable in the Iraqi economy as men were, even though Iraq is pretty advanced in bringing women into the work force. But we had some truly incompetent employees that we were keeping on simply because we couldn't get better replacements. We knew they were under pressure to report to the Iraqi authorities. We told them, don't resist this. Your job is totally okay, tell them what you do, you don't have anything to hide, we don't expect you to hide anything.

At one point we had an exceptional employee walk in and apply for a job as our commercial assistant. This was very important to us because we were beginning to have a growing commercial activity with trade missions from the Department of Commerce. Khalid Talia was a Chaldean Christian but spoke fluent English and seemed to be the kind of person who could get a much better job than this. We suspected that he had been sent to us by the intelligence, mukhabarat. He was hired just before I got there. He immediately wanted to get to know me as the political officer. After a short period of time it became very obvious that to me that he was an intelligence officer. He never came out flatly and told me so, but he liked to let on that he was more important than he might seem. He was able to do things that nobody else could do. I remember one of the little things we did was to reestablish cultural exchange in the archeological area. Fr. Carney Gavin, a senior faculty member of the Harvard Semitic Museum came to Baghdad to bring back to Iraq the first token return of some cuneiform Hittite clay tablets that had been taken out of Iraq back in the '30s by a Harvard archeological exhibition. Senator Edward Kennedy, who had made a visit to Baghdad, had brokered this agreement. Hopefully, this first token return would help reestablish a wider U.S. - Iraqi relationship. The State Department sent a cable to us saying that Fr. Gavin would be coming into the airport with this sealed container, and it was terribly important that it not be opened in the airport since the very fragile clay tablet could be damaged if it were mishandled. I spent weeks working with the people at the Iraqi National Museum, who were quite excited by the visit. At the very last minute they said, we can't go with you to the airport, it's too dangerous for us, and it would raise too many questions. They were afraid to go to the airport to help receive this American with his package about 12" x 12", the size of a bomb I suppose. I took the problem to Khalid Talia, our commercial assistant. Khalid readily said he would go with me to the airport. It was like having a senior official of the Baath Party with me! As we walked through, customs and immigration officials would all but salute. They obviously recognized Khalid for what he was. We were extremely well treated. They whisked us through customs with no questions, perfectly happy that we bring this sealed container in. No problem at all. That was the first of a number of occasions when Khalid proved his value.

One of the things I did was to take a trip through northern Iraq. No U.S. diplomat had taken a trip to northern Iraq since before the break in relations in 1967. And you'll recall we had been involved with Iran in the effort to help the Kurds. I had applied to take this trip to northern Iraq, been turned down several times, and finally again I asked for Khalid's advice. He said maybe it would help if traveled with me. I said, fine. So I sent in a request to go accompanied by a member of the embassy staff. No problem. Trip approved. So Khalid and I took this trip through northern Iraq, giving me a chance to get to know him better. He gradually became more open about his curious relationship. And it was very much a two-way street, because he was able to verify to the intelligence people that we were not up to things we shouldn't be doing. I was able to feed through him the U.S. government line on some bilateral U.S.-Iraq issues in a way that perhaps had more credibility than they would when I made the same points at the foreign ministry. Khalid Talia, who has since died of a heart attack, continued to be the key Foreign Service locally hired employee at our office in Baghdad until the time when we had diplomatic relations.

Our security people from Washington, when they came out on an inspection, were absolutely outraged. How could we let such a thing happen? Well, it was an unusual situation in Baghdad. When I arrived there, for example, we had no communication facilities. When we wanted to have a classified communication, we would do a one-time pad encryption, take it down to the PT&T, and send it through commercial channels. We got other classified correspondence by pouch from Kuwait, once a week. After reading classified material, we would destroy it, trying to keep the absolute minimum of classified material. We gradually upgraded our communications, but even by the time I'd left, two and a half years later, they were far short of first class communications. Our Kurdish driver and his wife had an apartment in the chancery. Yes, we had a secure area, but it wouldn't have taken much for them to get in during the course of the night when all the Americans were away, and I suspect that they did let Iraqi intelligence in. Perhaps not. They were Kurds, and the Kurds can be both loyal to friends and very stubborn.

I also suspected the Kurdish driver was raking off the embassy on his purchase for us of airplane tickets. This gave him the wherewithal to do illegal currency transactions. He was an illiterate Kurdish driver, but he was in some ways very shrewd, very reckless and dumb in other ways. Partly because of the Kurdish driver's stubbornness and also because I think he was doing things that were questionable, he was held in jail for over a year. I know this because the Kurdish cleaning woman would come in every day and cry to me about what was I going to do about it. Over and over, I raised the matter at the Foreign Ministry, where I was blandly told that they would refer my query to "the competent authorities."

In a bit of black humor, I would describe the Kurdish cleaning lady as our security officer. This was before the seizure of our Tehran embassy, when you didn't worry about burning classified material, you just shredded it. Afterwards, we would give the shredded material to her, and she would burn it in the incinerator. And, of course, she had access to all the declassified area of the building at night. It was a highly irregular situation, but we were not doing particularly sensitive work during this period. We were simply trying to reestablish a normal kind of relationship, and it was one of those little steps along the way to full relations.

Normally, I was the number two in the Interests Section. However, for a period of about nine months in late 1977 and early 1978, I was acting in charge between Marshall Wiley and Edward Peck, who later came out to be the head of the Interests Section. During this period I became well known in the Baghdad diplomatic corps and at the foreign ministry. That paid off later when I dealt with Iraqis in Washington.

Q: What about the Soviet relationship? How did we see that? I mean they were giving them all their equipment.

MACK: That's right. I retrospect, I think we exaggerated the strength of the Soviet-Iraqi relationship. The Soviet relationship with Iraq was very important. It was one of the things we reported on, to the extent we were able to do so. I can remember calling on the number two man, the DCM if you will, or Soviet counselor of embassy a couple of times. The Soviets had a very broad, well established relationship. It was party to party between the communist party and the Baath party. It was military to military. It was through all the different ministries. We were aware that both sides had deep suspicions of one another. It was such a broad relationship, there were so many Soviet military - perhaps something like 1500 Soviet military advisers, but I forget what we estimated the number to be - that we tended to exaggerate the depth of the relationship.

The Soviet-Iraqi relationship was quite a broad one. It was strengthened, I believe, by oil swaps in return for arms. The Iraqis would provide oil to the Soviets, who would then ship it to India or other places and use it in sort of counterpart trade. Even though the Iraqis were very keen to get more into hard currency dealings and away from their dependence upon barter trade, they had barter trade arrangements with all the communist bloc countries. The Iraqis wanted to get back into the western market system. The Iraqi economy at that time was very much socialist and state controlled. As a result, along with the political-social deprivations, there were serious economic deprivations which weren't necessary. Typically, the Iraqis had all the worst aspects of both an underdeveloped country and a socialist country. They tried to set all the prices, for example, for agricultural produce. They did so in such an inept fashion that in this country of great agricultural potential, you almost never saw more than one fresh vegetable at a time on the market. Typically, they would set prices a little bit too low in the market, and the farmers would withhold produce. You would only see potatoes for a short period of the year, so I grew potatoes in the garden of my house. You would only see imported bananas once in a while, and they tended to disappear into the back alley black market where prices were higher than the public market place. Since we had a 15 months old daughter when we arrived, and a few years older when we left, we were always scavenging the market. My wife spent a lot of time standing in lines for tomatoes and other delicacies. There were conditions of artificial scarcity that didn't need to be the case. Diplomats were shielded from this a little bit but not entirely. In the Interests Section we could see the potential for Iraq, but we often despaired that they would open up and begin to loosen up on the reins of power.

Q: That's the tragedy of Iraq, isn't it? Here is that country with lots of potential.

MACK: Very much so. But they were definitely on the upswing during this period. Tight though the government controls were, the economics of the country were improving year to year to year. Baghdad was scheduled to be the location for a non-aligned summit in, I believe, 1980. The outbreak of the Iraq-Iran war prevented that from taking place. But relations were very good, for example, between Cuba and Baghdad. As a result, sugar was one thing that was plentiful on the market. There were anomalies like this because of the barter trade that they entered with so many different countries. Relationships were very good with Yugoslavia, a certain appreciation on the part of the Iraqis of a socialist country that could maintain its independence from Moscow. They were worried about how they were going to do this. They worried about an over dependence upon the Russians.

So we could see the potential for a stronger American role, but I felt it was important not to rush things, but to gradually build up trust. We built up a little bit of a cultural exchange relationship, but not much of a one. We were making some very substantial strides in the commercial area, mostly things like American agricultural products, but also other American items were beginning to come in. Still there were areas where there couldn't be any direct relationship. The Iraqis would not import American cars. We saw American cars everywhere; anybody who had the right contacts in the Baath party, or in the government, could go to Kuwait and buy American Chevrolets. White Chevrolet Impalas were common in Iraq, but they all showed up in the U.S. exports to Kuwait and enriched the Chevrolet dealership in Kuwait. There was a great premium for used American vehicles.

A lot of my time was spent trying to dope out how the Iraqi system worked. I often felt that nobody was interested in what we were reporting. In fact, at the end of my time in Baghdad, when I came back and had a de-briefing by the intelligence community, a huge number of people showed up. There was a lot of interest in everything we were reporting, and I reported everything from biographic information on Saddam Hussein and his family relationships, to Soviet-Iraqi relationships, Syrian-Iraqi relationships, whatever.

The Arab Summit in Baghdad in 1978 was a key event. It took place after the Camp David agreements, and the summit resulted in the expulsion of Egypt from the Arab League. There was obviously a lot of interest in Washington because of the Arab-Israeli issue. I went to see one of my Arab diplomatic colleagues, one of the Arab ambassadors right after the summit ended, because everybody wanted to know what the secret agreements were, particularly regarding Egypt. This was a case where all that cultivation and drinking coffee together paid off, because he received me and was helpful. I said Washington is very interested in finding out about the summit. He said, I know exactly what you need, here's the final agreement, I will go to the next room. The secret agreements were in Arabic, of course. I did the fastest, quick translation from Arabic into English that I've ever done of an important document. I scooped the U.S. intelligence community, when they got it from some of the other Arab capitals by about five or six days later. At least, that pleased me.

This second assignment in Baghdad was a great intellectual challenge, trying to figure out what was going on. I felt personally drained because I didn't have as much contact with Iraqis as I would have liked to have had. I often had to rely on analysis of what I gleaned from the Iraqi media in addition to chance conversations. In this way, for example, I was able to analyze the shift by Saddam Hussein from confrontation with the Iraqi Shia during their religious observances in early 1977 to appeasing them a year later by praying in the Shia manner at the shrine in Karbala.

One of the people I had gotten to meet was an Iraqi who served as an interpreter for Saddam Hussein. He was from the ministry of information, but he very often served as interpreter for Saddam Hussein. He was a bit of a character, rather flamboyant. He was as near to a flaming fairy as would be tolerated in the rather strict and sedate Iraqi society.

Q: For somebody who might not know the terminology, we're talking about a homosexual.

MACK: Yes. As I was leaving in the summer of 1979, he said, I want to have you to a farewell luncheon. Of course, I was delighted. He was the only Iraqi who had asked me to a farewell social event. I remember he offered to pick me up outside the U.S. Interests Section and go to a restaurant, just the two of us. Well, I thought that was He said, "Hold it very carefully, because you can't get these radios here. I got it when I went with Saddam Hussein to Cuba." He said he got it in the duty free, and "It's really a good radio, so I don't want to leave it in the car, we'll bring it into the restaurant." We went to a restaurant that was called The Ruby, Al-Yaqut in Arabic. It was a houseboat on the Tigris River, and we had an exceptionally good meal. The government interpreter took this radio in with him, telling me he was afraid it would be stolen if he left it in the car. He put the radio on a seat between him and me. So I proceeded to deliver my lines into what I knew was a bugged radio. I recited everything that I wanted to tell the Iraqi government, particularly what I understood to be very strong U.S. concerns at that point about what seemed to be a drift to war with Iran. This was in the summer of 1979, and our concern was that this would be very destabilizing for the area and would work against U.S. and Iraqi interests in the long run. I remember the interpreter making the other argument that, no, no, the government here knows what they're doing. What he said tracked with other indications I had seen that they felt that Iran was breaking up, and Iraq could grab the part of Iran which was across the border east of the Iraqi province of Basra. This area was often shown on Iraqi produced maps of the region as Arabistan, while the Iranians called it Khuzestan. It was one of the main oil producing areas and had an indigenous Arab-speaking population. In Baathi ideology as expounded by some Iraqis, this was part of the greater Arab nation. It was clear that they thought they could move in and have this area for the taking.

This was my last reporting cable from Baghdad. I expressed my concern that Iraqi officials seemed so confident about their ability to pick up part of what they saw as a collapsing and disintegrating Iranian empire in the period after the Islamic revolution. I never had the feeling that the Iraqis felt threatened by Iran. It was much more a question of some Iraqis being motivated by a combination of Arab nationalism and their own territorial greed. It was arrogant and reckless to a remarkable degree. I remember people in Washington disbelieving and saying no, they wouldn't be so crazy. But it turned out to be one of the occasions, and not the last, when Iraqi leaders allowed a combination of political arrogance and greed, and I think a bit of parochialism about the way the world really works, to overcome good sense and prudence.

Q: Were they making any noises about Kuwait at that time?

MACK: Oh, no. There hadn't been any threats expressed against Kuwait. The Kuwaiti ambassador was one of the people I saw very often. He had total disdain, I remember, for the Iraqis, and there were a lot of Kuwaitis who came to Iraq as tourists because in Iraq they could drink, and there were also looser social standards as far as relations between the sexes. And Iraq was green, greenery and water, so it was a very popular destination for Kuwaiti tourists. When they could get an exit permit, and when they could get the hard currency, Iraqis loved to go down to Kuwait to shop. Kuwait had the free market that Iraq lacked. Iraq had the relaxed social mores, the greenery that Kuwait lacked. So it seemed like a pretty good relationship, and one that could go on for a long time.

Q: Do you have any comments about how Marshall Wiley and Ed Peck got along?

MACK: I would say that both of them came there with the idea of the relationship becoming a much more elevated one. Both left a little discouraged that during their time all they had been able to do is push the ball a little further. Neither one of them found a good reason why the Iraqis didn't establish diplomatic relations with us. Sure, our relations were not very good, they were marked by a lot of suspicion, but that was true for a lot of other countries. I felt the Iraqi leadership believed it gained a little bit of leverage in the Arab world by posing as being purer than other Arabs. They weren't going to compromise their principles. They always talked about the Palestine issue as if it was the issue of destiny. In fact, it was quite clear to me that strategically they ought to be a lot more concerned about Iran than about Israel. Why would they be concerned about Israel? In my conversations with them, I would try to make the point. But they would have none of it. In their view, I did not understand the importance of their nationalist mission, and they felt threatened whenever and anywhere an Arab was threatened. They felt as brothers to Palestinians. This was very much in their rhetoric. A lot of the Arab ambassadors were very cynical about this rhetoric and tended to say it was just a mask for Iraqi efforts to establish their leadership in the Arab world. That's partly true, but there was a large dose of true belief. It was a combination of Baath party ideology with realpolitik, and this was the kind of thing that prevented them from moving to a full diplomatic relations with us.

Q: Did you get a feel for...you know, something that goes back, we're talking about way back, a couple of millennia back, the Cairo versus Baghdad axis for the Arab world?

MACK: Yes, of course. They were glad to see Sadat out of the Arab League. The Egyptians immediately became another group of pariah diplomats. The Egyptian embassy people, who had previously avoided me, suddenly were happy to come to my house or exchange visits. The real tension during most of my time there was between Damascus and Baghdad. They were ideologically so close, and yet so much at odds in personal antagonisms between the leaders, plus there was a geopolitical aspect. The Cairo-Baghdad rivalry is an old one but not as old in Arab and Islamic history as the Damascus-Baghdad rivalry. That one, which goes right back to the first centuries of Islam, is very deep. In the run-up to the Baghdad summit, when the Iraqis tried to assert their leadership, they made a tactical decision for a rapprochement with the Syrians. It lasted for a few weeks, just long enough for the Baghdad summit and a short period afterwards. It seemed very unnatural. Neither country had kept an ambassador in the other's capital. The charge d'affaires of the Syrian embassy described the bizarre events in the days just before the summit when the Iraqis suddenly realized that it wouldn't look too good when Hafez al Assad arrived to have burned out cars in front of the Syrian embassy. The Syrian embassy cars had been trashed by an Iraqi mob, and there were no Iraqi mobs that weren't inspired by the Iraqi regime. After having ignored them for a long time, the Iraqis told the Syrian embassy to please remove the cars. The head of the Syrian embassy, told them, not on your life. You trashed the cars, you remove them. Sure enough, about a day before the Syrian delegation to the summit arrived, the Iraqis dragged away the burned out vehicles.

We did not see Iraq as being the natural leader of the Arab world, but it was definitely in contention with both Egypt and Syria. Temporarily, however, after the Baghdad summit, it had emerged as the nominal leader of the Arab world. To the extent that the Iraqis thought strategically, a claim to leadership arose from some of Saddam Hussein's occasional writings that you wouldn't necessarily see but you'd hear about. These were internal Baath party documents sometimes echoed in the Iraqi press. It seemed clear he thought in terms of an emerging multi-polarity in the world. It would not be just an East-West U.S.-Soviet bloc conflict, but there would be different blocs. Europe, with which Iraq was establishing good relations, particularly with the French, would be one bloc. The French were establishing very good relations with Iraq in the military supply area. Iraqi strategists saw Europe as one pole, along with the Far East as another. They saw the Soviet Union, they saw the U.S., but they also saw the Arab world as one of the power poles, and clearly Saddam Hussein saw Iraq as being the leader of the Arab bloc. So I suppose this kind of strategic view, along with their ideological commitment to Arab unity, those two things kind of went together. Moreover, the needs of a dictatorial regime to survive and to repress any kind of dissent, together with Iraq's growing economic power, fed these notions of strategy.

Q: I guess to just wrap this up for this time, you left there in the summer of '79.

MACK: I left in the summer of '79 after the Islamic revolution in Iran. The Ayatollah Khomeini, who had been living in exile in the Iraqi Shia city of Najaf, was expelled from Iraq when the regime was trying to improve its relations with Iran under the Shah. They lived to regret that. I left before Iraq and Iran went to actual hostilities, but you could see the tensions rising. I also left shortly before President Bakr retired and Saddam Hussein became the supreme leader of the country. Soon after he became the top man, nominally as well as actually, Saddam conducted a thorough going purge at the leadership level. This astonished people, because many who thought they were long time comrades in arms of Saddam, even close friends, were executed. He was a formidable character. Nonetheless, many of the Iraqis saw him as the human face of the regime. He was known to be tough and ruthless, but he was also known to be willing to make exceptions to the Baath party rules. There was a kind of ombudsman system set up, whereby people could send messages and complaints about the bureaucracy to His Excellency, the deputy. Of course, this was one of the ways that Saddam Hussein could gain information useful to his system of control.

Q: I even saw this with King Saud in Arabia.

MACK: Petitioners wouldn't have direct contact with Saddam Hussein, but they could get messages to him, in effect reporting on corruption or something that might take place. During this time, there was virtually no crime in Iraq. They were going through a period of economic prosperity, but also the penalties for law breaking were quite ruthless.

There was none of the kind of petty crime that one associates with a third world country. If there was corruption, it was very, very well hidden, and there were highly publicized cases of government officials being executed for corrupt practices. Corruption was a capital crime. Illegal currency transactions were capital crimes. Illegal border crossings were dealt with very ruthlessly. This was very much a Stalinist society. It was a Stalinist political system but with a heavy dose of third world incompetence that gave it just a little bit of a human touch. Security in Baghdad, at least, was good for people who had no involvement in politics. My wife and baby daughter went everywhere in the city unprotected, and I never gave it a thought.

Q: Just to put it on record, you left there in the summer of 1979, just as things were heating up. We're going to have a war between Iran-Iraq, you're going to have our embassy seized, all hell is going to break loose.

MACK: The Tehran embassy had been seized briefly but let go. At the time, we did not know that the embassy would be seized again with U.S. diplomats held hostage for over a year.

Q: So where did you go from there?

MACK: I was assigned to Tunis as DCM. Something like 21 people bid that job. It was one of the more desirable jobs that came up that year at my grade, and I didn't think I'd have much chance. I got the job partly because of my reporting from Baghdad, but also because I had volunteered to take the trip to Beirut in 1976. That was remembered by a staff assistant in NEA who mentioned it to the senior Deputy who was considering the DCM possibilities. They remembered that I had been there when they needed me. This is the kind of thing that built loyalty between the NEA bureau and the people who worked there.

Q: Okay, we'll stop at that point.

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Today is the 22nd of February 1996. David, so we're going to Tunisia where you're going to be DCM. You were DCM there from when to when?

MACK: I was DCM in Tunisia from 1979 to 1982. That time did include a very substantial period between ambassadors when I was chargï¿½ d'affaires for a little over six months.

Q: You were saying part of your going out there was because you had been around and done something when needed. Who was the ambassador, because often it's still the ambassador's choice.

MACK: The ambassador was Stephen Bosworth. It was his first ambassadorial assignment. Steve was primarily an economic specialist and approached his assignment as ambassador to Tunisia with an understanding that he brought some very important strengths to the job which I think people have recognized in him. But he also recognized that he was new to the area. Steve told the Assistant Secretary for NEA that he would like to have an Arabist as his DCM, and he would look to the bureau to help find a person who was qualified both in area understanding and knowledge, but also had managerial ability to take on that job.

Q: And you were it.

MACK: I got the nod and found my association, first with Steve Bosworth and later with his successor Walter Cutler to be a very successful one. I had the good luck as a first time DCM of working for two ambassadors who were both superb chiefs of mission. They were quite different in their particular approaches, but both of them were very skillful at running a mission and making use of their DCM.

Q: When you went out there in '79. '79 was sort of a critical year in the Near East context.

MACK: I'm just a little bit uncertain as to when I arrived but I believe it was around the middle of August, it could have been earlier.

Q: The real critical date is November '79. You were well in place.

MACK: I was well in place before the seizure of our embassy in Tehran. From the point of view of U.S. interests and concerns in the area at large, Tunisia was only beginning to be a key post for regional purposes. There was a very strong bilateral relationship, as had always been the case. This was a great change for me coming from assignments in two countries, Libya and Iraq, where we had a very tenuous and almost adversarial relationship, to come to a post where we not only had very good relations and close relations, but also quite wide relations. Our mission in Tunisia included a large AID mission, Peace Corps, very extensive cultural exchange activities, military assistance group as well as an attachï¿½'s office. We were involved in relationships with Tunisia across the board in a wide variety of ways, and it was for me also the largest diplomatic mission to which I'd been assigned. So that was a major change for me. Tunisia had kind of been out of the center of things regionally, partly because of its location, but also because President Bourguiba had followed a policy that had tended to lead to estrangement between Tunisia and the Arab League, which was dominated by Egypt at the time. This had changed greatly after the Baghdad summit in 1978 with the expulsion of Egypt from the Arab League and the switch of the Arab League headquarters from Cairo to Tunis.

Q: We're talking of course about the fall-out from the Camp David Accords and Egypt making peace with Israel.

MACK: That's right. The move of the Arab League headquarters to Tunisia led to a much larger Arab diplomatic corps. Tunisia was trying to take advantage of this change in Cairo's fortunes to build up its own relationship with the rest of the Arab world, moving a bit eastward in its political orientation. I wouldn't want to overstate that, but to a degree it was seeing an opportunity and moving in that direction. In addition, the organization of the Islamic conference had elected a Tunisian, Habib Chatty, as its secretary general. The organization of the Islamic conference had its headquarters in Jeddah, but Habib Chatty was often in Tunis. There was another dimension, therefore, in which Tunisia had a certain weight in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

Q: What was the difference between the Islamic conference and the Arab League?

MACK: The organization of Islamic conference is an organization for the governments of Muslim countries, all the way from Nigeria to Indonesia. It's a much broader organization then the Arab League. It included Iran among its members and was only beginning to get on the U.S. scope in terms of its potential importance. Tunisia had been rather isolated from the Arab world, and because of its very secular government was not very much involved in Islamic politics. It's fair to say that the Tunisians were enjoying the somewhat greater weight that this seemed to give them internationally.

Q: In the first place could you tell me how Stephen Bosworth operated? You say he was an economist, and Tunisia doesn't seem to be particularly an economist playground. Maybe I'm wrong.

MACK: Steve took a very broad approach toward the U.S. government relationship with Tunisia and his own personal role as ambassador. We were heavily engaged with the Tunisian economy. While it was not one of the important economies of the world, it was pretty obvious that the future progress in Tunisia was dependent upon improving its economic situation. As a friendly government, the United States would reap a great deal of credit in its overall relationships with Tunisia if it could really help Tunisia take off economically. We had an economic relationship, particularly with AID and to some extent with the Peace Corps. Bosworth, who saw that there was a great need for economic restructuring in Tunisia, set about using our leverage as a major provider of aid and our good political relationship to engage the Tunisians in a fairly systematic and highly sophisticated economic dialogue. He would have small meetings at his residence, including our AID director, our economic counselor and key economic figures in the Tunisian government. It was really sort of a post doctoral seminar in economics among these guys. Without wanting to impose ourselves in some kind of neo-colonialist role, it seemed desirable to nudge the Tunisians along to the kind of economic restructuring which, painful though it might be for internal political reasons, would enable them to achieve greater economic success. In fact, Tunisia has done that. I like to think part of it was the result of these seeds that were planted in the time that Steve Bosworth was there. It was his idea that the U.S. not simply hand out aid but make sure that it accomplished some permanent development.

I wouldn't want to suggest that Steve was focused totally on that. He was aware also of the security relationship between the two countries and U.S. political support for Tunisia. These two elements were keys to our welcome in the country. We didn't have the advantages the French did with their cultural entrï¿½e to the country, where the elite tended to be Francophone and had been educated in French universities. We were never going to be the kind of economic partner with Tunisia that the European community could be, for example. And, obviously, we didn't have the automatic community of sentiment that the Arabs enjoyed with Tunisia. But there were these political and security dimensions. Without wanting to oversimplify, basically as long as U.S. relationships with Libya were bad, and as long as Tunisia felt threatened by Libya, we were bound to have a fairly close relationship with Tunisia. Moreover, Tunisia was on the southern littoral of the Mediterranean, which counted for something during the cold war. We had more U.S. Navy ship visits into Tunisian ports than any other country on the southern Mediterranean littoral. We also had a fairly brisk military assistance program underway for training and supply. Generally speaking, U.S. military equipment was offered to Tunisia on concessional terms. And it became clear that the Tunisians very much relied upon the presence of the Sixth Fleet as an ultimate security guarantee if things were to go bad with either Libya or Algeria. Tunisia tended to feel threatened by states that had fairly radical politics and military forces more substantial than those of Tunisia.

There was also the legacy of a couple of decades of high level contacts between Tunisian leaders and their U.S. counterparts. This was very much due to the historical role of President Bourguiba, a hero of Tunisian independence, and Tunisia's first and only president at that point. Bourguiba was a fascinating figure, very much in decline physically, in a manner that affected his mental stability. His doctors said he suffered from hardening of the arteries, and this seemed to be affecting some of his mental and emotional stability. That in turn had some serious deleterious and negative effects on the Tunisian political system. In effect, you had a sort of arterial sclerosis of Tunisian politics. The political system became increasingly rigid, increasingly centered around the cult of personality of Bourguiba, who was no longer able to manage the political situation and Tunisia's foreign policy on a consistent and regular basis as he used to do. As a result you had great rigidity in the system. It made it hard to have meaningful political change. Anybody who seemed to emerge as a possible successor to Bourguiba would eventually excite Bourguiba's suspicions. He would then remove such people from power.

It was a fairly humane government by regional terms, but it was not a progressive government at all politically. I say that despite the fact that culturally, economically, and in their foreign policy, there was much to be admired in what Bourguiba had accomplished and in what the rest of the Tunisian political establishment had absorbed by way of lessons. It was clear that with every passing year the tensions were building up internally and that there needed to be political change to accommodate them. Of course, Tunisian developments did not always happen on the schedule that Washington envisaged. When I was getting ready to go out to post as DCM, a political officer from the embassy was leaving Tunisia for another assignment. His name was Charles Brayshaw. When Charles had gone out to the post years earlier, I was the desk officer for Tunisia. I had told him at that time that he would have a very interesting assignment and while he was there certainly Bourguiba would die. That was something I believed was definitely going to happen during the two years I was the desk officer. It didn't happen then, it hasn't happened since. [Bourguiba died in April 6, 2000 at the age of 96, after the date of this oral history]. I remember Brayshaw passing through Washington between assignments, looking me in the eye and saying David, while you're in Tunisia it's going to be a very interesting assignment because certainly while you are there Bourguiba is going to die. He had found a very clever way to remind me of the difficulty of making these kinds of predictions.

Q: How did the arrival of the Arab League in Tunisia play? One, did we have relations with it? How did we deal with the Arab League?

MACK: We were just beginning to have discussions with them. We did not want to have a close relationship with the Arab League, given the fact that we took exception to expelling Egypt over the Camp David Accords. As a result, our contacts with the Arab League tended to be at my level and below, rather than at the ambassador's level. Arab League politics were of interest to me. Not only had it moved to Tunis, but a Tunisian secretary general replaced the long time Egyptian leadership. Chedi Klibi, the secretary general of the Arab League, had been Minister of Information in the government of Tunisia and remained part of the Tunisian political establishment. Like most of that establishment, he was basically Francophone in his education and quite secular, even rather European in his outlook. He was a curious, unlikely person to be the head of the Arab League. Moreover, Klibi had hired on a number of Tunisians as his immediate staff. Tunis was hosting a plethora of Arab ambassadors, because many Arab governments sent both an ambassador to Tunisia and, at the same time, an ambassador to the Arab League. One of the Arab ambassadors told me that he had felt insulted when he telephoned to speak to Chedi Klibi as the secretary general of the Arab League, and the phone was answered by a Tunisian secretary who spoke to him in French. This Arab ambassador, who like many of his colleagues did not speak French, found this symbolized the anomalous character of Tunisia as the center for multilateral Arab diplomacy.

After our embassy was taken in Iran, the U.S. stopped being quite so persnickety about contacts with the Arab League. We realized they could be potentially useful. As a result, the contacts that I had built up there shortly after my arrival became more frequent, and we certainly tried to maintain a good entrï¿½e to Klibi. When an Assistant Secretary of State came through Tunis, the embassy suggested he call on Klibi. From that time on, Klibi became much friendlier and more open to us. He also began trying to find a role for himself and the Arab League in brokering a solution that would lead to the release of our hostages. This never came to be, but we had quite an active series of exchanges with the Arab League all through the hostage crisis to try to generate some solution. As a diplomatic establishment, the Arab League was extremely sympathetic with us because of the question of diplomatic privileges. Arab League officials were consumed with their diplomatic status in Tunisia and wanting to make sure they got full privileges and amenities, and they obviously could see that there were some important international principles at stake.

Q: You're talking about the takeover of our embassy in Iran that lasted from November 1979 until January of 1981. Let's talk a bit about that crisis. I imagine you must have been pretty well consumed by this, weren't you?

MACK: I wouldn't want to suggest that it took up most of our time in Tunisia, but it certainly was the most exhausting preoccupation during the time I was there. It was the sort of thing that made you lose sleep and that ate away at you on a day-to-day basis. Not just in Tunisia, but probably U.S. diplomats all over the world tried to figure out ways in which they might somehow make a contribution to resolving this situation. It was an issue that we focused on with our intelligence assets, since from time to time Iranian officials would pass through Tunis. It was a major subject of our diplomatic conversations with the government of Tunisia, as well as with the Arab League. With the Arab League, it was the primary subject of our discussions, but it was also a major subject in our conversations with President Bourguiba and other officials in the Tunisian government. It was a great relief for us when the hostage crisis was resolved. One of the things we did at the embassy was to organize a non-denominational, but religious, thanksgiving service at a nearby church.

The bulk of our concerns in the embassy were with bilateral matters. I was personally very interested in the Arab League part, which was one of my special assignments. The ambassador said I could take care of all the Arab ambassadors, as far as he was concerned, and of the Arab League. Most of the rest of the embassy was concerned with bilateral matters involving our economic relationship, AID, security relationships, and our various military activities.

We had many high level U.S. government visitors coming through during that period, ranging from secretaries of State to former President Nixon and General Vernon Walters of the CIA. Philip Habib visited at one point as a special emissary. U.S. visitors always got fairly good access to the government, very often including meetings with President Bourguiba. Meetings with Bourguiba were always subject to real uncertainty. He would tend to be very lucid for a few minutes, and then go off on a tangent of some kind of his choosing. Sometimes he would even become very angry at his subordinates. One time, he angrily lectured his son, former foreign Minister Bourguiba Junior, who at that point was not in a formal position, just acting as a presidential adviser. While it could be embarrassing, especially for the Tunisians, it was always interesting to us to see how the old man was doing.

We were very sympathetic to some of the ministers who were gingerly trying to steer Tunisia to a little bit of political reform, and to economic reform. One of them was Prime Minister Mzali, who was very open to the idea of moving Tunisia in a new direction. This included bringing Tunisia a little closer to the Arab world, softening a bit the rather harsh secularism of official policy in order to make a few minor concessions to Islamist sentiment in the country. Mzali and a few others seemed to be trying to open up the political situation cautiously. Tunisia was very much a one-party state, and a very successful example of political control on the part the Destour party, which Bourguiba had founded. But increasingly that party was bureaucratic, rigid and wasn't able to adapt to change. Mzali was trying to change this, and for his pains he was eventually removed by Bourguiba as he became too popular.

It was instructive to watch this ebb and flow of personalities around Bourguiba. To our dismay it was very often the more sycophantic and unimaginative politicians who seemed to get along best with Bourguiba. But Bourguiba had done a number of great things for the country, and certainly it was very much to his credit that he had helped liberate Tunisian women to a very great degree. He had moved the country on to a course of family planning which was very remarkable then in the Muslim world, and I think is still quite creditable. They have managed to reduce the birth rate significantly. A lot of that is due to Bourguiba's influence. He also had done a lot to encourage modern education. He pressed very hard for that. We tried to be as helpful as we could through our cultural exchange program and the Peace Corps to buttress these efforts.

As I mentioned earlier, the security relationship was always strongest when the Libyans were the most threatening. At times the Libyans engaged in a certain amount of subversion, as well as propaganda against the country. Although Tunisia had a larger population, it did not have Libya's wealth. Moreover, Tunisia didn't have the same kind of modern arms that Libya had obtained from both the Soviets and the French. Tunisia often felt quite threatened during this period by Libya and Qadhafi's periodic threats that he was going to unify the two countries, if necessary by force. It was during one of these periods that Qadhafi became very exercised by the presence of the U.S. fleet in the Mediterranean, particularly as U.S. warships would periodically cruise into the Gulf of Sidra, entering the Libyan heartland. Qadhafi had warned that there was a line of death, that if our aircraft crossed over it they would be shot down. That led to a confrontation between one of our aircraft carriers and a squadron of Libyan fighters in which the Libyan fighters were like fish in a barrel for our carrier based fighter aircraft. Not too long after that, the aircraft carrier Nimitz entered the Bay of Tunis for a port call. I was in charge at the time, and although I continued to live in my house, I would use the ambassador's residence for official functions. We had a reception there for some of the officers from the Nimitz, and we weren't at all certain what kind of attendance we would get from the Tunisian officialdom. We thought they might be very cautious and careful about coming to a reception at that particular time. In fact, they showed up in droves. I remember the rapt attention of the Tunisian military officers when I introduced them to one of the fighter pilots who had shot down a Libyan fighter, and how they listened to his description of that military engagement.

Good relations prevailed through for most of our time there. It enabled us, for example, to be competitive with the French for influence in the country. The French were very much supporters of the status quo, which meant they really wanted to see a continuation of Bourguibaism with its strong pro-French bias. We tried to be more nuanced in our approach. We were all for various kinds of political and economic reforms, but also we had a particularly different approach in the language area. Part of our mission was the field school for the Foreign Service Institute Arabic program. The Foreign Service Institute Arabic Field School had been moved from Beirut after the troubles there. After a brief period in Cairo, it moved to Tunis. At the time I arrived, I was the only Arabic speaker in this very large mission. The Foreign Service Institute was very much of a step-child, not really welcomed by a lot of the people in the mission, in particular not by the previous DCM, who thought it was really a nuisance. Bosworth told me to look after the Foreign Service Institute, which as a graduate of the Arabic School in Beirut, I was keen to do. Plus, the director of the field school was Margaret Omar, nee Klefner. She later married the regional medical officer in Tunis and has published under the name Margaret Nydell. Margaret and I had studied Arabic together in Cairo when I was a Fulbright scholar and she was on a grant as well. It pleased me to take the Foreign Service Institute under my wing, help integrate them into the mission and see that they didn't feel isolated. I became a godfather to that part of the mission, as well as U.S. Information Agency Arabic language publication called "Al Majal," which was published in Tunis.

As it happened, while I was in Tunis we replaced the head of the political section with an Arabist. I also recruited a graduate of the Foreign Service Institute Arabic School to become the number two in the political section. We picked up an officer in the economic section who was an Arabist. So suddenly from no Arabists we had come to have a fair number. The French embassy took notice of that. At one point, we learned of a staff meeting at the French embassy in which the French ambassador warned that we were trying to undermine the French position in Tunisia. He reportedly said that we were engaged in a form of cultural warfare by encouraging the idea that Arabic was the proper official and first language of the Tunisians, and that English, not French, would be the second language. I felt, in fact, that we had succeeded in improving our level of contacts with younger Tunisians, since the younger generation of Tunisians tended to be better trained in classical Arabic, and more attuned to both Arabic and English.

At one point we had a meeting at my residence, coffee with some visiting American Arabist scholars, and we brought them together with some Tunisian students and intellectuals. One of the students angrily started talking about the Tunisian political establishment. He said that they all prefer to speak French and are married to French women. I said, they are not all married to French women, what are you talking about? He said, yes, yes, it's true they're all married to French women. Well, that was a perception of a younger generation of politically disenchanted Tunisians. The people I dealt with on a regular basis, cabinet ministers and under secretaries, automatically used French in their official work. They still do, I think to some degree. They were very proud of having a "formation franï¿½aise," [French educational foundation] as they would say. When I arrived, speaking Arabic very well but speaking French very badly, I tried to speak Arabic at the outset. I recall one of the ministers saying to me, "Monsieur Mack, l'Arabe n'est pas une langue serieuse." [Arabic is not a serious language.] He made sure I knew that he preferred to deal in French. I quickly learned that I was going to have to improve my French. I took a tutor, one of the embassy spouses who was a native French speaker, and she helped me get up to a level where at least I could manage my ordinary business with these people, and also effectively accompany visitors.

Q: It's sort of ironic, isn't it, to be in an Arab country...

MACK: Well, particularly in an Arab country that has become the seat of the Arab League. I could joke with younger Tunisians that this was the imperialist language, but it was no joking matter with the senior people in the establishment. They would insist upon speaking French, and would feel more comfortable in it when discussing official business.

Q: In one of my interviews with Dick Parker, who was one of our first ambassadors to Algeria, he appeared at a meeting where the entire cabinet was there, and Boumedienne said, now why is it that the American ambassador speaks Arabic, and most of you don't?

MACK: I had a similar experience actually. There was an Arabic language radio service, of course, in the country, as well as a French service. The Arabic broadcasts included a very popular talk show. The Embassy Public Affairs Officer got me once to take a call from the Tunisian host of this talk show, who interviewed me in Arabic. It happened that President Bourguiba was listening at that time, and he never forgot that. Bourguiba could forget a lot of things, but every time he would see me he would say, "Ah, c'est vous, Monsieur Mack, qui parle l'arabe." [Oh, it's you, Mr. Mack, who speaks Arabic.]

We may also have made people like Bourguiba a little bit suspicious in a matter related to Tunisia's Muslim identity. After what had happened in Iran under the Shah, who prevented U.S. contacts with the Islamist groups, we were determined to avoid that trap. Both Ambassador Bosworth and later Ambassador Cutler supported the idea that we should have a regular liaison with the leading Islamist political group, At-tayar al-Islami, which I would translate as the Islamic Current while francophone Tunisians called it, often derisively, Le Tendance Islamique. This was a moderate and rather tame organization, so far as we could see in our contacts with them. We conducted the dialogue for a while at the second secretary level, later at the first secretary level in our political section. It was a modest dialogue at a fairly modest level, but we kept in contact with them asking them about their concerns. This group, which at that time was headed by Abdul Fatah Morru, was basically reformist in character. They wanted to end things like the flouting of the Ramadan restrictions on eating, drinking, and smoking in public. They wanted more Islamic studies in the educational system. They basically felt, as I think a lot of ordinary Tunisians did, disgusted by the blatant sexual and other moral excesses that were associated with the tourism industry. The tourism industry is a very important part of the Tunisian economy.

Q: Well, there were nude beaches, weren't there, and all that sort of thing?

MACK: There no official nude beaches, but many European tourists would simply remove their tops at the beach. More seriously, many young Tunisians were being drawn into prostitution associated with foreign tourism. There was material there for the Islamists to exploit without necessarily wanting a violent overthrow of the system. Unfortunately, the system had very rigid and addicted to the pure form of Bourguibism. This implied turning their back on Islam in a cultural way, and treating it as something with a purely limited religious role. For some Tunisians, it meant they weren't really able to bring these Islamists into their political system. They did very much resent the fact that we had this contact, even though it was on a modest level, and they tried to get us to break it. When the matter was raised with the new ambassador, Walter Cutler, he turned it aside very nicely. Cutler had real savvy and finesse. He was a political pro, and particularly after what had happened in Iran we simply felt it was prudent to keep this kind of watching brief. I believe it was raised with Cutler by the Foreign Minister, probably speaking for Bourguiba. After Cutler turned the issue aside, it came up again through the Tunisian embassy in Washington to the State Department. So we had to turn it aside again. And then I remember it was brought up with the station.

Q: You're talking about the CIA.

MACK: The CIA had a close liaison relationship with the security people there. They didn't like it. They argued that the Islamic Current would amount to nothing if we didn't give them a sense of importance by talking to them. We didn't think that they amounted to a lot, but we thought they did represent a potential problem for the government, as they were exploiting some genuine grievances that were felt by a much larger part of the population. That kind of thing annoyed the Tunisian government, as did U.S. human rights reports that were, let's say nuanced, and not enthusiastic about human rights progress in the country. Human rights reports were just coming into vogue at the time. During the Carter administration you couldn't duck these things the way they had been swept under the rug earlier.

Q: Congress had mandated them, too.

MACK: That's right. So there were these kinds of little tensions on the side, but in view of the fact that we were overall very supportive politically and in security terms, they were minor irritations in the relationship without becoming disruptive.

Q: You left there when?

MACK: I left in the summer of 1982. Not too many months after Ambassador Cutler had arrived. Walt, of course, had his own take on Iran. He had been named to be the ambassador to Tehran shortly before the hostage crisis, and to his good fortune the Iranians refused agrï¿½ment. He felt pretty lucky that he ended up in Tunisia after that. Cutler was a really smooth political officer. Walt was not at all interested in the kind of probing economic discourse that Bosworth had had, but he was a very shrewd and skillful political operator. He was inclined to leave a lot of the day-to-day management of the post to me. I had, of course, by the time he got there, been in charge for six months, and was trying to overcome this chargï¿½ syndrome. He was very sensitive to it.

During my three years in Tunis I had done some things which made the post much more oriented toward the Arab and Islamic nature of Tunisia. For example, many of the employees wanted to have a break in the middle of the day and go to prayers. There was no mosque anywhere in the vicinity, so in order to cut down on absenteeism from work we set aside a little room over by the motor pool where people could say their prayers. I judged that was no violation of separation of church and state, and it was certainly appreciated by the employees. It was a gesture that perhaps got around in the community, indicating that we were sensitive to the Islamic side of things.

Q: I would think that Tunisia being the playground of the Europeans particularly, would have attracted embassies where the ambassador and the whole staff spoke French, and they were very happy with this. In a way it was a sort of a Mediterranean holiday for them, and these Americans were too bloody serious about it.

MACK: Oh, absolutely. We were one of the few posts, aside from the Arab embassies, that took this kind of interest. And most of our personnel were personnel who were French speakers rather than Arabic speakers. There is a very Mediterranean, Frenchified part of Tunisia, where you could spend your entire tour without ever going down to the souk or visiting Islamic cultural sites. If you got outside of Tunis and some of the other cities, however, you got much more of a feel for the Arab and Islamic side of the country. For those of us who felt comfortable in both, it was wonderful to be able to move back and forth between the two worlds. This was certainly true of my family coming from the Middle East. For most of us who came from Arab or other Muslim posts, particularly for the Peace Corps people and AID folks, it was a wonderful and refreshing change to be in an Arab atmosphere part of the day, and then maybe go to a nice French restaurant on the Mediterranean in the evening. That was a great pleasure.

In this connection one and relating to this funny little rivalry with the French, I remember when both the Fourth of July and the Quatorze Juillet (Fourteenth of July) fell during the month of Ramadan. During the month of Ramadan, few Tunisians wanted to come to a reception at the normal time a National Day reception would take place, from 6:00 to 8:00 o'clock. That was the hour when they wanted to be at their house, the moment the sun went down so they could have their iftar, breaking of the fast. If they went out in the evening, it would be around 10:00-11:00 o'clock. They would have their final meal in the evening and then go to bed at around midnight or 1:00 o'clock in the morning. I was in charge at this time, so I came up with the idea of having the Fourth of July reception from 9:00 to 11:00 pm. As usual we invited many more than we expected to show up. Virtually every Tunisian we invited came, they loved it and felt comfortable coming out at that time. Shortly afterwards, we got our invitations to the Quatorze Juillet, the French National Day. The cards had been printed up for 6:00 to 8:00, and then before sending them out they had struck out the time, and put in 9:00 to 11:00. I felt that, by golly, even the French had learned something from the U.S. example. We were a little bit ahead of the curve.

Q: In a way, this is one of the accusations that has been made about us so much that we don't really understand the culture, and every revolution we seem to be on the wrong side. Was it because of the shock of Iran, or was this just fortuitous? The shock of Iran and this Islamic thing was making everybody think hard.

MACK: My inclination would have been to do this anyway, but it was the shock of Iran that enabled me to do it, and get away with it. I had two non-Arabist ambassadors in Tunis who went along with such ideas and thought it made good sense. The sad U.S. experience in Iran probably made the difference.

From a family point of view, Tunis was a refreshing change. After having been in a real hardship post in Baghdad, we were at a very comfortable post. This is where my wife, who has a Harvard doctorate in art history, was able to get into classical archaeology, providing tours for visitors. Our residence in fact was in Carthage, built over the ruins like so many residences in that very fashionable suburb of Tunis. My daughter started her first school, a French pre-school. She has many good memories about Tunis. It was one of the few posts we were at where we liked to have members of our family visit. It was a nice place to be.

Q: You left there a little before the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, didn't you?

MACK: Actually I left after the invasion had started. The invasion started in June of 1982. I already knew at that point that I was going to be the office director for Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Iraq. In fact, I had wanted another DCM-ship overseas for my next assignment, but the Department insisted on bringing me back to head up this office. I made a trip out to the area from Tunis with the departing office director, so I had a chance to meet some of the officials in those governments, including in Lebanon. The invasion took place not too long before the Fourth of July, which was Walt Cutler's first National Day reception. A year earlier, I had had the incredible success of the Ramadan Fourth of July reception, something like 900 guests including virtually all the Tunisians that we invited. The invasion of Lebanon cast a real pall on U.S. relations with all the Arab countries. The Tunisians had become far more conscious of their Arab personality, especially because of the presence of the Arab League. A lot of our regular contacts, boycotted for the 1982 National Day reception. There had been a Council of Ministers meeting that afternoon, and exactly one Minister attended our reception. It was clear he had been assigned to be the representative of the Tunisian government, but few others among our regular contacts attended. The Tunisians let us know in unmistakable fashion that they were in solidarity with their Arab brothers and with the Lebanese over that issue. In a sense, it was an indication of the way things were to evolve. Our bilateral relationship with Tunisia was to become very important as a link to some of the Arab radicals with whom the Tunisians could easily deal and we couldn't. Eventually PLO headquarters joined that of the Arab League, and the Tunisians were very helpful in bridging between us and some of the other Arabs during the upcoming period.

Q: Well then we'll pick it up the next time when you become the...

MACK: Country director for an office called NEA/ARN, Arab Region North, which included at that time Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Iraq.

Q: One of the questions I'd like to ask, I'll put it at the end here. This was the Lebanese invasion by Israel, really represented what I would call an almost earth change in the attitude within the United States. I mean both the body politic and elsewhere in the general public about the way we looked at Israel. It wasn't complete but the Israelis are no longer the shining knight in armor. I thought we might talk about your perception of that from the vantage point in NEA.

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Today is the 12th of April 1996. David, in the first place you were director of Northern Arab affairs. When to when?

MACK: This was an office that was called Arab Region North, or ARN, and it was from July of 1982 until the summer of 1985.

Q: How did you get the job?

MACK: Well, it was not my choice. I wanted to stay overseas longer. I bid for other overseas assignments and I remember the cable from the central personnel system very well. It said, you have received none of the jobs for which you bid but do not be concerned, you will be named as a director for one of the NEA offices. This was exactly what I had feared! Shortly thereafter, Assistant Secretary Nick Veliotes came through Tunis. At the ambassador's house he drew me aside on the balcony overlooking the Mediterranean, grabbed hold of my arm, and said something to the affect that, "this is a terrible job, this is one of the worse jobs in the Foreign Service, it's so hard, you're going to hate it. But dammit, we've got to do it, and you're the person." Nick really knew how to make a major appeal to my sense of duty, so that I felt that I was having a great patriotic opportunity.

Prior to taking the assignment, I was able to join the incumbent in the position, Nat Howell [W. Nathaniel Howell, later to be the U.S. Ambassador to Kuwait], in visiting several of the countries for which I was to have responsibility. They were Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Iraq. After that, I visited Israel for talks with Israeli officials. My visit to Beirut in May of 1982 included an intimate dinner at the ambassador's residence. The ambassador was away, but Mrs. Dillon, the ambassador's wife, hosted the occasion for Bashir Gemayel, Nat and me. Bashir was head of the leading Maronite militia group that was locked in combat against Palestinians and others. I had met his iconic father Pierre and his elder brother Amin in my brief visit to Lebanon in 1976. Bashir was a probable next president of Lebanon, and he was in fact receiving a considerable amount of support from the U.S. government at that time. Together with Howell, I also met with a number of other Lebanese leaders, but I had no foretaste at that time of the degree to which Lebanese issues would dominate the assignment during my three year tenure.

Shortly after I returned to Tunis, the Israelis invaded Lebanon in early June of 1982.

Q: You were in Tunis at this time?

MACK: I was in Tunis at that time, and it put quite a damper on our relationships with the Tunisian government like it did with most Arab governments. Nat Howell and I had agreed on a period that would allow me some leave in the United States before going to my assignment, I believe at the end of August. In the end, Nat became frustrated with his job during the invasion and decided to leave early. I was called back very abruptly. Following the Israeli invasion, there was a lot of work that had to be done on Lebanese matters. I was asked to leave Tunis on a Sunday, and I went to work in Washington Monday morning. From that time forward, I was in the office every Saturday and Sunday and holiday, up until Christmas Day when the Operations Center personnel kindly ordered me not to show up. It was that kind of intensive period in our diplomacy.

I arrived to find a very demoralized office. There was a feeling among ARN personnel that they had been sidelined in the diplomacy that was trying to deal with the after effects of Israel's invasion of Lebanon. The peace process was totally stalled, relationships with Syria were terrible. Relationships with Jordan were very, very tense. We still did not have diplomatic relations with Iraq. Iraq was involved in a war with Iran, but the U.S. did not yet feel much stake in the outcome. We had no relations with Iran, and relations with Iraq were very attenuated, still at the level of mutual interests sections in Baghdad and Washington. The U.S. government did not feel that we had much to do other than to hope there was no spillover from the Iraq-Iran war to other countries with which we had better relations and very important interests.

In the interim between Nat Howell leaving his job in disgust and my arrival, the deputy director was in charge of this fairly demoralized office. She was Elizabeth Jones, one of the most formidable Foreign Service officers I've ever met, and today our ambassador to Kazakhstan. Beth was at that time about seven and a half months pregnant, and she was huge. But she was also very much in control of all the facts and the issues, and in a staff meeting could be quite intimidating. I found that there were very few male Foreign Service officers who were prepared to argue with a woman in late pregnancy who knew her brief cold. And Beth was a very strong and effective personality. The younger officers in the office had lots of talent, but some of them needed guidance. They particularly needed to have their morale bolstered, and that was one of the things I set about doing. After a short period of time, we succeeded in making the office a very relevant one to issues such as Lebanon.

Q: When you say feeling by-passed, as you appeared on the scene, how did you see the situation? What was the cause of morale, and how did it manifest itself?MACK: During the period when Alexander Haig was Secretary, diplomacy toward Israel was carried out in a manner that was very closely held, even mysterious. Some of the diplomacy, perhaps, was known only to Haig himself. For example, exactly what was taking place between him and senior Israelis? In his book, Caveat, Haig has described a meeting he had with Ariel Sharon. Sharon claims that Haig gave him at least a yellow light for the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Haig says it was nothing of the kind, it's absolutely not true. So there was this feeling that other people at high levels were dealing with an issue that concerned Lebanon, and the Lebanese desk was never asked to contribute. In fact, there was a general feeling that U.S. policy makers were by-passing the concerns of Arab states and U.S. interests in those relationships.

In the NEA bureau, there were some strange personalities at work. Assistant Secretary Nicholas Veliotes was a person of capable of great bursts of energy, but he was not the most organized or consistent manager. On the other hand, one of his deputies, Charlie Hill, was extremely steady, patient, and meticulous. Some would say he was also secretive and capable of duplicity. Most other NEA personnel did not like Charlie, as they did Nick, who had a very engaging and open type of personality. On the other hand, there's no doubt that Charlie Hill was an extraordinarily capable Foreign Service officer. Charlie had come to the attention of senior people in the Department, such as Larry Eagleburger, who was the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, and eventually Charlie had a very close relationship with George Shultz. People in my new office perceived a tendency for mysterious instructions to come down from the 7th floor to Charlie Hill, who would then parcel out work to a couple of people in the bureau with whom he had a very close relationship. Those individuals didn't seem to be in our office. They were people elsewhere, more often than not in the office of Israel and Arab-Israeli affairs.

Nick had another deputy, Morris Draper, who also played his cards very close to his chest. Morrie tended, as well, to sit on lots of issues, rather than delegate actions down. Rather than bring subordinates and other people into the process he would set about handling matters on his own. All told there was a disconnect between the NEA front office and the office that I came in to head, and it fell to me to try to bridge that.

Q: I'm trying to catch the mood at the time because I consider this Israeli invasion of Lebanon really changed perceptions. But at that time was there... I mean, here you have an office that's being ignored more or less and some pretty nasty things were beginning to happen in Lebanon. Did you have to deal with what amounted to an anti-Israeli attitude on the part of the staff? Was there a feeling that the American government was so on the side of Israel that Lebanon was sort of being thrown on the ash heap?

MACK: It was more the idea that there was no regard for what happened to Lebanon. When I initially arrived, there had been this feeling that the U.S. had been in effect duped and co-opted by the Israeli government for purposes of certain Israeli leaders. It was less anti-Israeli than it was disgust with some of our own leadership. This was rapidly changing as the perception of the top leaders in our government changed. George Shultz had already replaced Haig as Secretary of State. In a statement at his confirmation hearing, Shultz took a very different and it seemed to me a refreshing approach to some of these issues. As the Israeli bombardment of the city of Beirut proceeded, with a strong feeling that U.S. weapons were being used for non-defensive purposes, there was a shift taking place at the top on the part of President Reagan and some of his senior advisers. There was a shift in perceptions about the Israeli role. Moreover, the President named retired U.S. diplomat Philip Habib as a special presidential representative to deal with Lebanon problems. People in our office looked to Shultz and Habib to make a dramatic change in the way business was being done with Israel and Lebanon. At the same time, however, there was concern they were going to find a lot of obstacles in positions that had already been taken, commitments that might have been made to Israel about which we could only dimly guess. We were also concerned that entrenched and secretive bureaucratic alliances would cause problems.

There was a view in the NEA Bureau and elsewhere in the Department that maybe the Israelis had overplayed their hand to such an extent that the attitude at the top of the U.S. government was changing. But this change was going to be difficult. Our office wanted to play a role in the evolution of the policy. Relationships between the United States and Lebanon had been extremely close in the past. This was especially true regarding certain groups in Lebanon, in particular the Maronite militia of Bashir Gemayel, the so-called Lebanese Forces. One complicating factor was that the Lebanese Forces had developed close and covert relationships with Israel. For the people who had been dealing with Lebanon for a long time in our office, this seemed imprudent for both sides. Both the Israelis and the Maronite Christians in Lebanon thought that they were successfully using the other side. It seemed to many of my new team in ARN that together the Israelis and the Maronites were leading themselves to an eventual disaster. That seemed to be the direction we were going, and we feared the U.S. was being sucked into a kind of tripartite alliance with the Israelis and the Lebanese Maronites.

Q: What about the office of Israeli affairs, or whatever it was called at that time? How were they feeling about this because Sharon and the Israelis were saying we're only going to do this, and they were already going farther. There was a lot of deception.

MACK: The office of Israeli affairs was staffed by very capable professionals who, I think, shared in many respects our concern about the way U.S. relationships with both Israel and Lebanon had deteriorated. They perhaps felt a little more relevant than people in my office did when I arrived, but they were equally concerned about what they saw as a very dangerous trend within Israel, as Defense Minister Ariel Sharon seemed to be gaining dominance in the Israeli government. This was also dangerous for the whole area. I didn't by any means see the people in the office of Israel affairs as adversaries, although I did feel that on Lebanon issues the ARN voice should have the greater hearing in the councils of the Near East bureau.

Q: We'll talk in a minute about developments in Lebanon, and how we dealt with them. When you have somebody with the power of Philip Habib brought in as a special ambassador to deal with the problem, does this tend to by-pass everything within the bureaucracy? How did he work within that situation?

MACK: Habib was an extremely powerful force that would ebb and flow. His personal health made it impossible for him to be consistently engaged on the Lebanon issue. Habib would come into Washington, having been called back by the President or by Secretary Shultz, with both of whom he had a close relationship. He wanted to include people in the policy process, and he was a great teacher. He would bring NEA people and others dealing with Lebanon together in groups, very often in small groups. He'd come down to our office and hold a meeting, go to other offices and bring people together. He would say, now here's what we've got to do, what's the matter with you, why haven't you been doing these things. He would lecture us, he would harangue us, and he would get our adrenaline up and get us all charged up. He would get people around town moving in a certain direction that he felt made a lot of sense, and very often our office agreed with Habib's views. Phil had a very convincing, persuasive personality. He wasn't just persuasive with those of us in the lower levels of the bureaucracy, he was also persuasive with the President of the United States, and most of the time with George Shultz. Phil was retired, and after a certain period of time, either because his wife or his doctors told him he had to stop, or because he felt that he had pushed things as far as he ought to push them, he would go back to California. When he did, very often old bureaucratic ways would assert themselves, and alliances would reemerge in opposition to what Habib had been trying to do.

Our office tended to feel that we had to maintain the momentum and the direction of what Habib had been trying to do. We often agreed with it, plus we sensed this was the direction the President and the Secretary of State were going. So there would be this ebb and flow of activity. It was exhilarating dealing with Habib, but it could be very frustrating when he left town and you would have the feeling of air coming out of the balloon.

Moreover, there were other figures whose personalities affected U.S. policy toward Lebanon. Habib was a Lebanese-American who spent a very distinguished diplomatic career dealing with other issues, not for the most part involving the Middle East. He obviously felt it was possible to save Lebanon, and that the U.S., if it was using its energies correctly and had the proper diplomatic direction, could do it. And he saw himself as an instrument of U.S. policy that could move things in the right direction. For Phil, saving Lebanon was a big factor. Moreover, success in Lebanon would serve broader U.S. interests and make the President look good politically. All these things worked together for him.

Then there was George Shultz. Among all the Secretaries of State with whom I worked, he is the one that I admire the most because of his inclusive approach to people in the bureaucracy. Shultz had a great appetite for reading the endless memos that we turned out. He demonstrated a thoughtful ability to integrate what we were giving him with what he was getting from other sources outside of the government, from other governments, and to come up with his own policy views. Also I thought he showed unexcelled skills in managing a large organization. This was not the first time he had been in charge of a large organization, either inside or outside the government, and he showed these kinds of management skills. But if Shultz had an Achilles heel, it was that he believed that through negotiations you could solve virtually any problem, no matter how at odds the adversaries seemed to be. If you were patient and negotiated carefully, discreetly, and persistently, you could reach agreements. He would often speak about his experiences as a labor negotiator. For him, like Habib, he viewed Lebanon as a test case of what the Americans could accomplish through a combination of negotiations and an application of power. Success in Lebanon would then enable us to play a galvanizing role in the larger Arab-Israeli peace settlement. Moreover, the Arabs were telling us, "how can you ask us to talk to Israel if you can't solve this problem between Israel and Lebanon? If you can't negotiate Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon, how could you ever expect to help us negotiate Israel's withdrawal from other occupied territories?"

Q: Basically the two best friends in the Middle East.

MACK: That's right, the U.S. had no closer friends in the area than Israel and Lebanon. So the Arabs put the challenge to us. And certainly Habib was arguing - I think effectively - that if we did it in Lebanon, if we achieved a resolution of the Lebanon problem, including Israeli withdrawal from the country, then it would be a catalyst to a solution on the larger Arab-Israeli issue. And for Shultz, with his belief in negotiations, this was an exciting and challenging prospect. And for the President, who obviously wanted to show his foreign policy leadership, this was also a very attractive possibility. He would not have to be engaged in it directly, except occasionally when he needed to get on the phone with Menachem Begin, or something like that.

There was a third key figure among the advisers to the President on Lebanon. That was Bud McFarlane, who eventually became the adviser for national security affairs. McFarlane, I think, like a lot of people in the government, felt that our national trauma in Vietnam had broken the link between force and diplomacy. He felt that we had to restore that link and show that the U.S. could use military force to achieve good political ends. McFarlane was always prepared to reach for a military tool, partly because he thought this would be an effective means to the political end, but also because he wanted to restore confidence in the use of military means and confidence in the U.S. military. He viewed this issue of Lebanon very much in a global sense. For Habib, Lebanon was perhaps the focus. For Shultz, it was the Middle East as a whole. For McFarlane, it was a matter of increasing U.S. global and military influence. At least, that was how it seemed to me.

Q: McFarlane was a former Marine.

MACK: George Shultz was also a former Marine, but he thought as a civilian political strategist. There were other people that I didn't deal so closely with, like Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger, a very powerful figure during this whole period. Weinberger's instincts told him that you don't engage the U.S. military except under the most extreme cases, and after having passed an exhausting list of tests. He hadn't yet codified the Weinberger doctrine for his approach to foreign policy, but it was clearly in his mind. Weinberger resisted getting the U.S. forces involved in Lebanon. Weinberger took a respectable position that was not espoused by anybody at that time in the State Department.

Through this period, people like me in the NEA bureau hoped to affect the policy process both through the routine channels of the bureaucracy but also through periodic close contacts with Phil Habib, who we knew was a pipeline right up to the President and Secretary of State. Also, we hoped to have some influence through the presence in the 24 hour Operations Center of one or more Lebanon experts during critical times outside the regular work day. We were providing most of the personnel for this presence at nights and weekends. It was very exhausting. Our people were working terribly long hours, but it was partly because of the Operations Center that we got a jump on the rest of the bureaucracy in Washington. It enabled us to make very timely and early recommendations on emerging policy issues. A lot of my time was spent up in the Operations Center, not simply down in the NEA bureau. It was there in the early morning that I could prepare to brief Shultz, Habib, Veliotes and other senior officials.

Nick Veliotes also had kind of given me the mandate for trying to draw together a lot of disparate parts of the Lebanon puzzle. I didn't always do that very well, but Nick gave me quite a lot of backing in dealing with other government agencies and parts of the State Department. In return, he would call on me at 3:00 o'clock Saturday afternoon and times like that. But at least, I felt increasingly plugged into the process. There was an extremely high level of U.S. public interest and political and Congressional interest once we had forces in Lebanon. That occurred in two different engagements, and I don't want to try here to recall the details of things that have been published in detail. I was not really in the decision-making loop on the question of bringing U.S. forces into Lebanon. Instead, I got into the loop after they were there, and then suddenly we had the issue of how long should they stay, and what the forces should be doing.

I'm not quite sure how policy on force deployment was made during this period It was clear that Habib, working as an intermediary, and working brilliantly I think, managed to achieve a cease-fire for the city of Beirut. That involved an Israeli agreement to end bombardments and draw back from the city, provided there would be an evacuation of Palestinian forces from the city. This was complicated, since the Palestinian forces had been the ones that were protecting the city in a sense. Although they were drawing Israel fire into the city, they were also protecting the city against Israelis. The Palestinian officials feared retribution against both Palestinian civilians and allied Lebanese, so they insisted as part of the evacuation bargain that there should be U.S. forces engaged, along with forces of other nations such as the French, the British and the Italians.

Q: Did the 1958 intervention weigh? This has always been looked under Eisenhower when we put forces in, and it seemed to stop things that were getting out of control. Did that weigh heavily do you think? History sometimes is a good thing, and sometimes it isn't.

MACK: I think that weight of history cut both ways in the policy debate. On the one hand, there were people who kept saying, Vietnam. Others said, things don't happen that way in Lebanon, referring to the relatively low cost and successful U.S. military incursion in 1958. The Lebanese are different, we've done this before in Lebanon. Of course, things were different in all three military engagements. For one thing, fire power in the hands of non-U.S. parties in 1958 was a lot lower than in 1982. There was a use of a false analogy here in the sense that Ernie May has written about in his book on the uses and misuses of history in policy making.

Q: Thinking in Time by Earnest May and Richard Neustadt.

MACK: Yes, Thinking in Time, a wonderful book. People didn't look at the differences between 1958 and 1982 as closely as they should have. There were assumptions that it would take a fairly small, measured, and short term application of U.S. power, and that once the Palestinian forces had left, and once the Israelis had pulled back, we could pull out, and things would remain stable. Meanwhile, my office and other offices had been frantically working to come up with places for the Palestinians to go, other allies who could put in forces of some kind, trying to be very supportive of Habib. My immediate supervisor of record, Morris Draper, was in the region with Habib. I don't believe I ever had an efficiency report from Morris Draper, even though he was my supervisor of record for three years, because he was often traveling. Morrie had many strong points, but one of them was not an ability to organize his office very well. Things like efficiency reports and other personnel actions very often didn't get done. Meanwhile, my office was proceeding to develop broader policies to support U.S. diplomacy in Lebanon. There were programs for the economic reconstruction of Lebanon, all kinds of things that we were busily working on.

After the Palestinians had departed, and after the Israelis had made a partial withdrawal and were poised to continue, all hell broke loose. The Israelis acquiesced - I think that's probably the kindest term - in the entry of Lebanese Forces into some of the refugee camps, not only Sabra and Shatila. Massacre victims were not only Palestinians but also a lot of Lebanese Shiites from the south. It is often forgotten that the Lebanese Shiites had tended to be opposed to the presence of the Palestinians down in the south. Most of us believed the Shiite Amal Party and village militia groups could have been made de facto allies of both the central Lebanese government and the Israelis in maintaining security in southern Lebanon. Instead, they were more and more radicalized and had pushed in a direction of opposition to any Israeli influence in the area. In any case, I learned very quickly about what was going on in Sabra and Shatila.

Q: You might explain what this was.

MACK: Yes. Hundreds of Palestinian and Lebanese refugees, who previously had felt that they were under the protection of the Palestinian forces in Beirut, were killed by militiamen from the Lebanese Forces. There's a lot of dispute about who was in charge of the militiamen, who was responsible, and there's also a lot of dispute about the degree of Israeli complicity. Stories of what might happen started circulating in the Arab diplomatic community in Washington quite quickly. I was called by the Tunisian ambassador, an old friend of mine that I had met when he was in Tunis. I had gotten to know him well, and he called me right after early and unconfirmed rumors of the massacres. I can remember running up to the Operations Center and getting on our secure phone to our embassy in Beirut and being told they would look into it. Secure phones were quite primitive in those days, and voices sounded like they were coming out of a deep well with a delay in reception.

It was difficult for people to move around Beirut to check out the report. The security situation was quite dangerous for our personnel. Our embassy was in a city that was under siege, and it was a very dicey business just to get around and find out what was happening. In the end, our very courageous political officer, Ryan Crocker, was one of the first non-belligerent witnesses to get to the site. He entered the camp and physically counted bodies. By the time we verified there had been a massacre, it was all over. We had brought it to the attention of the Israelis as soon as we started hearing about it. From them we got bland denials. They said things like, "don't worry about it, nothing like that is happening."

That event followed right after the pull-out to naval vessels in early September of our forces from the Beirut sea port, where they had overseen the evacuation of Palestinian forces and officials. Our few Marines - they numbered something like 1,000 - would not have been in a position to prevent the massacres in any case, as the port was quite far away from Sabra and Shatila. But the fact that we had pulled out right before this had happened looked quite bad. It was politically devastating.

Q: And also, if I recall, assurances had been made by Habib and others. You might explain.MACK: Habib had not made U.S. assurances of Palestinian safety, but he had conveyed what the Israelis were telling him. He had conveyed Israeli assurances to the Palestinians, mostly, maybe entirely, through Lebanese intermediaries. I'm not sure about the exact mechanism. He had conveyed Israeli assurances to Lebanese intermediaries, and then he had conveyed back to the Israelis Palestinian assurances regarding departure of their forces. So we were very critical to putting together this set of understandings. And I think, certainly as far as Habib was concerned, it had been violated by the Israelis. Habib was careful. I'm not sure he's on record anywhere of accusing Israeli officials of violating their assurances, but there was no doubt in his discussions with us later as to what he thought had happened.

Probably, for the President and Habib and Shultz there was a feeling of betrayal. The Reagan Administration had very carefully worked out the earlier deployment - when our forces would be deployed, for exactly what purpose, and for how long they would stay. I think it was two weeks. This had all been worked out in advance, it was limited, and it went like clockwork. However, the next involvement of the U.S. forces was anything but clear or smooth. Suddenly, I was told our forces are going back in. What for? I did not know the rationale in the minds of those who made the decision. In the days which followed, the State Department developed an after the fact rationale for the Reagan Administration to explain the second deployment of forces. It was to help restore and maintain order in the Beirut area and to reconstitute the central government of Lebanon so that it could extend its authority throughout the whole country. Of course, that also meant withdrawal of both Syrian and Israeli forces from the country. So it was quite an ambitious set of goals. As nearly as I can remember, it was something that we came up with after the forces were there to explain why the forces should be there. Helping to restore and maintain stability was the easy part. Much harder was to reconstitute the central government of Lebanon, and to assist that government in extending its authority to all of its borders, which included the withdrawal of foreign forces.

Q: Was this a matter of saying, oh boy, now I've got the tools to do something, or it's, oh my God, how do I come up with wordage that will...MACK: It's fair to say that I was not thinking more than a day or so ahead during September 1982. Other people were thinking much more ahead. Habib kept coming by and telling us he would explain what we were trying to do. He said it would only work if we enabled the government to take over security in southern Lebanon, and if the Israelis were out by the end of the year, by the end of 1982. I remember Habib telling us that. He was sort of whipping us, urging us to work 24 hours a day to make this happen. There was a panoply of things that had to take place: election of a president of Lebanon, election of a new parliament, as well as negotiations with the Israelis and with the Syrians. How would Lebanon or the U.S. negotiate with the Syrians on their withdrawal? Those of us who had dealt with Lebanon in the past were more aware than President Reagan and Secretary Shultz, maybe even more aware than Phil Habib, of the degree to which each of these Lebanese factions hated the others.

Q: What were you getting from our embassy? Bob Dillon was the ambassador. We had one before that but here's an embassy there, what was their role?

MACK: We basically had two major sources of information on what was going on in Lebanon. One was from the Habib-Draper party. Habib and Draper were in Lebanon and Israel a lot of the time and would be having meetings with senior people. Then there would be reporting from Ambassador Dillon and his staff, which often included reporting of a more standard political nature on attitudes below the leadership level. Such reporting was broader and more nuanced than what we were being told at a specific time by a few top leaders. Bob Dillon sometimes had great differences of perception from Phil Habib, but he very much respected the special envoy. By contrast, he did not get along at all well with Morris Draper. Dillon was keenly aware of the views of different Christian groups. He knew that there wasn't one Maronite view, there were different competing factions. Dillon also saw the need to try to reach out to other groups, like the Shiite leaders. This included Amal leader Nabih Berri. A lot of us, certainly the embassy, believed Berri would be a natural ally for the Lebanese Maronite president, if the president could overcome his prejudices and deal with an independent Shiite leader. This was not the view of the Israelis. It was also not the view perhaps of a lot of Americans dealing with Israelis.

The embassy in Beirut believed that it was going to be a long slog to achieve U.S. objectives in Lebanon. It couldn't be accomplished right away. Habib was telling everybody it had to be done right away, and it could be done right away.

Q: It's very American.

MACK: Yes, Habib had many of the best American virtues. Of course, things happened in a Lebanese way. Bashir Gemayel was killed. That upset a lot of plans. In the end his brother was selected as president of Lebanon, but his brother was a very different kind of person who didn't have the same kind of support from across the border in Israel or from the Maronite community. Amin was more of a conciliator with other groups, but he lacked leadership charisma. He's somebody that I had met when I made my trip out to Lebanon back in the mid-1970s. After Amin's election, Lebanese factional politics reasserted itself. Meanwhile the Israelis began to dig in or to get bogged down, and the Syrians were certainly dug in.

The Syrian army had been devastated in the Israeli invasion. But one of the things that Habib understood was that we didn't have all that long before the Syrians would rebuild themselves. I think they rebuilt themselves even faster than Phil envisaged, and they managed with Soviet help to restore their military strength. Habib had told us we had to meet the U.S. objectives for the second military deployment by the end of the year. By the end of the year, it was no longer so easy to deal with the Syrians. I think it was true in the beginning of September that, if the Israelis had been prepared to leave a messy situation in Beirut and a messy situation in Lebanon and take their chances on this untried shaky central Lebanese government, then you could have gotten a reciprocal Syrian withdrawal as the Israelis left. This is because the Syrians were very weak at first. Their military was weak, and probably a lot of Syrians didn't want any more to do with Lebanon. As it happened, the Israelis started off by being very stiff, unwilling to give an inch to the Lebanese, as we were urging, unwilling to even start their withdrawal. Then, when both the Israelis and we started taking casualties, the Israelis pulled back rather quickly to more militarily defensible positions outside greater Beirut and dug in. When the Israelis did that, it was a clear sign to the Syrians that all they had to do was take a deep breath and wait. The Syrians believed they would be able to wait this situation out.

Meanwhile negotiations had gotten underway secretly between some Israelis and supposed unofficial emissaries of President Amin Gemayel. I had a foretaste of Israeli views when Morrie Draper and I went up to New York in October 1982 to meet with Yitzhak Shamir. He was Israel's new foreign minister and may have had the title of deputy prime minister. Shamir was later to come to Washington to meet with higher level Americans, but Morrie and I had the assignment of getting a feel what the Israelis were going to brief us on, the position they would take in their negotiations with the Lebanese. I had assumed they were going to want to leave fairly promptly, provided that they got some cooperation from the Lebanese on security measures in southern Lebanon and provided the Syrians also withdrew forces from Lebanon. I wasn't prepared at all for Israeli negotiating tactics. It may have only been an opening position, but I was astonished at how rigid it was. Shamir conveyed to us that Israel was in no hurry. The Israelis obviously were looking forward to a prolonged, getting to know you negotiating process with the Lebanese. Our understanding of the position of Gemayel and other senior Lebanese was that they were hoping for brief face to face meetings and a quick resolution of the issue of Israeli withdrawal.

Morrie saw more openings in Shamir's position than I did. Along with Phil Habib, he had been dealing with the Israelis. I did not see the signals of Israeli flexibility that Morrie did, so I came back to Washington feeling pretty depressed.

Phil had told NEA how he envisaged the negotiations, involving Lebanon and Israel directly and Lebanon also reaching an understanding with the Syrians. Phil had clear ideas about what somebody was going to have to tell the Israelis in order to reinforce Lebanon's requirements for sovereignty up to the border. In retrospect, I don't think anybody ever told them. I remember hearing George Shultz quoted as saying the Israelis want to have this negotiation for its own sake. They don't want to just present their position and broker a deal with the Lebanese, so the Lebanese could have an Israeli withdrawal like a miraculous virgin birth. The Israelis wanted to have this prolonged negotiation leading up to an agreement, rather than an agreement being brokered by us, and then the sides meeting and signing it. I wasn't there when he said it, but I heard George Shultz being quoted as saying, "how can the U.S. government oppose negotiations between Israel and one of its neighbors?" I was only then becoming aware of the magic that Shultz ascribed to the process of negotiations, sitting down face to face. In the end, the negotiations took longer than anybody, probably including the Israelis, had imagined. They were drawn out and increasingly bitter. The negotiations left an extremely bad taste with the Lebanese. Rather than gaining more trust in the Israelis, the Lebanese came to have less. That was also true for the Israelis. The Israelis had trusted Bashir, but they didn't trust Amin. They certainly didn't trust Amin's negotiators.

The formal negotiations took place in a hotel at Khaldeh, just south of Beirut. I was there for the final negotiating session. The Israeli side was headed by former Mossad chief David Kimche and the Lebanese side by a senior Lebanese diplomat. The latter was a Muslim, partly intended by the Lebanese to signal that any agreement would commit the whole government, not just the Maronite president. Both delegations had skillful leaders and other highly qualified members with expertise ranging from military matters to legal procedures. The U.S. also had a delegation at the table. Although we were more a witness to the agreement than a party, the Lebanese in particular wanted us there. The atmosphere was businesslike and marked by mutual courtesy, but it was far from cordial.

It was apparent in the negotiations and otherwise that the Israelis were rapidly losing their confidence that this Lebanese central government could be an effective force down in the south. And it was kind of hard to figure out how they could. In my inter-agency functions I was meeting with groups, often as their chairman, trying to come up with ways of rebuilding the Lebanese army, and the assistance that we would provide. That became yet another mission for our forces over there. At this time they were ensconced at the Beirut airport, but another mission that our forces were going to do was training. This was going to be perhaps the principal way we were going to help reconstitute the Lebanese central authorities.

Eventually, Israel and Lebanon reached an agreement at the Khaldeh negotiations on May 17, 1983, but not before a terrible tragedy for our embassy. If I'm not mistaken, the car bombing of our lightly protected embassy in Beirut took place on April 16. Over 30 Americans and Lebanese were killed. I knew several of the Americans. Most of them were people associated with another agency, and they included Bob Ames, the National Intelligence Officer for the Middle East. A number of Lebanese were in the visa office at the time waiting for visas, and two U.S. Marine guards died. Many more Americans and Lebanese were injured. The embassy staff regrouped not too far away at the British embassy. The British had very generously loaned us a floor of the building where they had their embassy. A unit of U.S. forces moved in from their base at Beirut Airport to protect the British embassy. The effect of that car bomb was a fore taste of how dangerous things could get for U.S. diplomats overseas, since previous lethal violence tended to be targeted at specific high profile individuals. The bombing also led to far reaching changes in the protection we require for U.S. embassy buildings.

Q: During this time were you getting a feel from either our embassy or other about the change in the Shiite perspective?

MACK: In the wake of the Sabra-Shatila massacre and the embassy bombing we became more conscious of attitudes among the Lebanese Shiites. The press talked about the Palestinian refugees at the Sabra and Shatila camps, but I think the greatest number of people killed were Lebanese Shiites from the south. They had been displaced by fighting during the Israeli invasion and had not been accommodated elsewhere by the Lebanese government. The embassy had already been doing some very good reporting on the degree to which the Shiite Lebanese were being radicalized, but the rest of the U.S. government had probably not paid it enough attention. The radicalization of Lebanese Shiites was happening throughout this period. The way in which this was providing openings for Iranian revolutionary guards and other hostile elements only became apparent gradually.

Q: Were we seeing these as reflections of Iranians more than maybe we should? I mean, were Iranians sort of the devils?

MACK: Washington did not yet see Iran as the primary source of problems for Lebanon. For some in the U.S. government at that time, the devil was Syria. George Shultz, for all I admired him, was not by any means perfect. Shultz had decided that Syria was the problem preventing an agreement between Lebanon and Israel and Lebanese progress toward full sovereignty. In this respect, he had an attitude close to the Israelis and different from that of Habib. In bilateral talks with the Israelis about the negotiations, Habib would say, "Well, do you think the Syrians will accept this?" And the Israelis would say, "Don't talk to us about the Syrians, we're negotiating with the Lebanese. If the Lebanese can buy this, it's their problem to square it with the Syrians." Then we would ask President Gemayel whether he was briefing the Syrians, and Amin would assure us that he was. Unfortunately, Habib could speak forthrightly to both Lebanese and Israeli leaders, but he did not have a good relationship with the Syrians.

Q: Did we have relations with Syria?

MACK: We had full diplomatic relations with Syria, but the dialogue was not a very open one. Our ambassador, Bob Paganelli, felt sidelined and ignored by Washington, and he did not have much of a relationship with President Hafez al-Asad. He and other U.S. diplomats in Damascus talked with other Syrian officials, however, and they discussed events in Lebanon. Throughout this period, Paganelli was sending in reports indicating that the Syrians were not going to go along with what people thought they would accept. At the State Department, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research did good work based on what embassy Damascus had reported, along with other sources of information about Syrian attitudes toward Lebanon. These views did not seem to have any credibility with the decision-makers in Washington.

Q: I've heard reports about a meeting, maybe you were there.

Q: You might mention the chiefs of mission meeting.

MACK: At some point after Shultz became Secretary, he met with NEA ambassadors. I heard second hand that there had been a lot of grumbling at this chiefs of mission meeting, but the only person who spoke up really forthrightly to the Secretary against what the U.S. was trying to do was Bob Paganelli. Reportedly, he spoke very intemperately, which sounds like Paganelli, and that Shultz did not appreciate it.

Paganelli was a capable and very intelligent area specialist but a terrible bureaucrat. He had a way of making everybody angry. As a result, he wasn't as effective as he could have been, but he certainly had some correct insights. Unfortunately, he was sometimes the only channel for important but unwelcome news about Syria. Phil Habib had not been trusted by the Syrians for some time, and it went back to a diplomatic role he played as special envoy to the region in 1979. Habib had conveyed Israeli assurances to Damascus regarding the situation in southern Lebanon. As a result, the Syrians pressured Palestinian groups to reduce attacks across Israel's northern border. When Israel invaded in 1982, the Syrians felt they were in effect betrayed. Asad was surprised by the Israeli invasion, in good part because he relied on the Israeli cease fire commitments that Syria had received through Habib. Habib was deceived just like the Syrians were, but the Syrians blamed Habib and the U.S. This explains why Phil was not in a position to get directly from Damascus an independent verification of Syrian views. He tended to pay more attention to what his Lebanese interlocutors told him about Syrian views than what Bob Paganelli told him.

Q: I'm told they thought Bob was going to be on his way out, or something like that.

MACK: As it turned out, our embassy in Damascus was right on most of these points. The Syrians were rapidly reasserting themselves as a major factor. The tendency on the part of people in Washington was to believe that the Syrians were the ones creating problems for us in Lebanon, rather than the Iranians. Of course, it could well have been both in cooperation. Initially at least, the Iranians couldn't do anything in Lebanon without a certain amount of Syrian acquiescence, or even cooperation. So the issue of whether the Syrians were the primary problem is a little muddled.

Those of us who were close to people in embassy Beirut never believed U.S. military involvement in Lebanon was going to be painless. We knew this intensive involvement was going to be tough, that there would be casualties and that eventually there would be people in the U.S. military who probably would be lost. As long as the negotiations were going on, however, and they lasted up until the middle of April, there seemed to be a very strong rationale for keeping U.S. forces in Lebanon. Our presence was making it possible for us to be a credible interlocutor with both sides. The negotiations were really tri-partite, Israel-U.S.-Lebanon. Many Lebanese felt the U.S. used its presence to pressure the Lebanese side to come to agreements the Israelis had proposed. I think that's unfair, because there was tremendous movement over time in the Israeli position. The Israeli negotiating style was to have an endless series of fall back positions, and their position did evolve a lot over time. By the time an agreement was reached, however, there was not any good feeling between the two sides. The two sides were more embittered at the end of the process of negotiations than they were at the beginning. Certainly the Lebanese central government was discredited in the eyes of many Lebanese, particularly the Shiites. The Druze, however, and even some of the Maronite factions were extremely critical of the government. It was not going to be easy to sell the agreement to key Lebanese factions, even if the Gemayel government succeeded in getting a positive vote in parliament. Implementing the agreement, which required broad support, was going to be the hard part. In the end, selling the May 17 agreement to the Lebanese factions proved an impossible task.

As acting DCM and then as an aide to Habib, I was involved in the effort of trying to bring various factions aboard. The job of convincing the Syrians was to be done primarily by the other Arabs. There had been discussions throughout this period by Shultz and Habib with the Saudis and other friendly Arab governments. The Secretary and Habib felt they had a commitment from the other Arabs to deliver Syrian acquiescence to implementation of the May 17 agreement.

Three weeks after the April bombing of our embassy, just prior to conclusion of the May 17 agreement, I had gone on TDY to Beirut to replace our DCM to give him a three week leave outside Lebanon. The Department recognized the bombing was extremely traumatic for the people involved. Even for the survivors who were not badly injured physically, it was psychologically very traumatic. The Department and Ambassador Dillon had agreed that all embassy personnel needed to take a breather outside Lebanon reasonably soon after the bombing.

Q: Bob Pugh was the DCM.

MACK: Bob Pugh was DCM, and Ryan Crocker was political officer. They had dug bodies out of the embassy wreckage during those terrible days after the bombing. Now they were trying to deal with all the problems that happened, and reconstituting themselves in these temporary quarters in the British embassy. We had agreed that on a staggered basis everybody should have a TDY out of the country. Those who wanted transfers could have them, and a few did take that option. I went over on a TDY basis to replace the DCM. The British provided us an unfurnished floor of their embassy building, and our personnel were using the shabbiest imaginable temporary furniture. What impressed me, and what should impress every FSO, was that they were doing the annual efficiency reports. I thought to myself, "My gosh, people in the Department are typically delaying doing their efficiency reports." Ambassador Bob Dillon, who was a superb leader, knew that one thing that you must do is make certain that people are recognized for what they had done under difficult circumstances. As a result, everybody was working at that, as well as all the other tasks that they had to do. Although I met Beirut staff members who were badly damaged psychologically, and some of them have had serious psychological problems since, group morale was surprisingly high.

While I was in Beirut, the Lebanese and the Israelis concluded the May 17 agreement. While Ambassador Dillon called on most of the senior Lebanese leaders to gain support form the agreement, he assigned me to meet with some of them. Perhaps the most senior of these was Nabih Berri, the head of the Shiite Amal party and militia. There were basically three groups of organized Shiites at this point. There were the old feudal leaders, many of whom had positions in the parliament. Then there was the Amal headed by Nabih Berri, which represented a lot of poor Shiite. We saw Amal as representing the Shiite center, inclined to be moderate. If only people would give them a chance and a share of power, Amal would give the government and the Israelis a chance, but they were very suspicious of both. Finally, there were nascent groups beginning to form that were more radical, and under Iranian influence. These were forerunners of Hezbollah. We did not pay a lot of attention to them because they didn't seem to have a strong popular mandate. We saw Amal as representing the mass of Shiites who felt they were dispossessed and had been given a raw deal, and by god they were going to demand a new deal, a better deal, in this new Lebanese political system.

In my conversation with Nabih Berri he pointed out chapter and verse in the agreement between the Lebanese and the Israelis which he felt discriminated against them. In particular, he objected to language that propped up the little, mostly Christian militia group down in the south, the so-called South Lebanon Army, which was working closely with the Israelis. This local militia was drawn from a small minority of the population in southern Lebanon. In effect, the Israelis had enlisted them, providing artillery cover and various equipment and intelligence. The Israelis seemed prepared to rely upon the South Lebanon Army, rather than trying to build a bridge to the Shiite Amal militia, which had numerous personnel in southern Lebanon. The Lebanese government negotiators had agreed to curious wording in the May 17 agreement regarding the Lebanese parties responsible for security in the southern regions of Lebanon near the Israeli border. The agreement had been negotiated in English. While there were Arabic and Hebrew translations, the English version was considered authoritative. The agreement said that security would be maintained by the Lebanese armed forces and the Ansar. They used an Arabic term in the authoritative English version which was understood by everybody to be talking about this Christian militia, the South Lebanon Army. Ansar is a term in the Koran. These were the companions of the Prophet, sometimes translated as helpers. But the precise description of who these people were, and the name, South Lebanon Army, had not been used in the agreement. Nabih Berri, however, was under no illusion about who these people were. They were toadies of the Israelis, as far as he was concerned. Berri felt very aggrieved, because he had been perfectly prepared to help the Lebanese central government restore order in southern Lebanon.

That was an example of the kind of problems that existed internally in getting this agreement implemented. Moreover, the Syrians proved unwilling to go along with the agreement as far as their withdrawal was concerned. In the end, the parties never implemented the agreement, and a very difficult summer followed. Among other problems, there were escalating incidents of artillery shells striking the area where our forces were stationed around the airport south of Beirut and near the sea. Meanwhile, I had returned to Washington where I was putting my experience on the scene in Lebanon to work.

Q: Talking about these forces there, we had approximately how many people, and how were they comprised? Were you finding yourself coming up with different rationales?

MACK: Throughout this period, people kept trying to come up with a better rationale for keeping our forces in Lebanon, and even for deploying getting more forces. This was particularly true for Bud McFarlane and others at the White House. There was discussion of putting in a heavy U.S. division, which could sustain itself better and take on a larger mission than the Marine units.

At one point, Bud McFarlane called me to ask that I meet with a new, youngish, military staffer at the National Security Council. This officer [Phil Dur] is still in government and is now a Navy rear admiral. Bud described him as a really bright guy who had lots of ideas and needed someone to educate him about Lebanon. When I heard his ideas, I was alarmed. They involved greater forces, mobility, and deploying our forces up into the mountains. Go south, go east. Push the Israelis out, push the Syrians out. He had very ambitious ideas about expanding U.S. military presence. All I could think of was those Lebanese mountains where you're taking your life in your hands simply to drive over them. The idea of moving our forces out of the airport and up into the mountains struck me as being the wrong thing to be doing with them. Moreover, it was strongly opposed by the Pentagon. Both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary Weinberger's people were focused on getting U.S. forces out of Lebanon, not building them up. On the other hand, there were people in the White House and a few in the State Department saying the problem was not that we had forces there. The problem is that we were not using them well enough, assertively enough, and maybe we needed to apply more force. This was the gist of the inter-agency dialogue. At one point, it must have been August when a lot of people on leave, the young Navy officer from the NSC called me up and said, "The President has an appetite for taking decisions this week, and I'm going to be briefing him. What do you say we brief him on this plan?" I can remember thinking to myself, oh my gosh, if the President has appetite for decisions and the person doing the briefing is this young Navy officer, god only knows what decisions will be taken. I went to Nick Veliotes, or somebody at a higher level, who helped get things calmed down at the NSC. At that point in mid-1983, there was a lot of inter-agency controversy back and forth, thrashing around about what to do in Lebanon. The State Department was on board for keeping forces in Lebanon, perhaps with a training mission, but not for increasing the combat role of the military.

Q: I've heard some corridor rumor, probably more gossip or speculation, that George Shultz's Marineness was coming through. That Marines didn't leave with the job undone.

MACK: Secretary Shultz had confidence in the value of the presence of U.S. Marines in Lebanon. We had justified having the forces there in order to support the negotiations, but now we had to implement the agreement. So the forces were there to support implementation of the agreement, and to continue to support the reestablishment of central Lebanese government institutions. We kept coming back to reestablishing the central institutions, including the Lebanese army.

The Lebanese central government was getting its act in order to a degree, but much more slowly than people might like. When I was over there on TDY and talking to Bob Dillon, the political reasons preventing progress became clearer. Amin Gemayel, the president of Lebanon, did not like Nabih Berri, indeed seemed to resent him. Nabih Berri was low class. Amin was from the aristocrats. He was used to dealing with some of the Shiite feudal aristocrats, but not with somebody like Nabih Berri. Amin sensed, perhaps correctly, that the Shiites were a demographic threat to Maronite dominance. Amin was much more prepared to deal with Walid Jumblatt, the leader of the Druze. Although the Druze were historic rivals of the Maronites and the Jumblatt family had feuded with the Gemayels, Walid was a person from the same kind of social class. Amin Gemayel and Walid Jumblatt were sons of feudal leaders, one Maronite, one Druze. By contrast, Nabih Berri, even with a law degree from the Sorbonne, was a nobody in Lebanon's traditional order. It became apparent that there were these kinds of reasons why Amin, who could often be a good conciliator, was not prepared to reach out to emerging Shiite leaders. It was as if he saw them as the ultimate threat to Maronite rule in the country. Perhaps Amin was under pressure on this point from other key Maronites. He had a very tenuous grip on Maronite loyalties. Many Maronites distrusted Amin and felt he was too flexible. Not like their great hero, Bashir, his martyred brother.

During this period, NEA succeeded in getting George Shultz to hammer away at the Lebanese government leaders on the need to broaden their political base. They knew what that meant, they didn't like it, and they resisted it very strongly. Basically, the appeal of the Lebanese president and his allies was that the U.S. should put in more force, or use the force that we had effectively to support them, the Maronites who controlled the government.

I empathized a little bit, of course, because Amin and other Maronite leaders had their Orthodox Christian, and Sunni Muslim allies. Amin's government even had support from some of the old, feudal Shiite ministers who basically had cut their connections with the mass of the Shiite population. I don't want to be too critical of Amin Gemayel. As president of Lebanon, he proved to be a man of exceptional courage, but I doubted his political wisdom at various junctures.

The security situation in the Beirut area broke down terribly during September of 1983. In addition to seemingly continuous bombardments of Lebanese government positions, occasional shots were striking the U.S. held zone at the airport. It was hard to tell where firing was coming from. There are grounds to suspect that sometimes Maronite militiamen would lob something in our direction, just to see if we wouldn't shoot back at the Druze up in the mountains, who with Syrian support were doing most of the shelling of the city. It wouldn't have been from the Lebanese armed forces, but from one of the Maronite militia groups. It was a very complicated and confusing situation.

Secretary Shultz was highly engaged on a near daily basis. At his request, for example, I would brief him fairly often in the early morning. He clearly seemed to be focusing more and more on the Syrians as the problem. To me it seemed like the problems were Lebanese problems, and unless the Lebanese solved their internal problems, they would not be able to deal effectively with either the Israelis or the Syrians. In fact, the Lebanese embassy in Washington was not of one view. Ambassador Abdullah Bouhabib, who was a Maronite Christian despite his first name, had a direct channel back to Amin Gemayel. Sometimes, Abdullah expressed one point of view while his DCM, a Shiite Muslim with whom I would occasionally have discreet meetings, took a different position. Ambassador Bouhabib focused in on the need for greater U.S. support for President Gemayel. The DCM wouldn't come in to my office because we didn't want other Lebanese to know he was seeing me, but he and I might get together somewhere else for lunch. He told me that he understood what we were saying about the central government broadening its political base, but this was not what the ambassador was reporting back to Beirut. The DCM suggested we have the U.S. embassy in Beirut make that point to Amin Gemayel directly.

Let me finish this session with events at the time of the bombing of the Marine barracks. In September 1983, there was an escalation of violence at a strategic hilltop village not too far from where the Lebanese presidency is located. The village was held by a Lebanese army unit, but if it were taken by the Druze, backed up by the Syrians, Druze forces would be in a position to threaten directly the presidential compound. That also was near where the U.S. ambassador had his residence. At this point, Bud McFarlane was in Lebanon as a special representative. The people in the Pentagon hated having a senior envoy with McFarlane's background, constantly prodding for the Pentagon to get more involved. Senior officials at the Pentagon felt he was interfering with the chain of command. They were focused on not over reacting, not getting drawn into this conflict between Lebanese factions. They argued against doing military things for political goals. By contrast, Bud was entirely focused on using the military to attain political ends, but sometimes it seemed like he didn't have a clear, well articulated idea of what those ends were.

One morning the Operations Center called to say they needed me on the Lebanon task force, because Bud McFarlane wanted to speak to somebody. As I recall, it was about 2:00 o'clock in the morning on a Sunday. Before talking to Bud on the secure phone, I read the message he had sent. He reported a ferocious attack on the Lebanese army forward position. People had been killed in savage ways, such as with axes. McFarlane's view was that this meant there were Iranian revolutionary guards involved, because the Druses don't use axes. He said we had to respond with our military effectively. This would be in support of the Lebanese army, but we were being fired on too so there was a U.S. force protection justification.

By this point in Lebanon, the U.S. embassy and McFarlane had access to TacSat, a tactical satellite voice link, with far superior quality than what we had used previously. After I reached McFarlane on the TacSat, he told me we would need to have a high level interagency meeting to order a decisive U.S. military response, as the commander of U.S. forces in Lebanon told him they did not have such authority. McFarlane then asked me whether there was anybody in the room with me in the task force area. Actually, there was the usual technician monitoring the equipment, but I chose to consider that Bud meant anyone with substantive expertise, so I said no. He then asked, "Tell me David, do people in Washington think I've gone over the edge?" I made some kind of soothing comment, but I thought to myself, yes, this guy has gone over the edge. It was a very confused period in decision making about Lebanon. Senior people like Bud McFarlane were in Lebanon from time to time and in contact with the U.S. military units. The Pentagon feared, correctly in my view that such individuals were trying to affect U.S. military decisions on the ground without being part of the chain of command. Moreover, Ambassador Dillon was extremely skeptical of what McFarlane was up to, although he cooperated with McFarlane in helping him get access to key Lebanese leaders.

Q: As a presidential representative.

MACK: Bud McFarlane had been a presidential envoy, but he no longer had the position. Moreover, it was during this period that we were seeking a vote in Congress to authorize the continuation of our military presence in Lebanon for an additional three years. As I recall, the vote came on September 23. We got the mandate, but the senior leaders at the White House, State and Defense wanted to do nothing to give rise to more opposition in Congress.

The vote was very close, and it followed effective political work by the Reagan administration. The President had enlisted Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill as an ally. O'Neill spoke very eloquently during the debate in the House of Representatives. Listening to him, I was very excited to be part of the political drama. In retrospect, I can't see how I could have been so blind. At the time, however, I had been working hard to generate political support for the authorization. I had been briefing people in the press and people down on the Hill, including then Senator Dan Quayle. As the votes came in, I thought, wow, we did it, we got congressional support to keep the forces in Lebanon.

Shortly after that, Dick Murphy arrived in NEA to replace Nick Veliotes as Assistant Secretary of State. While Veliotes was still winding up the assignment, I came down to talk to Dick in his temporary office about the Lebanon situation. He was an old-line Arabist whom I knew and respected greatly, and he really knew the area. Dick said to me bluntly, "We've got to get the forces out of Lebanon." I thought to myself, "What's the matter with this guy? Doesn't he understand? We've just achieved the great victory of getting congressional support for keeping the forces in." But Murphy knew instinctively that Lebanon was not a place for the U.S. to have military forces for any extended period of time. The military venture into Lebanon had gone on too long, and we had to get them out. He was absolutely right. That fact, of course, was driven home shortly thereafter when the Marine barracks in Beirut were bombed.

Q: Well, should we stop at this point.

MACK: Yes.

Q: I just want to put on the end here. So we've really covered up to the point where the Marine barracks was bombed.

MACK: In early October, yes.

Q: Of '83, and we'll pick it up from there. A couple of things I'd like to ask about, and that is the role of Congress, particularly anything with the Israeli lobby, or AIPAC, and their role. And then what happened beyond the bombing of the barracks, but also at some point, talking about how when you has time with Jordan, Syrian, and Iraq, and how we saw things beyond this Lebanese thing.

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Okay, today is the 10th of July 1996. David, you heard what we were talking about. Let's first talk about the role of Congress in this, and AIPAC, and how you felt internal domestic pressures played on here.

MACK: Congress was still feeling its way to how assertive it could be given the new war powers legislation, which was a post-Vietnam development. Without conceding the constitutional legal point on the War Powers Act, the Reagan Administration sought Congressional authorization in September 1983 for a continued deployment of U.S. forces in Lebanon. Mostly due to very good working relationship in national security area between the administration and House Speaker Tip O'Neill, they succeeded in getting an affirmative vote. In the senate, however, it was a lot closer. This came as a bit of a shock to the administration, since the senate had a much stronger Republican base. For whatever reason, the Reagan Administration had not established the same kind of relationship with the senate Democratic leadership that they had in the house.

I remember watching the House debates. The management of the bill was conducted by Congressman Lee Hamilton.

Q: ...New York.

MACK: No, from Indiana. Lee Hamilton was the chairman of the House Subcommittee on Middle East and Europe. He was very able and did a very skillful job of steering the bill through. Speaker O'Neill actually spoke from the floor of the House, which is very unusual, and spoke strongly in support of the measure. It was also true that there had been a significant amount of lobbying on behalf of the measure by AIPAC. This is interesting because there was a distinct lack of sympathy among many of the Jewish congressmen, and presumably senators as well, for the authorization to keep the Marines in Lebanon. They felt pretty well torn, I think, between the pressures they were receiving from AIPAC to vote for the authorization, and their own instincts and predilections which told them to vote against. We often talk about AIPAC lobbying the congress, and AIPAC lobbying the administration. This was a case where the administration had successfully lobbied AIPAC to work the issue on the administration's behalf.

The fact that the bombing of the Marine barracks took place shortly thereafter almost guaranteed that future war powers deliberations, or quasi war powers cases, would be treated with even greater skepticism. Not to say there wasn't a fair amount of in this case. While it was not my usual job, I had done some lobbying down in the congress, including with then Senator Dan Quayle who voted for. The administration put on a very strong effort. It also did a good job of managing the public relations and media, which tended to play up the notion that it would be a great victory for Syria if the U.S. were to withdraw its forces under this pressure. Later on, some of the people in the congress felt they'd been had. They liked to assert their authority, but they didn't like to take the responsibility when something went wrong. And this may be one reason why there was such resistance to subsequent requests for Congress to authorize military action. An example came in January of 1991 when the congress debated whether we should be prepared to engage U.S. forces in order to liberate Kuwait. The Desert Storm authorization was much tougher going than the Lebanon authorization, despite what would seem to be a far more compelling case for the use of U.S. forces. Congressman Lee Hamilton, among others, was among those who voted against in January 1991. And in the senate, as you recall, it was a matter of a one or two vote margin in favor. In a way, disillusion over Lebanon a turning point in administration and congressional relations with regard to these issues.

I'd like to make another comment about AIPAC, because it's personal. Very close to the end of my time in this job in the summer of 1985, I was invited out to lunch by two well known officials of AIPAC, [Ken Rosen and Martin Indyk, see below]. It seemed curious that they would invite me to lunch, since I was just about to leave my position as director of this office. I accepted the invitation with the cynical attitude that this is the way U.S. aid money to Israel gets recycled! Moreover, AIPAC represented an important view in the political process, and I wanted to see what they had to say. In the course of the lunch they raised the question of my next assignment. At that point, I was hopeful that I'd be going to an ambassadorship. They probably knew I was in that zone. One of them, who I think is now the number two person in AIPAC, told me that he thought I was ready for an ambassadorship and asked whether I would like their assistance in obtaining the job. I declined the offer, saying I thought that I'd just let things happen the way they would happen. In my own mind, I was pretty confident that the assignment process would work out okay and preferred not to be in their debt. I let the incident pass but filed it away in my memory as an example of how this very skillful lobbying organization could have people throughout the congress, and the executive branch as well, in some sense indebted to it and owing them favors. I admire the way in which they worked the U.S. political system, even though I feel it's often unfortunate that they have such a predominant influence. AIPAC claims to speak for a part of the population which feels very fervently about Middle East issues, but it is not that numerous overall.

Q: I'm not sure, it has been some time, so there may be some duplication. But did you go out to talk to Jewish groups to present the other side of the coin?

MACK: Not to a very great degree. The Department used me mainly as one of the administrative spokespersons with other communities, particularly the Arab-American community, wider university groups, etc. For whatever reason, I think it was felt there were other people who could be more effective in working the Jewish groups on the administration's behalf.

Q: What about the Arab communities in the United States? What was your impression?

MACK: At this point, they were just getting themselves organized, and in many cases they were almost pathetic. I liked them personally and befriended a lot of these folks, but they did not do a very skillful job of representing themselves. Of course, they were badly split over a lot of issues, like Lebanon. Christian Lebanese immigrants and their descendents are the most numerous part of the Arab-American community in the United States. They were often were at odds with other members of the community who strongly espoused the Palestinian cause. Arab-Americans were a pretty disparate group. I spoke at some of their national conventions, etc. They were among the most hospitable of Americans and always very sociable, but often their lobbying activity seemed unlikely to gain them much support where it really counted.

Q: Going back to the aftermath of the blowing up of the barracks. Did you find yourself being sent to Congress to repair bridges, to patch holes?

MACK: Yes, I was often sent down to talk to staffers and occasionally to members of Congress. I did formal testimony on only a few occasions. One of the times I was sent down to do formal testimony was before a House committee that was investigating the deployment of forces, and the rationale for deployment of forces into Lebanon. That was a pretty rough hearing, as I recall. The Lebanon deployment did not have very enthusiastic support from the professional military. Their friends in Congress had heard the various murmurs that people were in Lebanon for political reasons, and that this was the wrong kind of situation in which U.S. forces should be engaged. It was more common for the Department to send me to the Hill to talk to staffers or to an individual member who wanted a briefing. Maybe he was making a trip out there, or planning to make a major speech.

Q: In your office was there after the barracks destruction. Was there a change of attitude to why are we here, and what are we doing?

MACK: The bombing of the Marine barracks was not such a turning point for my office, and our view of the rationale for their presence did not change quickly. The bombing of the American embassy the previous spring had been a far more traumatic event for us. I had friends who died in that bombing. It seemed a little ironic that so much more attention was given to the bombing of the Marine barracks than had been given by the U.S. public and media, and by Congress, to the bombing of our embassy. The bombing of the Marine barracks was terrible, and of course the loss of life was very high. It seemed a little peculiar, however, to describe the victims as innocents. In fact, a Marine Corps officer told me that he objected to describing this event as an act of terrorism. Marines, he indicated, were not victims of terrorism. In his view, it was an act of war, the Marines had handled some things wrong in terms of force protection, and he vowed they we're going to do it better next time. I thought that was probably the appropriate attitude for the Marines. But this was not the attitude, I think, for a lot of the media and the Congress, nor of President Reagan who I think in some public speech described the Marine victims in terms of innocent young men who were now going off to heaven, giving a somewhat different image than I think the world would want to have of the U.S. Marine Corps.

Reservations were growing in my part of the State Department as to how military forces should be used for the political ends of our country. Mind you, we had all adopted Phil Habib's view, which was that we should have done this rapidly, i.e. by the end of 1982. That would have been a little less than a year before the bombing of the Marine barracks. If we couldn't get the Syrian and Israeli forces out by the end of 1982, it would be too long. And here we were in the fall of 1983, so why were our forces there? As part of our job, we were continually trying to explain what the mission of our forces was and how it might be changed.

At this time, however, there were still some very hawkish individuals working on Lebanese issues, particularly in the National Security Council. Bud McFarlane had become the new director of National Security Council affairs, and he remained a true believer in the importance of the U.S. military mission in Lebanon. His people working for him, including young military officers, very often followed his lead.

Q: He was also a former Marine officer himself.

MACK: Bud was a former Marine and a very strong believer in the importance of our engagement in Lebanon. His staff would come up with new and different ways to use the forces, usually including getting more forces in, and having them take on very, very active missions up into the mountains of Beirut, or down south. One idea was they would press ahead in the south as a way of getting the Israelis to gradually move out, and they would follow in their wake. Another idea was that they would move up into the mountains and press the Syrians out by the act of simply moving ahead. In a previous session of these interviews, I described what it was like to work with Phil Dur, a good military officer, who was always very keen to be doing new and more aggressive things. I described how he called me up one day to say that his superiors were all out of town, and he was left there as the person who was briefing the President. In this connection, Phil Dur said the President has an appetite for making decisions, so he thought this would be a very good time for the State Department to make a proposal along the lines of what he had been urging for a more aggressive and expanded U.S. military mission in Lebanon. It seemed to me like the sort of thing that should not take place without senior advisors being present.

On another occasion, I was in the White House Situation Room when an inter-agency group just below cabinet level took a decision regarding deployment of the U.S. battleship New Jersey to shell what was referred to as Syrian gun emplacements in the hills. Actually, they would have been Syrian supplied weapons probably operated by Lebanese Druze gunners, rather than by Syrians. Military deployment of the New Jersey was an idea that the political leadership in the White House had taken up with some enthusiasm as a way of teaching the Syrians a lesson, and getting them to back off. Ed Meese was in the meeting.

Q: Was he chief of staff?

MACK: I think he was White House chief of staff at that point. Meese's face was flushed and totally red, and since I had not seen him in the flesh before, I did not know whether it was his normal appearance. As they were talking about bringing in the New Jersey, Meese said, "Yes, it fires a shell as heavy as a Volkswagen." I thought to myself, is this the level of strategic and military advice that President Reagan is dependent upon? On the other hand, General Vessey, the very capable chairman on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was also there. By the end of the meeting, Vessey had pretty well gotten everything he wanted to get, mostly in terms of military command authority, limiting vulnerability and protecting U.S. forces.

From my talks with Pentagon counterparts, I knew there was a constant problem during this period of interference in the military chain of command by political people, and particularly people from the NSC.

Q: I've been interviewing Chas Freeman who was our ambassador to Saudi Arabia at the time of Desert Storm and Desert Shield and he mentions this micromanagement coming particularly from Brent Scowcroft and others at the NSC during the time. You know, couldn't keep their hands off running something. It's pernicious, but it's probably there with everybody wants to get in on the action.

MACK: It was about this time, as well, that Phil Habib was no longer actively engaged. For serious health reasons, Phil had gone back to his retirement. The White House brought in a new special Middle East mediator, Donald Rumsfeld, former Secretary of Defense and a former White House chief of staff.

Q: ...former Congressman.

MACK: Rumsfeld made four trips to the Middle East as presidential envoy, and I went on his second and third trips. My immediate boss, Bob Pelletreau, accompanied him on visits one and four. We functioned as his regional experts and were joined by two other State Department officers in addition to security personnel. We traveled in a small U.S. Air Force executive jet, and Rumsfeld was generous about sharing his views and experiences. He worked hard, and he expected that his staff would do so as well. It was very labor intensive diplomacy. As we traveled, we were constantly writing papers to prime Rumsfeld for his meetings, and he would discuss the personalities and issues with us in some depth. Although the Rumsfeld mission was high profile, in my view it accomplished actually very little. He had good access to high level leaders along the itinerary, meetings were sometimes lengthy but, at the end of a day, it was hard to see where all this activity was heading.

Rumsfeld started the second trip by telling us that the problem in Lebanon lay with Syria, which echoed George Shultz, and we needed to figure out ways to increase pressures on the Syrians. Throughout the whole trip, as we were traveling with Rumsfeld, he would pepper us with short notes - the Rumsfeld "snow flakes" - and we were expected to react with papers and ideas of our own. The most memorable paper he had us do involved pressure points on Syria. At his urging, we were throwing in all kinds of things that seemed totally absurd, the kinds of ideas that the State and Defense bureaucracies would swat down for one reason or another. I came up with one that I thought might actually serve a useful political purpose, in addition to putting pressure on Syria.

One of the four countries for which I had responsibility was Iraq, and our slowly improving relations, still short of diplomatic ties, seemed to be at an impasse. I proposed to Rumsfeld that one way of seriously pressuring Syria and to make the Syrian government realize it wasn't a free ride for them to go after us in Lebanon, would be to bring Iraq back into a normal relationship with some of our friends in the area, such as the Egyptians and the Jordanians. I used muscular language, which seemed to appeal to Rumsfeld. It went something like, "We could drive Hafez al-Asad crazy by strengthening the Cairo-Amman-Baghdad Axis." We had already described Syria's long standing rivalry with these other Arab states and, in particular, the bad relations between Baghdad and Damascus. Rumsfeld seemed to really love the idea. He called me up to his seat in the aircraft to discuss it further. He asked what I had in mind. I rejected some of the more imaginative ways of improving U.S. relations with Baghdad, suggesting that it was up to the Iraqis to respond first to our offer to re-establish formal diplomatic ties, something that would require them to show a minimum of respect to the U.S., rather than posing as more uncompromising than other Arab states. U.S. generosity to Iraq would not be appropriate at that stage, but it had been years since a high level U.S. official had visited Baghdad. Rumsfeld asked what I had in mind, and I suggested that for a presidential envoy for the Middle East to include Baghdad on his itinerary would sound good to me. When we got back from this trip, Rumsfeld promoted the idea around the higher levels in Washington, and I put it into the formal pipeline as an idea for the next Rumsfeld trip.

The core countries for the Rumsfeld mission were Israel, Lebanon and Syria, but we also visited a number of other countries that I recall, such as Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Morocco. Rumsfeld's third trip to the region, and my second with him, included Iraq. To our disappointment, we did not see Saddam Hussein on that visit. Typically for the Iraqi government, as we took a step toward them, they got coy. Rumsfeld was able to meet with Deputy Prime Minister Taha Yassin Ramadan, who was one of Saddam's top colleagues in the Iraqi Baath Party and the government. Ramadan, as I recall, listened to Rumsfeld but said little, and what he said was Iraqi government boiler plate language, including the reasons why they were not ready for a closer relationship with the U.S. Our primary contact, however, was Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz. He was a first class diplomat, even if he worked for a thug, and he played his role with Rumsfeld very well. Although he had met with us formally in his office, Aziz also came to the government guest house where we were staying for a relaxed meeting. Aziz offered Cuban cigars. I don't remember whether Rumsfeld accepted one. Rumsfeld was smoking his Chesterfields, as I recall, while Aziz leaned back with a cigar and poured on the charm. His words were something like this: "It was a great pleasure to see you in Baghdad, Ambassador Rumsfeld. You have had very interesting things to say, most interesting ideas. What a shame that His Excellency the President was unable to meet with you. He has a terribly busy schedule, you know. Perhaps, if you were to visit again it could be arranged. You would be very welcome."

It seemed likely to me that Rumsfeld would. He did come to Baghdad on his fourth trip as presidential envoy for the Middle East. This was one of the reasons why not too long after that we moved toward resumption of diplomatic relations with Iraq. I felt that I had sold a good idea, and a timely idea, for basically the wrong reasons. In my mind, there were better reasons to try to improve relations with Iraq than the value of annoying Syria.

When Rumsfeld left Washington on the fourth trip, conditions in Lebanon were deteriorating rapidly. NEA needed me in Washington, but the idea was that I would come to the region to join the Rumsfeld party in February, after his second visit to Baghdad, and as part of another effort to resolve the Lebanon crisis favorably.

Q: This would be '84.

MACK: Early February '84, as I recall. I got as far as Tel Aviv and found that Rumsfeld was curtailing the trip. Everything had collapsed in Lebanon. The army was about to break up, and significant parts of the army were disaffected from the Lebanese president. Ambassador Reginald Bartholomew, our new ambassador in Beirut, had told the State Department he would like me to come to Beirut to help him out during this period. Having come all the way to Tel Aviv, I said sure. A helicopter from Beirut was to pick me up at Tel Aviv Airport. As I left Tel Aviv, I crossed paths with Rumsfeld and his team, who arrived on the helicopter. As we passed one another on the airport tarmac, I recall Rumsfeld saying, "Over to you, Mack." It seemed to me his team was headed back to the U.S. with suspiciously happy sighs of relief. As I flew into Lebanon, I thought, "Rumsfeld knows something, and he is not coming back."

After this long helicopter flight, I arrived at what seemed to be almost a Vietnam type landing zone at Beirut airport. U.S. and Lebanese personnel were underground or in bunkers, because there had been considerable shelling of the airport from the hills. The helicopter touched down, let me off, and got out of there immediately. After standing in the open with my suitcase for what seemed like a long time, somebody from the U.S. contingent came out and grabbed me. Subsequently, the U.S. military moved me on to our embassy.

Reggie Bartholomew, as usual, was very upbeat, certain that we could work things out, but he allowed as how things were pretty bad. His adrenaline, I could tell, was pumping at a very high rate. When you see Reggie with adrenaline pumping at a very high rate, you see a guy right out there on the edge. He's a pretty ebullient guy to begin with. During this period, he was spending most of his time at his residence. Security had gotten so bad that he couldn't really get to his office, still in the temporary facilities at the British Embassy. I stayed with Reggie for about three weeks. It was during this period, when the Lebanese army finally fell apart. We were having very intensive talks with Lebanese government leaders, including Amin Gemayel. Although it was not yet clear in Beirut, President Reagan was changing his policy toward Lebanon from one of, "We won't let the Syrians and terrorists drive us out," to "We've done our job, and now we're going home."

Finally, we were told to inform President Gemayel that the Marines would be withdrawn. I think we had three separate instructions in the course of four days or less. The first said something like they will be withdrawn but after a reasonable transition period that we can talk about. The second, as I recall, was that the Marines would be withdrawn in two months. The third was, they'll be withdrawn in two weeks. I don't remember the exact timing and figures, but it was a truly awful period. Reggie felt the ground was just disappearing under his feet. We had no confidence from one minute to the next about what Washington expected of us, or what Washington was prepared to do. In the end, the decision was taken to put the Marines offshore aboard U.S. navy and marine corps ships, to have them available in case of need but not to keep them onshore.

Q: While you were there what was Ambassador Bartholomew, or his staff, what were they saying about the utility of the Marines?

MACK: For Bartholomew and his staff, the presence of the Marines was an indication of whether we were committed to the central government. The Lebanese government was dependent upon our military and political support, if they were not simply to do a deal with the Syrians. The other side of the instructions that we were getting from Washington was encouraging the Lebanese government to accommodate themselves to the Syrians. Despite the earlier view of Secretary Shultz that Syria was the problem, that didn't surprise me too much. In thinking about the various alternatives to having U.S. military forces there, it had always seemed to me, and to a lot of other people in Washington that the Syrians did have a role to play in stabilizing Lebanon. Unfortunate though it was, treating them as the problem without also seeing them as part of the solution was getting us nowhere. We had encouraged the Lebanese and the Israelis to work to reach an agreement. We had done so without getting Syrian's support in advance; that clearly hadn't worked. The Syrians did in fact have, like it or not, a lot of security concerns about what happened across their very long border with Lebanon. It wasn't only the Israelis who had security concerns about what happened in Lebanon. It was also the Syrians. In fact, for the Syrians it was probably much more critical to the survival of the Syrian government, if not Syria as a nation, than it was for the Israeli government. For any Syrian government, it's necessary to have a handle on what happens in Lebanon in order to prevent Syrian opposition groups from operating out of Lebanon. I think we even got Shultz to express that once in a public forum. It may have been Shultz in congressional testimony, when he included a line about Israel and Syria both having strategic interests in Lebanon or something like that. Of course, the Lebanese government resented that terribly, because previously Washington had been telling them to stand fast against the Syrians, and indicating they didn't have to worry about our support. In my own discussions with Lebanese, I would use the U.S. and Canada example, coupling my disapproval of Syrian methods while expressing understanding of their security need for maintaining influence in Lebanon.

At the time our forces were pulling out, the Lebanese had to begin considering the nature of their relationship with Syria. It was painful to watch them do this. They resented the idea that our leaving, as they saw it, required them to strike a deal with the Syrians. But in the end that's what they did.

Q: With your involvement there, were you in contact with the Lebanese?

MACK: In my capacity as Ambassador Bartholomew's temporary aide and visitor from Washington, Reggie and I were seeing President Gemayel and other senior Lebanese on a fairly regular basis. Some of Gemayel's lieutenants were more flexible about striking some kind of deal with the Syrians than was popular with Maronite opinion. The Lebanese foreign minister was Elie Salem, an Orthodox Christian, as is the usual system, and President Gemayel also needed Sunni Muslim allies in his government, in particular a Sunni Prime Minister. At one point, as I remember, Gemayel seemed provoked and said something rather sarcastic like, "Well, I suppose you Americans wouldn't have any problem with me taking Rashid Karami as prime minister. He is Damascus' man, so that is probably what you want me to do." We didn't have any instructions on it. Reggie replied along the lines of "that's entirely your decision to make Mr. President," etc. It was one of those cases where we certainly were not telling them to avoid the Syrian embrace. We were telling them it was their decision to make. We no longer had the kind of leverage to insist that Gemayel not take a Prime Minister considered to be pro-Syrian.

Q: We weren't talking to the Syrians at this point?

MACK: We had a very distant relationship with the Syrians at this point. You don't ever stop talking to the Syrians. Rumsfeld had even gone to Damascus, where he had a couple of very chilly meetings that I was in on with Syrian officials. Despite ongoing formal contacts at a fairly high level, the state of the dialogue was not great.

Q: We're talking about February-March of '84 while you were there. Were you there when the Marines pulled out?

MACK: I'm not sure that I was still in Lebanon when the last Marines actually left physically. As best as I can remember, I was. In any cases, I was certainly there well after the presence of U.S. forces ceased to be a factor in the Lebanese situation. They had already been totally discounted by the Lebanese government.

Q: During that period were we thinking of maybe discontinuing our embassy there?MACK: Some people in Washington may have been thinking of pulling our embassy out of the country, as well. We were in the process of building what was called an embassy annex in a more secure but less central part of Beirut. The idea was that we would move back to the old embassy some day, the one that had been bombed. Or at least move back to West Beirut, which was the center of political life. We were working on building an embassy annex in East Beirut, an area with a almost entirely Christian population.

In the fall of 1984, after our personnel had moved into the new embassy annex, it was struck by a car bomb. This happened despite elaborate security procedures, and despite being in an area that was part of Christian East Beirut and supposedly much safer. Nonetheless, it too was vulnerable to a car bomb. A number of people were killed. This time, not so many Americans died as did in the spring of 1983, but there were a number of people killed. They were primarily Lebanese, local employees as well as Lebanese visitors in the consular section waiting room.

NEA Assistant Secretary Richard Murphy and I got on the plane and were airborne within something like 36 hours to come out to Lebanon. I continued on with Murphy for a regional tour after the emergency visit to Beirut. The visit to Beirut was a good opportunity to see an embassy within a few days of a severe trauma. In a severe crisis for both the embassy and US-Lebanese relations, it was performing the job it had to perform. By this time we no longer had a military presence in the country, and the embassy was the last remnant of the official U.S. presence in Lebanon. They had just been hit by a truck bomb. Bartholomew was badly injured, and he had bleeding from a chest wound. When we first met him he was in bed at the residence. In fact, the entire embassy was in the residence, which was being used as a temporary chancery until operations could be restored in the shattered "embassy annex".

The Public Affairs Officer was out of Lebanon at the time, and the Lebanese and foreign media focus on us was intense. Aside from the Lebanon story, Beirut was still a gathering place for the international press that followed the Middle East. The number two person in the small USIS operation was a younger officer, a very astute junior officer named Carol Madison. She was an African-American woman whom I had met before in Tunis when she was doing an internship. Having gone through this bombing, Carol was in charge of trying to do something with all the press that was milling around. At one point, Carol came to me and asked my help in getting the attention of Assistant Secretary Murphy and Ambassador Bartholomew. She said, "We really need to have Ambassador Bartholomew come out and say a few words to the press. It wouldn't have to be very much, but there's a rumor that he's dead or dying, and we really need to stop the panic." I talked to Reggie and Dick Murphy about it, and they agreed. We literally taped Reggie up, and he came out to the residence living room, filled with reporters, and gave one of the classic Foreign Service briefings to the press. Smoking a cigarette, as he usually did, Reggie struck a debonair air. He waved at the press and said, "Hi guys." After reeling off the five or six points we'd written for him, doing it with great abandon, Reggie concluded with a "see you later," left the living room for his bedroom and collapsed immediately, blood oozing from under one of the chest bandages. I really admired the way Reggie and the whole embassy held up under those circumstances. There was not much of a U.S. presence left in Lebanon, and we really counted on them.

This was the start of the first of several regional trips I took with Murphy.

Q: You still had the same position?

MACK: Yes, I was still the Office Director for ARN, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Iraq. However, we moved into a very different phase in late 1984. Many illusions had come to an end, and we were engaged in efforts to limit the damage. One recognition of reality was to try to broker an arrangement among the governments of Syria, Lebanon and Israel, that would somehow stabilize the situation in southern Lebanon. This was in part a response to Israel's request for our diplomatic help.

The Israelis, at least most Israelis, did not want to stay in southern Lebanon. At the same time, they did not feel they could simply pull their forces out and leave their northern Israeli settlements vulnerable to shelling across the border. The same situation they're in now. In late 1984, they hoped the U.S. could broker some kind of solution to the dilemma. Israel had an uneasy coalition government, the so-called Government of National Unity, with Shimon Peres as prime minister, Yitzhak Shamir as foreign minister and deputy prime minister waiting to take his turn as prime minister. Yitzhak Rabin was defense minister. Shamir didn't trust Peres, and Peres didn't trust Shamir. In this delicate matter of southern Lebanon, Rabin was the one who had the unenviable job of trying to broker differences and represent this strange Israeli government of national disunity, as people called them. We met with the Israelis several times during the course of this shuttle, always with Rabin and sometimes with one or both of the other principal Israeli leaders.

My last trip with Murphy on this particular mission was in December of '84, and it ended the effort for the U.S. government at this time. I believe it was the third of three trips to the region trying to broker arrangements involving the three countries. In essence, the idea was that the U.S. would have informal agreements with Israel, Lebanon and Syria regarding southern Lebanon. While there would be no direct agreements between or among the parties, the "arrangements", as the U.S. called them would be mutually reinforcing. Typically, after unannounced U.S. Israel discussions in Washington or Tel Aviv, we would go to Lebanon and talk first to President Gemayel. Then, either together or separately from the president, we would talk to the prime minister. By this time, Gemayel had a pro-Syrian prime minister, Rashid Karami, that Gemayel felt he had to accept to keep the Syrians from beating up on him. We would meet with both of them and with the foreign minister. Then, we would go to Damascus to meet with foreign minister Farouq Shara and vice president Abdul Halim Khaddam, and sometimes with president Hafez Assad. We usually were able to meet with president Assad, and Murphy always requested that in advance through the U.S. Ambassador, as well as mentioning our request when we met with Khaddam. Murphy had been ambassador in Damascus, and the Syrians liked and respected him, so we almost always saw president Assad. Then we would go to Israel for publicly acknowledged talks.

A few times we also visited Jordan to discuss restarting the wider Arab-Israel peace process, but we did not talk about that in public. While the public rationale of the Murphy missions was to broker arrangements for southern Lebanon, there was a secret agenda to try to get the peace process revived. This issue arose, but without any expectations of progress, in talks in Damascus and with the Israelis. We made no public statements about the subject, and I don't recall that the other parties did so. Most probably, Shamir did not agree with Peres on this aspect. Many people in both Israel and the Arab countries must have been suspicious, but I don't think it ever leaked that we also had tentative peace process talks underway. The public focus was on the problem that Lebanon posed for regional stability. While Jordan seemed a stretch, it was just plausible that we traveled through Amman from time to time due to the awkward logistics between Israel and Syria, as well as Jordan's friendship with us and the shared concern that problems in southern Lebanon could destabilize the whole region.

In December of '84, when we started our final round of trips shortly before Christmas, we told all parties that we would stay in the region as long as the indirect negotiations over southern Lebanon appeared to have life. We wanted to complete them successfully, and we were prepared to stay on into the new year, even if it meant foregoing Christmas in the U.S. Our talks in Israel in the middle of the shuttle seemed very unpromising to me. The U.S. Ambassador in Israel was Sam Lewis, who was very experienced and wanted badly to see this effort succeed. He had argued that the Israelis had offered some elements which should interest the Syrians. After leaving Sam at the airport, I was finally alone with Murphy, who asked for my opinion. Dick probably knew that I had been biting my lip. As best I can remember, I said, "You know the Israelis have given you a pile of shit. They expect you to grow rose bushes on it, but this is not going to work." To Dick's credit, he gave the effort his best try when we got to Damascus. As upbeat as possible, he presented the Israeli positions about what they were prepared to do and would expect in return. Basically, the Israelis were only prepared to leave southern Lebanon under terms very close to the failed agreement that they had reached directly with the Lebanese, a year and a half earlier. Predictably, the Syrians responded with scorn and showed no interest in the Israeli proposals. As I recall, we met with Shara but Khaddam then declined to see us. From the Syrian perspective, it involved keeping southern Lebanon in the Israeli sphere of influence. In turn, we were asking the Syrians to obligate themselves to try to keep the Lebanese and Palestinians with whom they had influence from making any trouble in the south. When we learned that President Assad would meet with us despite the discouraging response from our first meeting on this stop in Damascus, I took it as a good sign. Perhaps he was over ruling his hard line Vice President. But Assad made clear they were not interested in the ideas we brought from Israel. He expected that we would deliver that message without softening it.

The last meeting was in Israel, after we had come back from Lebanon, where we had reported on the talks we'd had with Hafez al Assad. The meeting room at the Israeli Ministry of Defense was filled with a large group at the table, as well as Israelis and Americans around the walls. In addition to Rabin's top military and civilian advisors, Peres and Shamir had both sent their representatives to the meeting. The U.S. embassy in Israel was plugged in with various factions and gave us a sense of the degree to which key Israeli personalities did not trust one another. There must have been about 14 Israelis at the meeting. There were about eight of us, including Ambassador Lewis and others from the embassy.

After Murphy had explained what the Syrian reaction was to Israeli proposals and what the Syrians would be willing to do, it got very quiet. Finally, Rabin said, "Well, at least you'll be able to go home to your families for Christmas." Next, the Israeli chief of staff, Moshe Levin, a tall gaunt man with a very sad face said, "Yes, get the boys home for Christmas," which struck me as an echo of the late Vietnam War sentiment in the U.S. Then the Israelis started talking amongst themselves in Hebrew, and I asked one of the people from the embassy, what are they saying. They were talking about their troops in Lebanon. As the U.S. embassy officer described the conversations, they included that it was cold and getting colder in Lebanon, that morale was miserable. The Israeli forces were saying they don't know why they are still in Lebanon, they don't know who they can trust, they don't have confidence in their supposed allies in the army of south Lebanon, but what choice did they have? In short, the Israeli troops and their officers felt they were stuck.

From that meeting and the background information from U.S. embassy personnel, I was left with the strong impression that Israel had a bankrupt strategy for dealing with the southern Lebanon security problem. Because of disunity, personal rivalries, and also because it was a really hard problem, this Israeli coalition government could not make the political decisions that might enable them to resolve the dilemma. As a government and a nation, they were stuck. The tragedy is that over a decade later this dynamic among Israel, Syria and Lebanon continues with no real change.

Stuart, I'm trying to remember whether I talked about our work on the hostage problem?

Q: I think we did. I think we covered that.

[In fact, we did not, and it would have been a major omission from the edited oral history. The following seven paragraphs are David Mack's recollections of some key points regarding the U.S. hostages in Lebanon and a civil airline hi-jacking, as composed in August 2008.]

The bombing of the U.S. Embassy in the spring of 1983, followed by the bombing of the Marine barracks later that year, were the first episodes of a wave of terrorism targeted at American citizens, including diplomats, journalists and educators. As best we could determine, the perpetrators were extremist elements among the Shiite Muslim community. Some of them, at least, were motivated by family vengeance related to the imprisonment of kinsmen implicated in bombings in Kuwait. To an uncertain extent, they enjoyed the support and encouragement of Iranian authorities, represented in Lebanon by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, which was training Lebanese extremists in the Bekaa Valley.

The capture, torture and murder of William Buckley, the CIA station chief in Beirut, was particularly painful for U.S. government personnel. I had worked with Buckley when I substituted for the DCM in May 1983, and I considered him a professional and dedicated U.S. Foreign Service colleague. After he disappeared in Beirut while traveling from his home to the temporary embassy offices in West Beirut, we engaged in frantic, ultimately unsuccessful efforts to find him. Other Americans taken hostage included Acting AUB President David Dodge, CNN correspondent Jeremy Levin, other journalists and both Catholic and Protestant ministers working as educators. As I recall, there were about a half dozen hostages, several of whom did not see freedom until years later.

U.S. government efforts resulted in the early release of at least two of the hostages. One of them was David Dodge. After he was seized on the AUB campus, he was moved by his captors to the Bekaa Valley. From there, he was eventually taken across the border into Syria and flown from the Damascus Airport to Tehran. We learned of this latter movement, which appeared to be under full control of Iranian authorities, through sensitive intelligence sources. There was no evidence that Syrian authorities were involved, or if they were whether the involvement was at a high level or merely the result of Iranian bribery of low level Syrian personnel. After inter-agency discussions, the Reagan Administration authorized the U.S. Embassy in Damascus to inform the Syrian government at a very high level and with appropriate safeguarding of intelligence sources and to obtain their help to return Dodge safely. The Embassy made the approach to Rifaat al-Assad, brother of the Syrian President and head of a Syrian security agency. In effect, they told him it appeared the Iranians had made fools of the Syrian authorities and betrayed the trust the Syrians had placed in their alliance. Rifaat responded rapidly, flying to Tehran and returning shortly with Dodge under his protection. Dodge was released to us and returned to his family in the United States.

A second case where I think we were helpful was with CNN correspondent Levin. Like Dodge, he was also moved secretly into the Bekaa Valley. Levin was held there for some months. Eventually, he was able to walk away from the place of his captivity and approach a Syrian military unit, which sent him to Damascus where he was released to the U.S. Embassy. Levin believed he had escaped. It seems possible that his captors yielded to Syrian pressure to allow his escape, since this had become a major issue in the U.S. media and in our diplomatic contacts with the Syrians.

During my time as office director, ARN had primary responsibility for dealing with hostage issues. This included maintaining contact with their families and U.S. employers, a process that was time consuming and demanded great empathy and tact on the part of the ARN deputy director and several of our desk officers. We also coordinated diplomatic and intelligence efforts to locate and gain the release of the hostages, as well as public information. In general, we enjoyed high level support in the State Department and from the White House. This included the very effective combination of diplomacy and use of sanitized but still very sensitive intelligence with regard to the David Dodge episode. Most of the families relied on us and showed outstanding patience at the agonizing delay. This was particularly true for David Dodge's wife Doris, who had considerable contacts herself in the Middle East and who fed the rumors and information she received to our office. We had different experiences with other hostages. In the case of Jeremy Levin, for example, his understandably frustrated wife took a somewhat adversarial approach toward the State Department. CNN headquarters in Atlanta was more inclined to be cooperative, partly because I flew to Atlanta at one point and briefed CNN's owner and CEO Ted Turner, showing him a videotape of Levin by his captors that had come into our possession and which we were using to build pressure on the Syrian government for assistance.

The final episode of terrorism during my time as office director was in early summer 1985, shortly before I moved on. It was the hi-jacking of a U.S. civilian airliner and its diversion to Damascus. The U.S. Embassy in Damascus worked closely with the Syrian Government to gain the safe release of the airliner and most of its passengers, but not before the vicious killing of an American Navy employee who was aboard.

After I left the director position, the responsibility for dealing with hostage situations was removed from NEA/ARN. There was a feeling, which seemed strongest at the White House National Security Advisor Bud McFarlane and his successor Admiral William Poindexter, that a more innovative approach would succeed in freeing the Americans who remained in terrorist hands in Lebanon. In effect, the hostage portfolio went to Ollie North, a hard-charging U.S. Marine officer. Within the constraints of U.S. law and policy toward terrorism, we had tried lots of things on my watch at ARN but could offer only a few success stories. Basic to our approach was a patient and persistent insistence that offering material concessions or undue publicity to the hostage takers would in the end feed their appetite for taking hostages. It would raise the value of the American victims in the eyes of our adversaries. This was our message directly to the Syrians and indirectly to the Iranians and the Lebanese hostage takers.

Q: Dick Murphy came in sort of half way through. Dick, of course, is a Middle East hand par excellence. What was your impression of his attitude towards the situation in Lebanon, Israel, etc. Because he was kind of a new man, had been somewhere else and then was coming...

MACK: Dick Murphy had arrived from Saudi Arabia, where he had been a very successful ambassador, to be Assistant Secretary for NEA. He had extensive experience and was a superb Arabist. I'd known Dick ever since we were together in Jordan. He'd been very carefully prepared for the job. Basically, it was accepted wisdom that a career Arabist would not do well in that job because the Israelis would never trust him. Dick represented a risky experiment in that regard. Of course, starting in 1982, Reagan and Shultz had for a year or so been really frustrated by dealing with Israelis on several issues. They didn't like the Israeli-Lebanon venture, they didn't like the way the Israelis had dealt with us over that, and they blamed the Israelis at least in part for letting the Arab-Israel peace process bog down. The President and the Secretary were prepared to try some new things, and Dick was one of the new things. Part of the premise of this was that it would get the Saudis engaged in supporting us in Lebanon. In fact, the Saudis did get engaged during this period to an unprecedented degree in trying to help resolve the Lebanon situation. They used a lot of their influence with Syria, not always successfully, but they certainly made considerable efforts.

Before Dick came into the job, the Department had him go to Israel for more than routine consultations. It was arranged that he would spend time traveling in Israel to get to know the Israelis as a people. Dick also went to New York and spent time with people in the Jewish community. He did these kinds of things even before he actually got confirmed.

It was while he was awaiting confirmation, just after we'd gotten a successful vote in the Congress at the end of September, 1983, to authorize our continuing military presence in Lebanon, that Dick called me to his temporary office. As I previously discussed, the first thing he said was, how can we get our forces out of Lebanon? It's no place for them to be. And I had thought to myself, what's the matter with this guy? I was so caught up in the day-to-day expectations of my job that I had missed the bigger, broader picture which Murphy clearly had. Whether he had any encouragement from higher political levels at that early point, I don't know. But he clearly felt that we had to find some way to find an end game for our military presence in Lebanon. He was dead right.

Along with his overall strategic view about the Middle East, Dick brought an extremely good tactical sense to the job. He was very, very good. I was in a lot of conversations with him with both Arabs and Israelis, and I admired the way he could handle a meeting. From little vibrations he would manage to develop a bigger idea during the course of a meeting. He was not always adept at coming up with a conceptual framework going into a meeting or first addressing a problem, but once he started working on it, he was very creative. And it was a great pleasure to travel with him. He was a nice person to work with and fairly considerate of the people he worked with. He wasvery demanding, however, in terms of performance.

Q: Let's talk about the other.

MACK: Regarding Syria, there's not much more to say. Our relations were very strained, although we continued to have diplomatic intercourse during the time I was office director, and it occasionally proved useful. Syria had sent a very capable diplomat to Washington as ambassador, and I met with Ambassador Rafic Jouejati from time to time, usually to complain about Syrian behavior. The Assad brothers and Foreign Minister Shara allowed him to do very little of value, preferring to manage relations with the U.S. in Damascus. A senior U.S. visitor could usually get a meeting with Hafez al Assad, but such visitors were infrequent and the meetings were never automatic. It was clearly an adversarial relationship, and not going anywhere. In my view, that was pretty much because of the Shultz doctrine, i.e., that Syria was the problem in Lebanon. [As described earlier, it is noteworthy that the Syrians were quite helpful on a few occasions, but we could not always give them full credit for resolution of a problem caused by terrorist acts for which they had at least partial responsibility. Another example was the release to Reverend Jesse Jackson of an American navy pilot whose aircraft was downed in the course of a mission over Lebanon. We made the best of that dilemma by cooperating with Jackson's visit to Damascus, at a time when senior U.S. leaders did not want to concede our weakness by asking for the help of the Syrians.]

Q: What was our consideration and evaluation of the survivability of Hafez al Assad?

MACK: Just as there is now, there were reports about illnesses from which Assad suffered. Astute Syria watchers did not believe that anything other than illness was liable to bring him down. Assad had good control over the officer corps, and he had a pretty good control over the country. There was a little subtext about his relationship with his younger brother, Rifaat, and the possibility of eventual estrangement. Rifaat had a tendency to try to promote himself as being the successor to Hafez, something that wasn't appreciated by a lot of the senior Alawite commanders.

Turning to Jordan, our relationship with that country was outwardly quite good. There were strains within the U.S. government, because it was difficult to get support for all the things that NEA and the Pentagon thought we ought to be doing with Jordan in terms of arms sales and joint military activities. These were items that the Jordanians clearly required and things that would help promote our bi-lateral relationship, but there were also possible joint programs to advance wider U.S. security objectives. These included the idea of promoting Jordan as having a rapid reaction force which could help out in a pinch down in the Gulf. We worked on matters like this, but mostly unsuccessfully because of congressional opposition to doing more for Jordan.

Q: This is basically because of Israeli...

MACK: The Israelis were opposed to selling anything to Jordan unless it was directly related to helping the Jordanians prevent terrorists from infiltrating across the border in Israel. That the Israelis would support.

Q: What was your impression of King Hussein?

MACK: Washington at this time viewed Hussein as key to restarting the Arab-Israel peace process. He had a history of secret contacts with the Israelis. Israeli Prime Minister Peres had to be very careful with Shamir, his coalition partner as foreign minister. If the coalition held together long enough, the two would trade places with Shamir advancing to be Prime Minister. In that event, Shamir might well oppose such contacts with Jordan. I don't know all the details on this, but I was aware of enough to know that we had helped open a secret channel from Peres to King Hussein, by-passing Shamir and the Israeli foreign ministry. It was a very closely held, tightly controlled channel. The channel was used for trying to get the peace process going again, but also to pass messages regarding terrorist infiltration threats and how to deal with them.

Partly because of some successes in the secret Jordanian-Israeli talks that we aided, we became very hopeful that King Hussein might take an initiative with regard to the peace process. Mind you, we had tried to develop a relationship with the Yasser Arafat and the PLO that might one day be useful in the peace process. We had helped Arafat get out of Lebanon in September 1982 with most of his organization for political activity intact. He returned to Lebanon when the central government collapsed and our forces withdrew. A year late, in 1983, he was operating from in and around Tripoli, in northern Lebanon, where he had supporters in the Palestinian refugee camps. Once again, Arafat got into all kinds of hot water there, caught between the Syrians on the one side with whom he was at odds at that point, and the Israeli navy on the other. He was being hammered by the Syrians, and the Israeli navy was preventing his escape. Working closely with Dick Murphy, and with the essential support of the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv, we brokered a deal to get Arafat out of Lebanon once more. Once again, he disappointed us. We thought that after two close calls, he would make a deal with the moderates, Mubarak and Hussein, and support the peace process. Once again, Arafat flitted off, courting so-called supporters in South Yemen and the Soviet bloc.

The question became whether Hussein would be willing to take the plunge into the peace process without the cover of Arafat being there as well. We had failed to arrange the latter. There had been direct but covert contacts with the PLO. Officially authorized talks in Tunis did not start until later in the 1980s. Hussein did come to Washington, as I recall, on a high profile visit in the spring of 1985. The Reagan Administration placed a lot of hope on this visit. They brought Phil Habib back, and many top officials at State and the White House were involved in trying to get the peace process ginned up again. My very capable Jordanian desk officer, Marc Grossman, was right in the middle of developments and very close to the Jordanian delegation. Marc was helping to pull this together and providing top people in the State Department with a sense that Jordan would go for full peace in return for full Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories. The trick was whether that would seem enough in reach to get Hussein to commit publicly to the process. We were 70% confident that the King would take the plunge. In the end, he did not. Hussein felt too exposed to the Syrians on one flank and the PLO on the other, to depend on an Israeli government of National Unity that could not be relied on even by us to take a firm position on the extent of withdrawal. At that point, hopes for the peace process evaporated. It was a disappointment for those of us in NEA but also, I am sure, for Reagan and Shultz.

Although U.S. diplomatic contacts with the PLO no longer existed, my office had some responsibility for liaison with Palestinians in exile. I had a working relationship on a non-attribution basis with a Palestinian-American named Jawad George, who at that time was the head of the National Association of Arab-Americans. Jawad was also a member of the Palestinian National Congress, which was nominally an umbrella group for Palestinians in exile and of which the PLO was one constituent part. That was enough of a fig leaf for NEA to authorize my discussions with Jawad of what he heard from the PLO, but it was not the kind of thing to which we drew attention. Jawad used to come and see me after returning from meetings in Tunis, and I'd do a report to the NEA front office without mentioning his name. Presumably, the Assistant Secretary might brief select persons on the seventh floor or at the White House, but I did not ask.

Q: Tunis being where?

MACK: Tunis being where the PLO now had its headquarters. These were not very formal messages, and there was certainly no dialogue. Basically, Jawad would tell me what he had been told in Tunis. I really had nothing to say back to him, but we did develop a close relationship. When he died, at a rather young age while still in his job at NAAA, I went to a memorial service. It was in a big hotel in Washington and, of course, I was the only U.S. government official that came. All the Arab-Americans were thrilled to see me. To my personal chagrin, I had to leave the service; I couldn't stay because I realized they were going to have speakers up on a platform making speeches about Jawad, and one of the people on the platform was the head of the Washington office of the Palestine Information Office. He was another Arab-American, Hassan Abdul Rahman. Unlike Jawad, Hassan had an official position working for the PLO, and I was forbidden to have direct contact with him at that point. Hassan is still in the same job, if I'm not mistaken, and years later we were able to get to know one another after U.S. talks had developed into a formal relationship with the PLO. Prohibitions on such contacts were generally unwise, as they restricted U.S. diplomatic flexibility and kept us in the dark about developments. Personally, I had lost any respect for Arafat as a leader after his behavior in 1983, but he continued to count for a lot in Arab politics. Ironically, the Israelis eventually got closer to his people in the secret talks at Oslo, when the PLO position evolved in a positive way, while we continued the fruitless effort to isolate the PLO.

During my time as office director, we were able to make only desultory efforts to get the Arab-Israel peace process back underway. It was always understood that if could get Jordan into an active and open peace process, then we could do bilateral military things with Jordan as well. Unfortunately, none of that happened. As a result, relations with Jordan did not develop much during my three years as office director.

Relations with Iraq did develop, resulting in resumed diplomatic ties. I came into the job with a lot of knowledge about Iraq, and also a fairly skeptical attitude toward the Iraqis. During two tours in Baghdad, including my assignment in the Interests Section, I'd had some difficult experiences. One of the views that I held by 1982 was that fancy efforts to improve relations with Iraq were doomed to failure. When he was Secretary of State, Kissinger had held a secret meeting with Tariq Aziz in Paris. It had gone nowhere after that. When Brzezinski was National Security Advisor, at a time when I was in Baghdad, Washington tried at times to launch initiatives through third party emissaries, the foreign minister of Italy, for example. The Carter administration was trying to make Iraq their China, or Brzezinski was trying to make it his China. So they kept trying unusual initiatives. The Iraqi reaction, as best I could judge in Baghdad, was one of great suspicion. The Iraqis seemed to be thinking, "Why are the Americans trying to do this? They're clearly trying to entrap us in something we don't want to have any part of."

Baghdad's attitude toward Washington began changing as the Iraq-Iran war continued, often badly for Iraq, and they began to see some potential benefit from having an improved relationship with the United States. While I was working as officer director, after the Rumsfeld visits I described above, Iraq sent a new Interests Section chief to Baghdad. Previously, we'd had very difficult dealings with the Iraqi Interests Section. They were basically a bunch of low-lifes who tried to do foolish things like smuggling guns out of the country. We kept them on a pretty tight leash. In the spring of 1984, we hosted an official visit to Washington of Foreign Ministry Under Secretary Ismat Katani, a very capable, professional Iraqi diplomat whom I had known in Baghdad. This invitation was our reciprocity for the Rumsfeld visit to Baghdad, and it made sense as a part of the gradual warming between the two governments. Katani had been the U.S. Interests Section's most senior official contact in Baghdad. He was by nature cordial, correct and polite with foreign diplomats in Baghdad, and he had been very kind to me personally, despite my junior and unusual status there. Katani was also one of the senior Kurds in the Iraqi government, and a useful representative for his government. We had promising high level meetings with Katani in Washington. I can't remember whether he met Shultz, but he did meet with Under Secretary Eagleburger.

Katani had brought with him the new head of the Interest Section, Nizar Hamdoun, whom he introduced at an NEA hosted luncheon. I took one look at this guy, and thought to myself, my gosh, what is this? He looked like a Baath party thug, and his resume matched the visual impression. He had very good Baath party credentials, and Katani told us he had a personal relationship with Saddam Hussein. Hamdoun had been the head of the Syria office of the Regional Command of the Baath party in Baghdad. This was the office that had been responsible for setting in motion bombings in Damascus, among other matters connected with the relations between the two feuding wings of the Arab Baath Party. His English wasn't very good, and even his Arabic seemed closer to the Iraqi street than to the foreign ministry.

Initially, the State Department kept dealings with Hamdoun at a fairly low level. I would be his principal contact, along with Frank Ricciardone, my talented Iraqi desk officer. Frank and I soon came to appreciate Hamdoun's talent and resourcefulness. He worked his butt off and had a great natural talent for diplomacy, belying my first impression. Hamdoun had never had a diplomatic position, but he was really determined to succeed and he was not too proud to ask for advice. He would come in and see me fairly often, using most any excuse, behavior that reminded me of my own efforts in Baghdad. I would deliver the usual hard message from Washington about policies of the Iraqi government, and then Hamdoun would ask me, what else he could do. Could he meet with officials in other departments or members of Congress? Very carefully, and bearing in mind our own diplomatic needs in Baghdad, I would say yes, you can start meeting people down on the Hill. Here's the name of a senior staffer you could start with, and maybe he will agree for you to meet with a congressman. Gradually, Hamdoun started spreading his wings, and relations between our two governments began improving. The Iraqis started making desirable public statements about the peace process, essentially saying that whatever the Palestinians agree to, fine with them. The Iraqis suggested they weren't a principal party to the Arab-Israel dispute. Of course, this was music to the Israeli ears. Hamdoun was very adept in the Washington political environment. He played the media, he contacted the Jewish groups. There was nobody that he would not try to cultivate in Washington. Eventually relations were restored between the two countries, and Nizar Hamdoun stayed on as ambassador.

That makes it sound like the resumption of U.S. Iraqi relations happened very quickly. For my first two years as office director, however, the relations remained stalled. There were some suggestions from the U.S. intelligence agencies to establish a regular intelligence liaison with the Iraqis. I came up with a number of criteria that I thought the Iraqis would have to meet first. I'm not sure exactly what was when a liaison began, but I was not keen for jumping too fast into advanced relationships, either of a military nature or of an intelligence nature, until such time as the Iraqis were prepared to have a normal diplomatic relationship, and until they started doing and saying the right things with regard to issues like the peace process.

I can attest that at least until I left the job in the summer of 1985, there were no military items, or even items that I recognized as dual purpose items, sent to the Iraqis. One thing that I supported was to sell armored ambulances, made by Cadillac-Gage, to the Iraqis. This proposed cash sale had domestic political support, because it would keep a U.S. industry in business and American workers employed at a time when the U.S. military had little demand for the vehicles. The Iraqis were locked in this increasingly bloody war with the Iranians, and it seemed to me an armored ambulance was okay. While it was military equipment, it would be used to save lives, not kill other people. But the Seventh Floor turned down this proposal, I believe because it would break the U.S. policy against arms sales to either side in the Iraq-Iran war. I think we were fairly pure on this issue, at least all the time I was there. In fact I haven't seen anything subsequently that indicated that there were any significant U.S. military sales. Later, in response to allegations in 1992, the State Department did a full search of the files. There were some dual purpose sales in the later years of the Iraq-Iran war, but they were a tiny part of the overall Iraqi defense program. They still made some minor contribution, I suppose, to Iraqi military capabilities. U.S. sales of military significance were also nothing like what the Swiss, Germans, Italians or French were doing. While the later course of U.S.-Iraqi relations did not go well, I felt that getting Iraq back into a more normal and correct relationship with the United States was one of the achievements of my three years as office director.

Q: To put it into context, Iran and Iraq were in this horrendous war, and Iran was very definitely not in our good graces. Does this have an effect?

MACK: It is absolutely the case that while there were still questions about Iraq, an Iranian victory looked worse for U.S. interests in the region. That was even more so in the early 1980s than today [in 1996]. Iran was in everybody's bad book in Washington because of what they had done with us bilaterally, because of the threats they were periodically making against the Israelis, because of the rising tempo of their interference with shipping in the Gulf. Certainly, all of our friends in the Arab world were dead set against Iran. The Syrians were about the only Arab country that had a decent relationship with Iran during that period. We were constantly being urged by the Saudis, Jordanians and Egyptians to improve relations with Iraq. There was a lot going for it, and particularly when the Israelis started saying, in effect, why not? Resumption of relations with Iraq became a natural thing to do. Strategically, it made no sense for us not to have a relationship with Iraq, if they were prepared to behave in a responsible manner. [Discussion of marginal U.S. military sales to Iraq misses the major U.S. contributions to Iraq's ability to withstand the Iranians. See below.]

I have spoken, for example, about going to Baghdad with Donald Rumsfeld on one of his shuttles, and how Tariq Aziz in particular made a good and favorable impression on Rumsfeld. The Iraqis generally were minding their Ps and Qs in the early 1980s. So this was quite a natural thing to do.

I might mention one thing that I ducked at the time but I think I want to put it on the tape, just so I don't forget the names. It regards the two AIPAC officials who had the luncheon with me in 1985 and attempted to put some money in the bank on their account. One of them was Steve Rosen, who was in fact the number two person in AIPAC. The other was Martin Indyk, who subsequently went on to head an AIPAC spin-off think tank called the Washington Institute. Martin is now our ambassador in Israel. At that time, Martin was the head of AIPAC's research office. He was still an Australian citizen. Martin was a good scholar of the Middle East, but he was obviously a person who never hid his strong feelings of sympathy with Israel. [By 2008, Steve Rosen had been fired by AIPAC and was under a legal cloud. Steve stoutly maintained that the charges against him were unfair. Martin Indyk had gone on from his job as Israeli Ambassador to be Assistant Secretary of State for NEA. Once out of government, he founded and is heading the Saban Center at the Brookings Institute. Although his work as ambassador and assistant secretary was after my time in government, I gained respect for the job that Martin did in both positions, and I have shared my more positive views with both Americans and Arabs.]

Q: Back to the Iraq thing. One of the things that later became quite well known was that we were sharing satellite pictures with the Iraqis, which from a military point of view... I mean, it was one of the great toys that we had. It was also extremely useful. Was this anything that was going on that you were aware of?

MACK: No, not that I was aware of. I think the intelligence sharing started after I left. I knew the CIA had tried to a liaison relationship with Iraq, which I disapproved of as long as we didn't have diplomatic relations. As far as I was concerned, once the Iraqis were prepared to have diplomatic relations, there was no reason we shouldn't have and active intelligence relationship both through the military attachï¿½ out there and through Central Intelligence Agency personnel. If I knew at the time, I don't remember the details of what may have developed after we reestablished relations.

Q: By the time you left we had an ambassador?

MACK: Yes, although I don't know whether he had been confirmed yet. In effect, we took a page out of the Iraqi's book. We had a capable Interests Section chief, David Newton, who is now our ambassador in Yemen. After Washington considered a qualified alternative candidate, David was given the nod to stay on as ambassador. He remained in Baghdad throughout the end of the Iraqi-Iran war, including during the very difficult Iran-gate period. David was an exceptionally good choice for the job. Even before he was an ambassador and had the added access that came with the position, we could see a tremendous improvement in the quality of the political reporting from the U.S. Interests Section.

I believe I was gone by the time David was confirmed, so I was less aware of how well he handled the high level relationships with the Iraqi government after he became ambassador. From what I heard indirectly, however, he did well.

Q: You left the job when?

MACK: In the summer of '85.

Q: Where did you go then.

MACK: I had a year at the Senior Seminar.

Q: When you left the job how did you feel about whither the Middle East?

MACK: I felt very discouraged about our failure to even find a kind of preliminary resolution of the Lebanon issue. Because I had invested a lot of time and effort into that. I had been half convinced by Phil Habib and George Shultz of the wisdom of our trying to be the main actor in Lebanon. But when that didn't work, I certainly embraced the idea of trying to have an indirect Syrian-Israeli entente from which Lebanon would benefit. In the end, that didn't work either. I had placed a lot of hope in getting the peace process underway, mostly because I thought that Yasser Arafat would take the plunge. During the course of my three years, I think I went from optimism about Arafat to total contempt. I could not have believed at that point that he would evolve in the way he has evolved in recent years. By the middle of 1985, I had very little use for Arafat. I thought we had done everything we could to get him into the peace process, and he was beyond hope.

Despite serving in Baghdad and having Iraqi friends, I did not have a lot of personal feeling invested in the outcome of the Iraq-Iran war. I did wish that terrible war would end sooner rather than later on terms that would leave Iraq intact. It was in our strategic interest that Iran not be able to overrun Iraq. Iraq wanted to stop the war after a few years, after its early victories had been reversed and Iraq's very existence as an independent nation seemed at risk. The U.S. supported the U.N. Security Council resolution calling for an end to the war, which Iran resisted for many years.

In the earlier discussion about the U.S. tilt to Iraq in its war with Iran, I forgot to mention the support and enthusiasm of my office for the so-called Operation Staunch. This was the effort to prevent countries with which we had influence from sending weapons or military spare parts to Iran. We also sent a number of Americans or residents in the U.S. to jail for violation of the embargo on arms to Iran. Unlike the Iraqi situation, the U.S. had been a major military supplier to Iran during the time of the Shah, so there were Iranian aspirations for more U.S. arms for their inventory and Iranian needs for U.S. spare parts. Iraq did not have a similar need for arms supplies from the U.S. Although we weren't a provider of weapons to Iraq, it's also true that we didn't apply pressure to other countries that were supplying weapons, outside of the suppliers of chemical pre-cursors where we did make efforts, for example with the German government. We certainly made no apologies for the fact that Operation Staunch was one-sided. I think it was the right thing to do to tilt in the sense that we made great diplomatic and political efforts, often using our intelligence capabilities, to persuade governments to stop arms relationships with Iran. I think that was an important contribution to the eventual resolution of the war.

Q: I forgot to ask about Iraq, what was the role of the Soviet Union as we were seeing it then? Was this a concern to us?

MACK: The Soviets had played both sides in the Iran-Iraq war. They were an arms supplier to both Iraq and Iran. One of the reasons why I felt it was important for us to restore relationships in Baghdad was that we were leaving the field open to the Soviets. Despite what would seem to be their handicaps in many ways, it appeared that the Soviets might emerge as the power broker with significant positions in both Iraq and Iran. This would give the Soviets the ability to threaten vital U.S. national interests in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula. In the 1980s, these kinds of cold war strategic calculations were never far from the minds of U.S. policy makers.

I'd like to wind it up here.

Today is the 31st of July 1996. Well, David, shall we start again? You were in the Senior Seminar from when to when?

MACK: From the summer of 1985 to the summer of 1986, I was a member of the State Department managed Senior Seminar, intended to offer an alternative to the senior training programs of the U.S. military services. It was for me a very welcome change of pace, and worked out fairly well I think in terms of career preparation.

Q: Part of it of course is designed to make you more aware of the United States. Did that seem to work that way?

MACK: The focus was about 75% in that direction and well tailored to the needs of Americans who had spent most of their professional life outside the United States. We got out of Washington often and saw lots of aspects of the United States that I was totally unaware of. I had such a focused career that in a way I knew more about the politics of downtown Beirut than I did of the issues and problems in the farming country and cities of the Midwest. Domestic politics had been a very early interest of mine, before I got focused on international affairs, so I took advantage of the Senior Seminar to learn a lot more about the United States. Each student was in charge of developing one week of classes, both the syllabus, the reading list, reading materials, and to recruit the speakers. I chose U.S. domestic politics, so I had a very interesting experience and was able to bring in speakers like George McGovern, David Broder, and people of that caliber to speak to our group.

Q: So in '86 you finished the Senior Seminar.

MACK: I finished up the Senior Seminar in the summer of '86. In the spring of the year, the White House announced my nomination as ambassador to the United Arab Emirates. The announcement was preceded by a phone call from President Reagan, his graceful custom in dealing with new ambassadors. He told me with that very memorable, warm voice and with a tone of great sincerity how much he would appreciate it if I would accept being his ambassador to the United Arab Em-i-ra-tes. He was obviously reading from a cue card, as he tried to pronounce the name. I had no reason to suppose he was familiar with the country, but the great communicator could read his lines with polished expertise, and he knew how to impress an ambassador-to-be in a brief phone call that was economical with his time.

Q: Obviously you were forewarned about the presidential call. Had there been any negotiations, or anything like that involved in getting your ambassadorship?

MACK: I knew that the Near East South Asian Bureau wanted to send me to Abu Dhabi, to the United Arab Emirates. The Director General told me that they would like to put me up for either Khartoum or Abu Dhabi. I said I would much prefer Abu Dhabi, because at that time Khartoum was an unaccompanied post.

Q: Means your family couldn't go.

MACK: That's right, my family couldn't go to Sudan, and it didn't seem like that was going to change very fast.

Q: Did you have any problem in confirmation?

MACK: No, confirmation was an absolute breeze. I had prepared perhaps excessively for it. I knew facts and figures, and personalities, dates. For my confirmation hearing, there was a single member present, a senator from Virginia, who was a one-term senator, whose name I've forgotten. He asked me only one question. I had made a very carefully crafted little opening statement that I thought would sound well in Abu Dhabi, as well as to the Senate. He said, "That was a very eloquent opening statement, Mr. Mack. Tell me is your family here with you today?" That was the only question he asked me. I remember all too well that I actually muffed the response. I turned and said, "Yes, here is my wife Catherine," pointing to my eleven year old daughter, who glared back at me. The senator questioned a couple of the other nominees present for the hearing, there was a quorum call for a floor vote, and the senator announced that he was satisfied with his interrogations of us and we'd hear back from the committee. There was a long delay before final committee action, but no further questions about either the UAE or me.

Q: Before you went out to Abu Dhabi, one almost goes to a post as ambassador with a sort of an agenda, and a perception of a place before one gets there. I wonder if you could talk about how you felt about that?

MACK: I had never been to the UAE, although I had visited Saudi Arabia and Kuwait each a couple of times. The Gulf was not a part of the Arab world where I had traveled much. I talked to a lot of people who had been out there. I was very much aware that the UAE was a fairly unique political creation, a confederation. In its own way, the UAE was a successful experiment in Arab unity but on a rather restricted scale. It had a weak central government, and a considerable amount of authority remained in the hands of the rulers of the seven individual Emirates.

Q: They were Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Qaiwain, Ras al-Khaimah, and Fujairah.

MACK: You're one of the few people who could name them.Q: This is only because this was part of my consular district back in the '50s.

MACK: I knew that it was a country that had come from grinding poverty just a couple of decades ago to a very high per capita income. I also knew the UAE had a very small citizen population and large expatriate population. UAE nationals were a minority, and other Arabs were a minority of the expatriates.

I should mention, before we get too far away from the confirmation issue, that although I was confirmed with no trouble, there was considerable delay. By the time the Senate confirmed me it was about September 20, 1986. My daughter was in a private school already, and my wife had her own professional interests. We decided for the first year they wouldn't join me in the UAE. I'd go out by myself, in single status. I was very enthusiastic about the job, and I didn't believe at the time that I would miss my family that much, because there would be so much to do and so much to learn. It turned out I missed them an awful lot, but I did spend my first year at post doing very little besides working in one way or another. My recreation was to run or swim. I ran with the Marines in the early morning, which was a nice way to get acquainted with that part of the mission and good for my physical fitness as well. I was very heavily focused in the first year on the job. This was during the latter stages of the Iraq-Iran war, the so-called Tanker War was just beginning with Iranian attacks on oil and gas tanker traffic in the Gulf. There was also the occasional Iraqi attack on tankers headed into Iranian ports.

Q: Before we get to your getting there, when you went out was there anything that you were ready for. I mean, were they talking about this in Washington?

MACK: The U.S. government was not really ready for events that were already unfolding in the region. I had been down to the Central Command at Tampa twice for briefings. The first time with a Senior Seminar group, but the second time I was on my own or with a couple of other people who were involved in the area. I got a lot of very helpful attention from the then Commander in Chief of CENTCOM, General George Crist, and his staff. He had a very good J-5, Plans and Policy, Rear Admiral Hal Bernsen. Bernsen later became Commander of the Middle East force out in the Gulf, so it was fortuitous that we had met. U.S. policy at that point was based very much on a Cold War perspective, viewing the Gulf as part of Cold War strategy. I don't blame CENTCOM for this particularly, because Washington set the parameters for the policy. I remember well the regional threat briefing that I had seen by this time twice from General Crist. He was one of the U.S. Marine Corps intellectuals, who really tried to integrate military strategy with broader concerns. The briefing started off with the typical large map of the area of operations. The Soviet Union up at the top was colored red. The map didn't have a bear crouching up there, but you get the idea. After the map, the next slide to go up was a picture of Peter the Great. So you start with a false premise that the threat is going to be coming out of the Soviet Union to the oil resources of the Gulf, and then you give a sense of historical perspective to the false premise.

Q: A search for warm water ports. If you want warm water, what the hell, the Persian Gulf's got the warmest around.

MACK: The focus was very much on this. By this time, however, because of the deterioration of U.S. relationships with Iran, U.S. strategy had dropped the idea that Iran was a bulwark. The new strategy was to try to attrit Soviet forces coming through Iran, while establishing strong points for defense of the Gulf region on the southern, Arab side of the Gulf. The CENTCOM strategist envisioned a particular role for UAE territory. Along with Oman, the UAE lies at the mouth of the Gulf at the Strait of Hormuz, the choke point for moving the bulk of the world's crude oil. The UAE also had numerous airfields and ports. CENTCOM actually hoped to set up a forward headquarters in the UAE, and they pressed that notion pretty hard.

It was apparent to me even then from talking to knowledgeable people in Washington, and it became much more apparent after I got out to the UAE, that the immediate problem was going to be an Iranian threat to the area. The idea of a Soviet threat was cold war thinking that was rapidly becoming less important than threats from regional powers. There had not been much thinking about how to deal with that.

Q: Were there any UAE-U.S. relations problems that we were going to have to deal with?

MACK: The foremost problem was that the UAE, like most of the Gulf states, tended to keep us at arm's length as far as security cooperation. The Gulf Arab perspective was that it was a good thing to have the U.S. fleet in the Gulf, and that they would pick and choose the form of cooperation on an ad hoc basis, but most of the time they wanted us to be "over the horizon". Near by, so we could come to their assistance, but certainly not in the kind of relationship that would identify them as being a close ally of the United States. This was true of other Gulf states, although not as much for Bahrain and Oman. In the case of Oman, the Sultanate had entered into an access and pre-positioning agreement with us as far back as 1980, in the wake of the Iranian revolution. Bahrain, although they had no formal agreement with us, provided port berthing facilities for the U.S. Navy, along with some facilities ashore. It would be stretching things to call it a base, and technically the Manama facility was called the Administrative Support Unit for the Mideast force naval command. It was a facility that supported the operations of our fleet in the area.

Q: COMIDEASTFOR has been there since the early '50s.

MACK: COMIDEASTFOR, the primarily naval U.S. military command, had existed in one form or another since 1949. In general, we had had no official presence in the area prior to 1971. That was true for all the countries, except Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, where diplomatic relations had been established for some time. In the other Gulf states, formal diplomatic relations began in 1971 when the British withdrew from their treaty relationships in the area. The U.S. presence was basically diplomatic and commercial. The military presence was rudimentary. First of all, there was COMIDEASTFOR. We're talking about two to four naval warships most of the time.

Q: When I was there it was a seaplane tender which used Greenwich Bay and something else which would alternate, and that was it.

MACK: By the time I got to Abu Dhabi, we had a submarine tender with the admiral's headquarters staff aboard, and a couple of frigates. It was a very modest presence. U.S. military presence ashore on the whole Arabian Peninsula was limited to the small administrative support unit in Bahrain, and there was extensive pre-positioning or pre-po, to use military slang, of equipment and supplies for the U.S. Air Force in Oman. In terms of U.S. military forces globally, that amounted to basically no U.S. military presence on the Peninsula in 1986.

The UAE was known for being very diffident about having close cooperation with the U.S., partly because it was a weak federal structure. It was believed that the Emirate of Abu Dhabi was a little more interested in having a closer relationship. The Emirate of Dubai, however, the second most important of the seven emirates, much preferred to have the lowest possible profile in global politics. Dubai wanted a primarily commercial relationship with the U.S., along with a very strong trading relationship with Iran and other countries. Some of the other emirates, like Sharjah, also had extensive Iranian trade relationships. There was an acceptance of the idea that there would be a maximum of twelve U.S. ship visits per year, but that these should be spaced throughout the year and to various U.A.E ports. Each visit had to be agreed on a case by case basis. In point of fact, we hadn't been coming near the limit of twelve. This was both because we didn't have that many ships deployed in the area, and because of the nervousness from time to time of UAE authorities. One of the things that CENTCOM wanted to do was to see whether they couldn't develop a closer working relationship. Washington was basically supportive of that. However, Washington's main concern was to keep the oil moving. The U.S. oil companies, and other U.S. business activities in the area, were far more important parts of our presence than the fleet in the view of most Washington policy makers.

There was a modest, longstanding U.S. cultural presence at various points in the area. Dutch Reform missionaries had been in Basra, Oman and Bahrain from early in the 20th century. They were not proselytizing so much as they were providing medical services and in the case of Bahrain also some educational services. They maintained a hospital at the UAE interior city of Al Ain. Because of such work and the generally good reputation of U.S. companies, Americans were rather popular, as long as we didn't get too close to these governments militarily. Both the public and most government officials in the region viewed our politics toward the Arab-Israel issue with a lot of unhappiness. It was a constant subject of discontent and complaint. It was also the general opinion that we would be a very unreliable ally against the Iranians. Our close relations with the Shah were in people's minds, and the current U.S.-Iran estrangement was not viewed as a long term feature of U.S. policy. People were aware of the trauma that Vietnam had brought to the U.S. global outlook. In this part of the world, there was also a feeling that we had been unreliable in keeping what President Reagan had described as a vital military commitment to Lebanon. In their view we had reneged on the commitment as soon as we started taking casualties. Basically, the view was and remains that Iran was a permanent feature in the area, and they had to learn how to deal with Iran in some way. The U.S. would come and go as it suited U.S. convenience, and they really couldn't depend on us.

For the first year I was in the UAE, the dominant issue was the Iraq-Iran war and how it might affect their interests. As I arrived in late September of '86, the tanker war was getting underway. The Iranians seemed to have a full head of steam against the Iraqis, and many people viewed them as being unstoppable. I had had enough experience with the Iraqis to believe that once the Iraqis were fighting on their own territory, as they were at this point, they would prove very, very tenacious in defending against the Iranians. I was not as concerned as some people with a successful Iranian push into southern Iraq from where they could then threaten Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

I was very concerned, however, with the Iranian navy, the strongest in the area. It gave them a capability to disrupt the flow of oil in the area and to intimidate countries like the UAE. I could see Iran pressuring the Arab states of the Gulf to restrict their own production in order to raise the price of oil and the revenues that the Iranians would get from their production. The Iranians could not increase their exports significantly, at least in the short term. Countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait, on the other hand, were producing under their near term capacity. They had very different oil strategies. For the Iranians, it was to export every drop they could in order to maintain their revenues. They were trying to fight this war without borrowing, which had a lot to do with the economic views of the late Ayatollah Khomeini. They needed all the revenue they could get from oil, and they felt that the price was unnaturally low, as they saw it, due to over-production by these little under-populated Arab states. The Gulf states, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait foremost, were providing political assistance to Iraq. More important, they were providing under the table financial assistance. It seemed obvious to many people I talked to after my arrival in the UAE in late September 1986 that the Iranians would be prepared to use intimidation as well as overt military measures in dealing with the Arab states of the Gulf. They could use subversion, as well as overt military measures, to intimidate states like the UAE to curtail their support for Iraq and to lower their oil production. It wasn't a question of stopping the flow of oil entirely, but of restricting it to Iran's benefit.

Q: We'll come back to the tanker war, but let's talk quickly about your relations with the government. What was the structure of the government? Here you have these seven sheikhdoms, which had confederated, how did you deal with them?

MACK: The UAE was a confederation, the loose structure of the thirteen U.S. states prior to adopting our constitution. Although I was accredited to the federal government in Abu Dhabi where we had the embassy, one of the interesting peculiarities of the system was that the sovereign body of the confederation was the Council of Rulers, composed of the rulers or amirs of the seven emirates. I was supposed to be dealing in some sense with all seven rulers. Although I only presented credentials to the UAE President, Sheikh Zayed Al Nahayan, the ruler of Abu Dhabi, I was also required to then make formal calls on all the other rulers before I officially met with federal cabinet members. So it was an awkward system. It was not a cabinet government, or to use the Arabic term a diwan government. It was a government by consensus. It was more of a majlis government where you had to get a lot of people to agree to an issue through different meetings before anybody would be prepared to take a decision. The federation government had primacy in foreign affairs, but in fact each one of the rulers tended to conduct a little bit of foreign affairs on the side. This was particularly true of Dubai and Sharjah, who often went their own way on foreign policy matters.

There were UAE armed forces, headquartered in Abu Dhabi, but in fact headquarters had no authority at all over the armed forces of Dubai, located right next door. Dubai had its own military force, as to some extent was true of a couple of the other emirates. The Dubai military force was completely independent from the federal military headquartered in Abu Dhabi for equipment, as well as command and control, intelligence, and everything else. So, for example, if you wanted to have a U.S. navy ship visit into Dubai, you had to get approval of the foreign ministry in Abu Dhabi. But before they would give you approval, the foreign ministry would have to get a clearance first from the GHQ, or general headquarters of the federal armed forces. That was easy enough. But then the foreign ministry would have to get approval from the ruler of the emirate where you wanted to make a ship call. If it was Dubai, our preferred port of call for refueling and shore leave, it would require approval from the authorities there. Curiously, the federal Minister of Defense was Sheikh Mohammed Al Maktoum, the commander of the Dubai armed forces and a senior sheikh of the ruling family there, the Maktoum family. As the Minister of Defense, his federal cabinet position, he had no real authority over the federal military establishment. This mixture of federal and local authorities meant that I was constantly shuttling back and forth among the different emirates, trying to stitch together little agreements. In practice, if the U.S. navy wanted to have a ship visit into Dubai, we would broach the subject with the Dubai authorities informally. If they said okay, then we would make a formal request in Abu Dhabi and wait for the foreign ministry to go through the formal clearance process. This was terribly cumbersome and time consuming.

Q: And I'm sure you had very impatient U.S. Navy people saying, what the hell, we're just coming in to get some fuel.

MACK: The U.S. Navy was impatient, and I could understand why. CENTCOM in Tampa also pressed their case. Shortly after I had arrived and before I had even presented my credentials, I learned that the Commander in Chief of Central Command, George Crist, was planning a visit which would include all of the various emirates. Already, virtually at the time of my arrival, we had a port call in Abu Dhabi by the COMIDEASTFOR flag ship, the La Salle, which was the submarine tender. Admiral Bernsen, the Commander of the Middle East force, was aboard. So I had already had a major military visit even before I was credentialed, and before I could attend official bi-lateral functions aboard the ship. Fortunately, before Crist arrived, I was able to present my credentials to Sheikh Zayed. That made me finally official, so I was able to go along with General Crist on his round of calls. This does give some idea, however, that the U.S. regional military commanders tended to push pretty hard to get themselves and their concerns to the top of our diplomatic agenda in the region.

In this connection I also want to say a little something about the credential ceremony. I was on Sheikh Zayed's agenda along with the new Lebanese ambassador, the Soviet ambassador, and a couple of others. It was to be the first Soviet ambassador to the UAE, and as it turned out he and I were right together in the protocol order. Since the Soviets were still in Afghanistan, I was prohibited by U.S. regulations from having a close formal relationship with him. I couldn't go to his national day reception, and I wasn't supposed to invite him to mine. In fact, of course, we were right side by side in all the protocol functions. He was also a very effusive, jovial, senior Soviet diplomat. Abu Dhabi was his fourth embassy, and his last one had been Damascus, their most important embassy in the Middle East. So I knew he was very senior. He was also a good deal order than me, and he seemed to have discovered glasnost before Gorbachev.

Q: Glasnost being an openness.

MACK: Yes. Ambassador Felix Fedotov very much wanted to promote a personal relationship between the two of us and see better relations between our two countries. His whole purpose for being in Abu Dhabi, it became apparent, was to convince people in the UAE that the Soviet Union had changed and was no longer a threat to them. The wider target for Soviet policy was the rest of the Gulf region, including the Saudis who would see him in the UAE, even though the Saudi government had not allowed the Soviet Union to have an embassy in Riyadh. Fedotov was good at this. He had a good sense of humor, so he played the likeable and harmless buffoon to some degree. But the U.S. had many advantages over the Soviet Union in the UAE. Although neither one of us played up the competitive aspect, the cold war was not over. The Abu Dhabi based media liked to focus on it in the sense of showing Fedotov and Mack standing side by side, along with the latest news from Afghanistan.

My Arabic was reasonably good at that point, and I wanted to make brief remarks in Arabic, as I presented the credentials. I asked the advice of the president's interpreter, Zaki Nusseibeh of the famous Palestinian family, and he encouraged me to do so. What I said as well as how I said it must have made a favorable impression on Zayed, who proceeded to talk to me for something like twenty-five minutes. Fortunately, I had prepared some things to talk about in Arabic, as we sat there together on the couch in this huge majlis, with all the other senior members of the ruling family and cabinet members watching. So I got off to a very good start, and couldn't complain at all about my reception on the official side from that point on.

That was well, because I had to promote a military relationship for which the UAE was unready. Moreover, official Washington was uncertain about how fast to proceed and how far to go. We had the Central Commander in Chief coming in, and he had a definite agenda. I was still feeling my way toward what the overall U.S. agenda should be. I had, before I came out, drafted the letter from the Secretary of State to me, so I pretty well knew what my instructions would be. And sure enough, when I got my letter it was almost word for word as I had drafted it. I had goals of improving security cooperation and increasing the levels of trade and business. I'd have to check, but I think the third principal goal was something like obtaining support of the U.A.E government on international political and economic issues, particularly the Middle East Arab-Israeli peace process where we had some problems. The UAE was nearly half way through its turn as a member of the Security Council. Obviously, this had some particular importance to us, but it could help or hurt our overall relations.

General Crist wanted to have a full press on not only the federal government, but also on each individual ruler, in order to establish a close security relationship. Together, Crist and I went calling on not only the Abu Dhabi military authorities, but on the civilian authorities, the rulers in the various Emirates, and in Dubai on the nominal Minister of Defense. While Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum wasn't a minister of defense in our terms, he certainly was the number one security official for the Emirate of Dubai. For that matter, he was the most important economic-political decision maker in the Emirate, as his two elder brothers, the ruler and the deputy ruler, seemed to defer to him. Crist and I had a good series of calls, giving me a very quick look as an observer at some of the people that I would deal with during the coming year. As a result, when I made my own official calls on them they had already met me in the company of the Commander in Chief of the Central Command. This was useful, but I had to make sure it did not lead to misunderstandings.

During the course of that trip, Crist pressed very hard to get the forward headquarters established in Ras al-Khaimah. RAK was one of the poorest of the Emirates. It would be stretching things even to call them least wealthy. By UAE standards, RAK had a good size indigenous population and a rather modest per capita income.

Q: Because oil revenues did not go to everyone. They went by state.

MACK: It is helpful to contrast the U.S. and UAE federal system. In both, certain things are very centralized, but the government functions that are centralized or decentralized differ considerably. In the Emirates, public education during my time in the country tended to be centralized, with a common curriculum and a single UAE university, unlike the highly decentralized U.S. system of education. In both countries, the police are decentralized. Defense was a central government function in the U.S. from the beginning, unlike in the UAE. Over time, the U.S. has developed centralized government economic functions, but in the UAE economic matters were almost totally decentralized when I arrived in the country. Anything dealing with the extraction and sale of petroleum and minerals, from exploration to the marketing of petroleum products, was controlled and sometimes managed by the individual emirates. To the extent that they met their agreements for providing some of their oil revenues to the federal treasury, the oil contributed to the welfare of all. In fact, however, the federal treasury depended on hand outs from Abu Dhabi for adequate resources. There were often chronic budget problems on the federal level, whereas the individual emirates that produced oil and gas, like Abu Dhabi and Dubai and to a certain extent Sharjah, had very well funded local authorities and government activities.

One consequence was that Ras al-Khaimah was in continual need of revenues. As it was located near the Strait of Hormuz, it had been identified by the Central Command strategists as being the key point in the Gulf where they wanted to have a position. RAK was rather desperate for some kind of relationship that would be remunerative. For historical reasons, it was also anti-Iran and wanted U.S. support of its grievances, and the U.S. had more recently started viewing Iran as a potential adversary. Crist, without so far as I am aware of any support from Washington, rather forcefully advocated the idea that a big empty hotel the RAK had built a couple of years ago and had never been able to open because it wasn't economically feasible, would make a dandy headquarters building for the Central Command.

While this idea would have made the UAE federal government nervous, Crist had an attentive audience in the RAK. Sheikh Saqr bin Mohammed al-Qassimi, the ruler of the Emirate of Ras al-Khaimah, was a delightful old pirate. Saqr told me quite cheerfully that his ancestors were pirates, something the ruler of Sharjah, from another branch of the Al Qawasim, had published a book trying to refute. Saqr had been the ruler since 1947, had many sons from several wives and was an old style Gulf ruler.

Q: I met him in a call on him.

MACK: Saqr had been the ruler of RAK since 1947, and he had entered the federation somewhat reluctantly. He thought of himself as sovereign in matters of foreign policy, as well as security and the economy, whatever Sheikh Zayed down in Abu Dhabi might think about such matters. Left on his own, Saqr would have probably liked to make a deal with CENTCOM. But Saqr was economically dependent on Abu Dhabi and knew that he had to get federal support if he was to do this. It appeared there was a mutual interest there between Central Command and this one emirate. Indeed, there were a couple of other emirates sufficiently desperate enough for some kind of remunerative activity under their control that they might have been tempted to enter into a special relationship with the U.S. But the ones that really counted - Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah - were all for keeping the U.S. military at arm's length.

Q: Was there a large Iranian expatriate community?

MACK: There's a large Iranian origin population in the UAE, particularly in Sharjah and Dubai. The nature of the community was very heterogeneous. It included people who had come from Iran, starting back in the late 19th century. These Iranian settlers before the oil boom and in its early years tended to be native Arabic speakers of Arab ethnic origin. The southern Iranian coast line and offshore islands had been settled by Arabs in the early centuries of the Islamic period. To the extent they spoke Persian after emigrating to the UAE, it was as a second language. This part of the Iranian origin population was thoroughly integrated with the local people of Arabian Peninsula tribal origin. Then there were some primarily Persian speaking peoples, who had settled in the emirates for commercial reasons. As a result, there was a merchant class of Iranian origin, both Arabs and Persians, particularly in Dubai, Sharjah, and Ajman. These merchants were fully bi-lingual, even though they might trace their origins variously to either Arab or Persian roots. During the '50s and '60s, there were Iranians, some of whom were anti-Shah, who had tended to settle in this area as the oil boom got underway. A lot of Iranians were attracted into the area because of the oil boom, so many of them were anti-Shah, but not all of them. Finally, a few years after the Iranian revolution in 1978-79, you started getting anti-Mullah Iranians who were leaving Iran. They came to the UAE both because of the economic pull of these booming economies in places like Dubai, but also because they didn't like the kind of cultural-political system that was being set up in Iran. It was hard to generalize about the Iranian community.

Q: Were there the equivalent Mullah agents, many proselytizers?

MACK: There were, in effect, agents of the new Iranian regime in the UAE. In addition to the Iranian ambassador in Abu Dhabi, who with his staff was rather active, there was a representative of the Ayatollah Khomeini in Dubai. He had a big hospital and educational institution at his disposition. The Imam Khomeini's representative was believed to be engaged in subversive activities of various kinds, particularly with the not insubstantial Shiite population in Dubai. There had been some rather minor security incidents attributed to Iranian subversion. Moreover, there had been what the U.S. government considered to be a very plausible security threat against my predecessor as American ambassador.

Q: Who was that?

MACK: My predecessor was Quincey Lumsden, George Quincey Lumsden. Quincey had left nearly a year before my arrival at post. During that time, Fred Gerlach, an Arabist colleague, had served as charge d'affaires, and he continued with me as DCM for the following year. It was thought that the known threat to Ambassador Lumsden continued after his departure, so I inherited quite a lot of security. Maybe it's just as well my wife and daughter didn't arrive with me. It was plausible that there was a hangover of the security threat, which would have worsened with the continuing Iraq-Iran war and my involvement with the improving relations of the U.S. and Iraq. By this time, Iran identified both the U.S. and the UAE as tilting toward Baghdad. The UAE government was subject to subversion because of its political and economic support of Iraq. Its vulnerability also resulted from the economic openness of the UAE and its substantial Iranian origin community. There were two UAE military APCs with machine guns mounted on top in front of the U.S. Embassy and another at the gate of the U.S. Ambassador's residence. They were manned around the clock and, presumably, ready to fire.

Q: That's armed personnel carrier.

MACK: The UAE government had stationed the APCs to protect us, but it did not give the best impression to visitors. Both the American embassy and my residence already had what appeared like fortress-like walls. It all looked fairly ominous. I was followed wherever I went. The security people had obligingly supplied a Land Rover with sub-machinegun toting troops as a follow car to my official vehicle. From my first week in Abu Dhabi, I recognized the need for security, but I also wanted to reduce the profile. I didn't want to be followed around town by this Land Rover full of gun toting people. Frankly, I was just as frightened that one of them would let off a round by accident. And, of course, it was hard to invite guests to the ambassador's residence when they would have to pass by this armed personnel carrier. It was not very welcoming.

One of the early things I did was to commission my regional security officer and DCM to come up with security that would be adequate but not quite so high profile, and eventually that was done. Eventually, we improved the nature of our gates so we'd have a proper kind of barrier to vehicles at both the residence and the embassy. That enabled us to get rid of the armored personnel carriers. We got the UAE government to assign a single bodyguard who would accompany me in the ambassador's vehicle as a way of doing away with the need for a follow car. That was much more satisfactory from my point of view. I also had to solve a problem related to my running habit. The regional security officer had heard that I was used to road running in both Tunis and Washington. He told me I couldn't run in the UAE. I told him that he'd have a cardiac case on his hands, so we worked out a compromise. I agreed to vary my times and routes, and I usually would run with the Marines, who were doing it as part of their regular workouts. This was fine with everybody concerned.

It's fair to say for the first two years I was there, while the Iran-Iraq war was underway, security in some way or another was my major concern. That included security for U.S. warships in Gulf waters and in UAE ports, security threats against U.S. government installations, security of American private sector companies and citizens, and the potential vulnerability of the American Community schools in both Abu Dhabi and Dubai. We spent a lot of time on security issues, and my personal security was a tiny part of it.

Q: You were there from when to when?

MACK: I was there from September 1986 to October 1989. The Iraq-Iran war comes to an end in August of 1988, when the nature of my job changed considerably.

Q: I guess we'll move on to the tanker war.

MACK: The tanker war could have a direct and immediate effect on the economics of the UAE, but also on the global economic situation. Iranian attacks on tankers had already caused the Japanese labor unions to refuse to crew any of the tankers coming into the area. Of course, that didn't stop the tanker companies. They just started hiring Filipinos, Indians, or Bangladeshis to crew the tankers. But there had been successful Iraqi air strikes against the Iranian tankers as far down as the eastern gulf, very close to the UAE, which showed the reach of their air force was considerable. The Iranian navy managed to intimidate a lot of shipping, and they prevented any neutral or Iraq-bound shipping from going on the Iranian side of the gulf median line, the line that runs smack dab down the middle of the Persian Gulf. The Iranians declared that any traffic on the Iranian side of that line would be considered in a war zone, since they'd been subject to Iraqi attacks there. So they would consider either air or ship traffic in the area to be fair game. The Iranian navy pretty well tried to control that side of the Gulf, even though it was mostly international waters in a legal sense.

Surreptitiously, the Iranians were mining other portions of the gulf that could contribute the flow of supplies into Iraq. Small, fast ships with small missile launchers and rocket propelled grenades began making sporadic attacks on neutral shipping and laying mines in the shipping routes on the southern side of the median line. These vessels were the so-called bog-hammers, which I guess was a Norwegian made small boat. They were harassing and attacking ships headed toward Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, or the UAE. The un-flagged, anonymous nature of the craft gave the Iranian government a certain amount of deniability. These were Iranian revolutionary guard controlled ships, obviously operating under the security umbrella of the Iranian navy, but the Iranian navy was coyly saying they couldn't be responsible for such small craft. This was causing a significant increase in global oil prices and the constant threat of a real curtailment of supply. A couple of times there were prolonged periods when there would be no traffic through the Straits of Hormuz because of the scare that the Iranians had mined the Straits. In fact, I don't think they ever did.

Q: Obviously the UAE had control of the tip.

MACK: In fact, control of that international waterway is murky. The tip of the Musandam Peninsula, a narrow extension of the Arabian Peninsula at the Straits of Hormuz is Omani territory. There's a curious bit of geography there. A lot of the national territories in that area are not contiguous. The U.A.E has territory on both the Persian Gulf side but also on the Gulf of Oman on the Indian Ocean side. However, a disconnected portion of Omani territory lies at the tip of the Musandam Peninsula with UAE territory on either side. So there were basically three countries involved at the Straits of Hormuz - Iran, most notably; and Oman; and the UAE. As an international waterway, the Straits of Hormuz are supposed to be free for commercial shipping and for so-called innocent passage of the warships of all nations. It was of great interest to our armed forces, the U.S. navy in particular, that they be well placed in both the UAE and Oman to check an Iranian effort to close the Straits. The portion of the UAE closest to Hormuz is the emirate of Ras al-Khaimah.

Gradually, I felt I was making some progress during October and November in getting a closer U.S. relationship with the UAE on such matters. I was not pushing the full CENTCOM agenda, since I knew Washington did not support the idea of moving the CENTCOM headquarters out to the UAE. But there was inter-agency support for me in seeking much easier and increased access for U.S. ships to make port calls, to use UAE refueling and re-supply facilities, and for encouraging joint training and joint exercise activities. We seemed to be making a fair amount of progress.

Both a serious threat and real opportunity arose in November. (I would need to check the exact date.) There was an Iranian attack on an offshore installation of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, an oil production platform that was just on the UAE side of the median line. A little oil facility called Abu Bakhoush was strafed from the air by Iranian aircraft. Although the Iranians did not acknowledge the attack, we had plenty of reason to believe that it was Iranians that had done this, presumably as a way of intimidating the UAE and the other Gulf Corporation Council of States to stop their support for Iraq. The basic Iranian position, not illogical, was that if the Iraqis were making it hard for them to ship their oil out, they were going to make it hard for anybody else to ship their oil out of the Gulf. They had already stopped Iraqi oil, which they could do because the Iraqi oil export terminals were in range of Iranian artillery. Iraq was shipping oil out in other ways, such as their pipelines through Turkey. But the Iranians were now putting the pressure on neutral shipping to and from the Gulf Arab states, and this seemed to be a part of it.

Hamdan bin Zayed, the Under Secretary of the Foreign Ministry and one of Sheikh Zayed's sons, called me in directly after this attack on Abu Bakhoush. Sheikh Zayed had made it very clear that Sheikh Hamdan was to be my main point of contact on foreign policy matters, rather than the foreign minister. Foreign Minister Rashid Abdullah was an older man and a very savvy diplomat, but I was told I was to deal more with this relatively inexperienced son of Sheikh Zayed. In some respects this was awkward, but on matters of direct concern to Zayed, it could be an advantage. Hamdan received me for a late evening meeting. He said that the UAE was feeling very isolated, as they were not getting any expressions of political support from other countries at this hour of need. They had been attacked by aircraft they believed were Iranian, and they felt very vulnerable to Iranian military pressures. Since roughly half of the UAE oil production was from offshore fields and wells not that different from Abu Bakhoush, they saw it as a warning that the Iranians could easily close down half of their production. In addition, through control of the sea lanes the Iranians could threaten the other 50% of their production that was from onshore wells.Using the plural form which suggested he was speaking for Zayed, Hamdan said they wanted to know what kind of support they could get from Washington.

It was not entirely a surprise that other governments had been slow to express support for the UAE regarding this event. Most governments were viewing it as an ambiguous situation, unsure who staged this attack. Through our intelligence sources, we believed the attackers were Phantom aircraft, which were not in the Iraqi inventory. They had to be Iranian, and Iran had the motive. Most people, including official Washington, were not very keen on volunteering a statement. However, I knew from reading the telegrams from Washington that the State Department had prepared a reasonably supportive statement for contingency use if asked. It's just that the question had not come up in the press conference that followed this attack, and then by the next day, people in Washington had forgotten about it.

There was a reason why the U.S. government was being so cautious about saying anything with regard to Iran. The media were already broadcasting stories that the U.S. had a secret arms supply relationship to Iran. The Irangate rumors were already circulating.

Q: You might explain Irangate.

MACK: A newspaper in Beirut [possibly linked to Syria] had broken a story, officially denied by Washington, that there was a secret arms supply from the U.S. to Iran. Supposedly, the purpose of the arms transfers was to obtain the release of U.S. hostages that were held in Lebanon by an Iranian-backed militia group, the Hezbollah or a similar forerunner. It turned out to be true, but it was denied at this point, and I certainly hoped it was untrue. That was the big focus in Washington, and nobody paid a lot of attention in the media to this attack on a small UAE oil installation. But there had been some discussion between myself and people in Washington on the secure phone. I suggested that it was a likely subject for a media question to the Department, and they had arranged a rather supportive statement. In the end, no question was asked and the Press Office did not volunteer the statement. But I took the initiative of saying, Your Highness, if you would like me to make a statement about our meeting, I'll do so. I'm prepared to do so because I know what the Washington position is, it just hasn't come up in public. But I'll be happy to make the statement here. In fact, I had the text in my pocket, thinking that this might be the reason for our meeting. When I showed Hamdan the text and helped with my extemporaneous Arabic translation, he brightened up. He went out of the meeting room and made a phone call, presumably to his father. When Hamdan came back he indicated they would like such a statement.

It had been my habit to avoid making statements to the press. After every meeting with an official, the press people would be waiting outside, and some of my foreign diplomat colleagues liked to make their views known in this way. It was my view that the UAE government would make its own statements on the meetings if it thought it was useful to have public coverage. Ordinarily, I would just smile, say it was a great meeting and walk away. This time I came out and said that I had a statement to make. Because of the late hour, the only person staking out the meeting was from the official Emirates News Agency, and he was absolutely stunned. This agency normally reported official government releases and little else. I made the statement to him, and he took it down on his tape recorder. At about 1:00 in the morning, I had a call from Peter Hellyer, editor in chief of the English language Emirates News, the government daily paper. Peter, a long time U.K. resident employee, was cautious and asked whether they could really use my statement, which had been passed to them by the Emirates News Agency. I indicated that was why I had made it. He said, okay, we'll check it with the Under Secretary's office. As a result, a statement appeared in the Emirates News the next morning. After that, the foreign media and local Arabic papers picked up the story. There was some curiosity as to why the statement was made in Abu Dhabi and not in Washington, but at least the U.S. had responded publicly and privately by criticizing an attack which targeted economic resources of great importance to the UAE and of strategic interest to the U.S.

Soon after that, however, the local atmosphere turned sour. The Irangate crisis broke, and all kinds of doubts arose about the nature of our support to the UAE and the nature of our relationship with Iran. This was a problem for the U.S. all over the area, and a much greater problem for our ambassador in Baghdad than for me. But it also created a lot of doubt as to whether General Crist and David Mack knew what they were talking about when we said we wanted a closer military relationship with them. If such a relationship wasn't to be defense against Iran, what was it for?

Q: How could you explain the Irangate? We were both sitting on it, it was pretty obvious that it had happened. We'd supplied some guided missiles, tank type missiles to the Iranian - not a lot, but enough. How did you explain this?

MACK: To begin with, Washington officially lied to us in the field. We had an instruction from Washington in the form of a NODIS cable, in principle the Secretary of State's direct channel to U.S. ambassadors and other senior officials. It started off right at the top: The White House has supplied us with the following statement that you are instructed to use with host governments, if asked. And, of course, we were being asked everywhere. The statement was a bald-faced lie, which had been drafted by Howard Teicher, an NSC staffer. When I read the cable, I thought that it looked great. But it seemed to contradict flatly the media reports out of Washington, raising all kinds of suspicion that the alleged arms arrangement was true. So I made a secure phone call to John Craig, the director for Arabian Peninsula Affairs, who told me that the statement had been drafted by Howard Teicher, it had been sent over to them, and that's all they had to go on. He couldn't give me any more instructions. He didn't tell me it was true, but he didn't tell me that it was in any sense to be dismissed either. So the NODIS cable was the only instruction that I had to use, and I did. That did a lot of harm to my personal credibility, as well as the credibility of the U.S. government.

This came at a bad time for the U.S. government in its relations with the UAE. Increasingly, the Emirates authorities worried about how they were going to protect the half of their production that was offshore, and how they were going to protect tankers coming in to upload oil from terminals along the coast. The responsibility for this fell to the federal military authorities, which is another way of saying the Abu Dhabi controlled military authorities, known as the General Headquarters or GHQ. They realized they had to have a closer relationship with us to make up for the UAE military weakness, but they had doubts about U.S. intentions and reliability. They became more interested in U.S. Navy ship visits as a way of demonstrating their closeness, something that responded to the needs of our navy.

The UAE also asked us to supply them with Stinger missiles. The Stinger is a small man-portable ground to air missile that can be used against an attacking aircraft. These were the same kind of missiles that we had been supplying through a covert program to the mujahideen in Afghanistan. Although this was widely known, it was something that I could neither confirm nor deny at the time. Rumor even had it that U.S. Stinger missiles were available in the arms souk in Peshawar, Pakistan. True enough, we had provided quite a lot of the missiles to the mujahideen, and accountability was loose.

One of these missiles had found its way back to another small gulf country, Qatar. The armed forces of Qatar had been so unwise as to show it on a military parade. This led to congressional restrictions on the sale of any man portable missiles, like the Stingers, to countries in the Gulf, the so-called DeConcini Amendment, named for Senator Dennis DeConcini. An exception had been made for sale of a limited number to Saudi Arabia, and the second exception was made for a sale of limited number to Bahrain. Both required a presidential waiver. Representatives of the UAE armed forces had raised this with people in the Central Command, asking whether this would be an appropriate kind of air defense for them to use out on these exposed oil platforms.

In addition to the various minor platforms, the UAE had a huge oil gathering and gas liquification facility, together with an export terminal, on Das Island, which is way out toward the middle of the Gulf. Looking at the map, Das Island appears to be a very vulnerable installation. The Iranian attack on Abu Bakhoush had shut down production at that production. It was a relatively small site in terms of overall UAE production, and they could live with and indefinite delay in getting it back on line. But the UAE could not live with what they thought might follow, such as an attack on Das. As a senior Abu Dhabi sheikh told me, it would go up like a nuclear explosion. With the gas liquification plant, in particular, I could imagine the destruction would be huge. The UAE asked us very specifically to provide them with Stinger missiles, which they could use as a defense of these vulnerable points. We would supply the missiles and train their personnel to use them.

Although there had been military to military discussions in both Tampa and Abu Dhabi, the UAE made the official request to me. I received it both from the commander of their air force, President Zayed's third son Mohammed, and from the Under Secretary of the Foreign Ministry, President Zayed's fourth son Hamdan. Mohammed and other UAE Air Force officers had already had discussions with U.S. military officers. We already were selling them Hawk air defense missiles, which was fine for defense of their land territory, but now they needed something to defend these oil installations out in their Gulf economic zone. These points were well out of the coverage area of the Hawk missiles. In any case, the Hawks were for higher altitude and wouldn't be effective against an attacking aircraft such as the Phantoms which the Iranians had used to attack Abu Bakhoush from a low level flight across the Gulf.

I told Sheikhs Mohammed and Hamdan that I would certainly submit their request to Washington. I expressed personal sympathy with their needs, but I said that I knew this was going to be a difficult thing to sell in Washington. There would be Congressional opposition. They said the Administration had ways to deal with the problem, and if we cared about the relationship, we would surely find a way to do this. Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed had been encouraged by people in the Central Command with whom they had discussed the matter, and who believed this was the right kind of air defense system for this purpose.

Washington turned down the request and instructed me to convey the bad news back to both the UAE Air Force and the Foreign Ministry. I did so in meetings with Zayed's sons, the Air Force Commander and Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry. They were both very disappointed, and we argued back and forth. The matter escalated, and the next step came when I was called in by the Crown Prince, Zayed's first son Khalifa. He and I had a long discussion about this and about the damage Irangate was causing the U.S. regional reputation. Khalifa urged me to seek reconsideration from Washington. He was not only the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, but he also had the title of Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. It was clear to me that this was a defining moment. The most I could get from Washington in return was that they recognized there was an air defense problem, but that Stinger missiles were not the appropriate means for dealing with this. Washington said they would instruct Central Command to put together a survey team to visit the UAE, look at the problem, and come up with the appropriate answer.

Since the people in Central Command had been the ones that had originally fed this notion, I knew that Central Command had had their arm twisted on it. Now they were going to have to come up some kind of military answer that from a technical point of view would be second best but would address the issue. We went through all of that. When the CENTCOM team arrived, their UAE hosts really opened up to us in a way they had never done before about the nature of their vulnerabilities. Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, the air force commander, personally escorted the survey team and me to Das Island and to Abu Bakhoush. He also described their readiness to put their top personnel into defending these points out in the offshore economic zone, given its importance to UAE national interests, but they needed the right kind of armament. CENTCOM produced a thick report, which I presented to Sheikh Mohammed. It prescribed a combination of radar, communications and a type of fixed missile that could be installed on the offshore installations. This was an older missile system that could be made available to the UAE, but it was a crew-served missile that wouldn't have the same application to terrorism. By contrast the Stinger is an ideal weapon for terrorists, and this is what had worked so well against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and we didn't want them to have these missiles around the gulf. The UAE argued they could be trusted to control them, but it was clear that Washington had another view. Moreover, it seemed implicit to me that UAE defense of the offshore areas would in the end require close cooperation with the U.S. fleet in the Gulf. Unfortunately, the shock of Irangate naturally undermined the trust the UAE would be willing to place in us for such a vital matter.

As we reached late December 1986, relations between the U.S. and the UAE were troubled. When I had arrived in September, we were entering a fairly high point - a visit of the Commander in Chief of the Central Command, a growing recognition by the UAE that they needed some help in dealing with the Iranians, and very good basic economic relationship. Political relationships when I arrived were not particularly strong, but they were not bad either. The area where there seemed to be room for real long term growth was in military cooperation. The Irangate scandal, however, injected a real problem of credibility in the U.S. political position. Who were we with, and who were we against? Since President Reagan had dismissed Admiral Poindexter, the director of the National Security Council staff, along with Colonel Ollie North of the staff, it seemed to me that Secretary Shultz and Secretary Weinberger were back in charge of Administration policies regarding Iran and Gulf security. I felt reasonably confident of where we were headed on this. But the rest of the world, and particularly a cautious little country neighboring Iran like the United Arab Emirates, still thought the U.S. was hopelessly muddled. From my own perspective, we were still getting a lot confusing talk out of Washington, including from President Reagan.

This was the setting in which the UAE government had come to us with what they felt was a very reasonable request, and we had turned them down. Before the CENTCOM team arrived for the offshore security survey, I had a climactic meeting with President Zayed in late December. I decided that I needed to have a discussion with him to convey what I understood to be the real situation with regard to U.S policy toward Iran, that Irangate had been a terrible mistake. Mistakes were made, as President Reagan had said, but we were now on the right course. The UAE government could have confidence in us, and we could have a frank discussion about security strategy in the area, the Iranian threat, and what we could do together to meet it. It would also be an opportunity to tell Zayed directly about the survey team that was prepared to assist with this problem. This would answer their question as to how to handle the problem of defense of the petroleum installations, in cooperation, of course, with the U.S. Navy.

After I learned of my appointment to call on Zayed, I had a call from Sheikh Mohammed, the commander of the air force, Zayed's third son. Speaking in Arabic, he said, "Mr. Ambassador, you have a meeting with my father." I said, "yes, that's correct, Your Highness, I hope you'll be there," because he very often was there when I met with his father and could help both of us in understanding technical military issues. Mohammed said, "no, I won't be there. I'm leaving the country." I replied, "when you get back I will of course report to you on the meeting, but I'll also go right away to see Sheikh Khalifa, the Crown Prince, and give him a full report on the meeting." To my disappointment, Mohammed said, "actually Sheikh Khalifa won't be here. Sheikh Khalifa and I are leaving to go hunting in Pakistan. Mr. Ambassador, are you going to tell him about the Stinger missiles?" I said, I thought the U.S. response on the Stinger matter probably would come up since I would be telling Zayed about our proposal for a survey team, and that we hoped very much they would all support this idea, which seemed to be a good way of dealing with the problem. After a pause on the line, Mohammed said, "Mr. Ambassador, we haven't told him about the missiles." This should not have surprised me, given how much Zayed's son's feared that he might blame them for failing to persuade the U.S. to meet the request for Stingers.

So, I went into the meeting with foreboding. It fell to me not only to discuss the wider political issues, the dialogue that I had intended, but also to break the news that they could not have the Stinger missiles they believed would meet their security needs and for which they had made a formal request. It was a very, very tough meeting. I earned my money for Uncle Sam on that occasion. Zayed had with him his second son, Sheikh Sultan, who did not hold an official position at the time, although he had been Chief of Staff of the UAE armed forces at an earlier time. I neither expected nor received any help from Sultan. Whenever the president would say to me something like isn't it true that you did this and did that, and isn't it true that you said you would support us in our security needs? - Sultan would chime in, "Yes, Your Highness, yes, Your Highness."

Zayed had a very forceful, appealing and straight forward way of presenting the case for the missiles. He was a semi-literate Bedouin who is now the president of this very wealthy, but very weak and essentially defenseless country. Zayed took great pride in the tribal military traditions which, unfortunately, do not have great relevance to the UAE's modern security problem. Zayed had been a fighter in desert warfare when he was young. He talked to me about how the UAE young men were not highly educated, but they know how to aim. He even showed me how they would aim the missiles at aircraft, using line of sight with the naked eye. Eyes like those of hawks, he said. Zayed had been sold on the idea that the Stinger was going to be the silver bullet, the answer to their problems.

Given the fact that my own military advisers had told me that the Stinger was probably the best weapons for the UAE to get for this specific purpose, I was inwardly sympathetic. Outwardly, however, I had to make the case for another alternative, making the best use possible of my rather tight instructions from Washington. That was perhaps the low point of my time as the ambassador. The political problems stemming from Irangate created political doubts about relying on the U.S., and then we rebuffed this key military request.

Q: Shall we pick it up the next time. You finished seeing the president, told him that we weren't going to be able to give him Stingers but that we would send out a survey team. So we will continue after that on...

MACK: ...on the survey team, but also on Operation Earnest Will. This was the program for protecting shipping in the Gulf, and it began to restore our situation. We'll continue another time.

Q: Today is the 5th of September 1996. David you heard where we were the last time. So we'll talk about the survey team, and then Earnest Will.

MACK: We did get a survey team out from CENTCOM. Many of them were the same sort of U.S. experts who had earlier, and informally, told the United Arab Emirates' military that the Stinger missile would probably be helpful to them. But the team came with firmly circumscribed parameters. They produced a fairly predictable and probably a fairly sound set of recommendations, including much greater cooperation between the U.S. Navy and the UAE armed forces. It included training possibilities. It also included a proposal that the UAE buy a different kind of ground to air missile, one that we didn't really have in our inventory. It would be a ground to air missile that both the French and, I believe, the Swedes produced, a crew operated missile rather than a single man shoulder-held fired missile like the Stinger. The idea in Washington's mind was that this crew operated missile would be less of a problem for falling into the hands of terrorists. On the other hand, the response from the UAE military was that they had already considered that system and were not interested.

Having the survey team come out did provide me with one very interesting experience. General Mohammed al-Badi, Chief of Staff of the UAE armed forces welcomed us very cordially. Then, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed commander of the air force and the son of the UAE president took charge of showing us around and provided us with first rate briefings on the UAE military and the threat to the country as they saw it. Sheikh Mohammed was in charge of the air force, but he also had responsibility for air defense, so he was the logical person to take charge of this group. They really did open up a lot of their military to us in a way that they hadn't before. The survey team personnel from CENTCOM were quite impressed by the degree of access they had and what they got to see. Among other things, we were taken out to a couple of off shore points. The primary one was Das Island, a huge petroleum processing and storage facility. It lies north of Abu Dhabi and very close to the median line of the Gulf between Iran and the UAE. It was vulnerable to an Iranian attack, and there were about 4,000 people working and living on the island. Until I visited this small island, I did not appreciate the extent to which it was a very concentrated and sensitive industrial area.

We toured those facilities as an example of what the UAE had to protect. The Iranian attack on the Abu Bakhoush platform, an installation of far less value, amounted to a warning shot. We then visited Abu Bakhoush. While Das was close to the median line, Abu Bakhoush was right at it. The sensitivity of this location was illustrated by the fact that you could actually look out and see a similar Iranian off shore oil installation in the distance. Since the time of the attack, Abu Bakhoush had remained shut down and un-repaired.

I spent a lot of time on this trip talking to Mohammed bin Zayed. I was trying to persuade him that a closer relationship between the UAE and the U.S., regardless of the kind of military equipment that we sold them, would be their most important guarantee for protection against attacks of the kind they feared. Our Navy could be very active in the area. It would be much more effective, however, if it was working closely with the UAE armed forces. This would involve communicating on a very intense and regular basis, engaging in cross training, and conducting joint exercises with both the UAE air defense and their navy. Sheikh Mohammed took all that in. He seemed convinced that we had the capability of doing that, but he asked the critical question. What is it for which the UAE can really count on the U.S.? He made it clear that he understood the capability of then U.S. military, but he seemed to share his father's question as to U.S. motives. In various ways, Sheikh Mohammed made clear the UAE could not put its security or the security of its vital oil installations in the hands of somebody else who might have a different agenda. This was a particularly hard issue to deal with coming in the wake of the Irangate controversy. There were real doubts about the nature of whatever relationship we might be planning on developing with Iran. This was a fairly strong argument that could be made in counter to my arguments, and it would take more than U.S. promises to settle the issue.

The upshot of this, as I said, was a set of military recommendations from CENTCOM that was almost predictable. While we went through the motions of being open minded and listening to UAE ideas, the end result was pretty empty for them as they saw it. But it was the first little step toward closer cooperation between our two militaries. For the first time, the UAE had really opened itself up to this kind of give and take with the U.S.

Q: Two things as you're talking. One, you're saying at that off shore platform you could see an equivalent Iranian platform. Weren't the Iranians pretty vulnerable to something happening to what they were doing? I would think it would keep them from messing around. That's one, and the other one was, in these things did the fact that we had promised strong support of South Vietnam, only to withdraw at a critical time...this was back some time ago, were the Emirates aware, or were they raising the specter of our Vietnam...

MACK: In the geo-political background during this whole period of time were three developments. One was the whole Vietnam experience, and the message it sent throughout the world that there were real limits to the degree to which the United States could be depended upon in a crunch. Second, and much closer at home, was the perception of a lot of these conservative Arab regimes that we had not provided adequate support to the Shah of Iran, or that our criticism of the internal situation in Iran had undercut the Shah, and the consequent feeling that the U.S. could be a treacherous ally. Third was the most recent event and one that in a way tended to be most on peoples' minds - what happened in Lebanon. That was a situation in which President Reagan had declared very strongly and assertively that we had vital national interests, and then within a few months we had pulled our forces out of the country. Against this background, the Irangate scandal topped it off. Arms for hostages discussions had taken place in Tehran, and the supply of weapons to Iran was against everything we had said and been preaching. Taken all together, these things created an atmosphere where trust in the U.S. was in short supply.

Let me respond to your other question. You said, wasn't it apparent that the United States could, in effect, provide deterrents by the fact that the Iranians would be very vulnerable to our military efforts. There was no doubt that we had the capability. In fact, less than two years later did take military action against that very oil platform at Sirri, the same one that I had seen from Abu Bakhoush. We said our actions were prompted by the use of this platform as a base for Iranian attacks on neutral shipping in the area. We certainly had the capability. But the question for the UAE in early 1987 was, what were our intentions? And what would be our willpower in a situation in which we would take, and in the end did take casualties. These were the three questions: intentions, sustained willpower, and a willingness to take casualties to protect an ally's interest.

Q: Can I ask here because I think it's important for historians who depend so much on the written record - we're talking about the perception which you as a trained political observer seen, and people looking at the backing down in Lebanon, the Irangate, both of which are administration not showing the judgment, or stamina, in situations in the Middle East, and raising doubts. This is an important thing for policy planners back in Washington to understand as part of the framework. Yet it's a little bit like explaining to someone that they have bad breath. It's embarrassing to the administration to be told this. Did you feel constrained in your reporting the atmospherics?

MACK: I did not feel constrained. At this point, there was a general acknowledgment that the commitment that was made in Lebanon was a commitment made for political purposes. Whereas, the kind of commitments and interests we had in play in the Gulf were strategic. I did not find a problem about giving a sense of this kind of background to Washington. I did not mind telling Washington that policy failure on our part had led to a lack of confidence on behalf of allies and trading partners around the world. The Department did not seek such analysis, but no one ever told me to keep such views out of my reporting of host government attitudes.

During this post-Irangate period, I think all of us in the field were looking for some way to restore the tattered credibility of the U.S. A couple of things were underway. One that I'd like to talk about at some length was a proposal from the Kuwaitis that we provide protection to their ships. As I recall, this dated from the summer of 1986. By asking that we re-flag some of their tanker fleet as U.S. ships, the Kuwaitis tried to make it look as if it was not really a political alliance, but simply a commercial deal. They would make the necessary financial commitments in order to get their tankers flagged as American tankers, and therefore when we protected the tankers we would be protecting ourselves, rather than Kuwaiti shipping. Initially, there wasn't a great appetite in Washington for making this commitment. But I think all of the ambassadors out there were looking for various ways to do things, and after the Iran arms for hostages' scandal, this proposal was revived. [See several pages below for more on re-flagging.]

Washington had become more interested in initiatives with the Gulf Arabs. Another example, at this very low point in U.S.-Arab relations, was to invite President Zayed to make an official visit to Washington. There had been no interest in that when I'd had my pre-arrival consultations in the summer of 1986. I had raised the idea with the Chief of Protocol, Selwa Roosevelt, who dismissed it by saying, "He doesn't sound like much fun. I don't think Nancy would go much for this kind of a visit." Now, when I requested an invitation for Zayed in early 1987, I took the following line: the current perception of the United States out here is about as low as it has ever been. We are perceived as being an undependable ally, unwilling to stand up for our true interests, and of being anti-Arab. The U.S. comes across as both pro-Israeli and pro-Iranian. The symbolism of a state visit by President Zayed would reverse that perception. Visually, and by reputation, Zayed was about as Arab as you can be. It's hard to be more Arab than that guy. He won't come across as some westernized Levantine Arab. This will be a pure Arab visiting the United States. Since there was not a lot going on between us right now in active relationships, the visit would be mostly a matter of formality. The more ceremony, the better, and the Reagan White House kind of liked ceremony. A visit by Zayed, I argued, would send a signal, not only to UAE officials, but to a many Arab officials elsewhere, that there was an interest in Washington in having closer relationships with Arab governments.

I got an almost immediate positive response back from Washington. They were this desperate at that point. This was a straw, and they clutched at it as a way of trying to restore the reputation of Washington. Mind you, it helped that this point, Poindexter and North were out, and Shultz and Weinberger were very much in the driver's seat, particularly George Shultz as far as our policy [toward Iran and the Gulf].

Q: We're talking about Oliver North and John Poindexter for the National Security Council who were responsible for the Irangate fiasco.

MACK: However, when I presented the idea to the UAE, first at the Foreign Ministry to Sheikh Hamdan, the Under Secretary and a son of Sheikh Zayed, and then later when I mentioned it to the Crown Prince, it never got a positive response. I might just mention that when I had my farewell call on Zayed, over two years later, he told me that he appreciated the fact that he had the invitation, but he simply couldn't accept it in 1987 because the attitudes towards the United States in the area, and in his own country, made it undesirable. It would not have been in the interest of the UAE for him to do visit Washington. As he said in a very colorful phrase in Arabic, people would say that Zayed is the tail of American imperialism. Although it seemed like a clever idea to me, it obviously wasn't timely from Zayed's point of view. Unfortunately, it turned out to be one chance of getting him to the United States for an official visit. After that, the next time there was an opportunity, we had the BCCI controversy.

Q: A bank fraud controversy.

MACK: The BCCI controversy of the early 1990s involving a Pakistani bank with ties to the UAE raised reasons why neither Zayed nor the U.S. found it to be an appropriate time for him to come. Zayed is now a much older man, and I fear he will never make the trip except perhaps for medical care at the Mayo Clinic. [This proved true.] But the more important initiative in U.S. relations with the Gulf Arabs was this question of re-flagging Kuwaiti ships.

Q: When that first came up, how did it struck you?

MACK: It struck me as an artificial device, but I never doubted that we should protect neutral shipping. If you couldn't move the oil, if the oil tankers were going to be subject to random Iranian supported piracy and harassment, then our most vital interests would be in jeopardy. But there was a lot of opposition in Washington to another military commitment. Would this be like Lebanon? There was real opposition to new military commitments, and particularly for governments with which we did not have very close relations. Kuwait had been a difficult government to deal with. It had given us endless trouble on the Arab-Israel issue. On security matters, Kuwait had kept us at arm's length, not even permitting ship visits.

Q: You're talking about military ships?

MACK: In the UAE, unlike Kuwait, at least we had some dozen U.S. Navy ships visiting per year. So there was not a lot of sympathy for Kuwait. However, people in Washington, and the President included, still saw things in terms of the East-West dynamics. They had not yet figured out that the great threat to the area was no longer the Soviet Union, which was in a state of rapidly increasing decline. For top Washington leaders there was still an overriding concern about keeping the Soviet Union out of the Gulf. That was almost the number one objective that Washington continued to stress in major policy papers regarding the Gulf area. As a result, it did get people's attention when the Soviet Union offered the Kuwaitis protection for Kuwaiti shipping. Being bargainers, the Kuwaitis began playing the U.S. and the Soviet Union off against one another to see what security benefits they could get out of the cold war rivalry.

The Kuwaiti proposal got an airing in Washington during a Chiefs of Mission conference for the Near East and South Asian ambassadors. I believe it was in early February of 1987. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Murphy, along with the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Marion Creekmore, convened the U.S. ambassadors from the Gulf states in a small group in Murphy's office to consider how the U.S. government should respond to the re-flagging proposal. Creekmore had been opposed to this idea all along, had argued very strenuously against it and was partly responsible for the long delay in answering the Kuwaiti government. Every one of the ambassadors from the region argued for it, mostly in terms of our long-standing commitment to support the flow of oil and stability in the region. In the end, the decision was positive. As one result of this meeting of the ambassadors, the NEA Bureau submitted a paper for a decision by the President. I heard that in the President's mind, the aspect that weighed the most heavily was the Soviet counterproposal to protect Gulf shipping. For at least part of official Washington, the major issue became how to trump the Soviets and keep them out of the region? In effect, the decision was very probably taken for the wrong reasons, but it was the right decision.

Q: Where was Marion Creekmore? What was his background, and where was he coming from?

MACK: Marion was a South Asian specialist and an economic expert. He had not had much Gulf experience. He was not, if you will, one of the little fraternity of Arabists. He did not see the importance that we did of having a close political relationship with these rather peculiar governments. One reason that I was pretty sure it was the Soviet issue that made the difference was because Marion told me afterwards that he had changed his mind once the Soviets made their offer. In fact, he did not shift his position until he found that the ambassadors in the region were unanimous and until it appeared that the Kuwaitis would accept the Soviet offer. That didn't change anything as far as I was concerned, but I realized that Marion was feeling the policy vibrations from the White House, and perhaps from George Shultz.

Q: What was your estimation at the time that you were getting about what the Soviets could do if they wanted to do this?

MACK: I don't really remember in detail. We certainly didn't think the Soviets had the naval military capability at hand. They would have had to bring a fleet into the area, whereas we had maintained a naval presence for decades. I'm sure there was skepticism in Washington about the Soviet capability. Washington wanted to avoid the possibility that the Soviets would respond to a U.S. negative decision by telling the Kuwaitis they were moving ahead positively but needed a refueling and re-supply base in Kuwait. I could see why these kinds of arguments would be fairly compelling in cold war terms. To me, however, the compelling argument was that you had to protect the oil out of the Gulf from whatever predator, and at the time the most likely predator was Iran.

Q: Were you getting any feed in from the Asian bureau, the European bureau, particularly Japan depended heavily on this oil and I was wondering if this was a support, or not? Or was this kept within the bureau.

MACK: I honestly don't know much about the wider internal policy making on this. The point I want to make is that every single ambassador in the Gulf felt we should do this, felt that it would go down well with their host governments, felt that their host governments would provide support in terms of access to their ports, refueling, overflight arrangements, etc.

Q: This included our ambassador at Saudi Arabia?

MACK: Yes. I returned to post in the spring of 1987 feeling a lot better about U.S. strategic resolve, and confident in my own mind that this decision was coming. I still met a lot of skepticism from the UAE government as I tried to begin developing ideas with them for a closer strategic relationship, without having gotten yet a clear go-ahead from Washington. We started the process of consulting. We brought a CENTCOM team out to brief the UAE officials in late 1987 on the military plans for what was to be called Earnest Will. There was an underlying skepticism from the host government that the U.S. Navy would actually do more than simply sail around and try to deter interference with shipping by its presence. The question from the UAE officials was whether we would be willing to fire back if the ships were fired upon. It's fair to say the UAE government was also skeptical about what other GCC governments, particularly the Saudis, were likely to do. They knew we had very close relationships with Saudi Arabia, and part of what we had to get in the way of support and assistance from the UAE for effective Gulf security was the ability to over-fly their territory with Saudi based AWACS.

Q: You might explain what an AWACS is.

MACK: The AWACS is a 747-type aircraft produced by Boeing. It is configured for airborne radar surveillance of a very wide swathe of territory. Basically, you see everything that moves in the air in this swathe of territory. The AWACS system has a certain radius in which it's effective. Operating over Saudi territory, the AWACS range would not have been effective as far away as the Straits of Hormuz. You actually had to get over UAE territory before you had effective coverage to detect aircraft in the vicinity of the Straits of Hormuz.

There was a lot of reluctance on the part of the UAE partly because in the past the UAE had difficult relationships with Saudi Arabia, including border conflicts. The Emirates had been British allies in the original development of the oil industry in the Gulf. By contrast, Saudi Arabia had been close to the United States. There had been a major controversy over some territories out in the desert, areas shared by the UAE and Saudi Arabia, such as the Buraimi oasis.

Q: In fact when I was there in the late '50s the British did not even have relations with Saudi Arabia over that, and when we visited there we couldn't go to the Buraimi oasis because we didn't want to stir up things.

MACK: The struggle over the Buraimi oasis was a critical part of the early history leading to the founding of the United Arab Emirates. It concerned, as the UAE saw it, successful efforts to stop the encroachment of Saudi authority at the Buraimi oasis. This was done with British support, including British officered Emirate troops, the so-called Trucial Oman Scouts. In the late 1980s, there were still some old British advisers around who had participated in those events. They may have been retired or semi-retired, but the British advisers still had influence. Even without the British, many UAE leaders had suspicions about Saudi Arabia. Not quite on the same level of negative attitudes toward Iran, but they were suspicious. The UAE was particularly nervous about trusting aircraft which would be based in Saudi Arabia coming across UAE territory, with Saudis aboard as part of the crew. They were concerned that what the AWACS could they see and do would give the Saudis control over the United Arab Emirates. So there was this additional layer of concern, added to the concerns about the United States that we have already discussed.

Initially, we did not get agreement to everything the U.S. needed for effective operations. There had to be direct Saudi-UAE discussions, and in the end those two governments reached agreement on the degree to which the AWACS aircraft could cross into UAE territory and procedures for doing so. It was not easy for the UAE government to reach a decision. This was a confederation where Abu Dhabi would have to sell everything to the other emirates. There were concerns in Dubai that this was going to draw hostile Iranian attention without compensating security benefits. So it was also a difficult internal problem for the UAE to get agreement to these measures. It was only subsequently, once the operations got underway, that we really got full agreement to have overflights of UAE territory from our carrier out in the Gulf of Oman, which is the extension of the Indian Ocean, in order to conduct missions in the Gulf.

Mind you, at this time it was still U.S. Navy doctrine, and continued to be doctrine until late 1990, that you don't put a carrier in the confined waters of the Gulf. So anything we did in the Gulf from carrier based aircraft would require flights over UAE and/or Omani territory, unless you followed a very round about route over the Straits of Hormuz, avoiding land areas.

Q: What role was Oman playing?

MACK: In Oman we had much longer standing, formalized military cooperation. This included an access agreement and the pre-positioning of U.S. military supplies. That dated back to 1980, plus the British had very close cooperation in Oman. Of all the states in the area, next to Kuwait I suppose, the UAE was the one with the least ongoing military relationships with the west in general. The U.S. had very close military relationships in Bahrain and Oman, and rather close in Saudi Arabia. The French and British had pretty close military relations in Qatar. Like Kuwait, the UAE tried to be as independent as possible from any great powers. Participation in Operation Earnest Will was a major step for them, and in the end it worked. We consulted very closely during this period. I got particularly close to Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, the commander of the air force and air defense, and to Mohammed al-Badi, the chief of staff in the armed forces. We had critical moments when I could see they were testing us, and watching our reactions. One of those moments arose prior to the beginning of Operation Earnest Will, the shipping protection operations, when there was an Iraqi air force attack on one of our ships in the northern Gulf.

Q: You're talking about a tanker.

MACK: No, [the Stark] was a U.S. Navy war ship cruising in the northern Gulf. It was attacked by an Iraqi Mirage aircraft armed with a French air to surface missile.

Q: The Exocet, which had quite a reputation after the Falklands war, a very dangerous weapon.

MACK: There was considerable loss of life, American Navy personnel killed in the attack. This ship had to go into Bahrain for repairs afterwards. It was a very troubling event. This attack took place at a time when the Irangate scandal was still fresh, and relations between Baghdad and Washington were marked with more than the usual mistrust. However, the Iraqis immediately said that it was an accident and offered compensation.

Q: We're talking about an Iraqi, and the ship was the Stark, I believe.

MACK: An Iraqi aircraft had been on a patrolling mission over the gulf. Iraqi aircraft had engaged very often against Iranian tankers. Everybody I've talked to who was knowledgeable about the attack on the Stark agrees that it was an accident. Since 1990, there has been a tendency on the part of some outside the government to look back at that incident and say it was intentional. In fact, discussions between both governments at the time did not bear that out. It was thought that an Iraqi pilot had misidentified The Stark as an Iranian warship, prior to launching the Exocet. The Iraqis were in the process of paying compensation when they invaded Kuwait in August 1990.

UAE leaders seemed concerned that an incident as serious as the attack on The Stark would cause the U.S. to disengage militarily from the Gulf. Especially since we were not even expecting an attack from the Iraqis, this kind of event would be a cause for us to leave the Gulf.

The news of the attack reached me when I was traveling up to one of the northern Emirates for some official meetings. I heard from the embassy that we had an expression of regret from the foreign ministry, but it was kind of a pro forma sort of thing. Then I got a call on my car telephone from Mohammed bin Zayed. Sheikh Mohammed gave me what seemed a very heartfelt expression of condolences. He said that if there was any way they could be of help, we could count on the UAE. I said that the U.S. Navy personnel and the ship would be cared for in Bahrain in this case, but we would appreciate the willingness of the UAE in the future to its ports available for such unfortunate accidents. Sheikh Mohammed offered all their facilities, such as hospitals and ports.

He then added what I thought was a very revealing indication of the real background for their sympathy and concern. He said, "I hope this won't mean that you'll take the fleet out of the Gulf." For me, as I reported to Washington, this was a good example of what the really important tie between the United States and these countries meant. It was not a matter of sentiment or shared values, particularly. Certainly, it was not a matter of common political systems or common histories. It was a matter of shared interests. Arab states like the UAE needed to have us commit assets for the Gulf. We, and our democratic allies, needed the oil. It was really clear to me at that point, and from then on I began to formulate my own ideas about Gulf security strategy based on an objective and mutual assessment of shared interests.

Q: When the Stark incident happened, did you, and did the other American ambassadors reporting around explain that this was sort of a test about whether we would stay in or not?

MACK: I don't honestly remember. Frankly, I had no doubt that we would stay in the Gulf at that point. By this time, we had formal instructions that Operation Earnest Will was going to proceed. I was convinced by the instructions that I had received from Washington that our military planning was really serious and based on high level decisions. We were bringing extra aircraft into Saudi Arabia, extra ships into the Gulf, of which the Stark was one. For our allies in the gulf countries, however, it's fair to say that they were not really sure we were truly serious until the first U.S. Navy escorted convoy of tankers came through the Straits of Hormuz. Even then, our UAE partners wondered what would happen if we met with military resistance. We did meet with some problems. A tanker in the first convoy hit a mine in the northern waters of the Gulf as it approached Kuwait. It was clear that this was dangerous business. The Iranians had the capability from their small boats of at least harassing individual U.S. escorted ships. Initially, at least, Iranian ships and aircraft seemed to be prudently keeping their distance from the convoys. At the time of this first convoy, however, there was not much we could do about a mine laid in shipping channels in advance.

As Operation Earnest Will began to work out, eventually some people questioned whether it was more than a limited exercise. The original notion was that the U.S. Navy was only going to protect the few U.S. flag ships involved in merchant shipping to the Gulf. Even including the re-flagged Kuwaiti tankers, there weren't that many. Gradually, it became obvious to observers in the Gulf states that by protecting those few U.S. flag ships, and simply being present to do that, we were in effect protecting other shipping. This was one of those unannounced parts of our policy that people became aware of over time. Moreover, as operations developed, the naval elements involved in Earnest Will included the ships of other states, NATO partners like the French, the British, the Belgians, and the Dutch. U.S. diplomacy had brought them into this coalition, even though the U.S. Navy, backed up by the U.S. Air Force with assets like AWACS, provided the basic core. We all had rules of engagement that would allow us to come to the assistance of any neutral shipping that was under hostile fire. Gradually that became apparent, and confidence began to return to both our regional partners and to the world's merchant shipping.

There was another major emergency task which took place during the early months of Operation Earnest Will, and both the United States and the United Arab Emirates responded very well. One of our escorting war ships, the Roberts, hit a mine. As I recall, the incident took place north of Bahrain. The Roberts was almost split in half. It was the view of our Navy that the only place where it could be given adequate repairs was in Dubai. This became a test of the UAE assistance that Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed had offered after the Stark incident.

Injured people aboard the Roberts were evacuated to a hospital in Bahrain. But the ship itself began to limp toward Dubai, sailing at low speed. We went to the UAE right away both in Dubai and in Abu Dhabi. It was not enough to get the agreement with the federal government; we had to also get the agreement of the Emirate of Dubai. The idea of bringing a warship into the very modern and busy Dubai dry dock, one of the jewels of the Dubai economy, would be an unprecedented event. Moreover, given the civilian nature of this facility, there was going to be a lot of haggling over how we would unload the munitions from the Roberts once it got to Dubai.

Agreement for the safe haven and repair of the Roberts came quickly from the federal authorities. The Emirate of Dubai's agreement required a bit more time and some back and forth negotiating. We were getting behind the scenes help within the small group of UAE leaders who really counted in such matters. Obviously, there was a lot of consultation about these arrangements that took place between the federal authorities, probably Sheikh Zayed himself, and the principal sheikhs in Dubai. We had a history of successful and virtually trouble free U.S. Navy ship visits into Dubai, and that helped. But the main factor in getting Dubai's agreement was that by this time had there had been several months of protecting shipping in the area. The economy of Dubai was dependent on such merchant shipping, and Operation Earnest Will had protected it. Once again, and despite some concern in the U.S. about the losses flowing from this novel commitment, the U.S. government was proceeding to fill its role in Gulf security.

I might just say a word about the U.S. domestic support. It was very thin. The Reagan administration never went to the Congress to get authorization. Given the background of the Lebanon fiasco and control of Congress by the Democrats, I question whether the Congress would have agreed. Moreover, by the spring of 1988 we would have been in a primary season...

Q: You're talking about American primary.

MACK: Yes, for the American presidential election. There was great competition in the Democratic party to see which candidate would face what was assumed to be most probably a George Bush Republican candidacy. There were nine principal Democratic candidates. I think the media dubbed them the "Seven Dwarfs." During a public debate among these seven candidates, only one of them - Al Gore - supported Operation Earnest Will. The other six of the candidates expressed opposition. One of the candidates, Stuart Udall, very effectively ridiculed the ship protection program at this nationally televised event. For a U.S. domestic audience he scored a lot of points. Events like this in U.S. domestic politics made it all the more remarkable that the Reagan administration continued Operation Earnest Will.

Q: Now our Vice President.

MACK: Al Gore is now Vice President, but because of a family tragedy he did not continue in the 1988 primary race. Nonetheless, when May came, even though he had withdrawn from the race, and we had the May primary in Oregon and I voted by absentee ballot for Al Gore. So there was very weak support domestically for what was seen to be putting American forces at risk for the sake of oil. So there was obviously some concern there, and the administration had to handle it very, very skillfully which I think they did by and large. But we certainly were gaining credibility all the time with the Arabs.

I remember from time to time when Washington visitors would come out, and since I had preached long and hard during the Irangate period that we had lost credibility, I remember people saying to me, "Well, David, have we managed to restore our credibility out here?" And my response was, "Well, general, or senator, or Mr. Secretary, credibility is a little bit like virginity. Once you've lost it, it's really hard to fully restore it, but yes, we're doing lots better." And, in fact, I would say that as we came into the summer of '88, in the spring of '88 that's when we had the major clashes with the Iranians where our aircraft based on a carrier in the Gulf of Oman, took out a couple of Iranian warships, where we attacked a couple of platforms. We attacked a platform ostensibly in reprisal to the Iranian mining which had taken the Roberts as a victim. How did we know it was the Iranians? Well, we caught them red-handed. Obviously when the Roberts hit a mine we could only suspect that it was the Iranians. But later, I believe using infrared radar, one of our aircraft was able to actually catch an Iranian bog hammer, which was one of their small boats, in the act of laying mines in the ship channel that we would be using for our convoys and that another neutral shipping was using. So we actually caught them red-handed. In reprisal, as I said, we went against their offshore oil installations. Then when the Iranians - I forget the date, but it was maybe April of '88 - in a sort of tit-for-tat thing went after another UAE offshore installation. This was an installation of Sharjah at the Bubaric field. It was attacked by the Iranians more or less as a reprisal for the fact that we had attacked an Iranian installation. This was ironic because the oil from that Bubaric field, although it was under a concession to the Emirate of Sharjah, and the concession was operated by a U.S. company, but the proceeds went 50-50 to Sharjah and Iran because it was in the territorial waters of Abu Musa, an island in the middle of the gulf over which sovereignty was contested then, and is still contested between the UAE and Iran. It was revealing to us, we thought, of the degree to which the Iranian government did not act in a very coordinated and well thought out way, that they would attack an offshore installation that in fact was contributing to the Iranian economy. When they did that, however, we took it as a cause to respond with our U.S. carrier aircraft against the Iranian navy, and Iranian navy ships. I believe two of them were sunk in the ensuing engagement, and the Iranian navy did not venture out of port effectively for the rest of the period of 1988.

On the political side during this period, back in 1987 we had proposed at the United Nations a resolution for ending the war between Iraq and Iran. A resolution which turned out in the end, when it was finally accepted, it was Resolution 598. A complicated resolution which didn't assess blame. The Iranians were holding out for blame. A resolution that would blame the Iraqis for starting the war. This resolution did not assess blame, but it certainly...by this time Iraqi forces had successfully regained the upper hand against the Iranians after a period of time in which the Iranians appeared to be winning the war, the Iraqis had regained the upper hand, and were holding some Iranian territory. The resolution would have required the Iraqis to withdraw to the international borders. The resolution was really a balanced one, and offered the Iranians more than they might have hoped for given the fact that at that point they were losing the war, and not very popular with anybody. But they held out. The Ayatollah Khomeini, who did not want to admit defeat. They held out for a period of roughly a year. The United Arab Emirates was on the Security Council. I remember that their permanent representative was Mohammed Sharar, who is now their ambassador in the United States.

The UAE during the period even after the ship protection program started, they hated to have to side with Iraq against Iran. They didn't have a lot of use for the Iraqis either, at least most of the Emirates didn't. They suspected them in the past of supporting terrorist groups in the UAE. They didn't have a great sympathy, but by and large they hoped the two would sort of fight themselves to a standoff. I think that was their view, which was the view of a lot of people in Washington. But I think the UAE gradually came to the realization that it could not continue to avoid voting for this resolution even though the Iranians were not supporting it. So in the end the UAE voted for the resolution. That was a critical vote that we needed, and I had lobbied long and hard for in Abu Dhabi. I think there had never been any doubt that when it came to a vote, they would vote for it but they were doing everything they could to avoid it. I can remember a UN vote when the UAE was simply absent. Their representative had to go to the bathroom. They just didn't want to take sides between Iraq and Iran if they could help it. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia were much quicker to take sides with Iraq against Iran. But in the UAE they were very reluctant to do so. And that's partly due to their sort of weak federal structure.

But the war sort of ground on at a fairly low level with the Iraqis having the upper hand on the land. And after the engagements, as I recall April of 1988, with no subsequent serious Iranian threats to neutral shipping.

We knew so little about Iran. It was really hard to say why the Iranians were delaying. It seemed manifestly obvious to us that they needed the relief from the expenditure both of people and money to keep this war going. They clearly no longer had an ability to put the Iraqis back on the defensive, and it just seemed like it might have to wait until the Ayatollah Khomeini died. But then everybody wondered, with his reputation, how could any successor take the decision to stop the war. The atmosphere in the UAE became increasingly exasperated, I think, with the Iranians. The Iranians still had the capability of supporting terrorist activities. The UAE was still very open and very vulnerable. Security had been a big concern of mine as you might imagine for these whole two years. My first two years out there security and military concerns dominated, and we continued to worry about possible Iranian... We'd get reports about possible Iranian security threats, and terrorist threats, both against us and against the UAE government. We got progressively closer with the UAE during this period, and had much closer exchanges of information.

I was preparing to go on home leave with my family after the Fourth of July celebration in 1988. Here I'm going to be a little hazy on dates, but I believe on July 1 we got some startling news. First from public media - or actually, first, I started getting phone calls from the Chief of Staff, from the Foreign Minister, from the commander of the Air Force, as to what was going on, that there had been an Iranian civilian air bus shot down, the Iranians were claiming, by a U.S. Navy ship. From the media we learned that our government was denying this, and the Navy was saying that it had shot down an Iranian warplane using a surface-to-air missile, a Standard missile it's called. We had an extremely capable guided missile cruiser in the Gulf at the time commanded by a Rear Admiral.

Q: The Captain was Will Rogers, Jr. An Aegis cruiser, brand new to the Gulf.

MACK: Okay, not a Rear Admiral, a Captain. It was a complicated situation. It was complicated on the surface with lots of small craft, everything from fishing boats to the Iranian bog hammer hammers, and they all kind of look alike. It was difficult sometimes to figure which was which. And it was complicated in the air, with our aircraft, other countries' military aircraft and civilian aircraft. What we were told initially... I could get nothing out of Washington, we got nothing. We did, by contacting the fleet in Bahrain, we began to get some information to indicate that we better be careful. The cruiser says this was an Iranian military aircraft, we are verifying that, we are trying to verify that it was an Iranian military aircraft that was attacking the Aegis cruiser. The Navy side of this has now been quite well documented by an article put out in a journal of the Navy War College, quite a good article because other U.S. Navy ships did not believe at the time this was an Iranian military aircraft. But the people aboard the Aegis tragically did. It was an Iranian air bus in fact, with a full passenger load going from Bandar Abbas to Dubai, not only with Iranian civilians aboard, but also with either 17 or 19 Emirates, mostly from Dubai and Sharjah, mostly from Dubai, and a few Pakistanis, a couple of Italians and Yugoslavs. But even Admiral Crowe, the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington, gave a public briefing backing up the version from Captain Rogers. It was much, much later, and long after we knew this was not the case from intelligence sources, that Washington finally acknowledged that a mistake had been made. Fortunately, President Reagan immediately...his personal instincts probably were extremely valid and useful at this point, he immediately offered to pay compensation to the victims. He did not offer to pay compensation to the Iranians for the aircraft, but did offer to pay compensation to the families of the victims, and acknowledged that it was an accident.We, of course, had a number of decisions to make rather quickly. The first one, the easy one, was to cancel our Fourth of July celebration, which would not have been very appropriate at that point, and would have been a potential security problem as well. We also consulted very quickly with the Navy on ship visits, we had one in port in Dubai. The Navy felt it wanted to take the ship out, and not risk having it there, and we agreed that was probably prudent. I still had no instructions from Washington, nothing from Washington. I sent a cable to Washington, which as I recall, I informed them that I was postponing at least indefinitely my leave plans. I had my wife and daughter proceed as scheduled, postponing my leave plans until we find out whether this is going to be an ongoing security problem for us here. I told that that I thought this could be a very serious security problem on two grounds. Since there were UAE nationals involved, there could well be a popular hostile response, and particularly family members could feel that they needed to take revenge against particularly any U.S. military in Dubai, but for that matter, against our consulate general. We had to assume that there might be this kind of popular hostile reaction. Secondly, that it obviously provided the Iranians with an opening to use assets that they had already gotten into the country, or send new assets in, in order to stage the kind of terrorist attacks that we'd been worried about for the past two years that I'd been out there. This would be a situation in which there would be a certain amount of sympathy for them if they did this. So we had these two kinds of security threats.

I also told them that I had decided in consultation with the country team, that I would go down to Dubai to talk to the sheikhs and the American community, and to visit the family of the principal UAE Dubai victims. There was one family where five family members had been lost by the number three official in the Dubai police, who happened to be the person that usually arranged the security for our visiting ships, and I said my intention was to go down and pay a condolence call on him. I don't remember whether I ever got a reply back from Washington. I told them I was going to do it, and this is one of those cases where often it's best to simply state a course of action and say unless otherwise advised, this is what I intend to do.

When we discussed this in the country team, the regional security officer was opposed to me going, and definitely opposed to me paying the condolence call. That was one case where I simply said well, you're doing your job trying to look after my security, I'm doing my job and I think this is the right thing for the U.S. ambassador to do. As it turned out things went even better than I could have anticipated. I immediately got a meeting with the number one Sheikh in Dubai, Mohammed ibn Rashid, who is also the Minister of Defense. He received me very well, expressed full understanding, as the Foreign Ministry already had in a note, but he expressed understanding that this was an accident, and accepted our explanation. Then he went on, which was really something that I couldn't have expected him to say, that he wanted to assure me that we had no reason not to have future ship visits to Dubai, that the Dubai authorities would continue to maintain security for our ships. And I said, "And also Your Highness, may I also tell you that we're worried about our consulate general." "Oh, of course, we'll continue to provide full protection for your diplomats." And I said, "Your Highness, I do intend to meet with the American citizen leaders after this, with your permission, I would like to be able to tell them of your attitude toward protecting the American community, and American property." He said, "Absolutely, you can tell them that we'll provide full protection of the American community, and American property. We want to have more Americans here." As a result I had a good meeting with the American community, and settled them down, but not until that evening when I had paid the condolence call. The condolence call was, of course, very difficult. The man had lost his father, his step-mother, and three siblings, who were I believe half-siblings. It's not unusual, of course, that they would have been in Bandar Abbas, because a lot of these families, and his was one of them, were families of Arabs who had been living along the Iranian coast for centuries, and then had migrated back to Dubai during the early part of the 20th century, or during the oil boom, and his family was one of those. They were Shiite, as is the case of many of these families, but they were Arab Shiite. But they had very close connections to Iran, they spoke Farsi. So there was always a lot of questions, people never quite knew where people from this kind of background were coming from. This, of course, was a community that was very important in Dubai commerce, and was very much involved in the trade - both smuggling and legal trade to and from Dubai, Sharjah and Iran.

I went to his residence with the assistant regional security officer who was stationed down in Dubai...he went along with me to the condolence call. And, of course, it was two hours sitting on the floor - always a terrible toll on my knees, speaking Arabic, talking about everything from education in the United States, to God and family, etc. It was a draining experience for me. During the time, of course, there were crowds of people coming and going to pay condolence, and they all saw the American ambassador there, and everybody in town by the next morning knew what I had done. That helped a lot over the long term.

I went back to Abu Dhabi shortly thereafter, all of our assessments looked positive, and I proceeded to join my family in the United States.

Now the reaction in Iran was stunning. Ayatollah Khomeini did not believe this was an accident. His assessment of our motives was so dire that I believe he thought this was intentional, a warning that we were prepared to bomb Iranian cities if necessary until they stopped the war. Shortly after the air bus incident, Khomeini stopped the war. He told the Iranian people that it was a bitter pill which they must swallow. Iran accepted Resolution 598, and this eight year war came to a close. There were a lot of good reasons why they should have stopped the war, but I think for the Ayatollah Khomeini this was a critical factor. He felt the United States was so absolutely ruthless and committed to damage the Islamic revolution in Iran that we would stop at nothing. Did he just seize on the incident as a pretext to stop a war that he realized was lost? To know that would take somebody who knew his internal thinking much better than me. In terms of timing, at least, it was a key turning point.

The U.S. Navy Department had its own investigation of the incident. It came out kind of murky, but there were a lot of changes made in the procedures that ships coming into the Gulf were to follow in dealing with the possibility of civilian aircraft. The event brought Captain Roger's career in the Navy to an end. It was a good lesson for me. Together with the Irangate scandal, the way the U.S. government handled the Iran airbus incident showed me I couldn't count on Washington to provide me with clear information. I got my best information by back channels from friends in the U.S. Navy and other agencies. I also benefited from good advice at the time from the military officers on my staff. For decision making, I got nothing but verbal pap out of Washington, and I had to make up my own instructions.

Q: In a way it shows the clearance procedure is such in Washington: one, you have to be very careful you don't go against whatever the prevailing story is. I mean, you just can't. And the other one is that you're not going to get honest assessments. Just because of the clearance it has to reflect things.

MACK: There was no way I could have gotten a clear intelligence assessment in any timely fashion. My station chief could provide me with some raw reports that he was seeing, and he briefed me on them. As you say, the Washington clearance process is cumbersome at best. I think it's also the case that, in the latter part of the Reagan administration, the inter-agency process in Washington had gotten worn down in many respects. Eight years of the Reagan administration were coming to an end, and things were not quite as crisp as they might have been in an earlier period.

In the region and for me, it was a relief to have the Iraq-Iran war over. My third and final year in the UAE was very different from what we've been discussing. The first two years had been consumed with internal security, security for the American community, military operations, and trying to build bi-lateral military cooperation. The third year was much more routine, a balance of political, military, and economic affairs. I took on a lot of commercial and cultural exchange issues that interested me. It was a very productive and interesting year for the U.S. mission, but not with the historic drama of the first two years.

Q: In matters of getting the UAE to join up with the tanker operation, allowing overflights. Here you have something which closely resembles the United States under the articles of confederation. Did you find that you had to go to all the Emirates and talk it up, and then go to the president? How did this work?

MACK: Most of the hard work was done by Mohammed bin Zayed. More and more, he was acting on behalf of Chief of Staff Mohamed al-Badi and of Sheikh Mohammed's father, Sheikh Zayed, the president. I did go to the different emirate rulers, explaining what we were proposing, and talking to them about the rationale. It was important that they hear it directly from me, because I knew that in the end the other rulers had to sign off before the federal authorities in Abu Dhabi could agree formally. An agreement between Dubai and Abu Dhabi was critical. But still, the other rulers played a role. The Ruler of Fujairah had military training, and his emirate had a key geographic location on the Gulf of Oman. And the others all wanted to be consulted and to know what we were doing. The only place where support was more or less automatic was in Ras al-Khaimah, which predictably always took an anti-Iranian point of view.

Q: They're the point people, aren't they?

MACK: Ras al-Khaimah is near the Straits of Hormuz, and they also had a grievance against the Iranians. When the UAE was established in 1971, the Iranians under the Shah occupied the three disputed islands. Two of them were RAK possessions. Greater Tunb Island and Lesser Tunb are very near the Strait of Hormuz. The third island, Abu Musa, was a Sharjah possession. Whereas Abu Musa is right on the Gulf median line, the Tunbs are much closer to the Iranian shore. Ras al-Kamiah's claim for the Tunbs was adopted by the United Arab Emirates. The ruler at the time probably made this a condition of joining the federation. Sheikh Saqr is still the ruler. He's a very old man, a little older than Zayed, I believe, in his late 80s.

Q: I probably met him in the late 1950s.

MACK: Saqr is a little man with a forceful personality and penetrating black eyes. He feels a great grievance against the Iranians for taking his islands. He blames the British for, as he saw it, colluding with the Iranians. Which is true to some degree. The British wanted to tidy things up in 1971 and get the Iranians to accept Bahrain's independence, which Iran had been disputing. In return, the British were prepared to let the Shah have his way with the three islands. An anti-Iranian position always got enthusiastic support from Saqr.

The third disputed island, Abu Musa, is where the Mubarak field lies and was the subject of the Iranian attack in April 1988. Abu Musa, like the Tunbs, had been occupied by the Iranians, and there is still dispute over sovereignty. When I arrived in the UAE, there was shared administration, involving Sharjah police and administrative personnel, as well as the Iranian military forces. In more recent years, the Iranians have pushed the Sharjans out. Sheikh Sultan, the Ruler of Sharjah was a real contrast to Sheikh Saqr in Ras al-Khaimah. Sheikh Sultan is highly educated with a doctorate from Exeter University and a conciliatory manner. He told me that, if only Zayed would let him, he would be able to deal with the Iranians very well, because he knows how to talk to the Iranians. Like Dubai, Sharjah has a lot of commerce with Iran. Sharjah had worked out this system of shared administration for Abu Musa, including the 50-50 split in oil profits. Sharjah had its flag on one side of the island, while the Iranians had their flag on the other side. As a result, Sharjah had a somewhat different attitude regarding Iran and the disputed islands. Until, of course, their oil platform was attacked by the Iranian navy.

I spent quite a lot of time visiting the ruler of Sharjah to discuss U.S.-UAE security cooperation. He was probably the most difficult to convince within the Council of Rulers. It may have taken a fair amount of pressure from Abu Dhabi and Dubai to convince him. In the end, I think he would have been isolated from the others if he did not agree, but his unique economic relationship with Iran made it important for him to join the consensus that was developing.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point? So what are we talking about, 1988?

MACK: We're talking about the period from the summer of '88, when I come back from home leave, to October '89 when I finally leave. It will comprise, as I say, a lot of fairly routine diplomatic activity. For historical purposes I ought to mention how we were talking to the UAE and other gulf states about Iraq in this period. And I should also talk about our efforts to build on the military cooperation established during Earnest Will and expand on it with an effort to have repositioning in the UAE, ultimately partially successful. I should talk about that because in effect what historians in the future, I think, have to realize is that without operation Earnest Will, and the cooperation established at that time, and the reputation of the United States for meeting its commitments, we would not have been trusted in August of 1990 by these states in the way in which they did. There was very rapid, and in the case of the UAE, virtually automatic acceptance of what we needed in the way of cooperation. And a lot of that had to do with the background of Earnest Will.

Q: The other thing is that as sort of an aside, I still think its important if you'd talk a bit about what you did as ambassador to foster commercial relationships.

MACK: I want to talk about the cultural, commercial side, as well as the on-going military side, and the political consultations, particularly with regard to Iran and Iraq.

Q: And also you want to talk about the reaction to the Palestinian Intifada.

MACK: Again, during this period of time.

Q: Today is the 14th of November, 1996. We have three main things. One, the growth of the military cooperation. We're talking about the time you returned from home leave in '88, you left in '89?

MACK: That's right.

Q: Why don't we talk about that first and then we will pick up about the cultural side.

MACK: I had home leave and the period of time also chairing a promotion board. So I came back to the UAE in September 1988, came back to Abu Dhabi very much refreshed. The Iranians had accepted UNSC Resolution 598, the UN Security Council resolution ending the Iraq-Iran war. This was a resolution that the U.S. had been largely responsible for offering. It was a balanced resolution between Iraq and Iran, much better than the Iranians could have expected that they would get under the circumstances that they saw prevailing with the international community very much against them. In fact, I think it's fair to say that the resolution reflected the view of the United States that there really should be no clear winner from the Iraq-Iran war. I remember that one of the first things I did when I got back to the UAE, was to make a semi-public speech. It was before the American Business Council in Dubai. At the urging of my public affairs officer and some of the people at the Business Council, I agreed that on this occasion we could have members of the local media present. I think we billed it as off the record, but we also assumed there would be some reporting on it. To make sure they got it right, we even distributed my text to the members of the media who were there. It was in fact an occasion when we could talk with a fair degree of credibility about the way in which the United States could be supportive of Gulf security, and the importance in that regard of a willingness of the United States to use force, doing so for economic and strategic interests which we shared with GCC states such as the UAE.

I recall, for example, that I quoted a maxim during the question and answer period which followed my prepared remarks that said, "diplomacy without force is like a smile without teeth." Typically, the press coverage of my remarks highlighted that comment rather than my carefully crafted thoughts about the nature of a shared interest between the United States and GCC states. I used the example of an oriental bazaar, or souk, where both the merchant and the customer have a shared interest in making sure that there's security and that you don't have thieves that plague the area, and that without that kind of security the interests of both suffer. Describing this as the kind of complementary interests that our military intervention in the Gulf, and the presence of our fleet in fact since 1949 was intended to serve, building on the relationships that we had established, and the vast increase in cooperation between our Navy and local officials. The Central Command wanted to proceed to put in place some kind of meaningful pre-positioning of materiel (what the U.S. military calls PREPO) for future such contingencies.

One of the serious problems our military forces had found was that, although this is an area that produces a lot of oil, and has some refineries that at least can produce bunkering fuel for ships, there are certain kinds of fuels, particularly high octane aviation fuel, that are not produced by any of the refineries in the area. It was a logistical problem to make sure the U.S. aircraft aboard our carriers had an adequate supply of aviation fuel. The Central Command set itself about the task of trying to find a place where they could preposition aviation fuel. Certainly the best choice, based upon surveys that they had done and visits to the various ports, was at the giant port of Jebel Ali, which was to the northwest of the city of Dubai and, in 1988 almost entirely unused. Dubai had its own port, which was a little more convenient for the city. Jebel Ali was maybe 10 miles outside the city, had been literally carved out of the desert by Sheikh Rashid, the once visionary ruler of Dubai, who was still living but no longer able to govern. He was still the ruler in name, but he was paralyzed. The ruling family of Dubai and the UAE media carefully guarded any news about his health, and his picture was frequently shown in the newspapers - for example, with an article that he had sent a message of congratulations to the vice president of Malaysia on Malaysia's national day. He would also receive messages from time to time from world leaders, but this was actually a lot of eyewash. He was the only ruler that I'd never been able to call on. I called on all of his sons, but had never met him and none of the other ambassadors had either.

Part of Sheikh Rashid's vision for the development of Dubai was to build this huge port, a gigantic port, which many people laughed at and said was a great white elephant. It had excellent facilities, however, including fuel storage facilities, and CENTCOM thought it would be just the answer to the problem that we faced. It was not going to be easy to do, however. First of all, we would have to get agreement from the U.S. authorities as to what kind of arrangements they could live with. And typically they wanted a government to government agreement which would stipulate among other things that anything that we stored in this leased facility would be U.S. property that we could remove at any time. The U.S. military wanted an absolute UAE government promise to do that.

Under the best of circumstances it's hard to get government agreements in the UAE about security matters. To get a Federal agreement you need to get the consensus of all the rulers, and to get a meaningful agreement for something like this you needed to have separate agreement with the authorities in Dubai. A Federal agreement wouldn't be worth the paper it was written on without some kind of agreement with the authorities in Dubai. I remember that I made some very careful presentations both in Dubai and to the Federal authorities with material that had been provided me from CENTCOM.

In addition to storing fuel they also wanted to store water, or at least have the capability of producing water. And for that purpose they wanted to bring in a ship which was called a reverse osmosis water production unit, or ROPU. The ship would then be able to deploy to any point in the Persian Gulf, and start producing water for forces that might be deployed - let's say to Saudi Arabia, or Kuwait, or to the coast of Iran in theory, or to one of the islands out in the middle of the Gulf. We tried to sell both of these ideas, both fuel storage and having the local authorities allow us to tie up a water production facility at one of their ports. My idea was to put the ROPU at the port of Abu Dhabi, and the fuel at Jebel Ali. I thought that this way we could get both the major Emirates, Abu Dhabi and Dubai, involved in repositioning arrangements. I didn't succeed at the time I was out there in getting the water production unit deployed to Abu Dhabi. Frankly, there was a lot of suspicion about our intentions. I was told that if it was just a matter of using it somewhere in UAE territory, they would be delighted. But they wouldn't accept the idea that it might be used somewhere else, and that they would be blamed for having kept some kind of militarily important equipment that was then used, for example, for an invasion of Iran, or Iraq, or to put down a rebellion in Bahrain. So there was a lot of suspicion about what we were up to, and I was not able to dispel it at that point.

Q: As you were making your arguments for the POL storage, and ROPU, what were you pointing at as far as why this was needed? Who was the potential enemy? I assume you had to say, now look, this is being done because we're protecting you against whom.

MACK: Well, it wasn't too difficult for people to imagine that we might have to have another conflict with the Iranians. But at the same time we were also trying to alert people in the area to the possibility that there might be another adversary, Iraq, for example. We simply couldn't tell in advance. One of the complications here was that, under instructions from Washington, we were at the same time raising the subject of Iraq with states in the area. To my knowledge, none of the GCC states were receptive to our suggestion that we ought to consult together about the possibility of meeting an emergency that would be generated by some Iraqi threat. I know they weren't receptive in the UAE. What I kept hearing quite firmly from the leaders of the UAE was that they appreciated the presence of our fleet in the area because they recognized that they had a potential serious problem with Iran. As far as Iraq was concerned, they said we should leave that to them. That was another Arab country. One of the other rulers told me, referring to Sheikh Zayed, the president of the country, "Zayed will take care of the Iraqis." The UAE leaders made it very clear that they thought they could handle any potential difficulty with Iraq diplomatically. But they were not so confident about dealing with Iran. They did not want to talk about contingency planning against a country like Iraq that they viewed as an ally, and had viewed as an ally at least during the latter part of the Iraq-Iran war. So that probably introduced some awkwardness in our discussion of pre-positioning.

The one area where we did make progress was on fuel, but we had in the end to do it in a way that they felt comfortable with, but the lawyers in Washington did not. The principal Sheikh in Dubai was Muhammad bin Rashid, the Defense Minister, the third son of Rashid, a person of strong character and perceptive intellect, and also the person who was in charge of Jebel Ali and the security of the Emirate of Dubai. Muhammad bin Rashid made it very clear that Dubai would have no problem with entering into a strictly commercial arrangement for the storage of fuel, whereby a company would provide fuel to the U.S. Navy. But they didn't want to have a direct relationship with the U.S. Navy, and we would have to do it in the way any other commercial arrangement for Jebel Ali would be managed. And at that time they were very eager to get some kind of customers in Jebel Ali, since this huge port was virtually empty.

So we looked at the rules for the port of Jebel Ali. The regulations of the Jebel Ali Free Port said that companies could bring in equipment, and bring in workers, and then take them out as long as they didn't take them from the Free Port into UAE territory where normal customs would apply. In other words, as long as fuel that we pre-positioned in Jebel Ali was not taken into UAE territory, we could use it anywhere in the area. In effect, this was the opposite situation of what we had with ROPU, where Abu Dhabi would have accepted it for the UAE but not if we would take it elsewhere.

I worked very closely with the head of logistics, the J-4 for Central Command, a major general. Major General Christian Patte was his name, a Swiss origin officer in the U.S. Army, Chris was a very capable logistician. And with the support of the then commander of the Central Command, we managed over a period of time to persuade the lawyers in Washington that a government to government agreement was not necessary. One of the arguments I used was, aside from the fact that a government to government agreement was impossible and we couldn't achieve it, that we could rely upon a commercial arrangement with a U.S. company. The U.S. company in turn could have a commercial relationship with either the government of Dubai, or with a Dubai company. We could hold a major U.S. corporation responsible for delivering the fuel. It seemed to me we ought to be able to hold a U.S. corporation responsible more easily than we could the government of Dubai. And plus, this was the Reagan administration, so I made the argument that cooperation with the private sector is something that the U.S. government encourages. At first there were terrible squeals from the lawyers in the Pentagon. But eventually, with the help of the Central Command, we were able to reach such an agreement, private tender was let, and aviation fuel was stored in Jebel Ali. The importance of this was that when in August 1990 the Iraqis invaded Kuwait, we had established pre-positioning of fuel in the UAE. We had not managed to get the even more extensive PREPO the U.S. military sought, but at least we did have the top priority of aviation fuel in the area for our Air Force and Navy, and we did it through this commercial gambit. My attitude was, PREPO by any other name would smell the same, and we were able to do it by this commercial route, establishing a useful precedent.

Q: It does strike me, particularly of what we've had in our Muscat and Oman, what we had in Kuwait, and also the infrastructures that had been built up in Saudi Arabia, although in a way we've been helping the guy who is going to cause us a great deal of grief, Saddam Hussein. We were in many ways much more set for him than we were for any other problems anywhere else. Were we thinking of one thing, and another thing happened that we were getting ready for?

MACK: I myself am unaware of whether there was any sort of master strategist at some point in the U.S. government who said, we should sell the Saudis a lot of redundant military airport capability in Saudi Arabia because we may need it someday. So far as I know it was done mostly on a commercial basis, and the Saudis had very expansive ideas of what their own military needs would be. To my knowledge, people were not thinking ahead, and did not do this for a future contingency involving U.S. forces. But I could be wrong, and if somebody can take credit for it, they ought to come forward and do so. Certainly in the UAE what we were able to do was far more modest than what we were able to do in Oman through our official access agreement, or in Saudi Arabia just unofficially. And, of course, in Bahrain we relied on de facto cooperation without the benefit of an agreement. The only agreement we had with Bahrain was the rental of the facilities at what was called the Admin Support Unit, which was the ashore facilities for our Middle East naval force. So I think we had a certain amount of luck in developing a variety of pre-positioning arrangements throughout the region.

In general, of course, the State Department was discovering the importance of commercial activities to a much greater degree during this period. I had made some efforts during the course of the Iran-Iraq war in fact to get trade delegations out there. The efforts were not very well rewarded. U.S. business did not want to come near the Gulf under the circumstances that were prevailing at the time. The Department of Commerce and the Embassy did try one trade mission. We had about 20 people signed up for it, and then U.S. companies started dropping out one after another. It was going to be in Dubai, as I recall, at an international textile exhibition that the Dubaians were having. When you looked at the reasons, as these U.S. companies dropped out, it would be because they feared the security in the area, which they regarded as a war zone. And who could blame them? They were hearing from the State Department and the U.S. embassy that they would be secure out there, but when they would flip on the television, there would be a picture of an oil tanker burning, and it would say, dateline Dubai, oil tanker in flames.

Finally, with the war over in late 1988, U.S. companies began taking an interest and competing a little bit with the British, French, Germans and the Japanese. These competitors had been having us for lunch, and U.S. firms had slipped from a huge part of the market share in most of the Gulf states, to a more modest part. The only place where we were really holding our ground was in Saudi Arabia, and in the oil and gas industry. But in the rest of the commercial areas we were not doing nearly as well as we should.

There were a variety of reasons. One of them was the Arab boycott. I remember, for example, that I had worked very hard to try to get a major contract for mobile phones for Motorola, which at that time at least was the world leader in mobile phone technology, so-called cellular phones. And wherever I turned the answer was, yes, but it's on the Arab boycott. I finally decided the only chance was to raise it with Sheikh Zayed himself. We had a visit from our Secretary of Energy, but he declined to raise a non-energy commercial issue, which struck me as a little peculiar coming from a Reagan cabinet member. So I took the initiative to raise it with Zayed. After carefully working on Arabic equivalents for the technical language, I made the argument on UAE national security grounds. I noted that the only way they could mobilize quickly their military officers was by telephone, and that their military officers were very often hither and yon, on the road, and out in the desert. How would they manage this unless they had mobile telephones, and Motorola was absolutely the best company. I added that other Arab states, such as Syria which hosted the headquarters for the Arab boycott authority, would make exceptions for the use of Motorola telephones by their police or armed forces. Zayed turned me down, said that he simply was not prepared to go to the other Arab states and say that he was making an exception to Arab boycott provisions, unless it was something that was specifically and solely for the UAE military. This was a general contract for their national mobile phone system.

We also had, I think, general problems out there in terms of a lack of market access because the traditional suppliers had been from other countries. This was certainly true in the area of food products. In the United Arab Emirates you scarcely ever saw U.S. food commodities in the local grocery stores. We were able to sell U.S. rice and wheat in bulk to bulk suppliers in places like Dubai, but we were not doing at all well otherwise.

My diplomatic mission was able to make progress on processed food imports by working together with our regional agricultural trade officer, who had his office in Bahrain and an Egyptian assistant that worked for him at our consulate in Dubai. The regional Ag Trade Attachï¿½ was Pitamber Devgon, a very savvy American official of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service. I want to applaud Dev as a good example of a part of the U.S. Foreign Service that doesn't always get treated as being fully a part of the Foreign Service. He was an American citizen who had emigrated to the U.S. from India, and he spoke English fluently but with a pronounced Indian accent. As it happened, a lot of the people who headed the major grocery stores and other food distribution and retailing operations in the UAE were foreign nationals from India. So Dev had developed pretty good personal relationships with a lot of these folks. Together with him, the Embassy developed a campaign called Yum-Yum America to sell U.S. food products. I threw myself into it, and we got the U.S. Information Service involved. Having been in so many meetings with UAE officials over the previous two years, I was a well recognized personality at that point. My picture had often been in the paper and on television, and now the UAE citizen and expatriate audiences saw me in grocery stores sampling U.S. food items, and making appropriate comments about how delicious they were.

We had just gotten a contract for U.S. food suppliers with Spinneys, which was one of the old line formerly British food retailing operations in the Middle East. The regional market for imported food, often high value products, tended to be dominated by British food commodities. British Ambassador Michael Tate, an old friend I had known him for years going back to my second assignment in Baghdad, came up to me at some reception. Michael, with his best imperial manner, said something like, "Dear boy, isn't this really just too tacky, Yum-Yum America?" I could only imagine how envious the British were, especially now that there was American food on the shelves of Spinneys. I told Michael that in matters of regional security, we were in one trench, but we would be enemies forever in the commercial area.

Just to finish the commercial issue, we had another example of our growing and expanding relationships with the UAE, which also says a lot about the way the UAE was developing as a country. That was in the area of textile negotiations. What was happening was that textile producers from places like Bangladesh were coming into the free zones in the UAE. The entire Emirate of Sharjah, for example, was almost a free zone. Firms from South Asian countries that had reached the ceiling of quotas for textile exports to the U.S. were establishing textile operations in the UAE, bringing in their own workers and their own equipment and producing with really very little relevance to the local economy. They would have a local sponsor. They would pay a little rent, maybe, and a few utility charges, but basically it was just an offshore operation. They were producing textiles for the UAE, which had no U.S. textile quota, since it had never before been a producer of textiles for the U.S. market. There was a legitimate suspicion on the part of the U.S. textile industry that these were fraudulent operations that were little more than re-labeling, and in some cases that was true.

We informed the UAE authorities that we were going to put a textile quota on them. They had few laws regarding the import of textiles and no laws at all regarding the production and export of textiles. Moreover, there were no federal authorities prepared to deal with the issue. In effect, we had to use the threat of a textile quota to get them to take any interest in the matter. As the various local Chambers of Commerce began complaining about the proposed U.S. action, the federal authorities decided that they would take advantage of this and, in effect, strengthen federal authority by coordinating the negotiations. So the federal UAE government negotiated on behalf of this very diverse group of local and expatriate interests. With our encouragement, the UAE government established a coalition and brought together the various textile interests in the country to deal with the U.S. In a way, just as the threat from Iran had strengthened military cooperation between Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and incidentally the United States, so it was that the threat of a U.S. textile quota enabled the federal authorities in the UAE to strengthen their hand with all these local interests.

The textile issue brought forth hostile articles in the paper, particularly in the English language press which was dominated by South Asians and Palestinians and Egyptians, the sort of people who were involved in the textile business. I remember Sheikh Suroor, one of the senior sheiks of the ruling family in Abu Dhabi who was attuned to foreign trade issues saying to me, "I'm seeing all this about textiles, so tell me, Mr. Ambassador, do we have a textile industry in this country?"

The U.S. diplomatic mission had a very well coordinated program on this. The Embassy's Economic Officer was very operationally oriented, and he really sank his teeth into the problem. His name was Don Roberts, and Don was the day-to-day coordinator for me. We got our U.S. Information Agency involved in putting out public information to combat the public information coming from the UAE expatriate textile interests. We used information from our consulate general in Dubai, because a lot of the textile companies were in Dubai, Sharjah and Ajman, emirates in the Dubai consular district. We arranged for the UAE's newly empowered foreign trade officials to visit the U.S. to learn about the U.S. textile industry and its powerful role in U.S. politics. In the end, we had successful negotiations. A quota was established that gave them room to grow their industry somewhat, but at least put limits on the extent to which they could continue to invade our market with textiles.

Q: Did they start looking at these textile industries as a way to gain some revenue, from what I gather a rather modest income that was welcome, and that sort of thing?

MACK: No, not really. The interest for the UAE federal government was mostly bureaucratic and constitutional. The federal authorities saw that this was a function they could provide to businessmen all over the Emirates. People who previously had felt no need at all for the federal government now saw that there was a need. After many years of being mostly ignored by the individual emirates on economic matters, the federal government had a role to play.

Building on our textile dialogue, I started talking to some of the federal authorities about the problem of intellectual property rights. This was before there was really a lot of pressure from Washington, but I thought the next big problem could be demands from Washington that UAE companies respect U.S. intellectual property rights. The textile quota had really snuck up on us, and I wanted to avoid a repetition. The United Arab Emirates, which was very much of a laissez faire free trade economy, along with getting textile factories, was also getting people who were possibly producing, and certainly selling and distributing both in the UAE and to other countries counterfeit American video tapes. Not simply American, but from a variety of sources. So there was rampant commercial piracy of all kinds. There was very little protection for patents or trademarks, and none for copyrights. So I began to try to educate some of the federal authorities. It didn't really become a critical problem while I was there but subsequently did, and the UAE now has in many respects a model set of intellectual property rights protection. There's still some holes in it, but when I was visiting recently I talked to the Minister of Economy and Commerce. He is very proud about how they managed to respond to the intellectual property rights challenges that arose following my time in the UAE.

I very much enjoyed this kind of commercial diplomacy. I also enjoyed working on cultural exchange. We had already had a lot of UAE students going to the United States. During my last year in the country, I managed to spend some time at the UAE university in Al Ain, getting to know faculty members. My own philosophy was to discourage the idea that, as in the past, they would send students to the United States for undergraduate studies. I felt that there had been a lot of cases that hadn't worked out well. Young men who had gone who were not prepared in terms of their English language, who were not prepared emotionally, who got into trouble with drugs, sex, the whole gambit of problems.

Q: It's a real problem. They're not as mature.

MACK: That's right. Since they had established a university system, I encouraged my contacts in the government to educate their young men in their own country, but then take the ones that did the best, the ones that clearly showed they had academic motivation, and put them into graduate schools, especially in the United States. That's very much the direction that we tried to press them. I got to know fairly well the chancellor of the UAE university, who was a member of the ruling family. Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak was the son of the former Minister of Interior, a very important figure of UAE President Zayed's generation. He was quite ill, but I used to call on him at his majlis, and this was the kind of thing that was appreciated by his son. That gave me opportunities to discuss educational exchange in a relaxed social atmosphere. Suffice to say, our cooperation did increase a lot in that area.

In view of the importance of educational exchange in the overall relationship, I put some effort into the selection of a new PAO. The U.S. Information Agency in Washington had proposed a not very qualified and non-Arabic speaking replacement for our PAO, indicating they attached low priority to the UAE. I telephoned Paris to contact a very bright, energetic African-American woman USIS Officer I had met before in Tunis and Beirut. Carol Madison had a pleasant enough life in France but was under employed professionally. With her agreement, I successfully urged USIA to send her as our new PAO, and she helped a lot. The UAE universities were training huge numbers of local women. They were putting almost more effort into educating their women in the country than they were their men, while a lot of the men would be trained in other countries. The women typically were doing better in higher education than the men, partly because they didn't have as many distractions. The UAE university had separate classes and separate campuses for men and women, but with shared faculty. But also a lot of the best and most well-motivated UAE men went into the military, or the police, rather than going into universities.

During that period the UAE established junior colleges in a major community college program, and we worked with them on that. We tried to get the contract for a U.S. firm. In the end, it went to a Canadian firm instead, but we still worked very closely with them on trying to beef up those community college programs, partly because it helped meet the employment needs of U.S. companies.

Narcotics cooperation was another area which fits in with this theme of the UAE federal government gradually increasing its importance in their constitutional system. The UAE had long been noted as a place where there was a lot of smuggling that took place. Back in the pre-independence days it was gold smuggling and weapons smuggling. When I was there, there were problems with textiles and pirated video cassettes. Large quantities of U.S. cigarettes were being smuggled into the Iranian market during this whole period of time by dhows, traditional local sailing ships. There was also a lot of smuggling into both Iran and the UAE of narcotics, mostly for transit. Initially, I think, the UAE authorities were not terribly concerned about this. First of all they had this tradition of laissez-faire practices. They had very little in the way of controls on entry into the country. As a result they were being swamped by illegal aliens, illegal workers who would come in across the beach, and also by narcotics. They gradually were becoming aware that the problem was not one that they were immune to, and that some of these narcotics were being used in the country. They had quite draconian laws against narcotics use, but they weren't enforcing them to any great degree. And this is partly because, along with not having many laws and a legal structure, they also had very weak enforcement mechanisms, and the country was very open to all manner of items coming in by small boats from the Indian sub-continent, as well as from Iran, and they had very weak ability to keep it out.

Our Drug Enforcement Agency, DEA, came up with an excellent idea. It was to have a regional narcotics conference in Dubai as a way of developing a close working relationship with the authorities in Dubai and the other Emirates. Moreover, it seemed like a place, because of the hotels and good communications, to have an international conference. DEA offered to subsidize the travel there of their narcotics contacts in countries all the way from Nigeria to Bangladesh. It was quite a wide swathe. There was a lot of interest throughout the region. We helped to get DEA in contact with both the federal and the local UAE authorities, which mostly meant the police in the various emirates. In the UAE, the police power is still very much based in the individual emirates. In my time, certainly, there was very little in the way of federal police power. There were some narcotics authorities in the federal government, and we got them involved also, but they were rather inactive. One of the problems in the UAE in trying to enforce narcotics controls is that, while you could stop people coming into one emirate, for them to enter another emirate was just a matter of getting into a taxi and crossing the emirate boundary. So, obviously, there needed to be at least a coordinating federal role.

To encourage both federal and international cooperation, the U.S. government sponsored a series of regional narcotics conferences, eventually getting the Abu Dhabi authorities more involved. I attended the first conference in Dubai and spoke at the opening, speaking in Arabic about the importance of narcotics cooperation. This was another case, I think, where we were able to work with all parts of our country team to make a statement about what the United States stood for, and in this case one of the things we stood for was the right of every country to protect its borders from invasion by narcotics. It had had real practical benefits for the United States. We were able in a very short period of time to develop enforcement relationships, both in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, at a time when the airports of both emirates were being used for a lot of narcotics traffic that would come through on its way either to Western Europe or to Nigeria, often for transit to the U.S. It would come through typically from Pakistan or Iran. We had some very successful cases where intelligence that we provided to the local authorities about couriers coming from Pakistan was used by the local authorities to make narcotics busts at the airport. These narcotics in most cases were destined to end up in Western Europe or the United States. We felt very good about that, and the UAE authorities also realized that it was enabling them to protect themselves, and to protect their own young people against an infusion of narcotics. So it was another good example of international cooperation that served mutual interests.

The major regional political problem that arose during this period of time was with the intifada (uprising) in Palestine. The peace process between Israel and the Arab states had become quite moribund. The promise of Camp David was that there would be a continuing effort. That the efforts would not stop with the Egyptian-Israel peace treaty, but would continue to set up self rule in the occupied territories, and eventually lead to a comprehensive peace settlement between Israel, its Arab neighbors and representatives of the Palestinian people. This promise had not been realized, and the U.S. had not been energetically pushing the issue for some time, probably not since 1984 when the Reagan administration peace process efforts collapsed. Eventually, the tensions in the occupied West Bank and Gaza reached very high points, and young Palestinians - basically children - started taking it upon themselves to harass the Israeli authorities.

For the Israeli military this was a very unpopular occupation duty in the territories. In particular, to give them their credit, the last thing they wanted to do was to have to fight children throwing stones. The whole image of David and Goliath was one that they wanted to avoid, and the Israeli public was quite split over what to do about this. It became a serious problem of contention between the states in the Gulf, including the United Arab Emirates, and the United States. They felt we were doing nothing, and they argued that it wrong for us not to use our influence on Israel to get the Israelis to deal in a better way with the Palestinians. The Gulf Arab states also felt this was a serious threat to their security. It had long been mostly an unspoken effort on the part of the U.S. government to separate the issue of Gulf security from the Palestinian problem and the Arab-Israeli problem. It was a little hard to see how we thought we could do that given the fact that there had been a major oil boycott after the October 1973 war. But, nonetheless, there was a tendency in Washington to think that if we dealt with the major security problems, such as Iran and Iraq, then we didn't have to worry about effects on Gulf security from other kinds of problems, whether they were internal or dealing with the Arab-Israeli issue. We lectured them periodically about the wickedness of the Arab boycott, but we didn't even take that too seriously. It was not for most of the time a front burner issue.

The governments out there looked at it very differently. They realized that they faced potentially very serious problems of political disaffection from their own population, as well as a potential problem from terrorists. They feared terrorism that could be stimulated from outside, that could be exploited by radical Palestinian groups or by Iran posing as a champion of the Palestinians. So they tended to take the Israel-Palestinian issue very seriously. They didn't always articulate well the effect they felt this would have on security in the area and security of the oil supplies. During this period, however, it began to be apparent to American diplomats working in the Gulf Arab states that the problem taking place in the Palestinian territories was one that we couldn't afford to continue ignoring. That said, policy makers in Washington continued to shelve it until after the prosecution of the war against Saddam Hussein in 1991. That was when the U.S. finally reengaged itself very strongly under the leadership of President Bush and Secretary Baker.

I ended my time in the UAE feeling that we had advanced a great deal practical bilateral cooperation under the threat of the Iraq-Iran war, but we had not succeeded in establishing institutionalizing a form of cooperation between us and the UAE that would help deter future problems for our mutual interests. I do think the fact that the United States toed the mark in Operation Earnest Will established a belief on the part of the states in the area that they could count on us in a future contingency. It had a lot to do with the readiness with which the Saudis and the UAE and others cooperated with us after the invasion of Kuwait in 1990. They had seen that we were willing to come out there with major military forces and take casualties without turning and running. They were also convinced, and this is very important, that the United States wouldn't want to stay around in any great numbers. That, in fact, we would leave when there was no longer a need for us to be there.

So that was good. What was bad was that many political leaders in the Gulf Arab states seemed to believe that we had the capability of magically appearing with a very rapid response to save them from any problem that might arise. We could brief people at the military level regarding the difficulty of a major deployment until we were blue in the face, but what our principal military contacts understood did not always convince the political leaders. Therefore, we didn't have much in the way of institutionalized cooperation outside of Oman and Bahrain. My own high level contacts with Sheikh Zayed, in particular, had become much more difficult to arrange, and they were certainly much less frequent than they were when there was a serious international crisis and they felt a serious and ongoing threat from Iran. I left with a feeling that we would be really unprepared for a future emergency, and that we had not established a framework to deter a future emergency. The Gulf Arab leaders still wanted us to stay over the horizon. Moreover, in good part because of the Palestinian Intifada, they didn't want to be seen cooperating too closely with us at a time when we were unpopular in the rest of the Arab world and among Muslims generally.

I left this assignment toward the end of October 1989. I had stayed in the UAE a little bit longer than I originally intended. Washington was having difficulty lining up a successor for a country where our relations were more personal than institutional, so I didn't leave until they had a successor named, I had presented the request for agrï¿½ment for my successor, and we had reasonable prospect that he would be confirmed. By the end of October, I felt I could leave and Washington accepted my recommendation. My family had gone back in the summer of 1989, so I had been on my own for this indefinite period of several months. Moreover, I wasn't able to arrange a regular ongoing assignment since I didn't know when I would be able to be available. Washington assured me that it would be a good time for me to take a year as Diplomat in Residence, where flexibility in timing was possible. I agreed to become the Diplomat in Residence at Howard University, which was nice because it meant my family could stay in Washington. As a result, I ended up spending six months at Howard University, an interesting experience with aspects of American life that were new to me.

Q: I'd like to get back, first there are three little things. One, with the ending of the Iran- Iraq war, which you said was quite balanced and the United States played a significant role in this United Nations broker. Do you think in the UAE the U.S. got any credit for being the equivalent to an honest broker? Obviously, we had no love for Iran but does this show us in a good light? Or did we get a credit for it?

MACK: I don't think so. Partly because of Irangate, they continued to suspect that we would not be a reliable ally for them against Iran. Conditions might well change, and we would find it in our interest as a great power to have a much closer relationship with Iran, and that as a result they should not depend on us too much. I think that was basically their attitude. They took virtually no interest in what we had to say about Iraq during late 1989. This came up on a recent trip to the UAE from which I've just returned. While in Abu Dhabi, I had dinner at the home of a former Foreign Ministry official, Sheikh Fahim al-Qasimi, who had gone on to become the Secretary General of the GCC. Sheikh Fahim reminded me that I had raised with him the problem of Iraq in 1989, and how seriously we took the fact that the Iraqis had used chemical weapons in the latter stages of the Iraq-Iran war, both against the Iranians and against the Iraqi Kurdish population. At the time, the UAE didn't want to hear any criticism of Iraq, and they certainly were not interested in joining in any condemnation of Iraq for using chemical weapons, or even speaking to the Iraqis about it. On this recent occasion, however, Sheikh Fahim said to me, "I wish you had screamed a little louder about Iraq." So no, I don't think we received credit at the time for an even handed effort to end the war. Maybe over a longer period of time we're getting some credit.

Q: You mentioned the Indians who were involved in the newspaper business. I always think of the Indians as, particularly Indian intellectuals, having a certain disdain which they picked up when the British left, and maybe the right, too, and British universities, of the United States. In the first place, was the Indian population, I suppose that includes Pakistan, were they influential? And two, did they have sort of an innate anti-Americanism, pro-British, or not?

MACK: People from the sub-continent - India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Ceylon - were important in UAE commercial activities. They had little political role, and they were careful to be very apolitical about events in the UAE. Many of them had been in the country for a long time. Some children of these communities had been born in the country. The UAE tended to treat the expatriate community, including the south Asians, in a tolerant way, as long as they behaved themselves. They had their own schools. There were even Hindu places of worship, which would be absolutely out of the question in many Muslim countries. I didn't feel that the business people in the community, whom I occasionally met, were particularly anti-American. The exception was the journalists, whether they were the South Asians, who tended to dominate the English language publications, or the Palestinians, Egyptians, Sudanese, Lebanese, Syrians, and Iraqis who tended to dominate the Arabic language publications. Those people did have a lot of anti-American animus, which I think almost came with their professions. Like many people in the media in the United States, they delighted in being anti-establishment. The U.S. represented the establishment, and so I think it was kind of a natural impulse for them. The press in Abu Dhabi was much more restrained, more subject to UAE government influence, while the media in places like Sharjah and Dubai was a good deal freer, rather less responsible and a good deal more critical of the United States.

Q: The last thing about this period, you mentioned you had a woman USIS officer. How about, during this period, the ability of female officers operating in this Arab environment?

MACK: She was not the first woman PAO in Abu Dhabi. A former DCM had been married to a USIS officer who had been PAO. I don't think there had been other women officers in the UAE outside of the administrative section. Certainly women officers would be accepted at the Foreign Ministry or government offices, to go and pay official calls. Socially, it was very difficult. The majlises and other informal gatherings were very much part of a male only society. There was the occasional distinguished woman visitor who would present herself in a majlis, or be taken there by her ambassador, but it was rare. I don't think it caused consternation when it happened, but you could tell that people were not as relaxed, and as open, as they would be in the traditional male only gathering. People would take off their shoes, wiggle their toes and relax, something they wouldn't feel comfortable doing if there was a woman there. It was not easy then for a woman diplomat in the more traditional Arab countries, and I don't think it's particularly easy now. I've talked to a number of women officers who worked in these environments. Invariably, they're treated courteously at the government offices when they go there. It may be like the Foreign Ministry building in Riyadh, where there isn't a ladies rest room in this huge building, but our women officers at our embassy in Riyadh are always treated perfectly courteously when they go there. They're able to do their business. But do you have the same quality of rapport? I'd have to say no, not at all. Is it harder for a woman to function in one of these countries? Absolutely. Is it impossible? No. We have a woman ambassador in Oman now, and we've had women DCMs in a number of these countries. I think they've been able to conduct the most necessary functions, but there could be a lack of rapport where you'd miss something important.

Q: David, why don't we cover the Howard University period and then we'll stop.

MACK: Okay.

Q: What was your impression of Howard University, the connect between this and foreign affairs?

MACK: Howard had been long considered one of the most important training grounds for members of the black American elite, and the U.S. government was certainly trying hard in various ways to have an effective affirmative action program. The State Department had not always done particularly well. Ambassador Edward Perkins had become the Director General of the Foreign Service, and he was a very distinguished African-American U.S. Foreign Service officer. Perkins was very keen to have a Diplomat in Residence at Howard. Perkins wanted to send somebody who had ambassadorial rank so they would really make a strong impression with the idea that we would get young graduates from Howard to apply to the Foreign Service. I went, frankly, very imbued with a lot of optimism about this. Ralph Bunche had been, I believe, the first head of the political science department at Howard.

Q: Ralph Bunche was a very distinguished member of the early United Nations in the 1940s.

MACK: Bunch had been Under Secretary General of the U.N. responsible for peacekeeping. I hoped that I could identify the Ralph Bunches of the future, and get them into the U.S. Foreign Service. I had a bit of a disadvantage. I arrived late, and the State Department summer internships for the coming year had already been spoken for, or at least it was very near the deadline. The first thing I did was to get the Department to agree to extend the deadline, and I did manage to get an internship for one Howard University student who was finishing his master's degree program. He subsequently became a regular member of the Foreign Service; his name was Dwight Samuel.

But it was uphill work on several counts. To my surprise, I discovered that at least some people on the Howard faculty were not at all happy having me there. A very senior member of the political science faculty had had a bad experience himself with the State Department. He had been an academic in residence for a year at the Department and wanted to come into the Foreign Service, but he didn't feel welcome. He had a bit of a grudge against the State Department. There were also a number of faculty members who had anti-establishment attitudes of late '60s, early '70s University of California at Berkeley.

Q: Anti-government, anti-State Department.

MACK: Anti-government, at least. On the other hand, some of the professors with international backgrounds were very welcoming. The chairman of the Political Science Department at the time was a professor from Barbados, very leftist, but very happy to have somebody there who brought an international focus to his department. I also had a close relationship to the member of the faculty who was teaching American foreign policy, both at the undergraduate and the graduate level. Professor Babalola Cole was a Nigerian. He was delighted to have me join with him to assist in teaching his courses. We team-taught very successfully, I think. I also was able to team-teach with an Egyptian woman on the faculty. By contrast, many of the Americans were a bit standoffish, more than I had expected. I'd been used to the Foreign Service where racism tends to recede into the background. We are not without problems of racism in the Foreign Service, but when you're overseas particularly you're all Americans, and that's your primary identity. Certainly our experience with our daughter, who is mixed race, is that racial identity issues scarcely arose for her when we were overseas. They only emerged when she was in the United States.

The Nigerian professor, with whom I was team teaching, and the Barbadan origin head of the Department of Political Science faculty both encouraged me to come to their faculty meetings. I did come to one. Afterwards, the faculty member who had a particular animus against me, someone who is a leading authority on black politics in the United States and has been involved in the Jesse Jackson campaign, told members of the faculty that they had to be very careful what they said when Ambassador Mack was there because every word they said would be reported back to the CIA. That stunned me. I didn't go to future faculty meetings, because I felt I was making some people uncomfortable. And I wasn't particularly interested in faculty politics anyway.

With the students I had different experiences. My experiences with the faculty tended to vary from very positive with the foreign faculty members - from the West Indies or from Africa - but a bit standoffish sometimes with at least some of the Americans. Most of the students were like white students at any university. They're interested in getting their degree in dentistry, or engineering, and getting on with their lives. Very few of Howard's predominantly African-American students were interested in foreign policy or international issues. This was even true of African issues, which were required; everybody had to take a course dealing with Africa. My impression was that it was an unpopular requirement, and that few Howard students felt connected to African issues.

On the other hand, Howard has a very large percentage of foreign students, mostly from Africa and the Caribbean, and they loved to be able to talk to the American ambassador on the faculty. They were very interested, and if I could have recruited foreigners for the Foreign Service, I would have had a lot of applicants.

In addition to the Head of the Political Science Department, my work had good support also from the Dean of the faculty. He was very keen on this relationship with the State Department. He encouraged my proposal to bring Perkins to Howard for a meeting with interested faculty members, along with one of the people in PER who is a Howard graduate and was a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Personnel. With the Dean of the faculty inviting people, I thought we would have a huge turnout. As it happened, almost none of the African-American faculty members came. The lack of interest and even some hostility surprised me, but the more I thought about it, the more it made sense. With the problems that the African-American community was going through, why should they launch themselves on an international crusade? What was fine for Ralph Bunche was not something they felt was a high priority for their generation.

My time at Howard was productive for me, however. I learned a lot about the way foreign policy is taught, which helped me out later in my career. I was exposed to international issues other than the Middle East, and frankly I had a good time getting to know about aspects of American life that were new to me. So I don't regret at all the time I spent at Howard.

Where did you go next, and what were the dates?

MACK: During the time I was at Howard University in late 1989 and early 1990, I engaged in the usual negotiation with people at the State Department on my ongoing assignment.

Q: This is probably the most important practice of diplomacy that every diplomat does with your personnel officer.

MACK: John Kelly was Assistant Secretary of The Near East and South Asian Bureau at that time. John was a Foreign Service Officer who had had his career largely in Europe. He was named as ambassador to Beirut, when I first met him in the mid-1980s. After the assignment in Beirut, he became Assistant Secretary. John had started that assignment a year before my arrival, and reportedly he had a troubled relationship with the bureau but enjoyed the trust of Secretary Baker. Shortly after arriving at NEA, he had dismissed all of the deputy assistant secretaries and brought in new ones. He had done it in a very brusk way, calling them all together to say, "You're all out of your jobs." One of them was Howard Schaffer, the deputy for South Asia. Kelly said that new people would be coming in, telling Howard, in front of the other deputies, that the Department was offering the job to his wife, Teresita. If I understood correctly, Kelly hadn't talked to any of the deputies who had been in place before making this announcement. So the bureau was very demoralized.

There was interesting background for Kelly's attitude toward the NEA bureau. When he was our ambassador in Beirut, Kelly was caught up in the Irangate controversy, since it involved American hostages the Iranian backed terrorists had seized in Lebanon. Kelly had acted on some instructions he received directly from the NSC staff, unbeknownst to Secretary Shultz. Reportedly, Shultz was critical of Kelly on this account. I don't think Shultz would have named him to be Assistant Secretary for NEA, maybe not even to another ambassadorship. Kelly may have felt he hadn't had good support from the NEA bureau in what could have been a career ending experience for him. With the change in administrations from Reagan to Bush, matters reversed. I think it's fair to say that James Baker, as the new Secretary of State, and some of his close aides came to the State Department with a certain animus against the career Foreign Service.

Q: It was funny that the Bush administration, moving from the Reagan administration, normally this would be a friendly but it was more a hostile takeover.

MACK: Indeed it was, and there was a feeling that Kelly was welcome to the Baker people partly because he was not part of the Near East circuit and the NEA family. Kelly knew that his lack of identification with the bureau gave him a certain cachet with the 7th Floor. Some people speculated that Baker's aides, at least, had told him to make a clean sweep, to bring in new people, rather than to continue with the existing deputies. One of the new deputies he had brought in was Edward Gnehm, who after a year in the job was being reassigned to as the U.S. Ambassador to Kuwait. So that deputy job was coming vacant. People had mentioned the job to me as one I should seek, and I had an interview with Kelly. We were both fairly candid with one another. I told him that I was very interested in the job, that I thought I could make a real contribution because I knew a lot about the area, had a lot of various experience in the area.

Q: The job being?

MACK: Deputy Assistant Secretary of State with the coverage of all the Eastern Arab states plus Iran, but not focusing on the Arab-Israel peace process. Gnehm had been responsible for dealing with Jordan and Lebanon, for example, in a bilateral sense, but not dealing with them in the peace process. I thought I could make a lot of contributions, but I told Kelly that he had to understand that if I was going to be there, I did not want to be a token Arabist. That I intended to speak my mind and hoped that he would appreciate my frankness, and he said he would. I mentioned that we had met when Kelly went to Beirut as ambassador. The occasion was a social one, but the host intended for me to brief Kelly about Lebanon. That was during my year at the Senior Seminar, so I did not get involved in the friction that supposedly took place between Kelly in Beirut and the Department. Kelly was taking me to some extent on the faith of others, including his senior deputy, who also had NEA experience, that I would do a good job for the Department and, not incidentally, for him.

Q: We're picking it up next time where you go to be Deputy Assistant Secretary.

MACK: I believe that I arrived on the 20th of May 1990.

Q: And you were there from when to when?

MACK: From the 20th of May 1990 until late June 1993.

Q: So we'll pick it up at that point. I want to be sure to ask about Dennis Ross.

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This is the 5th of December, 1996, so we now have you going as what?

MACK: Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near East and South Asia. My specific responsibility was for the eleven eastern Arab states, plus Iran.

Q: This was from when to when?

MACK: This was from about the 20th of May 1990 until the end of June 1993.

Q: This was a time when there was a certain attention paid to that area.

MACK: Yes, and I should say that although I was dealing with our relationships with all of the eastern Arab states, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon in addition to Iraq, Iran and the Arabian Peninsula states, my responsibilities did not include working on the peace process.

Q: When you say peace process...

MACK: Arab-Israeli peace. Of course, I got involved in it in some respects but generally speaking that was not part of my responsibility.

Q: Let's take, my French is never up to it, tour d'horizon of the states that you had major responsibility when you took over. This is very important, not only how you saw them, but also what you were getting from the bureau before all hell broke loose.

MACK: I took that office at a time when our relationships were generally speaking good with most of the states in the area, but by no means excellent. However, our relationships were particularly bad with Iran and getting worse very fast with Iraq.

Starting from the Levant, there continued to be a lot of internal turmoil in Lebanon and we basically were doing a holding action there trying to keep the symbolism of an embassy going under very, very difficult and strained security circumstances.

Q: Were there still hostages there?

MACK: A number of Americans still were hostages that had been taken in Lebanon, and we had a very small embassy that had tightly restricted activities. In Syria, our relationships were improving in the economic sphere with the activity of U.S. companies in the oil sector, for example. But politically there was a lot of stress in the relationship. This was a period when the peace process was, to use a euphemism, on hold. In fact, it had broken down virtually totally at this point. There had been very little positive activity since about 1985, and there was seemingly very little interest or initiative on the part of the administration to resume the peace process. The Administration and the Congress viewed Syria as a country that still had a strong relationship with the Soviet Union and, potentially, the country most likely to start another war with Israel.

Relationships with Jordan remained cordial but had become gradually less intimate with the breakdown of the peace process. U.S. assistance to Jordan, which previously had been very important, had gradually waned. Relationships with the countries of the Arabian Peninsula were proper but not close. They ranged from interactions in Oman, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain which at least included extensive military ties, even though in the case of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain it was mostly informal and ad hoc. Nonetheless, there was a great deal of practical on the ground military cooperation in Saudi Arabia with a large number of Americans involved in the training and equipping of Saudi armed forces and the Saudi National Guard. In Bahrain, the flagship of the U.S. Middle East Force was home-ported, and there were extensive U.S.-Bahraini commercial contacts. In Oman, we had a formal access and repositioning agreement dating from 1980. Relationships in the UAE and in Kuwait were economically strong, but politically we were not at all close with either of those countries. In the case of Kuwait, Kuwaitis tended to hold us at arm's length in any military cooperation activities. This was surprising, since we had had this program of protecting the Kuwaiti ships during the latter stages of the Iraq-Iran war. As soon as those hostilities were ended, the Kuwaitis again distanced themselves and did not encourage a close military cooperation agreement. Moreover, the Kuwaitis often took extreme Arab nationalist positions with regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Q: What was the attitude of the officers who were dealing with this whole area toward Kuwait at that time.

MACK: Most people dealing with Kuwait felt that the Kuwaitis were arrogant. To use an idiomatic expression, the Kuwaitis seemed to know the price of everything and the value of nothing. There was a feeling that the Kuwaitis had rented the U.S. flag during the latter stages of the Iraq-Iran war in order to have protection for their ships and regarded us as mercenaries they could buy. In fact, the Kuwaitis had been careful to take a public stance that they were only doing it as a commercial relationship, that it did not indicate a closer political or military relationship with the United States.

Among the GCC states, our relationship with Qatar was the most attenuated. We had no military cooperation agreements, even informal or ad hoc practical ones. That resulted to some degree from the fact that the Qataris had obtained some U.S. Stinger missiles from the international black market for arms. These were probably Stinger missiles that had been provided to the Afghan mujahideen through a covert action program aimed at the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. In any case, the Qataris had the missiles and had flaunted them in a military parade. The state of US-Qatari relations was such that we didn't know how many they had, whether it was only the two they had paraded, as they were inclined to say, or whether they actually had more. Publicity regarding the Qatari Stingers had led to restrictive legislation for the entire area on the sale of man-portable anti-aircraft missiles. It was an issue that prevented development of any meaningful cooperation outside the commercial sphere between the U.S. and Qatar, and I have already described how the prohibition on Stinger sales in the region had bedeviled our relations with the UAE when I was there as ambassador. In the economics sphere, we tended to be a weak third or fourth in the Qatari market to France, Japan and the UK. U.S. companies, very interested in the large economic projects that were on the drawing board in Qatar, felt that they were at a great disadvantage because of the restrictions in the anti-corruption law that did not allow U.S. corporations to be involved in the payment of bribes. By reputation, bribery was part of doing business in Qatar.

The final Arabian Peninsula country was Yemen. While not a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Yemen was a country where we had established a modest working relationship based on its ancient civilization and strategic position at one of the oil lanes choke points. Yemenis had just voted to unify south and north Yemen. The old People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, a Marxist dominated country with a capital in Aden, had been a country with which we did not have diplomatic relations, a country that was on the state supporters of terrorism list. In contrast, we had diplomatic and other relations with the Yemen Arab Republic, whose capital was in Sana'a. We provided a certain amount of military assistance, had sold them F-5 aircraft, for example. We also had an economic aid program which was important to the Yemenis and a presence of Peace Corps Volunteers.

To sum up the U.S. policy question for Yemen, we had been dealing with two very different countries. They had just unified, which raised several questions. First of all, would Yemen stay together? Would we treat it as a country with which we had diplomatic relations and a country that was not on the terrorism list? Or would we treat it the way we had treated the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, a semi-hostile state? I had inherited some interesting policy questions?

Iran and Iraq were the two largest countries for which I had responsibility. We had no diplomatic relations with Iran, dating back to the event that followed Iran's seizure of the U.S. Embassy and prolonged detention of our diplomatic personnel. We had some economic trade, but that was limited by U.S. executive orders that dated back to the Carter administration. The executive orders prevented the import of Iranian goods, ranging all the way from crude oil to pistachio nuts. We had two kinds of government contacts. There were indirect contacts through our protecting powers. In the case of the U.S. Interests Section in Tehran, the Swiss Government represented our interests as part of their Embassy. To the extent that the two governments conducted serious diplomacy, it tended to be through the Swiss. When the need arose, we would send messages to the government of Iran through the Swiss and the Iranians sometimes replied or even took the initiative using the same channel. These exchanges were usually rather sterile, but nonetheless a link that both countries found useful. Swiss diplomats also looked after a couple of American citizens who were in jail in Tehran.

The Iranians had an interest section in Washington under the auspices of the Algerian Embassy. The Iranian Interest Section was staffed by Iranian-Americans or permanent residents. They were really limited to consular activities looking after Iranians for purposes of passports and visas. We kept a sharp eye on them. The Iranian Government had named an Iranian diplomat at one point to head the Interests Section, and we accepted the principle of such an assignment. However, we found out he was an intelligence officer and denied permission for him to come. Still, an upgrade remained possible if Iran were looking for serious diplomatic engagement.

Q: Did we still have a good number of Iranians in the United States, particularly students?

MACK: A huge number of Iranians, both naturalized Iranian-Americans, and permanent residents. Iranians on a non-immigrant status were less common, but some had managed to keep a student status alive for years and years. Iranians with some kind of residence status or dual nationality numbered in the hundreds of thousands. They included many highly educated professionals such as doctors or university professors.

We also had a formal relationship of a judicial nature. As part of the Algiers agreement which had ended the hostage crisis in 1975, the two governments had set up a tribunal at The Hague with three Iranian judges, three American judges, and one judge that both sides chose. That tribunal reviewed claims that the two countries had against one another in an effort to try to get these awkward problems off the bilateral agenda. Both sides recognized that in some cases there were deserving private complainants, and if their claims could be satisfied it would at least remove minor contentious issues from the agenda between the two countries. This process worked fairly well despite the very bad relationships between the two countries. Occasionally, the lawyers for both sides would settle small claims. But from time to time the claims tribunal broke down, particularly because Iranian public opinion was very hostile to the idea of dealing with the United States. Iranian representatives at The Hague often were under pressure to take ideological positions which didn't work very well in a judicial framework. The Iranians had huge monetary claims against the United States, based mostly on Iranian property that had been sequestered at the time of the hostage crisis. The Iranians had also presented a claim for damages from the downing of the Iranian civil airliner in 1988. The United States had some smaller claims, mostly involving private property of U.S. companies or U.S. individuals, including Iranian-Americans.

Finally I come to Iraq, for me the most interesting case. Relationships between Iraq had gotten better very rapidly during the latter stages of the Iraq-Iran war. Diplomatic ties had been resumed in 1985 during my last State Department assignment as office director. Moreover, during the latter stages of the Iraq-Iran war we tended to assign responsibility for the continuation of the war to Iran, and most of the international community agreed. We had led a very active international program called Operation Staunch, where we tried to prevent arms from going to the Iranians. The Iraqis appreciated that. We had also developed an intelligence relationship with Iraq during the mid-1980s, which they did not always appreciate as much as we had anticipated at its outset. The wartime intelligence exchange had been badly marred by the Irangate revelations. This was particularly the case since among the explanations we had proffered as to why people shouldn't get too excited about the covert US overtures to Iran was that we had passed the Iranians some disinformation on Iraq. Understandably, the Iraqis immediately wondered whether we had been passing them disinformation on Iran. The Iraqis were quite paranoid in general about the situation, so our intelligence relationship with them had broken down toward the end of the Iraq-Iran war.

Q: It was mainly photo intelligence, wasn't it? Or was it more than that?

MACK: It took place when I was no longer dealing directly with Iraq. There were some efforts to put it in place before I left the DAS job in the summer of 1985, but it was mostly things that went on when I was in Abu Dhabi. I was really unaware of the extent of it. Subsequently I received non-specific briefings. In retrospect, I would call it a low level intelligence exchange. Still, the intelligence we gave to Iraq regarding Iran could have been very useful to the Iraqis during the latter stages of their war.

From May 1990 to the autumn of 1991, I studied carefully the files regarding US-Iraqi relations in the previous decade. There had been many unfounded allegations about U.S. material aid to Iraq. To my knowledge, with the exception of two presentation pistols, there was never any U.S. military equipment licensed for sale to Iraq. The federal authorities had prosecuted relatively minor cases of unlicensed sales, when we learned of them. Although there were cases of so-called dual use equipment or material which required licenses from the Department of Commerce, what was actually sent to Iraq was quite limited. It may have made some contribution to their efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction, but if so, the contribution was very marginal compared to what was made by other governments, including western European governments.

Q: Were you getting reports about, particularly German, British and French involvement in sales of this type of equipment to Iraq?

MACK: There was a long history of that. German chemical warfare precursors were sold to Iraq as early as when I was assigned in Baghdad in the late '70s, and the French were involved in Iraq's nuclear program at that time. The French, of course, sold a lot of high performance aircraft and other sophisticated military equipment. The British sold jeeps, tanks and other equipment for the Iraqi army.

Relative to the Soviet Union or some of our own allies, the U.S. role in the Iraqi military effort has been much exaggerated. There was, however, an important US-Iraqi economic relationship. A steadily increasing volume of trade included purchases of Iraqi oil by U.S. oil companies and American exports of food and manufactured items. Very little of this was what I would call really sensitive equipment, although there had to be judgments on Commerce Department licenses for the sale of items like computers. Principal Iraqi customers for US manufacture exports were the oil sector and the agricultural sector. Two particular forms of U.S. guaranteed credit had been established. One of them was a line of Ex-Im guaranteed credit. It was the lowest level of Ex-Im credit, but it did enable US exporters to offer the Iraqis marginally better terms in what was a very competitive market.

Q: Export-Import Bank.

MACK: Through The Export-Import Bank, the U.S. government would provide a guarantee to private U.S. banks extending supplier loans to Iraqi buyers. As I recall, it was a revolving fund of 250 million dollars, and was helpful in stimulating U.S. export activity toward Iraq. The Administration had also established a major line of credit through the Commodity Credit Corporation. This was a program to guarantee U.S. bank loans to Iraq for the purchase of U.S. food commodities. It enabled U.S. banks to finance Iraq's food purchases at a slightly lower rate than they would otherwise provide to a country with Iraq's generally not very good credit rating. The amount of outstanding Commodity Credit Corporation loans when I was briefed in May 1990 on what had become a controversial program was something like 1.8 billion dollars. New loans had been frozen in September 1989, and the Iraqis were making payments on old loans. Neither the Iraqis nor U.S. business interests and their Congressional supporters nor Iraq's critics in the Congress were happy about it.

In sum, U.S.-Iraqi relations had already become quite bad by the time I arrived on the job in May. New credits under the CCC program had been frozen. The Ex-Im program, I think, was still active but was already fully obligated. Political relations had taken a nose dive because of some very inflammatory Iraqi comments toward Israel, as well as the Iraqi show trial on espionage charges of a British Jewish journalist. Saddam Hussein had made a statement saying that Iraq would get chemical weapons and be able to "burn" Israel, if Israel ever attacked Iraq. Saddam's language was conditional - if Israel attacks - but nonetheless a very inflammatory statement, and the Administration had reacted to it with strong public criticism. The Iraqis had also made statements at Arab summit conferences and elsewhere, calling on the U.S. fleet to get out of the Gulf. We took such remarks rather badly. In fact, we believed that the presence of the U.S. fleet in the Gulf was one of the factors contributing to Iran's agreement to end the war in 1988.

There had been a nearly a year of setbacks in US-Iraqi business and political ties. The situation was not, however, all bad. At the end of the Iraq-Iran War in 1988, Baghdad and Washington had full, formal diplomatic relationships. Although there were no close personal ties at the leadership level, the ambassadors to both countries had reasonably good access to their respective governments. The Iraqis were paying off the indemnities that they owed to the families of the victims aboard the U.S. Navy warship Stark, which had been hit in an accidental attack by an Iraqi aircraft, I believe in early 1987 when it was operating to protect neutral shipping in the Gulf. Few observers in Washington viewed Iraq as being much of a threat to Israel, unlike Syria which many saw in that way. There was a hope that Iraq would further develop its wary but correct relationships with the U.S. economic partners in the Arabian Peninsula, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. There were some signs that Iraq was improving its relationships with most other Arab states. As for U.S.-Iraqi relations, the perception in Washington was that they might have reached the low ebb. They could get worse but might just as well improve. That certainly was the way it looked to me as I took over the job.

A few weeks before, for example, there had been a joint demarche by Arab ambassadors in Washington on the Under Secretary for Political Affairs. The acting dean of the Arab diplomatic corps, on behalf of the others who were there in the meeting, complained that the U.S. was being too harsh toward Iraq. Ironically, that acting dean was the Kuwaiti ambassador, Sheikh Saud Nasser Al Sabah. His complaint reflected a perception in the Arab diplomatic community that we were going after the Iraqi government unfairly because of its anti-Israeli statements. In the course of my early briefings regarding the fourteen countries under my purview, I realized that we were probably going to have some fairly difficult times ahead with the Iraqis. I was not at all prophetic. I didn't believe there was going to be war, merely that relations were going to be chilly for a long time.

Q: You keep mentioning Iraq. At that time did you see the driving force in Iraq as Saddam Hussein, or was this a much more broader...

MACK: The driving force in Iraq was much broader than one dictator. Iraq had always been one of the key states contending for leadership of the Arab world. It's a country with which we'd had very difficult relationships long before Saddam Hussein came on the scene. It was the view of some people, including our ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, that as compared to some of his predecessors Saddam Hussein would be a more realistic leader, and one more prepared to do business with the west. It was also the case that in the view of official Washington that Iran was the much greater threat to the area, even though it was militarily prostrate after the end of the Iraq-Iran war. As a long term proposition, Iranian extremism posed a greater problem in most Washington minds than Iraqi designs.

When George Bush became president, he came had announced in his inaugural address that goodwill on the part of Iran would lead to goodwill on the part of the United States. However, there was no indication that there had been any Iranian goodwill with respect to the hostages or the Arab-Israeli dispute. Iran was still involved with supporting international terrorism and was prominent on our terrorist list. Iraq had been taken off the terrorist list in 1981, when Alexander Haig was Secretary of State. There was some question as to whether Baghdad still had relationships with terrorist groups. The general feeling was, yes, but it supported terrorism only against Iran. Nobody in Washington was terribly upset about that.

There were many potential problems in my area, and I did not expect that Iraq would monopolize my time in the way it did. In early June, however, following a suggestion from Sandra Charles, who was on the National Security Council staff, I convened an inter-agency meeting at my level. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the question of a potential Iraqi threat to U.S. interests in the area. I invited counterparts from CIA, from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and from several State Department offices, in addition to Sandra Charles and myself. I surmised that Sandra's suggestion had been prompted by a query she had gotten from National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, so we took a look at the issue. The discussion was fairly wide-ranging, but the intelligence briefing the CIA presented at the start of the meeting tended to push our attention in certain directions. The Central Intelligence Agency had done a major study on whether Iraq was likely to get into a war with Israel. This was a big concern of Washington policy makers in the Administration and Congress. The CIA had analyzed that question with care and concluded that, notwithstanding hostile anti-Israel rhetoric emanating from Baghdad, it seemed unlikely that Iraq would take steps leading to a war with Israel. However, if it looked like Iraq was going to do so, Israel would certainly preempt.

After the discussion about Iraq and Israel, our meeting gave considerably less attention to the possibly that Iraq might take hostile measures toward Kuwait or elsewhere in the region. The general view was that Iraq would not need to use overt force to get border adjustments or economic concessions from Kuwait. Rather, it would use intimidation and its considerable Arabic diplomatic resources. Iraq had a very capable Foreign Minister, Tariq Aziz, and was a major player in the Arab League. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait had both extended large loans to Iraq during the Iraq-Iran War, and Iraq was not making payments on them. The consensus in our meeting was that probably Kuwait would offer Iraq some concessions. We discussed whether the United States could get any kind of support and cooperation from the Arab states or from Britain or France for taking strong positions toward Iraq to prevent it from bullying Kuwait. The group's conclusion was that we could not. The Kuwaitis had already made it clear they would not consider any kind of military exercises with the U.S. The Saudis did not seem to be interested in anything beyond the informal cooperation with the U.S. that existed both in training and provision of equipment. Our discussion of a potential scenario of Iraqi intimidation short of war concluded that if the Iraqis did start trouble, the Arabs would deal with the trouble diplomatically and pay off Iraq in some way. Along with most of the others, I thought this would be a bad thing. Nobody, however, believed we could do anything effective to avert such a development.

That was the view in early June 1990.

Our inter-agency meeting did review the question of whether it was still the U.S. government position that we should be prepared to use force to protect our interests in the Gulf. We concluded, yes. Nothing had changed in that regard. That had been the position at least from the time of the Carter administration, when President Carter had formalized it, and we had to be prepared to do that. We had recently done so in Operation Earnest Will, the protection of shipping during the Iraq-Iran war.

During subsequent weeks in June and early July, I was distracted by matters dealing with one country or another. We had launched an inter-agency review of how we should deal with Yemen. There were internal divisions within our intelligence community as to whether the duly formed and newly unified government in Sana'a was overly tainted by the former southern government's support of terrorist groups. The new government included a lot of former south Yemeni officials who had links to international terrorist groups, including the minister of interior who was in a position to issue passports to terrorists and things of that nature. This was a murky area for judgment by the Secretary of State, although I supported trying to continue what had been a mutually beneficial relationship with the government in Sana'a, whose northern leaders seemed to be the dominant force in the newly unified regime.

We were looking at the nature of the U.S.-Saudi military relationship, whether that could be improved. There was always the question of future arms sales to Saudi Arabia. In a similar vein, there was the ongoing question of whether high performance aircraft would be sold to United Arab Emirates. In principle, most policy officials wanted to conclude a major sale to the UAE. At the time that I had been ambassador there, the United Arab Emirates was still on the fence as to whether it would buy military equipment from the French or U.S. Since then, it had taken various positions favorable to the U.S. and had finally decided to buy American. Moving along the Gulf coast, we had the usual requests from Bahrain and Oman for some kind of military assistance help. The Department of defense and my part of the State Department wanted to be positive.

With Oman, the renewal of our military access agreement was under negotiation when I arrived in May 1990 and was ready for successful conclusion by summer. I didn't have much to do with the negotiations, except to bless the process and make certain that it didn't fall off track. Conclusion of the Oman access agreement, closer military cooperation with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, and arrangements for completing the storage in the United Emirates of fuel for U.S. Navy ships and aircraft were all underway. They were soon to prove essential to meeting needs that Pentagon and State Department planners had only envisaged in a theoretical way.

By contrast, there was virtually no military cooperation with Kuwait. Despite our best efforts, Kuwait seemed unwilling to move beyond purely commercial interaction.

Q: Before we move to the complete Iraq business. Will you touch on Lebanon and the other Levant states?

MACK: We had many challenges in our economic and military assistance programs in Jordan, and congressional opposition was fairly predictable. It was a Democratic controlled Congress and a Republican administration, which didn't help.

With Syria there were a lot of problems involving the Jewish community in that country, efforts on the part of Israel and American Jews to enable these people not only to emigrate from Syria but to take out property, etc. We had difficult discussions with the Syrians about that and about Syrian support of terrorist groups. They were still on the terrorist list, something that limited bi-lateral programs in very ways.

We had intense discussions with the Lebanese Ambassador and senior Lebanese officials in Beirut about whether we could improve, broaden and strengthen our ties. The internal situation was in turmoil. There was always some question as to whether security concerns might force us to close down our embassy. For its part, the Lebanese Government and, probably, most Lebanese wanted us to expand the embassy and resume issuing visas. Visa issuance in Beirut had been halted due to security problems. We had tightly restructured our embassy to focus on bare essentials. US domestic opposition was blocking military assistance to the Lebanese armed forces. More than anything else, this reflected the views of some Lebanese-Americans, especially extreme right-wing Maronite Christian groups, who opposed the current government in Lebanon because they felt it was subservient to the Syrians. Such groups had the ear of some influential people in the Congress, including Jesse Helms, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. This had blocked even the most modest kind of military assistance training program, a small IMET program.

Q: IMET being...

MACK: International Military Training, military experience and training or something like that. It would have been a very modest program, where we would bring some Lebanese military personnel to the U.S. and train them, mostly on how to maintain U.S. equipment that they were purchasing. Lebanon was a country that had a large and very influential community in the United States, and most Lebanese-Americans wanted us to expand and improve relations. John Sununu, the White House Chief of Staff, took some interest in Lebanese affairs. He certainly didn't intrude to any great degree, but we knew he took some interest. George Mitchell, the majority leader in the Senate, was also of Lebanese extraction.

Q: A new senator from Maine.

MACK: Moreover, in the House there were vocal Lebanese like Mary Rose Oakar, a Member of Congress from Ohio, and Nick Rahall from West Virginia. They and others would show up fairly often at functions of the socially active Lebanese Embassy. In various ways we felt pushed to improve our relationship with Lebanon, which had only recently emerged from its long civil war and where terrorism was still a threat. For security reasons we had a ban on Middle East Airlines, Lebanon's substantial airline, flying into the United States. In fact, we wouldn't even let them sell tickets in the United States. There were many such security and political issues that limited what had been robust business and people to people ties.

I dealt a lot with the ambassadors from all of the Arab countries I covered, except for Saudi Arabia. Prince Bandar, the Ambassador from Saudi Arabia, tended to deal only with the Assistant Secretary for the Middle East, or with the Secretary of State, or with Brent Scowcroft at the White House. When he saw me, Bandar was friendly, but if I was in one of his meetings, it was to take notes. This reflected Bandar's status as a member of the Saudi ruling family, which had long enjoyed a special relationship with U.S. leaders, and his many years in Washington. As a result, I dealt with lower level officials at the Saudi Embassy.

I got to know and appreciate all of the ambassadors from the various countries I was working with. They all had their strengths and weaknesses, and most of them were interesting human beings. I also tried also to develop a dialogue with our U.S. ambassadors out in the field. As there were quite a few countries to cover, this could have swallowed up my whole day, and there was pressure to attend evening functions as well. For such reasons and to empower the people working for me, I encouraged office directors and desk officers to be active in dealing with both foreign ambassadors in Washington and our own ambassadors in the field.

Q: My first question is: with the hostages in Lebanon, this has been quite a question of so-called Irangate, so it was a hot political issue about what we were doing there, and the Reagan administration had gotten too involved. I mean, I think history will judge in trying to do something. The Bush administration came in and part of the thing was, what did George Bush know during the campaign? Was this kind of an off-limits subject?

MACK: Not at all. The legacy of Irangate and the ongoing hostage issues were still part of my agenda. There was, however, a much more elaborate structure for this big issue than when it began in the early 1980s. I had been the office director for Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Iraq when the first hostages were taken. Until the summer of 1985, we coordinated the issue from that office. After I left, the coordination responsibility went to Ollie North at the White House. After that arrangement was discredited, it came back to the State Department, where it was divided between two offices. The Bureau of Consular Affairs dealt with the families of the hostages on a region-wide basis, and efforts to free the hostages went to S/CT, the Department of State's coordinator for counter-terrorism. Usually in coordination with us, S/CT would deal with the intelligence aspects of hostage matters and with diplomatic efforts to get the hostages out.

We realized the Lebanese government could do very little to resolve the hostage problem. If there was any government that could do anything, it would be the Iranian government, and we did communicate from time to time to the Iranians about this. For the most part, we did so through the Swiss government, acting as our protecting power toward the government of Iran. Occasionally there would be a head of state from a country like Italy who would raise the hostage issue with the President and offer to carry messages back and forth.

The Iranians tended to deny that they had anything at all to do with the hostage matter, or even any knowledge about it. They also tended to deny having any influence over people in Lebanon who had taken hostages. However, from time to time the Iranians would say, yes, we're interested in the hostage situation too. As a matter of fact, some Iranians disappeared in Lebanon, and we'd like help getting them back. This was an old story, and it was pretty clear that the Iranians still thought that having the hostages gave them some kind of leverage in their relationships with the United States. That was another one of the unfortunate legacies of Irangate. Through our indirect channels, we tried to convey the idea to the Iranian government that far from being leverage in their relationship with the United States, the holding of American hostages was an impediment to any decent relationship with the United States. So far as we could tell, we had reached a stalemate on the hostage front.

Q: What about your feeling? I mean you'd been out of it, you came back and Jim Kelly was the Assistant Secretary, was he at that time?

MACK: John Kelly. John was Assistant Secretary for Near East Affairs.

Q: He was in a way not of the NEA bureau. How did he conduct his operations? And also, what was your impression of the interest of the Secretary of State, James Baker and his group?

MACK: So far as I could tell, Baker was not dealing with the Middle East at that time. He had had some involvement with the Iraqi issue in late 1989, six months before I came in. He had been involved in trying to shake loose new CCC credits for agricultural purchases, suspended since September. By mid-1990, however, I saw no indication that Baker and most people immediately around him, including Dennis Ross, were at all concerned with the Middle East. On the other hand it would have been hard to tell, because they didn't really deal with anybody in the bureau except John Kelly. John reported directly to the Secretary or to the Deputy Secretary or to the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, and we were not getting feedback about Baker's views. Whether accurate or not, we didn't have much feeling of either direction or interest on his part.

Q: I mean you weren't getting something from John Kelly where he would say, oh, look, the Secretary really wants to know about this.

MACK: No, not at all. I do not remember a single instance that summer where Kelly said that the Secretary wanted to know about a particular issue. But look at the global context. Earth shaking changes were taking place in the Soviet Union. This was the Gorbachev period, and I understood well that there were things outside the Middle East that for Secretary Baker were taking precedence. When we would send a message to the Iranians, one of the clearances we would always get would be from the office of Under Secretary for Political Affairs. We understood that the Under Secretary for Political Affairs had been delegated responsibility for coordinating the relationship, or lack of relationship, with Iran. To what degree he talked about it to Secretary Baker was never clear to me.

Q: Who was this?

MACK: Robert Kimmitt. Bob Kimmitt was an extremely capable political appointee. He had a very good staff, mostly of career officers, and he took a lot of interest in the Middle East. He had come with Baker from the White House and Treasury, so we presumed he enjoyed the Secretary's confidence. We were very aware of Kimmitt's active interest in Middle East matters, almost unique among Secretary Baker's tight circle. Larry Eagleburger, the Deputy Secretary of State, had had a lot of experience with Middle Eastern affairs in the past, but Larry's health didn't always enable him to be actively engaged in things. We were aware of Larry's views from time to time. I think it's fair to say that Larry didn't really see a problem in having a stalemated Arab-Israeli peace process. From his perspective, Israel's security was okay, so why should we upset things if neither Israel nor the Arabs were eager to get on with the peace process?

Except for the governments of Egypt and Jordan, there did seem to be a lack of interest among Arab governments regarding the peace process. This also reflected the fact of our lack of dialogue with the PLO. That had diminished to nothing because the PLO had been involved in the Palestinian terrorist attack on the Achille Lauro cruise ship, or at least somebody connected with the PLO executive committee was involved in the attack. As a result, the U.S.-PLO dialogue had been suspended.

John Kelly might have been involved in some peace process discussions, but I was unaware of it. Moreover, John's other deputies and the NEA office directors avoided raising the subject of the Arab-Israel dispute with John. I gathered that during the year before my arrival, many of my colleagues felt that John had rebuffed them or chastised them one way or another on this subject.

Q: He had a terrible temper, didn't he?

MACK: John had a bad temper. He could be very abrupt. Kelly was incredibly quick, very intelligent, but once he made up his mind he didn't want to hear any other view. Moreover, once he'd looked at a paper, he didn't take lightly to somebody coming back in and saying, "I think maybe we should do it a different way than you're suggesting." I've watched Kelly go through his in-box, take papers and slash comments all over them, writing comments almost faster than I could turn the pages. My office directors were terrified of what would happen when they wrote a paper for John Kelly. They would say, "Please carry this paper in yourself, David, and talk him through it before he looks at it." Jock Covey, the very capable Principal DAS in NEA, gave me similar advice. So I tended to deal a lot with Kelly and often functioned as a buffer between him and the three offices under my supervision.

I had responsibility for three offices: Arabian Peninsula Affairs, ARP; Northern Gulf Affairs, that was the name for Iran and Iraq or NGA; and Arab Region North or ARN, which comprised Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Other than me, all three office directors wanted to have nothing to do with the NEA front office if they could possibly help it. So they would deal with me, and let me deal with John Kelly. Both Kelly and Covey were either feared or mistrusted by the office directors and desk officers throughout the NEA bureau.

Q: Administratively and policy-wise, that's always a dangerous situation.

MACK: It was not a happy bureau. I gave Kelly more credit than others did. He was a hard worker, and he was dealing with what I considered to be a fairly difficult Secretary of State and with some of Secretary Baker's close staffers who were very jealous of their prerogatives and could be vindictive. While others regarded Jock Covey as Kelly's hatchet man, I understood what Jock Covey had to do to keep the bureaucratic machinery running smoothly. Moreover, Jock was putting up with a very difficult Assistant Secretary of State. Jock also got heavily involved in issues of morale and assignments for the people in the bureau, and I felt his heart was in the right place. He knew the importance of awarding an officer who had excelled at a real hardship assignment with a job that either carried a lot of prestige or would provide his family with a needed change. Jock was effective at dealing with the Washington bureaucracy, and it was nice to have him on your side.

Q: What was his background?

MACK: Jock had benefited from a variety of experiences, some with high profile and some in other agencies of government. He'd had a lot of Middle East training, but he'd also been on the Kissinger staff early in his career.

Q: Did you feel the hand, again on this pre-wartime of AIPAC?

MACK: AIPAC had some influence on issues of concern to me. I wasn't dealing directly with the peace process, but I felt the AIPAC influence in a negative way. They were trying to stop major arms deals with Arab countries. They were harassing the State Department with regard to our relationships with Syria. I didn't have direct dealings with AIPAC that I recall during this time. But I was certainly aware of their influence.

Q: What was your impression of the reports that were coming out, particularly in Kuwait, Iraq, and also Saudi Arabia from the ambassadors and their staffs about the situation there?

MACK: My memory is pretty dim about reporting from the area in May and June 1990. We had capable career ambassadors in most of these posts. Charles Hostler was the politically appointed ambassador in Bahrain, but he was a very good one,. Our ambassador in Saudi Arabia was our last career ambassador at that post, Chas Freeman, whose reporting tended to excellent. He took a lot of interest in embassy reporting. They were providing very good coverage under difficult conditions, because it's hard to get reliable information on Saudi Arabia.

The reporting from Iraq was fairly frequent. It reflected, I think, the reasonably good access that April Glaspie and other officers had to people in the government below the Saddam Hussein level. Like other ambassadors in Baghdad, she had not met with Saddam Hussein for a routine discussion, although occasionally she would meet with him together with a visiting delegation. I thought the other reporting from the area was pretty good. Our biggest blind spot was on Iran. We didn't have a post there, and other channels of information were not productive. I was frustrated by the lack of information we had about Iran, what their intentions were, what the government's policies were, what was the internal situation. It seemed preposterous to me that with over a half a million Iranian-Americans in this country, we had not been able to develop better sources for what was going on in Iran.

I met with once with Akbar Ganji, one of the Iranian opposition folks, and the officers in NGA met with similar representatives of the opposition. They were the moderate, pro-democracy opposition that we dealt with. Akbar Ganji had some support had fans within the Administration, and he headed a small group of Iranian ï¿½migrï¿½ activists called Flag of Freedom. He was brought around to be introduced to me. He seemed to be a perfectly nice person, believed in all the right things, including human rights and democracy, and he opposed Iranian persecution of its Bahai community. But as far as I could see, he had very little relevance to the situation in Iran. He did not seem to be able to tell us much about what was going on inside Iran.

The State Department did not deal with the son of the former Shah, who had a modest profile in Washington society but was deemed a light weight with little following among Iranian ï¿½migrï¿½s. Nor did we deal with some extremist groups, notably the People's Mujahideen, a leftist group with cult attributes which had been involved in the hostage takeover. Although the MEK (the acronym we used for the Persian, mujahideen e khalk) later had a falling out with Khomeini's people, they had an ugly record. They'd been involved in terrorism against Americans during the Shah's time, including assassinations of American officials. They were a force in Washington because they had a very strong public relations program. They also dealt with some people in the Congress, and they could generate congressional letters. The MEK was strongly opposed to the clerical regime in Tehran, but they were not in any sense friends of the U.S. They also had a very close relationship with Iraq, and they had forces there. We considered that fairly suspicious.

Q: Did the Kurds play any role in this at all?

MACK: No. We had protested in public, and very strongly in private, to the Iraqis regarding the human rights violations against the Kurds, particularly in the latter stages and immediate aftermath of the Iraq-Iran war. It was a very prominent part of our human rights report. We had also approached many other governments about the Iraqi use of chemicals against both Iran and against the Kurds. Even though we were tilting in favor of Iraq in that war, we protested quite strongly the Iraqi use of chemicals against Iran. I was reminded of this just recently when I was visiting in Abu Dhabi and a former senior official in the foreign ministry said to me, "You remember the time that you raised with us the question of Iraqi use of chemicals against Iran?" I replied that I did, and I reminded him of his response. He had told me it was no business of the U.S., and that the UAE government was not interested. He said, "Yes, that's true. In retrospect I wish that you had screamed a little more loudly."

We had made our position known. We had not felt that the Baghdad government's human rights violation against the Kurds were so serious that we should disrupt an entire relationship because of it. That's pretty much what it came down to. The situation of the Kurds in Turkey was not good, and Turkey was a NATO ally. The situation of the Kurds in Iran wasn't good either. At least in Iraq the Kurds were offered some kind of cultural autonomy. You could argue that Iraq provided better treatment of the Kurds national rights, despite these egregious human rights violations.

Q: David, do you think we might stop at this point because I would like to have more or less a whole clothe, and we'll pick it up next time.

MACK: Next time, I'd like to pick it up with the first major indications we saw that the Iraqis had aggressive intentions towards their neighbors in the Gulf.

Q: We've covered essentially the background, how you saw things in June of 1990 when you came in, and our relations with the various countries, and also how the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs fitted into the State Department relations with the Secretary of State and his staff. So next time we'll start with the war.

At the last tape, we covered sort of a tour d'horizon of the Arab countries as you saw them in June 1990 when you came to NEA. We've discussed the relationship of internal workings of the Department of State with NEA. So we're really going to pick up about you mentioned you wanted to start this by saying when you began to discern Iraqi hostile intentions towards its neighbors, and then we'll move into that whole war period.

This is the 14th of January, 1997. David has given me a set of notes regarding this whole matter of the war that he put together for a TV interview and I'm going to have these typed and placed here, and then we will ask some additional questions beyond that.

Notes on Gulf War for BBC Interview, November 1994

Situation in late May 1990

US-Iraqi relations were very tense, and prospects for improvement were bleak. Iraqi criticism of US military presence in the Gulf was harsh, and Iraq brandished the threat of CW against Israel. Iraq made efforts to evade US export controls to get embargoed technology, including devices with nuclear weapons application. USG was maintaining freeze on any new credit guarantees for US companies selling agricultural commodities to Iraq, but we encouraged Iraq to keep repaying the loans from U.S. banks for those purchases. From last credit guarantee in September 1989 to August 1990 Iraq received commodities worth less than $400 million but paid back much larger sum. Saddam Hussein complained he could no longer buy anything but wheat, an over simplification but we had stopped all but a trickle of US technology. A few weeks before I arrived, Arab ambassadors in Washington had come to the State Department and collectively urged the USG to ease up on Iraq. The spokesman for this oral demarche was the Kuwaiti Ambassador Saud Nasser Al Sabah. Together with the high level of European and Soviet trade with Iraq, that reminded us we would have no international support for collective international sanctions. The intelligence community had assessed Iraqi intentions as focused inward and unlikely to go to war. The community did take a hard look at the possibility of a conflict between Iraq and Israel, but not at the Gulf Arab states, where Iraq was still seeking financial support.

In late May, there was an Arab summit in Baghdad which took a very hostile line against the United States. The Iraqis led the attacks on US support of Israel and put pressure on the Gulf states to use their economic ties with the US to get changes in our position. The Gulf states resisted, but some of them seemed embarrassed by the charges. None of them sought closer ties with the U.S. To the contrary, I had the impression that Kuwait thought it was US policy toward Israel, rather than Iraqi policy, which was the greater problem for their security.

Sometime in June, I convened an inter-agency meeting at my level to assess our Gulf policy. We agreed that it was still our policy to respond with force if necessary to defend our vital interests. This was not new. As late as February 1990 we had instructed embassies in the Gulf states to reassure them this policy continued. ("Will use force if necessary to protect US interests in this area, including unimpeded access to the oil resources of the Gulf and the security and stability of friendly countries.") The problem was, our friends were not willing to work with us. Privately, they welcomed the presence of US warships in the Gulf but wanted them to stay over the horizon. Nor did they or any other foreign government seem particularly concerned about an Iraqi threat to the Gulf. Congressional critics of Iraq focused on human rights abuses and potential threats to Israel. Our own intelligence community did not see a near term threat, but they agreed to increase their attention to this issue.

On the morning of July 18, I saw the texts of letters from Iraq to the Arab League threatening Kuwait and the UAE because of their supposed overproduction of oil. The charge was that this kept prices low and prevented Iraq from solving its economic problems. Radio Baghdad was hyping this news in an attempt to pressure those countries. We did guidance for the noon briefing which stated our determination to ensure the flow of oil and to support the individual and collective defense efforts of our Gulf friends. I had little trouble getting the guidance cleared when I pointed back to the February instruction from which we drew the basic language. Later in the day, the Department used the statement in public. In effect, I felt we were trying to reach two audiences. We wanted to put Iraq on notice, but we also wanted to remind the Gulf Arabs that they needed to step forward so that we could work with them.

I had previously scheduled a luncheon with the Iraqi ambassador, Mohammed al-Mashat for that very day. I had done so with an idea that I would need to have a personal relationship with him prior to conveying what I anticipated would be bad news and warnings through him to the GOI during the coming months. The timing was a fortuitous coincidence. I prepared what any diplomat would recognize as stiff oral remarks, and I asked the Iraq desk officer to join us for lunch so that I would have someone else to help me remember the conversation. After Mashat had finished a light lunch I told him that we viewed the Iraqi letters to the Arab League as threatening and that we would defend our interests, reminding him that we had kept US Navy warships in the Gulf since 1949 and viewed their presence as a stabilizing influence. Any disputes should be settled by peaceful means, and we were committed to the sovereignty and integrity of the Gulf states. I also passed him a copy of the press guidance, after the Iraq desk officer verified it had been used at about the time Mashat arrived at the State Department for lunch. He asked what I meant by protecting US interests and by the reference to our fleet in the Gulf. I said the exact measures would depend on circumstances, but he knew very well that we had deployed and used force against Iran during the latter years of the Iraq-Iran war when Iran was threatening to disrupt oil production and transport and threatening to attack the Arab gulf states. Mashat got the point. He said that Iraq would never make war on its Arab neighbors. I asked him whether that included Kuwait, where there was a border dispute. Mashat assured me that Iraq had accepted Kuwait's full sovereignty and had specifically accepted the border in 1963, at which time Mashat had been an Undersecretary in an earlier Baath Party government. The most they would do would be to take their charges of harmful Kuwaiti economic policies to the Arab League. Nonetheless, I said, we wanted him to convey our views to Baghdad. Tell them we viewed the Iraqi letters as threats and we wanted a clarification of Iraqi intentions.

Mashat was a professional diplomat, but he was also working for an Iraqi regime that did not welcome the bearers of bad news. Unlike me, Mashat had been alone at the lunch and might soften the substance and tone of what I had said that went beyond our press statement. To make sure the message got through, we prepared a telegram to our embassy in Baghdad, asking Ambassador Glaspie to describe the meeting to her official contacts and to press for an explanation. We also sent the cable to Kuwait, Riyadh and other posts in the Gulf, as well as Cairo and Amman, instructing our embassies to get reactions from those governments and to ask what they intended to do about the Iraqi threats and our readiness to support their defense efforts. Since I had been acting on my own up to that point, I got the approval of my boss, Assistant Secretary Kelly, and the cable went out that night. Ambassador Glaspie carried out the instruction the next day and repeated the substance of my points at subsequent opportunities when she had meetings with senior officials. She received assurances that I would describe as more general than what Mashat had given me, but the bottom line was Iraq's claim that it would negotiate its differences with Kuwait. I was not sure that Mashat had sent our message, but I knew that no one at the Foreign Ministry would dare not to relay an important conversation, if only out of fear that an Iraqi intelligence agency was listening in. They also confirmed to Glaspie that Mashat had reported our conversation.

With one exception, the response from our Arab friends was not very useful. They tended to emphasize their efforts to work this out in what they called an Arab context, through high level contacts among Arab leaders. Some of them stressed that the US should avoid provoking the Iraqis. This even included Kuwait. The exception was the government of the UAE in Abu Dhabi. They asked us to provide tanker aircraft which could refuel in-flight their limited numbers of fighter aircraft to enable them to maintain a combat air patrol over their oil fields. There was inter-agency consensus at my level that this was a good thing to do in some way. State Undersecretary Kimmitt was sympathetic. Someone raised the question as to why the Saudis, who had tanker aircraft, would not be the logical party to do it. I was skeptical but overcame my own reservations to say that we could of course ask the Saudis before we went ahead on our own. When someone did talk to Bandar he said it was a bad idea; they certainly would not provide tankers but would not publicly object if we did. I spent the weekend of July 20 and 21 on the phones with our embassy in Abu Dhabi and key people in the NSC and Department of Defense to implement the deployment of USAF tankers as a joint exercise.

In addition to consulting with the Saudis about aerial refueling, we also briefed the Kuwaiti leaders on our plans. The Kuwaitis said the UAE had overreacted. Neither then nor in the subsequent days prior to the Iraqi invasion did Kuwait or Saudi Arabia seek our military help. This was despite our repeated private and public encouragement to discuss the problems of deterring Iraq. April Glaspie reported from Baghdad that the refueling exercise was the one development which might have caused some in the Iraqi leadership to take our diplomatic warnings seriously. In retrospect, it is clear that nothing we could say would affect Iraqi decision-making, only if we could do something fairly dramatic and closer to its borders.

As late as the third week of July, neither Iraq's neighbors nor we nor any other government nor public figure I know of believed that Iraq would invade. This included Mubarak and Hussein, as well as the Gulf leaders. We expected efforts at intimidation along with diplomatic pressure on Kuwait. We thought the best way to ensure that Iraq stayed on its side of the border was to be active in collective deterrence measures. Others, most tragically Kuwait, seemed to believe that any activity aside from inter Arab diplomacy might trigger the Iraqi actions they intended to deflect. By the final days before the Iraqi invasion, some in our intelligence community predicted a shallow Iraqi incursion, but we were not able to change the views of key allies. The USG was already pressing the envelope of what it could do unilaterally without being branded a warmonger by both Iraq's neighbors and important parts of the US public. For that matter, it was hard to second guess respected Arab leaders like President Mubarak, who had visited Baghdad and believed assurances he had gotten from Saddam Hussein.

The Iraqi troop movements in late July did lead the Administration to send another instruction to Ambassador Glaspie, following her meeting with Saddam Hussein, in the form of a presidential message. It was stronger in some respects, and it repeated the substance of our July 18 warnings to the Iraqis. However, it also stated our desire to have a good relationship. The second message was delivered to the Iraqi Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs for transmittal to Saddam Hussein.

Frankly, we were very unsure that we would receive any cooperation from the Saudis and Kuwaitis that would enable us to actually go beyond diplomacy. Certainly, we were not in a position to give Glaspie any specifics on what our military response might be. The only instruction that she had when she was called in for the meeting on July 25 with Saddam Hussein was the one generated by my meeting of July 18. Not an enviable position to be in. She used her instructions again in this meeting, but in my opinion whatever she said and however she said it would not have changed Iraqi plans. The Iraqis knew of the kinds of responses we were getting from other Arabs and the lack of enthusiasm in the U.S. Mashat was reporting on lots of things beside my remarks to him, the thrust of which Defense Secretary Cheney used with the media and Glaspie said she reiterated at every opportunity. Mashat was also seeing Congressmen and U.S. businessmen and reading the press. Some of them probably told him not to worry about what he heard at the State Department. Even a tooth rattling warning from President Bush would have been seen in Baghdad as a bluff, unless we had actually done something to go along with the words.

Ambassador Glaspie's cable reporting her meeting with Saddam Hussein tended to confirm what we were hearing from the various Arab leaders. The Iraqis were determined to get concessions from Kuwait to help them out of their desperate economic straits, but they intended to negotiate with Kuwait to that end. We also knew from our embassies in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia that the Kuwaitis were prepared to talk. None of the Arabs wanted us to disrupt the inter-Arab consultations which seemed to be underway.

The Iraqis obviously took note of the open testimony that John Kelly gave before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee of Congressman Lee Hamilton. His prepared statement subtracted nothing from what we had been saying publicly all along, including the general commitment to the sovereignty and integrity of our Gulf friends. Hamilton relentlessly pressed Kelly to say whether we had a formal commitment to come to Kuwait's aid in the case of Iraqi aggression. It made me wonder whether Hamilton suspected that some secret US-Kuwaiti agreement existed and that President Bush would go to war without getting congressional approval. In the end, Kelly had no choice but to acknowledge that we did not have such a formal commitment, and I suppose that added another element to Saddam's apparent confidence that he could get away with it. In fact, what we did would be dependent on circumstances. There was a threshold below which President Bush could have never gotten either foreign or domestic support for a military confrontation. Imagine that the Iraqis had simply seized a northern slice of the border and the islands at the mouth of their outlet to the Gulf. Could George Bush have called on the world and the American people to liberate Bubiyan Island for the Emir of Kuwait? All you have to do is state the question to know that the answer would have been "no". As it was, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the resultant threat to other Gulf states and to the world's oil supplies gave President Bush a receptive audience for strong measures to deter further Iraqi aggression and roll back the invasion. This proves one thing. It's not hard to achieve total surprise in international affairs, as Saddam Hussein did. All that's required is to do something unbelievably stupid.

In a sense, the war began with the invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, not with the US bombing campaign of January 1991. After I stood up a State Department task force the evening of August 1, we went to work to respond using the full range of U.S. influence. I spent long days, nights and every weekend for the coming five months on three main tasks:

- Building the diplomatic framework, initially for a deterrent military force, and eventually for a liberation force.

- Establishing a coalition to impose economic and political sanctions which would weaken Iraq's ability to hold on to Kuwait and might even change Iraqi policy.

- Employing both pressure and direct diplomacy with Iraq - in Washington, New York and Baghdad - to enable US and other foreign nationals to get out of Iraq and Kuwait. The thousands of American citizens at risk as hostages were a major concern of mine and, I believe, of President Bush. At the same time we were determined not to give in to Iraqi blackmail on their account.

I continued to be the main point of contact with Ambassador Mashat, but Assistant Secretary John Kelly joined me that night or in the early morning hours - it's all one in my memory - for our first meeting after the invasion. Kelly was very direct and forceful, demanding Iraqi withdrawal and making Iraq responsible for any harm that might come to U.S. citizens. At one point Kelly either lost his temper or feigned to lose it. (With John it could sometimes be hard to tell.) Mashat swore the Iraqi military moves had taken him by surprise and said he had no instructions on what to say. I'm sure both were true. Saddam would never have revealed such a military plan to the Iraqi Ambassador in Washington. Mashat agreed to convey our points immediately to Baghdad. As usual, we instructed our embassy there to make the same points at the foreign ministry.

Mashat was not a very likeable person, but he was reliable enough to be a useful channel. He liked the good life of an ambassador in a major Western capital, and his family did not want to go back to Baghdad. This gave him an incentive to try to resolve the crisis before it led to a break in diplomatic relations, if not a war. He had a PhD. in sociology from a U.S. university and had been Undersecretary of Education in the 1963 Baath Government. He had developed a fair amount of diplomatic expertise and knowledge of Washington. He knew that real political power was not at the State Department, and he tried to manipulate the U.S. media and various interest groups. As time went on, he lost his high level contacts, so he needed me even for routine things like protection for his family.

Mashat was useful to us as a secure channel to the Iraqi government which would reinforce our more direct channel in Baghdad for efforts to get Americans out of Iraq and Kuwait and to protect them while they remained. I could wake him up in the middle of the night to pass a message, and I frequently did so, especially as we began to convoy our people out by land and by charter flights. When he complained that he could not get a phone line to Baghdad to send a message, I would help him do so. I tried to treat him with respect, even when conveying the most hard line political warnings. At one point he started a meeting by joking, "I suppose you've called me in for the daily spanking," but we both knew it was deadly serious. I kept a picture of Nat Howell, our besieged ambassador in Kuwait, in my office. It was a constant reminder that we would not tolerate harm to our diplomats and other citizens. As I intended, Mashat took note of it. I think Mashat hoped that Saddam Hussein would realize the foolishness of the occupation of Kuwait, declare victory and withdraw. He hinted at the idea of a partial withdrawal, but I told him no deal. When Mashat called me to announce the Iraqi decree to let American citizens leave, he suggested that we ease up the pressure of sanctions. I told him that Iraq was smart to have ended one problem, but we still demanded total withdrawal.

Although Mashat knew there was opposition in the Congress and elsewhere to the use of military force, he realized that the Administration was serious about going to war if necessary. He accused President Bush of "beating the war drums" in contrast to positive Iraqi gestures such as releasing the hostages. Hoping for a negative vote in Congress, he argued that Bush represented an extremist view. It is hard to say how honest Mashat was in his reporting to Baghdad, but he seemed hopeful when we agreed to have Secretary Baker meet with Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz in Geneva in January.

I personally hoped without any optimism that Iraq would announce a total withdrawal at Geneva. Although I had been confident of U.S. military victory, at least since October 1, war is always filled with incalculable risks and gambles. We believed casualties would be much higher than they were. Even so, we worried a lot in December and January about a partial withdrawal, whereby Iraq would hold on the Kuwaiti islands adjacent to Iraq's narrow window on the Gulf and a part of northern Kuwait. We speculated that Mashat might have been floating trial balloons for Tariq Aziz on this point. We developed contingency plans to deal with such a proposal, but it would have been much harder, if not impossible, to maintain the coalition and keep our forces in place. This was my "nightmare scenario," unlike some others who feared a total withdrawal with Iraqi forces escaping any damage. Frankly, I was astonished when the Geneva meeting came and went and the Iraqis did not even propose a partial withdrawal to test the coalition's reaction.

When war came, it no longer suited our purposes to keep Mashat around, and we ordered the Iraqi embassy be reduced to a small interest section. He seemed surprised and tried to stay on medical grounds. We declined, and Mashat finally left. He probably realized that one of my goals was to encourage him to defect, but either his sense of pride or fear of retribution against his family in Iraq prevented that. But he never returned to Iraq. After going as far as Vienna, he stopped for medical treatment and eventually qualified for immigration to Canada, where he has kept out of sight. Mashat is a survivor if there ever was one. I suspected that he loathed and feared the regime in Baghdad, but he never admitted it to me.

Once war began, I was less busy than before. I did become a regular briefer at closed sessions of the Senate and the House. It was impressive to see how, for a time, partisanship subsided and members who had opposed the authorization of military force supported Desert Storm. When President Bush announced the end of hostilities, there was a great sense of relief at the Congress. I do not recall a single member asking if we should not continue the war. Congress was clearly relieved that we had liberated Kuwait with so few casualties. I was aware of no one who was proposing additional objectives, such as continuing the war to change the government in Baghdad. Some have since made the claim. As far as I was concerned, any such second guessing of President Bush came later.

I was told that General Schwarzkopf and the Pentagon had made clear to the State Department that they wanted no advice from us on how to handle the cease-fire talks at Safwan. It was to be a purely military meeting to deal with military issues only. In fact, it was only long after the fact that we got a report of the meeting, and that came through an indirect channel. We were surprised by the permission for use of helicopters, but the decision to go along with Schwarzkopf was taken before I even learned of it. The military argued that Iraqi artillery and tanks could kill civilians with or without helicopters, probably with more indiscriminate bloodshed. It soon became clear that our military wanted out of Iraqi territory in a hurry. There was some controversy about that, especially after the uprisings of Shiite civilians in the south. For a brief period, it looked like that might lead Iraqi military units to mutiny, but when the Iranians began to send their agents in to exploit what had been a spontaneous popular rebellion, the army coalesced around the leadership in Baghdad, fearful that the country might fall apart.

After the fact, people have speculated on what might have happened if Schwarzkopf had marched to Baghdad or if US forces remained in parts of the country. At the time, the reality was that there was negligible international or domestic support for such ideas. If there was debate within the Administration, I was unaware of it. The war had been fought under limited mandates from the U.N., from Congress and from our allies. The stated objectives were fully met. The mood of the American people was to get out before things got messy. With Vietnam and Lebanon still on their minds, the U.S. military fully reflected that instinct. Personally, I am not persuaded that they were wrong. Iraq is a huge and unruly country. Our ability to fine tune its internal politics is very limited.

A new situation arose when the Kurdish rebellion ended in a mass flight of refugees to the borders of Turkey and Iran. It was, moreover, a development which affected international peace and stability, especially with regard to our Turkish ally. Nonetheless, our military was very reluctant to become involved. The British and French insisted they could establish safe havens with their ground forces if we provided air cover and logistics. The Turks agreed to allow use of bases in Turkey as staging points for strictly humanitarian operations. In the end, the British and French proved incapable of doing the job on the ground, although they continued to participate in the air, so President Bush reluctantly agreed to put U.S. forces on the ground for a humanitarian operation in April codenamed Operation Provide Comfort. I was very clear in my talks with the leaders of Kurdish and other Iraqi opposition groups that the U.S. involvement was only for humanitarian purposes and that we did not support a separate state for the Kurds. At first, some of the Kurdish representatives did not like to hear that, but they came to appreciate an operation that saved possibly hundreds of thousands of Kurdish lives.

Q: David, in a way, maybe we ought to talk a bit about during the war. I have not had a chance to go over these notes, but let's talk a bit about some of the dynamics within the State Department which you've probably dealt with in there. How much of a bombshell was this?

MACK: By mid-summer, some of us thought there was a very good chance of serious problems with Iraq connected with the Kuwaiti border. We weren't certain about the magnitude of the problems that would arise, but we did believe that it could involve a need to evacuate citizens at least from Iraq, if not from Kuwait. As a result, one of the things the State Department did, which was very foresighted, was to run an emergency action policy game. The Foreign Service Institute organized and supervised a policy game that focused on the nuts and bolts of what you do about the threat to American citizens in the case of a conflict between two countries, with a large number of American citizens in both. As I recall we ran the conflict on the assumption that we would have to do an evacuation out of Iraq, but that the conditions would not require a full evacuation of the American citizens from Kuwait. It proved to be very good training for us. We brought in administrative experts from the M area (State Department managers for budget, personnel, logistics, etc.) That was to make clear what would be required to cut orders for the movement of personnel and what was required to get money. The game raised questions like how you go about getting charter aircraft.

Within the Near East Bureau, we had established the framework for a task force that would go into operation, initially a working group since technically a task force has to be set up by order of the Under Secretary for Political Affairs. We had established the framework for that with tentative rosters of people we would call upon. I am not aware of what kind of discussions may have taken place between John Kelly, the Assistant Secretary for NEA, and 7th floor principals (the Secretary of State and his deputies). If I was aware at the time, I've forgotten.

Q: But it is somewhat indicative of the fact that there wasn't much feedback up and down.

MACK: It's true that we did not get formal feedback. However, we in the NEA Bureau thought that other knowledgeable people, including the President, shared the view we had conveyed that the Iraqis were going to push a quarrel with Kuwait to the brink through use of their intimidation and Arab diplomatic pressures. I believe there was also a consensus that there would be a resolution of the crisis short of actual all-out war between Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and other regional states. As I think I may have mentioned earlier, we were pretty gloomy in NEA about the end results of this. Our presumption was that probably Kuwait would be pressured by the other Arab states, including Saudi Arabia and Egypt, to make some kind of concessions to Iraq. We did not look with any satisfaction on the fact that such concessions would be made. That would obviously violate the principle that governments shouldn't be able to obtain gains through threats to use force.

As early as June, our inter-agency meeting had reviewed the various possibilities for what Iraq might do and aired the scenario that the Iraqis would try to intimidate some of their weaker neighbors. In fact, that happened in mid-July, but the feedback from these countries was what we had predicted. Almost all of them, including Kuwait, wanted us to butt out, and they were certainly not interested in having closer military cooperation with the United States.

Q: In many ways the Kuwaitis had not built up much of a support group with either the United States or the Arab world, had they?

MACK: The Kuwaiti government seemed to take the view that, because of the wider ramifications in the Arab world, a close association with the United States imperiled their security more than it protected it. We were also aware that there was no broad political support for Kuwait within the Arab world. You couldn't get an Arab League position on such issues, certainly not in advance of something terrible happening. And without broader Arab support, no way could you get United Nations interest. So there seemed to be very little that could be done about the kind of provocations that the Iraqis were judged likely to commit. In the end, of course, the Iraqis went way over the edge, and provided abundant indication of their intentions for not only a permanent occupation of Kuwait. They also seemed prepared to use their military forces, if not to invade Saudi Arabia, to at least try to intimidate Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states in such a way as to gain predominant influence over their policies.

Q: In many ways looking at this, it looks as though the Iraqis made it a lot easier for us because our vital interests were really threatened-I'm talking about Saudi oil particularly.

MACK: That's true. What most concerned us, and would have made a response much harder if not impossible, were the careful salami tactics we thought the Iraqis might employ. Instead, we had a clear provocation, a provocation that enabled us to engineer a massive international coalition to get very strong support from key Arab and Muslim governments. It also enabled us to at least neutralize Russia, the Soviet Union at that time. Most immediately, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and forward deployments provided abundant evidence that Saudi Arabia itself was threatened militarily. That enabled us to get Saudi authority to bring our forces into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in a massive way. We were also able to bring forces into other Arabian Peninsula countries, along with our naval deployments into the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf.

By occupying all of Kuwait and showing indications at least of military capability, if not probable intent, to invade Saudi Arabia, Saddam Hussein's actions crossed the threshold that was required for us to take decisive action. That not only affected our ability to get international support for what we needed to do, but the threshold was quite critical for getting support within the U.S. government. Ever since Vietnam there had been a decline in the actual political support a president could expect by committing forces. Even within the administration, Bush faced a U.S. military that was extremely reluctant to engage forces for any kind of international emergency that seemed to fall short of a direct threat to vital U.S. national interests. Former Secretary of Defense Weinberger's various criteria for the engagement of military force were very much in vogue, and they were constraining.

Q: We can't use the military unless they're going to win, and win big, and not suffer any casualties.

MACK: And unless the reason for doing this is really closely attached to vital U.S. national interests and has the support of the U.S. people. It was quite a prescriptive list of conditions, resulting from the bad experience in the Vietnam War and the more recent bad experience in Lebanon. Initially, our military involvement in Lebanon had seemed very attractive to many people. But it had gone badly, and disillusion followed.

President Bush also faced a Congress that was controlled by the Democrats, many of whom were quite skeptical about the use of power by a Republican president. Moreover, there was a pernicious and widespread view among the elite opinion molders that George Bush was a political wimp, one who might be prepared to go to extreme lengths in order to win the next election. Many seemed to believe that he might want to employ the right kind of international crisis for that purpose. I'm afraid that was a very real view in the country. I've seen columnists write about President Bush sort of flexing of his muscles in a very macho way to overcome his own inner doubts and uncertainty. All this kind of psychobabble, I think, was really quite unfair to President Bush. As a life-long Democrat, I had voted for Michael Dukakis. At the same time, I could recognize that both Reagan and Bush had wanted to use U.S. military power to protect U.S. national interests.

Q: All right, you've reviewed your 1994 notes for the BBC interview, and there were some things on this that you'd like to expand on?

MACK: In general, the notes are a pretty good summary of things from late May 1990 until the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War, including the Kurdish situation. The notes did not go quite as deeply into some matters as I now feel I can for this oral history.

The whole question of the Iraqi threats to Kuwait and the UAE became public on the 17th and 18th of July 1990. First, there was a speech by Saddam Hussein. Then there were very specific and ominously formal sounding letters from Tariq Aziz, the Iraqi foreign minister, to the Arab League secretary general. In effect, the speech and the letters charged that by producing beyond their OPEC oil quotas, Kuwait and the UAE were engaging in a form of economic warfare against the Iraqi people by crippling Iraqi post-war economic reconstruction. It is true that Kuwait and the UAE were exceeding their OPEC oil quotas, and this could have depressed prices to some degree. It's also true that Iraq's economic reconstruction efforts were not going well. That this was effectively an act of economic warfare on the part of Kuwait and the UAE was a serious charge. The language the Iraqi leaders used and the fact that they had chosen to go public in such a way, publishing the letters right after sending them to The Arab League, seemed to set the stage for forceful Iraqi action against at least these two countries.

I described the way in which I had a prearranged meeting with Iraqi Ambassador Mashat. Actually, it was lunch in the executive dining room on the 8th floor of the Department. I had arranged the luncheon because of my growing feeling that we were going to have to use some hard instructions with the Iraqis over the coming years. For some months our relations had been in effect frozen-no more U.S. loan guarantees for either Ex-Im loans or CCC (Commodity Credit Corporation) loans from U.S. banks to enable Iraq to buy U.S. grain. All of this had been frozen. There had been a steady escalation of hostile rhetoric between the two countries. Since it seemed to me that I was going to have to be the bearer of a lot of bad news to the Iraqi ambassador, we ought to get to know one another personally, which hadn't happened since I came on the job May. That was partly because Mashat, generally speaking, enjoyed pretty high access in the U.S. government. I was not the normal person he saw. Much had changed since the mid-1980s, when I helped in the process of resuming formal diplomatic relations and was for a time one of their better contacts in Washington. Iraqi ambassadors had gotten used to being able to see higher level people. Aside from the State Department, they had a lot of contacts on the Hill, in other agencies of government, the National Security Council staff, etc. So I had Mashat to lunch along with the Iraqi desk officer.

Fortuitously, that was on the 18th. That was the morning we saw the messages to the Arab League and had done tough press guidance. It was used by the State Department, after being properly cleared. However, an indication of the toughness of the guidance was a subsequent call from an NSC staffer to me to say that we had overdone it. Our press office had the responsibility for clearing guidance with the NSC. Apparently, they hadn't done it that morning. That's not too unusual in a fast breaking situation, but in any case the guidance was well within the parameters of U.S. government policy. The complaint to me from this NSC staffer, as I recall the words, was that "it sounded to some people as if we were threatening to use force against Iraq."My guess was that "some people" referred to General Scowcroft or to people who had remonstrated to him. Well, I had intended to convey a strong response both in public and in private to Ambassador Mashat. I hoped that the Iraqi government in Baghdad would worry that we were going to respond in a very strong manner. I knew I was not in a position to be any more specific about the nature of the response. Within that constraint, it had been my intention to lean forward diplomatically as much as I dared. I was intentionally pushing the envelope as to what I thought could be said, based on my understanding of U.S. interests and policy and how the U.S. response would develop.

During the course of the lunch I provided the press guidance to Mashat, after ascertaining that it had been used at the noon briefing. After reading the statement, the ambassador expressed the view that we were over reacting. Iraq would never threaten U.S. access to the oil of the Gulf or use force against its neighbors. I asked whether that included the Kuwaiti border. Mashat stoutly denied that they would ever cross the Kuwaiti border. In that connection, he referred to the fact that he had been Undersecretary of Education in a Baath party government in 1963 which had exchanged letters with Kuwait, in effect confirming the validity of the border. He said he was certain the Iraqi government would not want to back away from that commitment, and they fully supported Kuwait's territorial integrity.

Mashat asked me about a line in the guidance which said that we would protect U.S. interests in the Gulf and support the individual and collective defense efforts of our long-standing friends. He indicated it was unclear and asked me to explain. I reminded him of what we did in the latter stages of the Iraq-Iran war, when Iranian attacks on oil tankers required us to take actions together with our GCC friends against the Iranian navy. At the end of our discussion, which was polite throughout and as amiable as could be given the rather bad news we were discussing, I said we must insist that he get clarification from his government as to its statements regarding the UAE and Kuwait. I stressed that we were really bothered by this. Mashat said he would report what I had said and seek views from Baghdad.

I did not trust Ambassador Mashat to be the bearer of bad tidings to Saddam Hussein. I wasn't confident that he wanted to play that role. So the first thing I did, together with the Iraqi desk, was to draft a cable reporting our meeting, along with an instruction for posts in the field. The cable was for approval by Assistant Secretary Kelly, although we also got a clearance from a staffer in the office of the Undersecretary for Political Affairs. It provided the text of the State Department declaration, described the nature of my conversation with Ambassador Mashat and asked posts to brief host governments. The cable went not only to Baghdad with an instruction to stress our need for an explanation, but also to our other embassies in the area and to London. We asked for feedback. We instructed our posts in places like Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, and Riyadh to brief their host governments and find out what they were prepared to do, how they were prepared to deal with what seemed to us to be threats by Iraq.

I know how the instruction was received in Baghdad, or at least how Ambassador Glaspie believes it was received. And I know how it was received in Abu Dhabi, where they took the matter seriously. Generally, the tenor from other Arab capitals was we were making a mountain out of a mole hill. Some expressed concern that we might provoke the Iraqis to do the kind of thing that we were worried about. They assured us that they could really take care of any problem with Iraq very well themselves, thank you very much, and would be butt out. In Baghdad, Glaspie says she got very similar kinds of assurances as I had from Ambassador Mashat. She presented the instruction in a series of meetings. Her prompt, initial meeting was with the Undersecretary for the foreign ministry, Nizar Hamdoun. I had known Hamdoun when he was the Iraqi ambassador to Washington in the 1980s, and I respected his professionalism. He is now the permanent representative of Iraq in the United Nations. Hamdoun indicated that Mashat had reported our conversation at the State Department. Hamdoun gave Glaspie the same assertion that they planned no hostile moves against Kuwait. Undersecretary Hamdoun might have been a little less specific than Ambassador Mashat had been to me, but he said nothing to contradict Mashat regarding the Kuwaiti border.

Q: Was the feeling at that time, or even before, that it was difficult to get messages to Saddam Hussein? And that Saddam Hussein was calling the shots, and maybe these people you were talking to were of no major consequence?

MACK: Specialists on Iraq agreed with my view that people would be careful about passing bad news up to Saddam Hussein. On the other hand, we structured this in such a way that lower level Iraqis would be more worried about the results of not passing on the message. I gave Ambassador Mashat a copy of the State Department statement. I was making up my own oral remarks pretty much as I went, so I didn't give him an aide memoire or anything like that. But I rather suspect, and this would be pretty standard practice, that Ambassador Glaspie may have done something like that in Baghdad. But in any case, we always thought it would be more effective to make a demarche in Baghdad than in Washington. One of the reasons was because in Baghdad you could almost assume that the conversation would be tape recorded, and that a foreign ministry official would not dare to withhold information of a serious nature from higher authorities. So we were certain the Foreign Ministry Undersecretary would pass on the message. Ambassador Glaspie's view was that messages delivered at that level, and in a formal way, did get through to Saddam Hussein. Based on my earlier assignment in Baghdad and what we knew about Iraqi procedures, that seems plausible to me. She told me that she reiterated the instruction my meeting with Ambassador Mashat had generated on several subsequent occasions. It was the primary instruction she had until, and including, her meeting with Saddam Hussein. .

Q: But did she use that instruction?

MACK: On subsequent occasions, including with Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz, and subsequently, she says, with Saddam Hussein. There has been a lot of criticism of Ambassador Glaspie by people who weren't there. We have her account that she reported in State Department messages, and then gave subsequently to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. And we have the Iraqi recounting, which they have published, at least in part. I don't know whether they published their record in its entirety. And it's distinctly possible that maybe April's body language sent the wrong signal. I know that it was easier for me to deal firmly with Ambassador Mashat at the State Department, starting with our luncheon meeting on July 18. I could come across as very decisive and very determined, conveying, as I hoped I had, that we meant business. Maybe it was more difficult for April Glaspie to do that, particularly since there was no indication that we were actually doing anything. There had been no major deployment of U.S. contingency forces into the Arabian Peninsula or the Persian Gulf, and certainly the Iraqis were acute enough to see that we weren't getting much of a reception from the other Arab states. I've no doubt that some of these states reported to the Iraqis that we had contacted them with this instruction, and that they weren't really doing anything about it.

The one exception was in the UAE. The UAE asked us to join them in what they called a joint exercise. They asked us to provide airborne refueling tankers for their combat aircraft, which were French Mirage fighters. This would enable them to maintain a combat air patrol over their offshore economic zone and the city of Abu Dhabi. In this way, they could protect their extensive offshore oil installations and their capital against a possible Iraqi attack. They deemed an Iraqi attack possible rather than probable. But if there were an attack, particularly on some of the offshore oil installations, the results could be disastrous. So they preferred not to take any chances.

As a former ambassador to the UAE, I felt this was exactly the sort of thing we should want to do. We had long wanted to get closer to the UAE government on military matters. They had tended to be very cautious, holding us at arm's length. I was on the secure phone with our very able chargï¿½ d'affaires out there, Ron Neumann, who is now our ambassador to Algeria. Ron was communicating both with me and with the Central Command. The Central Command was also interested in doing this. The initial decision making and arrangements for this operation took place over a weekend, a very long weekend for me, when I seldom left the State Department. I was dealing directly with Under Secretary Kimmitt, mostly by phone. At least once, I think, we talked face to face when he came in to the Department. I can't be certain whether he came to the building that weekend or not, but we talked by telephone on a fair number of occasions, sometimes at my initiative and sometimes at his. I dealt with a few other people at the State Department, the Department of Defense and other agencies.

Initially, I recall, Kimmitt seemed to think a U.S. joint exercise with the UAE made sense. Then he came back to me at one point and said, "Don't you think we ought to check with the Saudis first, because the Saudis have airborne tankers. Wouldn't it be better to let the Arabs work together with Arabs?" I allowed as how I didn't like that very much because I thought one of our objectives was for the UAE and U.S. military forces to work more closely. When he pressed the point, I said I guessed it wouldn't hurt to ask the Saudis. What I suspect happened was that NSC Advisor Brent Scowcroft suggested they go to the Saudis, and that either Scowcroft or Kimmitt then called Ambassador Bandar or queried our ambassador in Riyadh. Eventually, the word came back that the Saudis didn't want to do this. My guess is that Bandar initially may have thought it was a good idea, but his government didn't want to go along. So we lost a fair amount of time while we were going to the Saudis. But eventually we agreed to the UAE proposal. It took us several days to put it into effect. I was told that we had never used U.S. tankers to refuel French fighter aircraft. That surprised me, but apparently there was a difficult technical problem.

Q: To fit a nozzle into the fuel line.

MACK: Frankly, I think also our military people were very worried that the UAE pilots would not be very adept at this, and there might be a disaster in the process. There were a lot of technical complications. I'm pretty sure about the politics of it. Subsequently, there have been former Department of Defense officials who have said that the State Department opposed the proposal. That's not true, although it's quite possible that Bob Kimmitt fronted for the NSC Staff at some point over the weekend. The people I was working with at the State Department were positive. Someone at the NSC wanted to go slow. They certainly wanted to check out the Saudi angle. If State agreed to hold it up for a while, it was only to check out the Saudi possibility.

The refueling operations eventually took place. We ended up calling it a joint exercise. It was the only way we could seem to justify it. The lawyers were afraid that it might be construed as something that would come under the war powers act, since we were providing the refueling capability for a combat air patrol. The words combat air patrol made it sound like hostilities might be involved.

Q: Well, they were right.

MACK: Yes, and neither Washington nor Baghdad wanted to acknowledge the potential for U.S. - Iraqi hostilities. With a declaration of potential hostilities, the war powers act would have required the Bush Administration to inform Congress. Since we didn't want to do that, we called it a joint exercise. The UAE even wanted to keep the operation confidential, which only showed their naivetï¿½ about dealing with the U.S. Word got out very fast about what was taking place. In fact, I think that was desirable. Ambassador Glaspie reported that it was the one thing that happened during this period that got the attention of the Iraqis and made them think twice about the response they might face. But, it was a long way away from Iraq, and it was a relatively small operation. The joint operation with the UAE was not enough to persuade Saddam Hussein that we weren't simply engaging in diplomatic bluffing.

If we had deployed a squadron of F-16s into Kuwait, or taken similar actions in Saudi Arabia, the Iraqis would have had more reason to believe that we were serious. The absence of U.S. credibility in the region was a big part of the problem. People have focused too much on what we said to the Iraqis. I will stand by what I said to Ambassador Mashat and the instructions that I prepared as a result of our meeting on July 18. For diplomats, it was a very tough demarche. But the point is, they were just words. Saddam Hussein believed he had many reasons to believe Washington was not really serious. There was the Vietnam syndrome, divided leadership in Washington, Bush's wimp reputation, the Soviet angle, the oil angle.

Q: And the lack of Arab support.

MACK: Yes, the lack of Arab support, they had all these reasons that made them think it was basically just a lot of hot air, and David Mack and April Glaspie were going yak-yak. As the Iraqi invasion drew closer, April had her meeting.

Q: This was the meeting with Saddam Hussein, which was a surprise meeting?

MACK: A surprise meeting. She was told to come over to the foreign ministry, and when she got to the foreign ministry they said, "I'll take you to the palace." So to the very last minute she didn't know exactly what was going on. Except perhaps for presenting credentials after arriving in Baghdad, she had never met one-on-one with Saddam Hussein. She was always accompanying another U.S. government official who was visiting Baghdad. So she did not have an established relationship as a principal U.S. interlocutor with Saddam Hussein.

April is a very professional officer, and I would rely upon she said about the conversation as being accurate. However, even her reporting cable on the meeting did not indicate as fully as it might have the degree to which she presented the U.S. position. It was mostly a relating of what she heard from the Iraqi side. In fairness, that's what people in Washington were interested in. We weren't interested in what Glaspie had to say. We were interested in indications of Iraq's intentions. She was trying to serve the needs of Washington by making a very full report of what Saddam Hussein had to say.

Ambassador Glaspie clearly misjudged Saddam Hussein's intentions. Of course, so did everybody else, including the Russians, the Israelis, President Mubarak, King Hussein, King Fahd, and, most tragically, the Kuwaitis themselves. The Kuwaitis were in the process of lowering their alert level at about the same time. There were very complicated negotiations taking place or being arranged by the other Arabs, particularly the Saudis. As Glaspie met with Saddam Hussein, a meeting had just taken place between the Kuwaiti Crown Prince and the Iraqi vice chairman of their Revolutionary Command Council, one of the persons who was closest to Saddam Hussein. That meeting had broken up, but the reason was uncertain, and it was unclear to us at the time whether the Kuwait-Iraq talks were still going on or had been just briefly interrupted.

During the build-up to the crisis, Ambassador Glaspie had asked me in a secure phone conversation, "Was anything being done militarily?" She was referring to any U.S. military deployments that might to counter the possibility that the Iraqis might do something on their border with Kuwait. I had to tell her that I did not see particular evidence of that. At the time, I hoped there might be contingency actions I was unaware of. I learned later that in fact there were no contingency military measures under way. , but they might have. In retrospect, I know that the State Department and NSC proposed, or at least asked the Pentagon about the possibility of deploying an aircraft carrier to the Gulf. The Pentagon opposed the idea. Their reasons had a certain military logic. Supposedly, it was against naval doctrine to station an aircraft carrier in such a confined body of water, where it would be too vulnerable to land based air power. In fact, the U.S. had never at that point put an aircraft carrier in the Gulf. The President had the authority in August 1990 to order the Pentagon to do so, and he didn't. By January 1991, however, we had three carrier battle groups in the Gulf. You could say that naval doctrine changed during the intervening months

Q: And there was always Iran hovering over the horizon too.

MACK: Ambassador Glaspie may have not felt confident that Washington would back her up if she were using vigorous language in Baghdad. Much that has been written about her meeting with Saddam Hussein is 20-20 hindsight. It is a silly idea that Saddam Hussein was going to make a decision based upon what Ambassador Glaspie told him, rather than based upon what he was seeing with his own eyes, and through his diplomatic and intelligence sources from around the world, and particularly the other Arab states.

The Iraqis were far more likely to weigh heavily the actions of other Arab states. During late July, for example, certain senior Kuwaitis even asked Ambassador Howell, our ambassador in Kuwait, not to come to their offices. It would have been normal for him to go to the foreign ministry, but it would also have come to the attention of the Iraqis and the media. Instead, the Undersecretary of the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry discreetly visited Howell at the American Embassy for discussions about the crisis. Not only did the Kuwaitis not want to have any military exercise with U.S. forces, or any significant military activity of their own, they didn't even want to be seen to be in close diplomatic consultations. This was also true in Washington. I don't remember in this whole period having heard anything from the Kuwaiti ambassador in Washington other than a request for intelligence briefings. To the best of my knowledge, we did not get any requests for assistance from him or any suggestions about what should be done. If you were a U.S. ambassador in the field, whether you were in Kuwait or Saudi Arabia or Iraq, you had reason to feel that events were going to take their course without the U.S. taking a very staunch position. The only evidence to the contrary was the instruction that I had sent out to Baghdad and other key posts.

After Ambassador Glaspie's meeting and after her reporting message had been digested in Washington, a presidential letter was drafted, I believe by the National Security Council staff. It was sent to us for clearance and cleared elsewhere at a high level. Some people in the Department of Defense say that they didn't get a chance to fully express their views on it, but I have no doubt the Defense Secretary Cheney did. It was a presidential message from Bush to Saddam Hussein. As I recall, it was very much a on the one hand, on the other hand, kind of message. In a summary way and more general form, the presidential message reiterated the position that I had taken on the 18th of July. But it also said the U.S. wanted good relations with Iraq. It used words indicating that we looked forward to working with Iraq and expressed the wish to get this crisis past us, etc. I recall talking to an NSC staffer at the time, who told me the presidential message had been drafted in a way that would look right in the history books, whatever happened.

In Baghdad, Ambassador Glaspie did not present the presidential message directly to Saddam Hussein. She could not expect to get another meeting with him under these circumstances, and it was urgent. She provided the message directly to Under Secretary Nizar Hamdoun. He looked at it, said it was exactly what was needed and passed the message on to Saddam Hussein. Glaspie then called me on the secure phone. She reported how the message had been passed and that she was reassured by the foreign ministry reaction to it. She said that, provided the Kuwaitis were still ready to talk to the Iraqis, she did not think there was going to be a crisis. She thought the Iraqis and Kuwaitis were going to be able to talk their way beyond this problem. She said she would very much like to proceed on her long scheduled leave. Among other things, her elderly mother who was living with her was quite ill, needed to go back for medical treatment, and couldn't really travel alone.

I talked to John Kelly about Glaspie's request to travel. The humanitarian aspect of her request was not our main consideration, however. We accepted Glaspie's view, which was still shared by us, that war was unlikely. It was going to get a little messy, and probably the Kuwaitis would have to have to make concessions which, in the best of all possible worlds, we would rather they didn't make. The Kuwaitis hadn't asked us for help, and we didn't really owe much to them. We were being told by all the Arab leaders that the situation was going to be resolved. As a result, we told Glaspie to proceed on leave. When the crisis erupted shortly after her arrival in London, she felt very badly about not being on the scene. She called me from London and wanted to try to go back, but by then the invasion had begun.

Q: The invasion was when?

MACK: Iraqi forces crossed the border into Kuwait in the early morning hours of August 2nd, Kuwait time. It was still around eight o'clock in the evening, maybe nine o'clock, when the word got to me in the State Department. I was in the habit of going home rather late, so I was still in my office. I'd say it was between 8:30 and 9:00 pm, when I received a call saying there were embassy reports that the Iraqis had crossed...

Q: Before we get to that, had our intelligence agencies through normal aerial satellites, radio intercepts...you're talking about things that seemed like they were going to resolve.

MACK: It depends a little bit on whom you talk to in the intelligence community. People in the Defense Intelligence Agency say that they had sounded the alert days before. The Central Intelligence Agency, on the other hand, had the responsibility for presenting all source national intelligence. Until maybe a day or two before the invasion, the CIA was saying they did not think that the Iraqis had any intention of crossing the border, despite major force movements toward the border region. In the last day or so, some of the people in the agency started to say they believed the Iraqis would go across. Even then, the belief still was that it would be a shallow incursion aimed at taking control of the oil field along the border. There's an oil field that lies on both sides of the Iraq-Kuwait border. The latest CIA coordinated intelligence view before the invasion was that the Iraqis aimed to gain full control of that oil field, and perhaps two islands that are between the two countries. The Iraqis had long felt these islands, tiny Warba and the larger Bubiyan, blocked their free access to the Gulf. This result would be one of those things that seemed awful, but what could be done about it? Could you get an international coalition and other measures, including Congressional support, to save Bubiyan Island for the Emir of Kuwait? Merely by asking the question, you knew the answer would be negative.

So, as late as August 1, the consensus view was it would be a shallow incursion. If there are some analysts in the intelligence establishment who feel they predicted the full occupation of Kuwait, it never got to my attention. And I don't think got to President Bush's attention either.

I want to back up a little bit. One of the other things that took place during this period that's had a lot of attention by instant historians and critics of the Bush Administration was the testimony that Assistant Secretary John Kelly gave before the Subcommittee for the Middle East of the House International Relations Committee, chaired by Lee Hamilton, one of the most distinguished experts on foreign affairs in the Congress. In the course of this, Chairman Hamilton had hammered Kelly on the issue of whether we had a formal commitment to the security of Kuwait. Kelly tried every way he could to avoid giving a direct answer, because Kelly understood the value of a certain amount of diplomatic ambiguity about this. But Hamilton was absolutely relentless.

Q: This was done when? Was this before or after the invasion?

MACK: This Congressional hearing was before the invasion. It's on the eve of the invasion, possibly the 31st of July. Hamilton is just hammering away at Kelly, pressing him into a corner. And finally Kelly said, "No, we do not have a formal security commitment." Some people have said this gave a green light to the Iraqis, like Dean Acheson's drawing the line that didn't include Korea. The whole question is, why did Hamilton press so hard on this point? I've talked to Hamilton's chief staffer about it. The staffer admits that it was not helpful, but Hamilton really wanted to know. I think the answer is that Hamilton believed that there really was a secret security commitment to Kuwait. He was very suspicious. If you look at Hamilton's approach to many issues, you will find he's very suspicious that the executive makes commitments to use military force without getting Congressional authority to do so. It's a constitutional issue with Hamilton. I think he suspected we had such a secret arrangement with the Kuwaitis, and he wanted to ferret that out. So, for an understandable reason, he contributed to the problem of our lack of credibility with Saddam Hussein. Based on what we know now, however, it is clear that the Kelly testimony about a security commitment to Kuwait was not a major factor in Iraqi thinking. Like Saddam Hussein's meeting with April Glaspie, it was small potatoes compared to what we were doing and, more importantly, not doing on the ground.

Q: In Saddam's mental process we probably weren't much of a factor.

MACK: What U.S. diplomats said was not much of a factor. Moreover, I doubt very much whether a more strongly worded letter from George Bush would have been a significant factor. The Iraqis could see that we didn't have the military assets in the theater to deliver a prompt and effective response. There were some theoretical U.S. capabilities. We could hit Iraq using strategic missiles or B-52 bombers. That would be at a whole new level of seriousness for what was not a direct threat to the United States. Moreover, it would be an ineffective way of stopping tanks coming across a border. It's not the means of defense that you would choose to defend Kuwait against such a threat. In sum, other than going to a strategic level of military response for a conventional regional problem, it was hard to see what we could do under the circumstances.

In fact, there was a planned exercise of B-52 bombers coming from somewhere in the Far East, Okinawa perhaps, flying to Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, and then coming up through the Red Sea and Suez Canal to land in Egypt. When I found out about this, I thought it was a great idea and might have a deterrent effect on the Iraqis. But higher authorities decided it was not a good idea to proceed with the exercise. I'm not sure the Iraqis would have known about it, but we could have made sure they found out. My first reaction was that it would be like our airborne refueling operation with the UAE air force. It would have been another way to make Baghdad hesitate about crossing the Kuwaiti border. Would the Egyptians, when they thought about the implications, have agreed for the flights to go ahead? In the end, if the Iraqi tanks invaded anyway, B-52 bombing sorties would have been a poor way to deal with a border violation. I thought it was a useful coincidence, but other people were nervous about the coincidence. I've mentioned that the Pentagon did not want to deploy an aircraft carrier battle group into the area, and this may have involved similar issues beyond my understanding of appropriate military measures.

I think that Saddam Hussein made a lot of miscalculations: the post-Vietnam U.S. willingness to use military force, the personality of George Bush, his likely support from the Congress, Arab reactions, Soviet reactions in the new post-cold war era, the international leverage Iraq would have with the combined oil resources of both countries. Some people have argued, from basically the same evidence, that his calculations were both logical and understandable. Whatever the case, he was wrong on all of those points.

Q: All during this, in your position, Iran was part of your responsibility. Were there any emanations from Iran that you know of about what the Iraqis were doing, or was Iran a spent force.

MACK: We considered Iran a spent force militarily, but we were conscious of the Iranian factor as a political reality. As soon as we made our first military responses to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, we started sending messages to the Iranians through our formal Swiss diplomatic channel. Sometimes several times a week, we let them know in general what we were doing and why we were doing it, particularly that our actions were not aimed at Iran. This was important, since there were some accidental U.S. military violations of Iranian air space. I think the record shows that the Iranians behaved appropriately throughout the course of the Gulf War of 1990-1991. They observed the UN sanctions and maintained military neutrality. There are some questions as to what Iran has done since the war. On the one hand, we're pleased that they haven't returned the Iraqi aircraft that the Iraqis foolishly safe havened in Iran. On the other hand, we know that they've engaged in facilitating illegal oil shipments out of Iraq and across the Iranian border. The Iranians have documented such shipments as Iranian production.

After I set up the Iraq-Kuwait task force during the night of August 1-2, we had a long and terribly confused night. To be honest, it's a big blur in my memory. Calls were coming in from our ambassadors in the field, as they asked what to do about a wide range of problems. We kept an open phone with our embassy in Baghdad, now led by Chargï¿½ d'Affaires Joe Wilson. We were on a secure phone to Ambassador Howell in Kuwait. In fact, he may have still had telecommunication capability at that point. Iraqi forces quickly occupied Kuwait City and the northern part of the country. The U.S. Embassy had staff were having serious problems of protecting American citizens and trying to deal with various elements of the situation. We feared that the embassy itself might be invaded by units of the Iraqi armed forces. I was very preoccupied with a host of practical problems, as well as just trying to get other officials in to their offices to deal with the different aspects of the crisis.

I do recall, however, a couple of particular events in the course of that long night of August 1-2 and the immediate aftermath of the Iraqi invasion. We called Ambassador Mashat into the State Department, where Assistant Secretary John Kelly and I met him and sought an explanation of what had happened. On this occasion, Kelly carefully kept his temper, but barely. We were all under a lot of stress, and Kelly had a volcanic temper which he struggled to control. On this occasion he succeeded, but he was very, very stiff with the Iraqi Ambassador, correctly so. Right from the beginning, Mashat took great pains to assure us that he personally had no knowledge of the Iraqi plan to invade. I believe he was honest about that. I don't think Saddam Hussein would have trusted him. Secondly, Mashat said he had no instructions from Baghdad, but he was certain the problem between Iraq and Kuwait could be worked out. He was at pains to say that U.S. citizens would be protected in both Kuwait and Iraq; we had nothing to be concerned about there. We asked him to get in touch with his government for more assurances.

The other episode prominent in my memory during the first night after the invasion was that Undersecretary Bob Kimmitt called me. Kimmitt had been meeting with the NSC Deputies Committee to deal with the crisis. One of the urgent actions they had agreed upon was for the U.S. Government to seize all Kuwaiti assets in the U.S. and various other countries worldwide on behalf of the Government of Kuwait. This was to prevent the Iraqis from gaining control of Kuwaiti assets themselves, in the guise of whatever puppet government the Iraqis were setting up in Kuwait. Kimmitt, as the former Under Secretary of the Treasury and now Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs was the ideal official to arrange the matter. Kimmitt told me that we needed to get Ambassador Saud Nasser Al Sabah, the Kuwaiti ambassador, to give us a formal document saying that we can seize the assets, as a way of taking custody of the assets for Kuwait.

Kimmitt explained that he did not want to call Saud Nasser himself, because he didn't want to get in a discussion with the ambassador about military steps we might be prepared to take. Apparently, Kimmitt had gotten a request from the Kuwaiti Government at some point for a U.S. military response to the Iraqi invasion. The Kuwaiti Ambassador was waiting for a response, and Kimmitt did not have an answer for him. At this early point, we didn't know what we could do about the Iraqi invasion. One critical factor was that we would need to deploy military assets through Saudi Arabia, and we didn't know what the Saudis would let us do, using their airspace and territory. The Kuwaitis had waited too long for us to deploy forces all the way into what was now Iraqi occupied Kuwait. Since Kimmitt didn't want to talk to him directly, would I do it? I talked to the Kuwaiti ambassador and explained what we needed to do, not making an issue of the multi-billions involved in our request. Saud Nasser readily agreed, saying yes, he could get full authority from the Emir of Kuwait, who had escaped from his country by that point. I arranged for Saud Nasser to have meetings with key officials at the Treasury Department, in particular Richard Newcomb, Director of the Office of Foreign Assets Control, to put all of this into effect. The U.S. and other governments sequestered Kuwaiti assets around the world very rapidly in the course of that first night.

Q: How about the UK?

MACK: The UK and other friendly governments went along. Following Saud Nasser's action at our request, there was a lot of coordination with the UK and some other key governments and financial institutions. We were also in the process of issuing an executive order under the U.S. law for economic emergencies to seize Iraqi assets. There were substantial Iraqi assets both in the U.S. and in London.

Meanwhile, of course, I was involved in discussions as to what the military response would be. On an open line, I called Ambassador Chas Freeman, our ambassador to Saudi Arabia, who was on vacation in Maine. I told him that I thought he should come to Washington immediately. Initially, he did not want to do this, but I explained that he really should be in Washington because many things were going on that he needed to have a say in.

Q: You weren't telling him what happened at that point.

MACK: As I was in the process of calling Ambassador Freeman, many of the facts of the invasion were being broadcast on the news. I simply said that we had major problems at this point, and we needed him in Washington. Chas cut short his vacation and came down to Washington. When he arrived, Chas and I met alone with John Kelly in the latter's office. John began by saying, "We've got the news that Secretary of Defense Cheney is going to go out to Saudi Arabia. And Chas, we think you should go along." Chas remonstrated a bit, saying not that he wouldn't go with Cheney, he would do whatever he's told, but this is no way to approach the Saudis, etc. I said, "Chas, do you realize that if the Saudis don't agree to invite us in, we will have to simply deploy our forces unilaterally into the Eastern Province in order to protect U.S. citizens?" I remember Chas straightened back in his chair and said, "Yes, these are vital interests, and we can't be dependent upon the Saudi government as to what we do in this case. It would be much better to do it with them." I said, "You're absolutely right Chas, it would be much better if we could do it with them." As far as I'm concerned, Chas became one of the heroes of the Gulf War in the way he managed or helped manage the Saudi relationship, which was absolutely critical to the U.S. response. He worked very closely with the U.S and Saudi military people in Saudi Arabia, as well as the civilian Saudi leaders in making it all happen. Chas lost his vacation, along with a lot of other ambassadors who had to stay at their posts for a good long time, and we had great diplomatic assets in the field.

One thing making it easier for President Bush to build our response throughout the month of August was that Congress was not in session. If you remember, the President and a lot of other senior people, including the Secretary of State, rather ostentatiously took vacations.

Q: He was in Wyoming, wasn't he?

MACK: The President took a vacation in Maine, and many other key cabinet members went to their normal places of vacation. They were working on the crisis in their own different ways, and their key staffers were in Washington working furiously. Part of the reason for these publicly known vacations was not to show a sense of panic. Another factor was because we did not want senior U.S. government officials making public comments about our strategy for dealing with the Iraqi invasion. We first had to gain Saudi agreement, and after Cheney passed the word back to Washington, we had to start the military deployments flowing. We had to get significant military assets on the ground before the President or other officials talked publicly about what we intended to do.

Q: Still going back to the night of August 2nd, was it fairly immediately accepted on your part and others, about the American military?

MACK: Those of us working on the issue in Washington agreed that we needed to deploy military forces rapidly into the region. Going back to the meeting we had in June at my level, there was unanimity around the principle that we must be prepared to use U.S. military force to maintain the stability of the Gulf and to protect the flow of the oil. We viewed, that this is an absolutely vital U.S. national interest. Readiness to use force is not the same as wanting to use it or actually going to war. I did have the hope, which I held on to for a couple of months, that the combination of economic sanctions and military deployments would be sufficient to get Iraq to leave Kuwait. We needed that military force to protect the rest of the region and give the sanctions time to work. Sanctions by themselves obviously couldn't do it. I did not foresee, certainly for a couple of months, that it was going to be necessary to have an invasion of Kuwait in order to do this.

Q: The immediate regard was to protect the Saudi oil wells, and our interest there.

MACK: The U.S. military deployments under Desert Shield were not for the protection of just the Saudi oil fields and installations, but the also those of the UAE and the other states in the area. We're talking about an area that has two-thirds of the world's oil reserves. Two hostile or unfriendly states, Iran and Iraq, control parts of it. Iraq now controls Kuwait and is in a position to intimidate the other regional oil producers. So there was no doubt we had to be prepared to use military force. I wasn't convinced it would be necessary in the end to use it, but we had to deploy so we'd be ready.

All through the months of August and September, those of us who were informed about the military balance realized that we were very vulnerable on the ground. At least until the end of September, we were not ready to deal fully with a further Iraqi military move. So we were being rather careful to moderate our rhetoric, and we focused our public language and even what we said to most governments in terms of Desert Shield, defending Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Arabian Peninsula. We were implementing the UN sanctions and insisting that Iraq had to leave Kuwait, but we avoided indications that we were going to go to war to force that to happen.

As I said earlier, it would have been harder if Congress had been in session. Most members of Congress would have been like Congressman Hamilton in the hearing on the eve of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, pressing for more precise information regarding our intentions. A few Congressmen were in town during the recess. One of the most powerful was David Obey, a Congressman from Wisconsin and Chairman of the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee. He was a key person, both from the point of view of the State Department budget and foreign aid. Obey was demanding to be briefed, and none of the more senior State Department officials wanted to brief him. Finally, the Assistant Secretary for Congressional Affairs said, "Find David Mack. Let David Mack go down and brief him." So, the Department sent me down to brief Obey. Gardner Peckham, a Deputy Assistant Secretary for H, the Bureau of Congressional Affairs, accompanied me. Gardner, who is now the international affairs staffer for House Speaker Newt Gingrich, was a political appointee. He was nervous, as perhaps I should have been. Gardner told me on the way to the Hill that Congressman Obey had a terrible temper. "He's likely to eat you alive," said Gardner. Anyway, I gave the best briefing I could, honestly saying that I did not know details about military deployments, while giving him an idea of our overall strategy to deal with the effects of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and to reverse it - U.N. sanctions, political measures, coalition development, preparing for future contingencies. These were matters on which I was working and could talk about, at least in general terms. I tried to satisfy Obey while staying within the parameters of what I thought reasonable and safe. Nobody had told me what to say, so I felt the State Department trusted me to use my best judgment. Clearly, it was the military details that Obey wanted to hear, and he finally said he had heard enough from me. Afterwards, Peckham told me "Obey was really mad; kicked us out of the office." Others were relieved that Obey stopped asking for a briefing. The Administration was happy it didn't have much need to deal with Congress during the month of August. A month of relative domestic political quiet helped a lot.

Meanwhile, it was not quiet internationally. There were a lot of things that went on during that month, of course. August was one of the busiest months of my career. I had little sleep, often forgot to take meals and lost enough weight so that my wife was seriously concerned. We were working with allies, and one of the things I was doing on a daily basis was working on building coalitions for both economic sanctions and possible military action. Some of this is described in my November 1994 paper you have included with this interview.

One thing I don't describe in the paper is how we dealt with the question of global oil supplies. Iraqi and Kuwaiti oil was now off the market, except for some illegal smuggling from Iraq. That was roughly five and a half million barrels from those two countries before the occupation of Kuwait and sanctions against exports from both countries. Crude oil prices had spiked up dramatically. One of the things we wanted to do as a matter of policy was to get other producers to increase oil production to take up the slack. It had been a principle of U.S. government policy that we not interfere with oil markets. As a corollary, the U.S. government had avoided any appearance of having a discussion about pricing and production policies with the Arab States of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the GCC. In fact, we needed to do so. I assume we talked to Venezuela. I know we talked bilaterally to countries like the UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, countries with spare production capability. At one point, the Department sent me up to New York to talk off the record to a U.S. oil industry group to assess their concerns.

A discussion with Saudi Arabia was particularly critical. I was sent out to Dulles Airport to welcome Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al Faisal, who was making an airport stop before proceeding to Kennebunkport in Maine to meet with the President. Prince Bandar, the Saudi Ambassador, was at the VIP lounge of the airport, ready to join Prince Saud for the trip to Maine and the meeting with President Bush. Bandar asked if there was anything in particular that I needed to raise with the Foreign Minister before his meeting with the President. I said that we really needed to get more oil moving onto the market. The plane from Saudi Arabia was delayed, so I ended up having a good discussion with Bandar about a matter that I believed the President would raise but might not be on the Foreign Minister's agenda. It was well I was able to talk extensively with Bandar about oil and other issues, because I had time for little more than a greeting for the Foreign Minister, before we sent him on his way to Maine. Bandar said Saudi Arabia was working on the oil production and marketing problem, he promised they would take care of it, and soon after they did. Saudi Arabia made major increases in oil production, which at the increased price of oil was not a bad thing for Saudi to do for its own interest. It helped Saudi Arabia finance the war, as well as easing problems in the market.

Until the end of September, I was not convinced we could meet the potential Iraqi military challenge in an effective way. I knew we could prevail, but it could be at a huge cost for our forces, as well as for the population and economy of the Gulf. We thought we might be unable to reverse the potential Iraqi advances before they had gone all the way up to Abu Dhabi. In theory, they could drive their tanks to the eastern province in Saudi Arabia relatively quickly. This was the area with the richest oil fields in the world and critical export facilities. There was not much of a military capability in the area, and some experts argued the smart military strategy would be to harass, withdraw, gain time, and let Iraqis get over extended. Then we could try to defeat the Iraqis by destroying their lines of communication and supply, including those on their own soil. We could use B-52 bombers and other strategic capabilities against Baghdad and try to change Saddam's mind in that way. Such contingency planning was not very reassuring. Measures like strategic bombing would not help much on the ground. In the meantime, there would have been a lot of U.S. citizens and other civilians who would have been rolled up in the process. Moreover, the Iraqi forces might use a scorched earth strategy against the oil installations in the area temporarily under their control. It was a very dicey situation for a couple of months.

By the end of September I felt we could repulse any Iraqi effort to expand out of Kuwait. By the way, I was then and still am convinced that Saddam Hussein would have eventually moved against Saudi Arabia if we hadn't interviewed. When he would have done it is hard to say. Many Iraqis say they never had any intentions of going into Saudi Arabia, but after the invasion of Kuwait it was harder to accept such claims. What we know is that within the first few days of the invasion of Kuwait, the Iraqis had three armored divisions down by the Saudi border. To me, that was eloquent evidence.

Q: What about during this particular period, the American civilians who were caught up in this?

MACK: This was a great preoccupation for me and a lot of people in the State Department, and I think also for the President and our military leaders. On the one hand, we were determined that our civilians would not become hostages or be used as political hostages by the Iraqis. We were determined not to change our policies based on the fact that the Iraqis could harm, even kill, our civilians. This became a particular problem after the Iraqis started arresting civilians of the U.S. and some other coalition countries in Kuwait. The Iraqis were transporting some of the civilians to Iraq where they were holding them as human shields at installations they thought might be attacked. We were trying hard not to let this affect our decision making.We also avoided elevating the safety of U.S. government officials in both Kuwait and Iraq over that of other U.S. citizens. This quickly became a major issue in Kuwait. A large number of U.S. citizens in Kuwait were dual nationals, Palestinians or Kuwaitis who happened to have a claim on American citizenship through their mother. Moreover, very often we'd have one U.S. citizen child that was born in the United States to Kuwaiti parents or to Palestinian parents resident in Kuwait at the time of the invasion. Despite the many strange situations, we told the Iraqis that we supported the rights of all private Americans who wanted to leave Kuwait to do so, and we were urged all of them to leave. Very early after the occupation began, the Iraqis told us we must close the U.S. Embassy, and they said they would facilitate the safe conduct out of Kuwait of our official personnel. We replied we would not consider this until all American citizens who wanted to leave Kuwait had been able to do so.

After the Iraqis ordered all embassies in Kuwait to be closed, we made the decision that we simply were not going to do that. They would have to force us out. We would not leave until all private U.S. citizens had been able to leave. One of Ambassador Nat Howell's strengths was his stubbornness, even though Nat's health was not good. Other foreign diplomats and their governments were not so stubborn, and foreign embassies started closing. There was a lot of pressure on our embassy staff, especially as the Iraqis put it under siege, tightly controlling the entry and exit of both people and goods. After a while, they stopped allowing any food or water to be brought into the embassy compound, which contained offices and residences. The U.S. Embassy in Kuwait and the State Department exaggerated to the Iraqis and the public the capabilities of our embassy to hold out during this siege. For example, we put out the story that we had been able to dig a well, from which we were replenishing a reservoir of water in the swimming pool. Nat Howell did have the idea of reviving an old well and planting a small garden, as a bit of a morale builder. Actually, there were two water mains into the embassy compound in Kuwait. The Iraqis had cut one of them but had failed to cut the other. The second water main was an extension of the water main that supplied the adjacent hotel, which the Iraqis were using to billet their officers. We said that our people are getting by on very tight rationing of water, with just enough from the well to sustain life.

The private U.S. community in Iraq was not such a great problem. For one thing, it was much smaller. Most Iraqi-Americans never wanted to leave the country, unlike dual nationals in Kuwait. Moreover, in Iraq the Iraqi government wanted our embassy to stay, at least initially.

The decisive key to our management of the hostage situation, however, was we made it an international issue. Foreign embassies in Washington were pressing hard for briefings on events in Iraq and Kuwait and U.S. policy toward the crisis, and that became one of my principal functions. Except for a few key allies, we simply did not have the diplomatic manpower to conduct briefings on an individual basis. Instead, we made a positive virtue of group briefings, based on geographic factors and common interests. One of the first things I did early in August was to bring together representatives of all of the embassies in Washington who had significant numbers of their citizens in either Iraq or Kuwait. We promised to meet regularly, brief them on the situation, brief them on things that were being done, especially to aid members of foreign communities trying to leave Kuwait or Iraq, and listen to their own views. We also asked the diplomatic representatives to urge their governments to keep their embassies open in Iraq and Kuwait, if possible, and try to make the issue of foreign nationals an international problem for Baghdad, until it was resolved.

International cooperation regarding Iraq and Kuwait was taking place shortly after the end of the Cold War. One of the first decisions I made, for example, was to include the Soviet embassy in the group that had traditionally been composed of diplomats from NATO, the European Community and a few key allies from the Far East, like Japan and Australia. The Bureau of European Affairs told me this was an innovation, but seemed to welcome it at that particular juncture in the growing dï¿½tente between the Soviet Union and the U.S. I was able to defend the decision based on who had large numbers of citizens in Iraq and Kuwait. A less open motive was that I wanted the Soviets to be involved, as a government that could have useful influence on the crisis.

In fact, I agreed to meet individually and consult closely with the Soviet counselor who was assigned to Middle East matters. The Soviets had a substantial embassy in Baghdad, and we thought that they would be one of the most effective channels for dealing with the humanitarian issues that came up. The primary objective was to deal with humanitarian problems in the foreign communities and to eventually get foreign nationals out of Kuwait, a war zone, and Iraq, a potential war zone. Also, in my own way, I was showing the practical benefits of the Baker-Shevardnadze and Bush-Gorbachev rapprochements that were taking place at the same time. You could see the fruits of the end of the Cold War, and how helpful it was in an international crisis not to have this constant Soviet-U.S. adversary relationship. I think the Iraqis must have been dumbfounded at the degree to which the Soviets were no longer willing to automatically support Iraq just because Iraq was opposing the U.S. To the contrary, with a few exceptions the Soviets were in general quite helpful.

Q: How about the Palestinians? I mean King Hussein, the Jordanians really because they would have had a lot of people.

MACK: King Hussein also came to Washington in the month of August. One of my objectives was to get both Jordan and Yemen to break with Iraq and join the coalition. We had succeeded, somewhat to our surprise, in getting the Syrians to join the coalition against Iraq. If we could get Jordan and Yemen on board, we would have a solid anti-Saddam Hussein front in the eastern Arab world. Early on, I chaired meetings in which we tried to come up with a package of things we could do for the Jordanians. Jordanian and U.S. relations had reached low ebb, partly because the peace process had stagnated for some years. Congress had retaliated against Jordan's position toward Israel, which it thought was insufficiently forthcoming, by cutting down on assistance programs. We tried to come up with an emergency assistance program for Jordan backed up with plans for joint exercises, etc., so they would not feel vulnerable to Iraqi's retaliation if they broke with Iraq and implemented sanctions. We were desperately trying to put this package together as King Hussein was arriving in Washington.

King Hussein and his official party stayed at the Four Seasons in Georgetown. I went there to talk to a former U.S. chief of station in Amman who has for years now been working for the Jordanians as an advisor, presumably on security matters. I wanted to figure out whether there wasn't some specific thing we could do for the Jordanians. My former diplomatic colleague was having none of it. He made it very clear that he thought we had made a major strategic blunder. In his view, it was absolutely outrageous that the U.S. government still thought that these six ruling families in the Gulf could continue to control all this wealth while the rest of the Arabs were in poverty. He said that the Iraqis were absolutely right to take over Kuwait, and that they were heroes for the rest of the Arab world. The U.S. would rue the day that we had done this, and it was quite clear that the other Arabs would not stand with us.

Q: This was the American?

MACK: This was the former American official. I realized at once that the one person I thought could help talk sense to the Jordanians by explaining the determination of the U.S. Government to see this occupation of Kuwait undone had probably been advising King Hussein that Saddam could get away with it. I am not suggesting that there had been a conspiracy between King Hussein and Saddam Hussein against Saudi Arabia, something that many Saudis believed. But I think King Hussein definitely made a mistake. In part, it was because he received bad advice about the U.S. response from a former U.S. official that he trusted.

Along with Jordan, the other Arab country in the immediate region that was outside the coalition was Yemen. In my opinion, the Yemenis had sided with Iraq in good part because they had a great sense of envy towards Saudi Arabia. There was a huge disparity of wealth between these two neighboring countries, and a large part of the Yemeni labor force worked in Saudi Arabia. The governments in Sana'a and Riyadh mistrusted one another. After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, tensions between Yemen and Saudi Arabia escalated quite rapidly. The Yemenis, as indicated by at least some of their public remarks, tended to be sympathetic to the Iraqis. Soon, the Saudis started expelling Yemen workers, and this caused grievances on the Yemenis side. Matters got worse and worse.

Yemen appeared to be moving away from Saudi Arabia and closer to Iraq, and I was determined to try to reverse this trend. One of the things I did was work very closely with Yemen's Ambassador to the U.S., Mohsin Alaini. Mohsin was a Yemeni elder statesman, who had been prime minister five times. He had also been a secret member of the Baath Party, something I knew but never mentioned to him. Mohsin and I maintained cordial personal relations, all the more important as relations between our two governments deteriorated. We both wanted to hold together a framework for cordial U.S.-Yemen relations.

In the spring of 1990, Yemen had just been reunited. Previously there had been the Peoples' Democratic Republic of Yemen, run by a Marxist government with which we had no diplomatic relations, and it was on our terrorism list. That government had its capital in Aden. It had merged with the government in Sana'a with which we had had fairly close relations, including military assistance programs. This newly reunited Yemen had a Security Council vote, which we figured was going to be very important as we moved into high gear at the U.N in August. Initially, Yemen had not voted with us on a couple of resolutions, but in other cases involving Iraq they were wobbling.

The U.S. government had not yet decided whether to treat the reunited Yemen as being on or off the terrorism list. Would we have the same kind of programs with the newly unified Yemen as we had with the old Sana'a government, including modest foreign assistance and possible eligibility for Ex-Im programs and overseas private investment insurance? In September, we decided to extend the treatment we had given to the Sana'a government to the whole unified Yemen. That did not suffice to bring Yemen into the coalition against Iraq, but it did maintain a fragile relationship between Washington and Sana'a. I thought that was better than having no relationship at that point, and letting Yemen come under greater Iraqi influence.

Coalition management, and particularly keeping Arabs and Muslims in the coalition supporting sanctions on Iraq, was an important part of my job. I worked very closely, for example, with the Voice of America in the foreign press center to try to get the message across in the Muslim world. I could see that we were losing the propaganda battle to the Iraqis in a couple of ways. Saddam Hussein was a very secular leader, but he was managing to pose as a champion of Islam. He was also posing as the champion of the Palestinians and gaining a lot of popularity among them. In fact, Yasser Arafat foolishly visited Baghdad to consult with Saddam Hussein. Of course, we had little leverage with the PLO. Any direct U.S. dialogue with the PLO was prohibited by U.S. law.

At least, we could try to impact the psychological battle in which Saddam Hussein was posing as a champion of Islam and painting the U.S. as the enemy of Islam. Making sure that U.S. official statements didn't include phrases like Muslim terrorists, for example, was essential. We worked to advance the notion that this was a coalition effort, not Saddam Hussein against George Bush. Iraqi statements implied that it was just Americans in Kuwait who were at issue. We tried to convey that it was civilians from all over the world, including Muslims and Arabs, who were being mistreated by the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. And I think we succeeded in making it an international cause. One successful event in the campaign was a joint press conference with the Qatari Ambassador. I talked him into a joint appearance with me at the foreign press center for South Asian journalists. We had been taking a beating in the South Asian press, in India and Pakistan, as well as Malaysia and other Muslim countries. It helped make the point that Qatar and other Muslim countries were part of our military coalition against Iraq. Coverage improved.

I continued to be the U.S. official who normally met with Iraqi Ambassador Mashat. We did so quite frequently, as I described in my 1994 memo, both to convey our general views about the occupation of Kuwait and to deal with practical issues of U.S. citizens in Kuwait and Iraq. On a couple of occasions, senior State Department officials would decide they wanted Mashat to meet with somebody else, so it would be clear that my views reflected Administration policy at the highest level and could not be disregarded as by the Iraqis as a working level routine. I would accompany Mashat on such occasions. One time, Under Secretary Larry Eagleburger met with Mashat to convey a video of George Bush's statement to the Iraqi people. I knew it would take place on camera for public effect, so I was not surprised when Eagleburger ended his presentation and dismissed us abruptly, but Mashat was upset that he had no opportunity to respond before the cameras. I said I would report his response.

I treated Mashat formally and with courtesy and tried not to temper in any way the substance of messages that I was giving him to pass to Baghdad. To insure clarity, we normally passed the same messages through our embassy in Baghdad, usually after a delay for transmittal. By using this parallel channel, we also insured that our embassy in Baghdad, and often other posts around the world, knew what the latest Washington line was. To make sure that Mashat was reporting accurately, I always made sure to give him an aide memoire on my talking points, and we knew that he would promptly fax them to Baghdad. We even enabled Mashat to get a telephone line into Baghdad when he was having difficulty getting open lines. Obviously, this helped us monitor his communications. We believed that Mashat wanted to stay in Washington. His young children were in school here, and he had grown up children from a previous marriage who lived in the United States. A man who enjoys the good life and culture would not want to go back to Baghdad. We hoped this would give us a little bit of an edge, and that Mashat would try at least to relieve some of the humanitarian situations, particularly the release and departure of American hostages. In fact, he was useful in that regard.

One meeting between Mashat and Assistant Secretary John Kelly went badly, although I don't think it had lasting negative effect. John and I were both worried about the fate of our citizens in Iraq and Kuwait, and we agreed completely on the substance of what we wanted the Iraqis to do. We also agreed that Mashat needed to meet occasionally with someone above my level, so I called him in for a meeting with John and me at 9:00 pm, not at all an unusual hour during the crisis of 1990-1991. John had always been very stiff with Ambassador Mashat, but this time he completely lost his temper, got red in the face, and started screaming at him about Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and subsequent events. Mashat got very flushed, said he was outraged at being personally insulted and stalked out of the office. Kelly pursued him through the outer office, where terrified secretaries had heard the commotion in Kelly's office and were cowling behind their desks. I took Mashat out, knowing that the news cameramen were waiting downstairs outside the diplomatic entrance. Mashat liked to talk to the television people, usually not a problem for us, but I didn't want him to create a television news story about Kelly. I walked him around the mostly empty corridors of the State Department until he calmed down. He finally said he would call Under Secretary Eagleburger's office and complain, which I said was his right. After I got back to my office, I alerted Eagleburger's office to expect a call from Mashat but not worry about the substance. Then I went into see John, who had called for me.

By this time, Kelly had cooled down. He apologized to me and said he felt terrible, particularly because of our people in Iraq. He confessed that it had been a career long problem for him to control his temper on the job. He had done something similar once before, after the Soviets shot down the South Korean airliner. John was in the European bureau at that time, and he lost his temper with a Soviet diplomat. The Soviets published something about it. So John was upset with himself and told me to write up the meeting exactly the way it happened, because it was important that the Administration and our Embassy in Baghdad be prepared for any fallout. I included the atmospherics of how I had taken Mashat out and led him by a circuitous route through the State Department corridors, finally escorting him quietly past the TV cameras. I ended by saying I had told the Iraqi Ambassador that he shouldn't take it personally, that it's well known that Assistant Secretary Kelly has a volcanic temper, it's just that he almost always uses it only on his subordinates. I took the draft in to John Kelly, who asked me to stay. When he got to my final remarks to Mashat, John roared with laughter, and he wanted to send the cable out that way. His senior deputy, Jock Covey, read it and persuaded John that we should re-write it so it wouldn't put the Assistant Secretary in quite such a bad light. Personally, I admired John's honesty. I thought John did a very human thing, because Mashat could be obnoxious, and the Iraqis were an obnoxious country to deal with. But, as a professional diplomat, John knew he had let his personality get in the way of the job. From then on, he decided to leave the Iraqi Ambassador to me.

Q: David, we'll pick this up the next time and a couple of things that I'd like to do. I'll look over the text you have and some of the things... I have just finished a set of interviews with Chas Freeman and a couple of things occur to me. He complained that he was heavily pressured by Washington to keep going to the Saudis for money, and nobody would believe that the Saudis really had money problems, and if you would address that from your perspective. The other one was that he felt that during the war that the staff and the Americans there were not given the same consideration. Everybody had been given a chance to get the hell out of the Middle East during the war except for strategic reasons you couldn't make the same offer to the people in Saudi Arabia and this was resented. And there was another thing about getting anti-gas equipment which he said had been caused by the human rights people not wanting to... I don't know. These are actually sort of small things but I'd like to get the Washington perspective. But we'll cover other things as the war progressed that aren't covered, okay?

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Today is the 4th of February 1997. David, should we talk about the Freeman complaint? Were you involved in the ability to get out of there, voluntary departure in Saudi Arabia, and the gas problem?

MACK: Yes, I was. Ambassador Chas Freeman's concerns were not always on the top of my agenda, and as a result I think my recollections are a little bit hazy on some of these points. The Administration faced a dilemma with regard to voluntary departure of key government personnel and, as importantly, non-government personnel.

Q: Oil workers, for example.

MACK: Oil workers and also the immense number of civilian contractors for the Saudi military. The Saudi military to a much greater extent than many military forces depends upon civilian contractors, including a lot of U.S. companies that are engaged in support of high tech military systems. If there had been a large scale departure by the various U.S. expatriates who were working in Saudi Arabia, there would have been a collapse both of oil production and of Saudi military capabilities. Moreover, it would have crippled the country's capacity for supporting the incoming U.S. forces. On the other hand, there was a feeling that it would be desirable to have an orderly drawdown of the large number of dependents who were there with U.S. official and non-official personnel. Fortunately, a lot of the working personnel were there on unaccompanied status, or their families had been away in the United States at the time of the invasion and simply never returned.

Q: It was high summer when it happened.

MACK: That's right. But the U.S., unlike some other countries, did not take immediate efforts to encourage its people to leave Saudi Arabia. This was resented by some of the American personnel in the area, including people at ARAMCO. Many working Americans would have liked to have the Embassy implement voluntary departure for non-essential official personnel and dependents, something the embassy would only do if it were instructed to do so by Washington. Such a voluntary official departure would have spurred like action by companies like ARAMCO, which tied their procedures to U.S. government actions. The U.S. companies would have felt compelled to give their people the same option, thereby sending them back to the United States at company expense and greatly reducing company effectiveness and the ability to recruit replacement personnel. The various U.S. companies involved, out of a combination of corporate responsibility and the profit motive, were quietly pleased by the U.S. government's position. That may be a little unfair. There were obviously a lot of mixed feelings on the part of the companies, just as there were on the part of U.S. government officials. Both the Administration and private employers did not want to leave our personnel in harm's way, but they still felt that they had absolutely essential jobs to do. It was a difficult judgment call about future dangers which were uncertain. There were some very emotional briefings in the State Department for both company officials and employee representatives.

Questions involving chemical and biological weapons and the precautions to be taken for personnel were both emotional and complicated. The level of the science regarding the effectiveness of these various measures was really questionable. Moreover, there was a natural resentment on the part of U.S. diplomatic personnel in Riyadh, as well as private Americans, that at least some of the U.S. military forces were being provided with extensive safeguards in terms of protection from chemical agents and vaccinations for biological agents, but this was not being offered to U.S. civilians. As I recall, Chas Freeman, the U.S. Ambassador in Saudi Arabia, took the respectable view that we shouldn't provide American diplomatic personnel with protection that was not available to the wider U.S. population in Saudi Arabia. But at the same time, as I recall, Chas expressed repeatedly considerable and very intense resentment at the way the military was handling this matter for its personnel.

These were hard times, and I think there's no doubt that Freeman had some very sound points. They were reiterated extensively by his messages to the Department. Chas had a drafting habit that was very annoying to some people in the bureaucracy. He would list all the previous messages as references. It was a not very subtle way of telling people over and over again, "I told you so." At the same time, there was great respect for Chas's courage. He was trying to do a very difficult job to the very best of his abilities, including his great intelligence and superb drafting skills. At the same time, some high level State Department officials, especially on the management side, resented what they felt was his merciless nagging about things that we couldn't do for practical reasons.

Q: This is always a bureaucratic battle that probably goes on at any time, but at least it worked, not worked, but I mean you all survived this.

MACK: That's right. In the end, American civilians and diplomats, as well as Saudi civilians, came through the crisis without serious harm. There were a few casualties from the Iraqi scuds. The most tragic incident, as far as we were concerned, was the SCUD missile that hit a large number of our military personnel in Dhahran. There was a very low probability of this happening, and it resulted in the largest losses suffered by the U.S. from any one incident during the war. Despite all the fears, Saddam Hussein never used any of the chemical weapons in his inventory. Recall that he had used chemical weapons in the Iraq-Iran war and against some Kurdish villages in that earlier war's aftermath. We now know he had prepared chemical warheads for use in the 1990-1991 war but simply never used them. Whether he had ever weaponized any biological agents, or whether they were in the testing and development stage, is still an open question for me.

Q: Were you all, particularly you, looking as our forces in place were getting ready to move from Desert Shield to Desert Storm when the attack took place, both the air attack and then the ground attack. Were you seeing this as probably something that was going to win our objectives to essentially kick the Iraqis out of Kuwait?

MACK: Frankly, I was astonished that Saddam Hussein had failed to make some kind of challenging diplomatic maneuver to divert us from attacking. Moreover, I was personally dismayed when he did not choose to start withdrawing from Kuwait. Going to war was not my idea of a successful outcome for the U.S. Like a lot of people, I thought that our losses in the war were likely to be much higher than they turned out to be.

My nightmare scenario as a diplomat was that Saddam would withdraw part way from Kuwait and then defy us to proceed with military efforts to reject him from the rest of the country. It seemed to me very unlikely that we would be able to maintain coalition support for efforts to reject him from the rest of Kuwait if he was just in the northern parts of the country around the borders where the big oil fields were and had kept the two Gulf islands. Just like at the beginning of the invasion in August 1990, I was worried about the incongruous idea that George Bush would have to call upon the world to use military force to return Bubiyan Island to the Emir of Kuwait. I knew how hard that would be. On the other hand, I did feel that under those circumstances it would be possible for us to continue military deterrence and economic sanctions more or less indefinitely. We could contain the Iraqi threat over a long period of time, the way we did in Europe effectively with the Soviet Union.

Desert Storm began with an aerial bombardment on January 16. That phase of Desert Storm lasted for over a month until February 23, when coalition forces crossed into Kuwait and Iraq. Once the air war began following the Iraqi failure to yield in Secretary Baker's meeting with Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz at Geneva, it was clear to me that we would settle for nothing less than total withdrawal. Like a lot of people, I imagined that U.S. air power would have a greater impact than it did on decision-making in Baghdad. I assumed that there would need to be some kind of a ground campaign to force a total Iraqi withdrawal, but I had expected the Iraqi side would have moved quickly to reposition many of their forces out of Kuwait once they felt the toll on their forces of the air campaign.

In the end that didn't happen. Once the ground campaign started, it all took place faster than I had imagined.

Q: One hundred hours.

MACK: Right. The ground war was over by February 28. Once again, I misjudged Saddam Hussein's reaction. In the past he had found it difficult to face up to the reality of a changed situation, so I assumed that Saddam would order his forces to fight to the end once the ground campaign started. My memory of how Iraqis fought in their war with Iran also misled me. The Iraqis had indicated confidence they would have an advantage once it became a grinding conflict, something they had done for eight years with the Iranians. Particularly when they were fighting on Iraqi soil, as opposed to fighting on Kuwaiti soil, I expected there would be more determined resistance. The speed of the Iraqi military collapse surprised me. We believed that the morale of a lot of the Iraqi units was very bad, and some units did not fight well. Others, particularly the republican guard divisions, were pretty determined.

Q: Even while the air campaign was going on, you were in NEA, were you getting any feed in from other areas of the Arab world that was part of the coalition? We were getting too tough on Iraq, or anything like that.

MACK: No. I don't recall that Arab concerns for excessive punishment of the Iraqi Army was so evident that it was a factor in our thinking. Perhaps there were such sentiments in the Arab world outside the Gulf area, but they don't register in my mind.

Q: What was the mood...during, and the war got going, the mood towards Jordan?

MACK: On the one hand, Washington felt sympathy for the Jordanians because of the burden they had borne in dealing with refugees of various nationalities that had come out of Iraq or across Iraq from Kuwait. Many of them had been exposed on the open desert for a long period of time and had become quite a burden on Jordan's support system. On the other hand, the Jordanians had failed to take a decisive position against the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. One can argue endlessly about this, but it seemed to me that the Jordanian government should have taken a stronger position despite Jordanian public attitudes and Jordan's trade ties with Iraq. My feeling and the feeling of senior Administration leaders was that the Jordanians had chosen to play a very bad hand badly. Until they in effect asked for some new cards and indicated their willingness to enforce sanctions on Iraq, there would not be adequate Congressional support for increased U.S. aid to Jordan.

Q: I was just wondering, was there a feeling of, okay, let's stick it to them, or just sort of live with it?

MACK: No. There was a lot of residual feeling of friendship towards the Jordanians. Jordan had been a very close friend of the United States. We'd gone through difficult times together. There was never the kind of bitterness toward the Jordanians on the part of people in the American government that you heard expressed by the Kuwaitis or the Saudis. We asked both governments to consider helping Jordan compensate for the economic benefits of cheap Iraqi oil and the Iraqi market for Jordanian exports. The Saudi and Kuwaiti governments rejected the idea.

Q: Obviously you're almost submerged in the immensity of what was going on, and we've talked about the initial peace plan but was there a point where we said, where are we going to go from here? I mean, during the 100 days(?), or had there been thoughts prior to that, and position papers?

MACK: We didn't do enough planning for the post-war situation in Iraq. That was partly because we made some very over optimistic assumptions. After the kind of military losses the Iraqis were suffering, we assumed the chances were great there would be a political reaction by senior Iraqi military officers. They would oust Saddam Hussein from power. Then, we'd be dealing with a different Iraqi leadership, probably be a military junta. We did not anticipate a democratic Iraqi leadership, but it would be an Iraq that would probably be acceptable to its Arab neighbors. Kuwait might be the exception. A post-Saddam Hussein Iraqi government was likely to have tolerable relations with the other Arabs. To my recollection, no one in the Administration or the Congress ever suggested that it would be desirable to have a U.S. or coalition occupation of Kuwait. That was viewed as something that would be a terrible burden on the international community. Occupying Iraq and sustaining an occupation regime would probably lead in time to great bloodshed.

Secondly, I don't recall any senior official ever suggesting it would be desirable to break up Iraq. Rather, the feeling was that an Iraq that was militarily capable of defending itself against Iran was probably a good thing. What we focused our attention on for the post-war was not the political reconstruction of Iraq. It was the reduction of Iraqi's armaments and the establishment of controls over Iraqi military capability in a post-war Middle East system.

The key U.N. umbrella resolution for post-war Iraq was UNSCR 687. It was a ceasefire resolution that offered Iraq an end to coalition military attacks. It also established economic sanctions, intended to be temporary and contingent on Iraq fulfilling various conditions. The major conditions governed the weapons that Iraq would be allowed to have in the post-war order. Resolution 687 placed great attention on the inspection, destruction and controls to be placed on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction - chemical, biological, nuclear and missile delivery systems. This was central to Resolution 687. It's not by any means the only thing in there. Resolution 687 also called for talks about the Iraqi-Kuwait border, the return of missing Kuwaitis or an accounting for their disappearance, and reparations for war damages incurred by Kuwait and foreign nationals that had been working in Kuwait and Iraq. But the central objective that received the most attention within the U.S. Administration and the one that raised the strongest views was to set up a framework that would require Iraq to be shorn of weapons of mass destruction and ground to ground missiles with a range of over 150 kilometers.

Many officials at State, Defense and other agencies were involved in drafting the key provisions of Resolution 687. Assistant Secretary John Bolton of the Bureau of International Organizations headed a large inter-agency drafting committee. I was the NEA representative. The other key bureau at State was Political-Military Affairs. We gave most of our attention to the provisions for making sure that Iraq would never be able to threaten its neighbors with weapons of mass destruction.

The background for this concern went back well before August of 1990. The Iraqis, like the Iranians, had used long-range Russian developed SCUD missiles in the so-called war of the cities during the Iraq-Iran War. The Iranians had both a much larger population and considerable geographic advantages. They shot many missiles into Baghdad, which was relatively close to the border. The Iraqis, because of the greater distance that was required, needed a much higher level of technology in order to put their missiles into downtown Tehran, but they eventually succeeded in doing so. This indicated a major advance in Iraqi offensive military technology. It was also during that war that the Iraqis used chemical warfare. They did so first against the Iranians and then, after the end of the Iraqi-Iran war, against their own Kurdish population in at least one village, Halabja, near the Iranian border. The Iraqi government accused the Kurds of that border area of wartime collaboration with the Iranians.

Q: After the war is over, and we have a cease-fire, Saddam Hussein is still in place. What was the thinking in NEA about Saddam Hussein? Was it thinking that he's a short-timer?

MACK: The thinking in the Administration, including NEA, was that Saddam Hussein's internal power would likely not last for long after he had led the country into such a terrible defeat. There was a lot of respect for the Iraqi military, and we obviously overestimated their ability to organize themselves to put their political master in his place. Moreover, we didn't anticipate the nature of the internal uprising that took place after the end of the war. Frankly, a good deal of nonsense has been written about this. Many people, especially in the Iraqi opposition, said they responded to the appeal of George Bush to rise up and that we had a responsibility for protecting them when they did so. In fact, there was no internal uprising until the end of the war, long after Bush had suggested the Iraqi people might take measures against Saddam Hussein. I believe that President Bush did so as early as October 1990, a time when we hoped to avoid the need for a major military operation to eject Iraqi forces from Kuwait.

By the last days of the war in 1991, many Iraqis assumed that the Iraqi military had suffered such a fearsome defeat that they were no longer willing or capable of enforcing the regime's will internally. That turned out to be incorrect. The U.S. government knew that the Iraqi army was able to maintain internal control. Our question was whether the Iraqi units would remain loyal to the leadership in Baghdad. Ties between the Iraqi army and the Arab majority population were close. I won't say that the Iraqi people as a whole were enthusiastic about the invasion of Kuwait, but many of them were. The fact is that neither the Shiite Iraqis in the south, some of whom made the initial uprising, nor the Kurds in the north had been actively dissenting to a significant degree before or even during the war. Most of the soldiers in the Iraqi army were Shiites, and we were not aware of significant internal dissidence at the popular level. The Iraqi government had organized many of the Kurds into various village militias that had effectively kept order and security in the north and enabled the Iraqi military to devote its attention to the southern and western battlegrounds. I don't know what the opposition Kurdish Peshmerga freedom fighters were doing in late 1990 and January 1991, but they were not creating much trouble for the regime inside Iraq. The fact that back in October 1990 George Bush had made a speech addressed to the Iraqi people suggesting that they might be better off with new leadership was not the spur to the uprisings of late February 1991. They weren't responding to Bush's speech. What they were responding to months later was the defeat of the Iraqi army and the feeling that now they would have a chance to exercise their own will.

Long time Iraq-watchers in the U.S. government started from the premise that what held the Iraqi regime together at the center was to some extent a fear of centrifugal forces that might tear the country apart if they didn't have a strong central government. This is a staple of Iraqi history that goes back to the ancient history of Mesopotamia. Certainly in early Islamic history we can observe that Iraq had a reputation of being fractious and that only a very strong central government in Baghdad could maintain unity. The Ottoman Empire had relied upon its alliance with the Sunni Arab tribes, and so did the British after World War I. In Iraq's independent history there was a tendency of the Sunni Arab core of the Iraqi regime rallying around one of their leaders if they felt threatened by insurrections from either Shiite Muslims in the south of the country or Kurds in the northeast of the country. That's highly oversimplified. Indeed, the majority of the population in Baghdad had become Shiite, and there were a lot of Kurds in Baghdad too. But there was a sense that what held together the support base for the Baath regime was fear of the alternative. There was a fear both of Iranian influence dominating a Shiite religious movement in the southern part of the country and a fear of Kurdish separatist ambitions.

Soon after the ground war ended, we began to get information about the Shiite insurrection in Basra and other southern cities. It seemed as if it was very spontaneous. At first we saw no evidence of Iranian involvement, for example. Most interesting to us were reports of Iraqi military units mutinying and joining the insurrection. That did not seem necessarily at odds with the idea of the Iraqi military turning against Saddam Hussein and marching north to Baghdad. What upset that calculation was the entry of Iranian influence, first on the part of some Iraqi ï¿½migrï¿½ groups which had received Iranian refuge and support, including being armed by the Iranians. Encouraged by signs of spontaneous Shiite dissidence, some of these Iraqi ï¿½migrï¿½ units crossed the border. Reportedly, they were followed by Iranian agents. There were also reports early in the uprising of retribution against the families of Baath party members in Basra, for example. These developments, in my view, caused the Iraqi military to rally around Saddam Hussein.

After the Shiite uprising appeared to be having some success, the Kurdish insurrection began. They appeared to think that the Iraqi military was no longer able to maintain internal order. Once again, that seemed to start with spontaneous rebellions. This time, they were led to a great degree by the same Kurdish village militias that had remained loyal to the government throughout the war and for that matter throughout the Iraqi-Iran war in the previous decade. The organized Kurdish political parties in exile despised these Kurdish village militias, called jash in Kurdish. It was the central government armed jash that actually seemed to spark off the Kurdish uprising. Soon after, well known leaders of the Kurdish political parties, like Massoud Barzani of the Kurdistan Democratic Party and Jalal Talabani of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, appeared on the scene. The feeling in the U.S. government was that they were struggling to get out in front of what had been a fairly spontaneous uprising that was not of their making.

Q: Did you have any suspicion or feel that maybe the CIA was involved in any of this?

MACK: If the CIA had a hand in instigating the Kurdish uprising, I think I would have known about that. I'm relatively confident there was nothing significant. After all, the history of the CIA's involvement with the Kurds was ultimately one of betrayal back at the time of the Shah. It never seemed likely to me that the Kurds would again trust the CIA.

Q: Were you getting any Kurdish exile groups here in the United States? Were they coming to you, and what were they asking us to do?

MACK: Iraqi opposition approaches to us before the war were relatively few. However, Kurdish and other Iraqi exile groups actively tried to contact us in the wake of the uprisings.

Q: Was this after the defeat?

MACK: After the defeat of the Iraqi armed forces. There had been a few contacts over the years, even before the invasion of Kuwait. The Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani, for example, had a discreet meeting in Washington with a U.S. State Department official as early as a year or a year and a half before the invasion. Nothing came of it. During the occupation of Kuwait, Iraqi ï¿½migrï¿½s were not in touch with me, but there could have been contacts elsewhere in the government at lower levels that I was unaware of.

After the end of Desert Storm there were frequent contacts with the State Department. The Kurds in particular made a claim for our protection. Their situation had quickly become desperate after the Iraqi military suppressed the uprisings in major Kurdish cities. Huge numbers of Kurds headed towards the Turkish and Iranian border to escape what they thought was coming retribution at the hands of the Iraqi army. There is no denying that there was good reason to fear the worst. There was a past history of Iraqi atrocities against the Kurds, and the Kurds themselves had been pretty bloody in the way they dealt with some Iraqis from the central government after the uprisings briefly took over in cities like Erbil. They had good reason to fear retribution.

There was a bewildering variety of Iraqi opposition groups, and it fell to me to be the senior U.S. government official with authority to deal with them. At one point, I saw a list of over 40 Iraqi opposition groups which the intelligence community deemed noteworthy. We decided that it was hopeless to try to work with all of them separately; even the principal groups would be ineffective unless they unified their efforts. Nearly all had an ethnic or sectarian coloration. We didn't think it would be sufficient for the Kurds alone to unify their efforts, and they could represent their constituents more effectively as part of a wider Iraqi organization. We wanted to see some kind of opposition unity across ethnic and sectarian divides. In this way, both the Kurdish and the Arab opposition groups would have a chance of making a favorable impact on international opinion regarding Iraq. Over time, they might even constitute an effective alternative political force to the government in Baghdad, but short of that they could press for humane treatment for all Iraqis. As for the Kurdish parties in particular, we felt that faced with the prospect of Kurdish separatism there would be a tendency of the Arab center to rally behind Saddam Hussein.

Q: Was Turkey a factor?

MACK: Turkey was a big factor. The Turkish government, of course, was strongly opposed to any kind of Kurdish separatism. Some in the U.S. government, myself included, wanted the Iraqi opposition to be taken seriously, but we felt being unified in some way was a pre-condition for effectiveness. Secondly, they had to foreswear breaking up the country. They had to favor the unity of Iraq, or they weren't going to be taken seriously in Washington. Moreover, there would be no chance of international support from their neighbors - the Turks, Saudis, Egyptians, Syrians, and others.

In my first meetings with opposition groups, I found they spent most of their time complaining about rival opposition organizations. They expressed satisfaction about meeting at the State Department with someone who was knowledgeable about their country, but some of them seemed to think I should arrange for them to meet with President Bush or at least with Secretary Baker. I was pretty frank with my interlocutors in the opposition. I told them that until they unified their efforts I would be the highest ranking person they would see in the U.S. government.

Particularly for the Kurds, I said that our main concern was humanitarian. We would not support political aspirations to a separate Kurdish nation. But we shared their desire to protect Iraqi Kurds from repression and exile, and we wanted to know what we could do about that. In that connection, we noted that our practical ability to help depended to a high degree on our alliance with Turkey. After one meeting with a large Kurdish delegation, a Middle East newspaper quoted one senior Kurdish leader as saying, "Ambassador Mack received us with warm hospitality and cold words." At least, he understood the negative part of my message.

We told all of these groups that the U.S. supported Iraq's unity and territorial integrity. The Arab groups wanted to hear that, and the Kurdish groups reluctantly began to talk less and less about Kurdish separatism. We also said that we would insist in our dealings with Iraqi opposition groups that they accept UN Security Council Resolution 687, because that was the basic framework in which they would have to coexist with their neighbors and the international community. Most of them were quick to agree with that. Most were slower to concede that they had to unite their efforts with the other groups.

Meanwhile, there a debate was underway within the Administration about whether to reengage our military forces within Iraq's borders to try to do something about the great potential humanitarian disaster of dislocated persons in northern Iraq. Most of the affected people were Kurds, but there were also other groups, like Turcoman and Assyrians.

Q: What was the nature of the...

MACK: Most people in the U.S. government, and probably the U.S. public as well, had wanted to get out of Iraq completely. We had ended the war successfully in the view of almost everyone in the U.S., and they wanted nothing more to do with the country. There had been no desire for an occupation, and there was no call for a continuing presence in the country. The Pentagon, at least the uniformed military leaders, had been very keen to get our forces out of the southern part of Iraq as soon as they could. They had been very upset at the prospect of being bogged down in southern Iraq dealing with a fairly substantial group of Shiite refugees who had come into the border areas occupied by the U.S. forces. The refugees sought both humanitarian relief and protection against the Iraqi military. It was only the intercession of the State Department, the NSC staff and the White House that got the military to agree to extend some kind of protection and provide a humanitarian feeding operation. The military argued that the humanitarian operation would be a magnet that would draw in more and more refugees, making it impossible for our forces to ever get out of Iraq. As Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell was pushing to declare final victory and withdraw our forces.

In the end, we put a lot of pressure on the Saudis to take a large number of the refugees who claimed a fear of political persecution. Many of these claims were, I think, quite legitimate, and the Saudis reluctantly took a large number of Iraqis to their side of the border. They set up a refugee camp for something like 90,000 Iraqis, mostly Shiites.

Q: There must have been some discomfort on the part of the Saudis, not just the cost but the fact that these were mainly Shiite.

MACK: That was part of it. The Saudis were not really deterred so much by cost as they were by political considerations. The Saudis were still thinking there might be a new government in Baghdad.

The U.S. military had just gotten out of southern Iraq, and now we were suggesting in late April that they might have to enter northern Iraq. Turkey wanted us to do something to keep Iraqi Kurdish refugees from crossing their border. There was also a lot of pressure on us from France and Britain where there were well organized Kurdish pressure groups.

Q: Also the media played a role, didn't it?

MACK: The media played a big role. Television news was showing Kurdish civilians fleeing north from the fighting in desperate conditions. Although estimates of their numbers ranged widely, large numbers of people were involved, including women, children and elders. At the border with Turkey they were stuck in craggy mountains enduring very bad weather. It was still quite cold up in those mountains in April. I think it also has to be said that the Kurdish refugees did not look like the public conception of Iraqis. Because they were Kurds and Turcoman they tended to be lighter complexion, round faced, and they looked more like westerners. The television images aroused public sympathy in the U.S. and Europe. The British and the French governments took a lot of the initiative on the matter.

President Bush was having conversations with both Western European counterparts and President ï¿½zal of Turkey. ï¿½zal, unlike most of the Turkish political establishment, had a visionary view of Turkey's relationship to its own Kurdish population, perhaps even to the Iraqi Kurds. He wanted to avoid using Turkish military force to prevent an influx of refugees across the border. He probably shared the concern of the rest of the Turkish political and military establishment about the security problems that would result from all of these Kurds coming across the border. The general view in Turkey was that they had experienced enough problems with their own Kurds over the years. So the Turks joined the chorus of NATO governments seeking some kind of U.S. military response to help solve this problem.

As I recall, the British and the French told us initially that they would send in the necessary ground personnel to do the feeding activities and other refugee relief activities, if we would provide the logistics and the air cover. My task at the State Department was to draft a plan for this. I tried to fit what came to be called Operation Provide Comfort into a larger scheme for a future restructuring of our relationship with Iraq. I titled the paper that I wrote, A Program to Help the Iraqi People. I tried to take the emphasis off Kurds and place it on helping the Iraqis who were suffering from oppression from their government. It was clear that media in the Arab world and Turkey responded quite differently than the western media to the Kurdish refugee issue. Concerned about driving the Iraqi public and Saddam Hussein together, I was seeking a framework that would have resonance with the wider Iraqi community and their supporters in the Arab world and Turkey. When NEA drafted public statements or press guidance we spoke in general about the people of northern Iraq, rather than about the Kurds specifically.

Meanwhile, I was talking to Kurdish leaders and their representatives in Washington. I made it very clear to them that ranting about the Turkish government was unhelpful and would hurt their case in Washington. We not only opposed Iraqi Kurdish separatism, we also insisted that they not deal with anti-Turkish Kurds.Q: Was it the PKI?

MACK: We specifically warned the Iraqi Kurds away from the Kurdistan Workers' Party, the PKK. It was a group that had long conducted a terrorist campaign against the Turkish government.

Shortly after we began the military planning, the British and the French said they couldn't handle all the ground work either. So it ended up being mostly an American show, along with some representation from the British and French, a few other token units like the Dutch, and Turkey on its side of the border. Secretary Baker had helped the President make the final decision. Baker made a trip out to the area, where he had seen the actual situation along the Iraq-Turkey border. But I think the political forces were moving in that direction anyway. Operation Provide Comfort became a significant U.S. commitment and it provided a focus for a lot of public attention to our dealings with the Iraqi opposition.

Provide Comfort was a major humanitarian program, and it probably saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of Kurds. Moreover, almost all of the Iraqi Kurds that had crossed the border into Turkey returned to Iraq. To enable that, however, we had to become more involved on the ground in Iraq than we had wished, certainly more that the U.S. military wanted, at least initially. That was necessary to give the Kurds near or across the border enough sense of security to start going back to their villages in Iraq. So we carved out a little security zone in the northern part of Iraq.

At the beginning of the feeding operation of Provide Comfort we also established a no-fly zone, which comprised all Iraqi territory north of the 36th parallel. It didn't include all of Iraqi Kurdistan, but it covered the northern most Kurdish areas. It also included a huge hunk of northwestern Iraq that was populated largely by Arabs, including Mosul, the third largest city in the country and the site of a major Iraqi military garrison. The U.S. Air Force was adamant that a no fly zone had to be based on a specific parallel without exception to enable clear guidance and rules of engagement to our pilots. It also fit with my notion that we should avoid policies that were based on concern exclusively for Kurds, and the overhead coverage of Mosul was one result. The no-fly zone was a pretty big deal.

For on the ground security, we carved out a somewhat smaller rectangle in the northeastern sector of the no-fly zone along the Turkish border. The closest major town to the Turkish border in this area was Zakho, and most of its population was Kurdish, so it was a logical locus for relief activities. There was a lot of discussion about how large the security area should be, in particular whether it should also include the town of Dohuk, as the Kurdish leaders advocated. I had visited there and remembered that it had a mixed Kurdish and Arab population. Dohuk was considerably larger than Zakho, and it was a provincial capital. Inclusion of Dohuk within the on ground security zone was going to require more forces than the Pentagon originally wanted to put in. Undersecretary Eagleburger asked my reaction in one of our State Department meetings, and I observed somewhat acidly that it was not as large as Beirut, but it was much farther from U.S. carrier air support. Larry Eagleburger, like me, recalled our difficulties in Lebanon in 1983, and he was inclined at first to oppose including Dohuk. The Pentagon, however had now changed its very cautious initial views. The U.S. military now took the view that if they were going to be on the ground in Iraq, they were going to make the operation a success. They argued successfully that without including Dohuk in the security zone there wouldn't be enough of a populated area with urban facilities to get the Kurds moving back. As a result, we ended up with a substantial number of forces on the ground inside Iraq.

Q: When you're talking about coming up to these things, could you describe a little bit about who was involved? This was not an area that any Americans had particularly focused on before, and all of a sudden you've got Dohuk. INR, the Pentagon, CIA, what was the process?

MACK: The major players implementing Operation Provide Comfort and the no fly zone were the Departments of Defense and State. U.S. military assets were critical, and the State Department contracted with U.S. and international aid organizations through the USAID office of Disaster Relief.

The State Department became the primary coordinator of the political framework for our operations in northern Iraq. Under my direction, we were sending a series of ultimatums to the Iraqi government as to what we intended to do. Although we had withdrawn all the American diplomats from Baghdad and the Iraqis had broken diplomatic ties at the start of Desert Storm, we had allowed them to keep a small group of diplomats in Washington, headed by a mid-level Iraqi diplomat, to assure that we had a channel for communicating to the Iraqi government. We also used a second channel through the Iraq Mission to the U.N. in New York. We told the Iraqis to withdraw their forces from the security area we had established in northeastern Iraq. We also informed the Iraqi government that we were establishing the no-fly zone, and that we would shoot down any of their aircraft that entered the air space. And, of course, I was also dealing with the Kurdish groups, telling them what it was that we were trying to do for humanitarian purposes. We wanted to get their cooperation on the ground for feeding and housing the refugees, and we were also warning them not to start fights with the Iraqi military that they expected us to finish. We tried to make it clear that our involvement was not for the purpose of strengthening the political hand of the Kurdish organizations.

We were also dealing with the Turks and with other allies. In the U.N. Security Council, we supported a resolution dealing with the Iraqi people and distinguishing them from the Iraqi government. What became U.N. Security Council Resolution 688 was, as I recall, initiated essentially by the British and the French. Resolution 688, unlike the cease-fire resolution, was a non-mandatory resolution, but it had broad and expansive language which could be interpreted as giving the international community a mandate to assure that the Iraqi central government did not repress its people. As I recall, China abstained from voting for the resolution. While they did not veto it, they were unhappy about the precedent. While Resolution 688 was not mandatory under Chapter 7 of the U.N. Charter, it was an exercise of the authority in Chapter 6. That meant it had somewhat less force in international law. Nonetheless, we used it to the maximum extent possible in order to provide a legal justification for the humanitarian intervention on Iraqi territory and in Iraqi airspace. The State Department lawyers came up with a novel legal justification for what could have been deemed extensive violations of Iraqi sovereignty to aid and protect a part of its population. The lawyers reasoned that Iraqi government repression of its people was causing an ongoing international emergency, referring to the refugee problem on the Turkish border. This emergency was the cause of international instability covered by an earlier Security Council resolution authorizing all necessary means to restore stability. The words "all necessary means" was the U.N. way of authorizing the use of military force. It was a convoluted way of saying that we could pretty well do what we wanted inside Iraq, provided it was done to restore the international stability that had been disturbed by Iraqi actions back in August 1990. Resolution 688 established a basic framework for other resolutions justifying our no-fly zones over the north and eventually the south of the country, as well as other things we do that are not in the context of arms control under Resolution 687.

At the time, as I say, there was some limited opposition at the UN, particularly from the Chinese. Most of the international community, however, gave surprising and even enthusiastic support to what had seemed a novel and far reaching authority of the U.N. when the British and the French proposed it. The Saddam Hussein government had been so egregious in both its invasion and occupation of a neighboring country, as well as its treatment of its own citizens, that major efforts to try to reestablish a better order within the country now seemed acceptable, provided it could be justified by a Security Council resolution.

During the period we were launching Operation Provide Comfort and the northern no-fly zone I continued to deal with other Iraqi opposition groups on a frequent basis. It had become all the more important to do this, so that our military operations and high profile diplomacy were not misunderstood as supporting the idea of Kurdish nationalism and Kurdish separatism. Inevitably despite all the effort that we were making at my level, this identification was creeping in. Increasingly, the rhetoric used by senior officials spoke of protecting the Kurds, rather than the more varied population of northern Iraq. This was a problem not only with most Iraqis, but also to Arab governments. It was anathema to the Turks. Moreover, it was encouraging some Kurds to think they could in fact use this humanitarian program as a basis for establishing their autonomy. At the same time as we were engaged in humanitarian efforts, major Kurdish militia groups were reestablishing their control of some of the areas out of which they had been driven by the Iraqi forces. These included areas well to the south of the no-fly zone and outside the security zone where we had our ground forces and civilian aid workers. We thought the assertion of Kurdish control in areas where they were a majority of the population was not such a bad thing, as long as we didn't have to take responsibility for it. At the same time the Administration worried that if the Kurds went too far, they might expect us to bail them out of trouble.

For my part, I was very keen to show that the U.S. government had a concern for the whole of the Iraqi people, despite our continuing problems with the Iraqi government. As a consequence, I increased my attention to meeting people from various Iraqi opposition groups, and encouraging them to unite their efforts. My contacts included a wide range of very disparate groups. Some of them were the very cultured ï¿½migrï¿½ Iraqis you might meet in a London drawing room. They were well educated professionals, but many had very attenuated contacts with Iraq. Often, they had been out of the country since the original revolution in 1958. Some of the younger Iraqi expatriates had been born in exile to families that had left Iraq as a result of the 1958 revolution. They did not seem to me to be the kind of people who could make a revolution against Saddam Hussein. Others were, and usually they had fairly recent connections with the Baath party or with some organ of the Iraqi state. Often, these latter expatriate Iraqis were not the nicest people. But they were the ones that looked to me like they had a little more credibility.

We encouraged the various opposition groups to unify themselves for political action. This was not easy, as they had little in common other than opposition to the leadership of Iraq by Saddam Hussein. Eventually they had a conference in 1991, as I recall in Vienna, where they established the Iraqi National Congress. The INC was a loose umbrella organization for these disparate groups. We had encouraged very strongly the two main Kurdish parties to attend that congress and participate. Somewhat to our surprise they not only showed up, they also were among the founding members of the Iraqi National Congress. The INC established a Leadership Council of representatives named from six of the opposition parties, which were the leading constituent groups of the INC at the beginning. The Leadership Council chose a Secretary General, who was responsible for helping organize the efforts of the INC and coordinate their collective activities. They named Ahmed Chalabi to the position, but the constituent groups jealously guarded their independence of action and did not view him as the leader of the Iraqi opposition.

Chalabi deserves a few words of his own. When I first heard that Ahmed Chalabi wanted to come to see me, I was not terribly happy, knowing that he was a fugitive from Jordanian justice. Chalabi had been the head of a private bank headquartered in Jordan called the Petra Bank. He was from one of the leading old families of Iraq, a well known Iraqi Shiite family. His family had been in exile since the 1958 revolution against the Iraqi monarchy. Chalabi had received an excellent education in Beirut and the United States. He eventually fled Jordan at a time when the Petra Bank was going through difficulties with all kinds of allegations that he had embezzled substantial amounts of the bank's funds. There was a warrant for his arrest by the Jordanians, Interpol had a warrant for his arrest, and he was on our visa lookout list.

Another agency of the U.S. government had been in contact with Chalabi and approached me about his case. After interagency consultations, I decided that I would see him, and I helped him gain entry to the United States. Over time, I got to know Chalabi rather well. He is a bit of a rogue, but quite charming, capable, well educated and articulate in English. Although he was from a Shiite Muslim family, he did not seem particularly religious. Most important for the limited purposes we had in mind, Ahmed was a good organizer, a trait which was not common among the Iraqi opposition groups. With his role as coordinator, the Iraqi National Congress began to shape up into something of substance.

Supporters of the Iraqi opposition in the United States had a public conference in August 1991, at which I agreed to appear as the U.S. government spokesman. At that event, I made a public statement which indicated that the U.S. government was not seeking a normal relationship with the Saddam Hussein government in Baghdad, but that we would be prepared to deal with a new Iraqi leadership. At the same time, I tried to make it clear to the conferees that our support for their general aspirations didn't mean that we had chosen them or any of the opposition groups to be the next government in Baghdad. However, we hoped that they could be a catalyst for political changes that would enable the Iraqis to freely choose a successor regime to Saddam Hussein.

By the summer of 1992, following their successful conference in Vienna, we agreed that the INC was ready to talk to senior U.S. government officials and with other governments. We organized a meeting for a delegation representing the Iraqi National Congress with Secretary Baker and NSC Adviser Scowcroft, and we began helping them make contacts with other governments. There was still quite a cloud about Ahmed Chalabi personally. In fact, we decided that he should not accompany the leading members of the INC to their most senior meetings. That was partly because NEA Assistant Secretary Edward Djerejian, my new boss, and Secretary of State Baker were cranking up the U.S. efforts for the Arab-Israel peace process. I knew that they needed to have a good dialogue and trusting relationship with King Hussein, and Chalabi was still anathema to the Jordanians. Moreover, some of the Iraqi opposition leaders, including those representing the constituent organizations of the INC, had expressed to us in private their skepticism about Ahmed. So we tried to keep him in the background, and keep the focus on the luminaries who headed the different opposition groups. They included the following personalities and groups: Jalal Talabani of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, the leaders of several Shiite Muslim groups, organized around religious figures from leading Iraqi Shiite families, and Ayad Allawi of the Iraqi National Accord, a secular party that had a following among both non-sectarian Iraqis and Sunni Arabs. The number of Sunni Arabs participating in the INC was never quite as high as we would have liked, but there were a couple of former senior military officers who joined.

From 1991 through my departure from NEA in the summer of 1993, we encouraged the political efforts of the Iraqi opposition. We did not, during my time in that job, encourage any military efforts. This seemed to frustrate the principal Kurdish groups, the PUK and KDP. In fact, I continued to warn the Kurdish leaders and their representatives not to start fights in Northern Iraq that would, first of all, interfere with the humanitarian operations; secondly, might lead to a clash with the Iraqi military they could not handle. On behalf of the Administration, I let them know that we were not going to come in and save them from the Iraqi army if they started something they could not finish. A major concern for me, and something that I discussed with inter-agency groups, was what we would do if the Iraqi military started to push back. By now, the Kurds had retaken the major cities of Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. Sulaymaniyah was deep in the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan, and I felt it was reasonably safe from the Iraqi military. Erbil was another story. By the summer of 1992, the Iraqi military had begun to reorganize. Even at that early point, we judged that the Iraqi army was capable of taking Erbil in 48 hours of fighting. Our ground forces were minimal and not heavily armed. The U.S. Air Force units working on Provide Comfort and the no-fly zone did not have the kind of air to ground strike capability that would be effective against a determined advance by Iraqi armored units. So I found myself cautioning the Kurdish groups to be very careful about provoking the Iraqi military.

On the international political front, the Iraqi opposition continued to have some success. We helped them get in touch with some of the Arab governments. They were well received by the British and the French. The INC was starting to do somewhat better with the Turks, and I was consulting frequently about the opposition with the Turkish Embassy. Among other things, I made the point that the Kurdish parties were part of a wider movement that was committed to Iraqi unity and would be a safeguard against any Kurdish separatist aspirations. Either in late 1992 or early 1993, the INC had a second major conference, this time at Erbil on Iraqi territory. That was a major step. The INC leaders wanted me to attend and speak to the conference. After consulting within the Administration, we decided it could provoke a violent response by Iraqi intelligence that would set back opposition efforts. Even though Erbil was within the no-fly zone, we did not think it would be prudent to have any speaker from the Administration. We also tried, unsuccessfully, to discourage the travel there of Peter Galbraith, a staffer of the SFRC.

The Administration was conscious that we had a responsibility to not press matters in northern Iraq at the expense of Iraqi civilians in the southern part of the country. For some time, we had been getting indications that the Iraqi government was taking measures of retribution against a many of the Shiite populated areas in southern Iraq, including an effort to drain the marshes. We did not know exactly what the Iraqi government intended to in southern Iraq, but certainly they were not behaving in a humanitarian way. At a minimum, we needed better means to monitor the area and deter hostile use of the Iraqi air force. So, once again, we pulled out U.N. Security Council Resolution 688 with its rather vague non-mandatory language, and used it as a justification for setting up a no-fly zone in southern Iraq.

What we called Southern Watch was something that I had thought would be a good idea for a long time. We knew that by itself our air power could not protect the Iraqis in the south. It would not be able to do much about Iraqi ground forces, and those were the Iraqi military units that really posed the biggest threat to the people in the area. Those responsible for the arms control measures of U.N. Resolution 687 wanted an additional way of gathering information. Moreover, I saw a no-fly zone in the south as being another measure to keep pressure on the central government. It was a way to get the message through to the senior military in Iraq that good things would not happen to them as long as Saddam Hussein was their leader. It showed that Saddam Hussein was leading them into a situation where their sovereignty was becoming more and more compromised. I wasn't bothered when other people asked, "Aren't you violating Iraqi's sovereignty by these no-fly zones?" My response was, "Yes, we violate their sovereignty all the time."

One of the State Department's goals, which I shared, was to publicize the idea that, as long as Saddam Hussein continued to be their leader, the Iraqi government was going to be incapable of protecting the country's sovereignty. By 1992, Saddam Hussein's government was unable to protect Iraq's borders against an upswing of smugglers and people going across the borders illegally, things which never used to happen. Saddam's leadership had cost his government control of Iraq's borders and large hunks of Iraq's air space. The central government had lost control of a lot of the land areas in the north, and had greatly reduced control at night in the south. The government had lost control the currency, and there was rampant inflation and counterfeiting. There was increasing crime on the streets of Iraqi cities. These were the kind of points the State Department was advancing publicly as to why the Iraqis should get serious about finding a new leader.

In our view, the role of the Iraqi opposition in exile and in Iraqi Kurdistan was to be a political complement to international and U.S. measures to discredit the Saddam Hussein government. We were always of the view that any decisive opposition to Saddam Hussein would have to come from within the Iraqi political system. The INC could be a kind of catalyst. Plus, after a coup d'etat in Baghdad, perhaps they would be able to join with and hopefully moderate a new regime, enabling Iraq to reintegrate better into the international community. We recognized that a successful internal opposition to Saddam Hussein would probably be fairly bloody minded, composed of Iraqi military officers.

While I had a pessimistic view of Iraqi politics, I recognized the constructive potential of Iraq as a nation state. My positive impressions were based on Iraq's rich history and my experiences with Iraqis, both within Iraq and in the Iraqi diaspora. Other people in the U.S. government had a similar instinct, and the desire for better U.S.-Iraqi relations was based on a sense that this would be good for U.S. strategic interests. I believe that President Bush shared this view. Together with a colleague on the National Security Council staff, we got the White House to issue a statement on the first anniversary of the beginning of Desert Storm, to make it clear the U.S. government wanted Iraq to have a better future.

Q: August, '91.

MACK: No, it was the beginning of the effort to liberate Kuwait, late January of 1992. Among other things, the White House public statement said the United States was looking forward to working with a new leadership in Iraq to lessen the burdens that were on the Iraqi people. In conjunction with the public statement, we also provided private encouragement to Iraqi opposition leaders. We let people in the opposition know, so they could make some use of it, that Iraq need not be required to pay the war reparations to Kuwait forever. Once they got rid of Saddam Hussein, we would be ready to talk about getting rid of economic sanctions, especially the war reparations, so that future Iraqi generations would not have to pay such a heavy price. These were among the efforts we made to promote the idea of an alternative to Saddam Hussein.

Despite the frequent reports that I heard about plotting against Saddam Hussein, I assumed that if there were a successful coup, it would take place without our knowledge. Then we would face the difficult policy problem of how deal with a new situation in Iraq. My hope was that the U.S. government would be fairly generous and tolerant, but I knew there were some people in Washington who had different ideas. I was beginning to hear the view that it was not only a good idea to contain the Saddam Hussein regime; they wanted to keep Iraq weak for the indefinite future.

Perhaps I can close for today by noting the Clinton Administration's policy of the dual containment of Iraq and Iran. The Clinton administration came in 1993 while I was still in this position at NEA, and I have strong impressions about how they started to deal with some of these issues. But I'll wait until next week to talk about the doctrine of dual containment.

Q: All right, so next time you'll talk about dual containment.

MACK: Actually, next time I think we'll need to start by talking about Iran, because this was another one of the big issues I dealt with. I should also talk a little bit about our Gulf security policy and the Arab states of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Q: I just want to add on one other thing. I never did get to talk to you about the demand for Saudi money for the Gulf War. So if we could talk about that during the war. The other thing is you haven't mentioned how we had contact with Iraq. One assumes we did not have diplomatic relations, and then Kuwait. What were we getting when we went in there. The Kuwaitis had not been the most cooperative of people, and how we resumed relations. That's a whole...

MACK: Great.

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Q: Today is the 4th of April 1997. David, do we want to talk about Iran?

MACK: We need to talk about Iran and other issues that became increasingly important following Operation Desert Storm. Iraq had consumed a lot of energies in Washington. But the period following the war was a very interesting period for some initiatives that were considered and events that actually took place with regard to other Middle East issues.

The best known of these was the Madrid Conference and the effort the Bush administration made to break the deadlock in the Arab-Israeli dispute. I think historians will note that this was an example of the Bush Administration making use of the leverage it had obtained with both the Arabs and Israelis as a result of the successful prosecution of the Gulf War. It used that leverage to revive a peace process that had been dead for several years leading up to the Gulf War. In effect, the moderate Arabs realized the importance of the United States to their security. This gave us a certain amount of leverage with them. Many Israelis realized that there were some new security realities that suggested rather strongly that holding territory was not going to be the best way of maintaining Israel's long-term security. When I say the Israelis realized that, I don't include Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, who dug in his heels against any peace process. But the changes in Israeli public opinion were, I think, handled quite skillfully by the Bush Administration. They used Israeli public opinion to put pressure on the Israeli government to come to the Madrid Conference, leading to considerable peace process achievements in subsequent years. While I was not directly involved in the Madrid Conference, the positive impact on U.S. prestige and issues under my responsibility was clear.

Starting with the Madrid Conference we also managed to draw into the peace process countries like Saudi Arabia, as well as the other states in the Arabian Peninsula which had previously avoided any involvement in the peace process. We got them involved in very important ways that continue to be part of the fabric of the U.S.-Middle East policy today.

There was also a realization that we had some unfinished business with Iran. To a certain extent we've had unfinished business with Iran for a couple of decades now. At the beginning of the Bush administration - in fact, in his inaugural address - one of the few remarks that the President made about foreign policy was to say that goodwill on the part of Iran would beget goodwill in return. This was taken by the Iranians, I believe correctly, as a signal that if they assisted in gaining the release of U.S. hostages from Lebanon that it would have a favorable impact on U.S.-Iranian relations. In fact, after the conclusion of Desert Storm, the last U.S. hostages were released from Lebanon. This led to considerable discussion within the Administration of whether it was time for us to try some initiatives with Iran.

All through the Gulf War 0f 1990-1991, we had maintained a fairly brisk, although indirect, dialogue with Iran through the Swiss government. Switzerland was our protecting power in Iran, and the Swiss Embassy handled our relationships in Tehran, where Swiss personnel staffed a U.S. Interests Section. There was an Iranian Interests Section in Washington, initially part of the Algerian Embassy and later the Pakistani Embassy. It dealt only with consular and administrative matters, however, and was not a factor in the U.S-Iranian political dialogue.

The Swiss channel for our dialogue was simple and quite efficient, even if it lacked warmth and didn't leave too many possibilities for creative diplomacy. When we wanted to send a message to the Iranians it would usually be drafted up by one of the people in our office of Northern Gulf Affairs or by me. We would clear it with a restricted inter-agency group. We would get Seventh Floor approval, usually that of Under Secretary Robert Kimmitt. I would call in the Swiss embassy political counselor, the number two officer at the Swiss embassy. We would provide him the message. He would fax it or send it by telegram to the Swiss Embassy in Tehran. The Swiss usually passed it on to a high level Iranian foreign ministry official. It would be either the Under Secretary or the Director for American and West European relations. The latter was a very pragmatic and professional Iranian diplomat. The Swiss believed he had a direct channel to Rafsanjani, and that messages from the U.S. were handled outside of usual distributions. At times, the Iranian official receiving a message from us would return in a short time with a reply, hand it to the Swiss diplomat in Tehran, and the Swiss would send it back by the reverse steps. Because of the time difference, a two way exchange sometimes took place within less than 24 hours from when I handed the message to my Swiss contact and he handed a reply back to me. Very few people in either Washington or Iran were familiar with this dialogue.

Q: Could you explain who Rafsanjani was?

MACK: Hashemi Rafsanjani was the president of Iran, and he was a fairly senior cleric who had been close to the Ayatollah Khomeini, the now deceased leader of the Islamic Revolution. He was a complex leader. It was generally believed that President Rafsanjani was more pragmatic than either Ayatollah Khomeini or of the current supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Khamenei. Rafsanjani had been a key figure in the abortive Irangate initiative of the Reagan Administration. We believed that Rafsanjani had been involved in a lot of the bad behavior of Iran and that terrorist activity had not happened without his knowledge. At the same time, we believed he was a person who was capable of making some pragmatic accommodations because of his concern about Iran's declining economy. There was a circle of Iranian technocrats which looked to Rafsanjani for guidance.

My view, shared by many in the U.S. government, was that Rafsanjani was pragmatic rather than moderate. He was a person with whom one could deal even if you had to do it with lots of circumspection and caution. We had conducted a fairly brisk dialogue throughout the war, mostly on very practical things. For example, we would warn the Iranians that our ships were in an area of the Gulf where they wanted to avoid having any overflights. It was this kind of thing. Similarly, they frequently sent messages to us, protesting an over flight of their territory, or something of that nature. As long as we were engaged in hostilities with Iraq, probably not a bad thing from the Iranian perspective, their protests of our accidental air space violations seemed pro forma in nature.

The feeling in the Administration was that Iran had behaved reasonably appropriately during the war. Of course, it was very much in Iran's interest to have Iraqi military power destroyed or curtailed, and to have Iraq under a very tight UN sanctions program. Occasionally, Iranian spokesmen would shed some crocodile tears in public about the sufferings of Iraq, but we knew they were not at all unhappy with the way things had turned out. Moreover, it was in their interest to enforce the sanctions, and for the most part they did. From one perspective, we had no reason to be grateful to them for their wartime behavior. On the other hand, they had behaved in a responsible and pragmatic manner toward the U.S., rather than engaging in the ideological manner of earlier periods.

After the liberation of Kuwait and the end of the war, we had a breakthrough with the release of the U.S. hostages in Lebanon. Some argued that release of the U.S. hostages in Lebanon was nothing to be grateful to the Iranians about. After all, they were responsible for the taking of the hostages. While I felt strongly about the hostage taking, something that happened when I was dealing with Lebanon in the 1980s, it seemed to me short sighted not to use this event as a new point of departure.

Q: You might explain who the hostages were.

MACK: A half dozen or so American hostages were held in Lebanon by various cells generally considered to be part of Hezbollah, a radical Shiite Muslim political and terrorist movement. The cells seemed to be composed mostly of people whose family members were members of the Dawa Party who had been arrested in Kuwait following bombings which took place there back in the early 1980s, including a bombing of the U.S. embassy. The Dawa was composed mostly of Shiites who were in opposition to the Baath Party regime of Iraq. They were mostly Iraqis, but family ties between many Iraqi and Lebanese Shiites were quite strong. Lebanese family members had the idea that by taking American hostages they could put pressure on the Kuwaiti government, presumed to be close to both the Iraqi and the U.S. government at the time of the bombings, to release prisoners who were their relatives. Part of what inclined them to release the Americans was not so much Iranian influence as the fact that during the occupation of Kuwait their kinsmen had been released from jail.

Q: By the Iraqis.

MACK: By the Iraqis. In an irony of the occupation, the Iraqis probably just released all prisoners, including some who were opposed to the Saddam Hussein regime, without really knowing exactly who they were. In fact, some of the released Dawa prisoners then proceeded to work with the Kuwaiti resistance against the Iraqis. So the intense personal motivation for taking U.S. hostages in Lebanon had evaporated. We think the hostage takers were very confused by what they had done, but they had received encouragement from Iran to dig in their heels. We had been trying to send the message through various channels that holding American hostages was going to become a problem for them, as eventually hostages will start dying and the hostage takers will be blamed. I hoped that the psychological pressure might weigh even on hostage takers. In the end, I think they finally realized that holding Americans was no longer an asset. They weren't going to get money or political concessions, and the U.S. government had in any case become an enemy of Saddam Hussein, the nemesis of the Dawa Party.

As the hostages were gradually released, thoughts turned to how we should respond to the Iranians. In the beginning the National Security Council staffers made it clear to us in the State Department that the President had made a pledge in his inaugural address that good will would beget good will, and we really had to find a way to fulfill this pledge. We came up with a short list of possible things that could be done, actions or signals that the Iranians might take as being useful and friendly gestures on our part. All of the items on our list had their pros and cons, and for most of them the cons were pretty strong. We thought that what the Iranians would like most of all was a few billion dollars they had claimed from the U.S. government. They had exaggerated notions of how much was owed to them from Iranian government assets seized after the take over of our embassy in Tehran. Considerable Iranian military purchases had been in the pipeline from the time of the Shah. We had our own counter claims against the Iranian government from U.S. companies and from U.S. private citizens, including some Iranian-American citizens. Claims of both sides had been adjudicated or were in the process of adjudication at The Hague, as part of the Algiers Accords between the two governments. But it was very slow. One of the items on our list was to offer a very generous settlement of Iranian claims, but the Iranians might spurn our offer as too low. There were a lot of arguments against doing that, including budgetary reasons.

An item I liked was to provide some kind of compensation to the Iranians for the Iran Airbus that had been shot down in 1988 toward the end of the Iraq-Iran war. That was an attractive one, in part because the Pentagon lawyers did not want to have to take that case to court. They felt that they would be at a significant disadvantage in trying to adjudicate the Airbus downing internationally, and they would just as soon it was off the table of contentious issues between Iran and the U.S. A negative decision by the International Court of Justice on that case would be a bad precedent for the U.S. military elsewhere around the world. Moreover, we had already dealt with the most emotional issue by our offer of compensation to the families of the individual Iranians and other nationals who had been killed in that incident. Individual compensation was being held up while the Iranian government insisted upon compensation to the Iranian state, at least for value of the aircraft.

There were all kinds of ideas. One proposal was to do away with the executive order against imports of Iranian goods into the United States. This was a proposal which the economists liked, because we were arguably hurting U.S. consumers by our refusal to import Iranian oil into the U.S. There was also an understanding that removing the embargo on Iranian carpets and Iranian pistachio nuts might be important symbolically. Even though the value of such exports would not amount to nearly as much as oil exports, at least a part of the revenue would go to Iranian workers and small merchants. One argument against pistachio nuts was that Iranian President Rafsanjani's family was a major pistachio exporter. Rafsanjani's opponents among the Iranian radicals would view any relief to Iranian pistachio imports into the United States as an attempt to bribe Rafsanjani, and it would look like a return to U.S. interference in Iranian domestic politics. There was also the argument that California pistachio growers would be very upset by this.

Aside from some kind of settlement of the Airbus issue, the proposal that seemed to have the most virtue, after weighing the pros and cons, was simply to reiterate to the Iranians in a more unambiguous fashion that we would be prepared to resume some kind of direct diplomatic dialogue. We had said that we were prepared to have a direct diplomatic dialogue with authorized Iranian government representatives. I always added in my briefings to foreign diplomats, and occasionally in public remarks, that we were not interested in secret talks. We were not interested in cakes, bibles or any of that kind of funny stuff connected with Irangate. Here there was a bit of a cultural problem, because the Iranians had made it known in various ways that they would like to have secret talks, but only if we could guarantee they could remain secret. On practical grounds, it was hard for the United States to do that. But we at least thought there would be some virtue in stating to them explicitly, through the Swiss channel, that the time had come where the Islamic Republic of Iran ought to consider opening up a dialogue with us on a basis of equality. We could be very flexible about doing it in a variety of ways and in various venues. The sensitivities of the issue of the former U.S. Embassy in Tehran with the publics of both countries made it unappealing to reestablish a U.S. diplomatic presence in Iran as the initial step in a restored dialogue. It might, I thought, be easier for both sides to do it at a neutral venue, or possibly in Washington. That included the possibility of Tehran sending an authorized Iranian diplomat to their Interest Section in Washington. That office was then and continues now to be run by Iranian-Americans. They are locally hired personnel who have no diplomatic status or immunity from U.S. domestic law. With minimal diplomatic protection from their protecting power, Pakistan, we keep the Iranian Interest Section on a pretty short leash. There were things that could have been done to make the Iranian Interest Section more attractive to Tehran.

In the end, after inter-agency deliberations in late 1991, suddenly the signals coming from the NSC staff turned cold. Informally, we were thanked our work coming up with various interesting possibilities, but the message was that the White House was not interested in proceeding right at that time. My impression was that President Bush's political advisers told him that this would be a very unwise thing to do as he moved into a presidential election year, that he would open himself up to all kinds of domestic political attacks for having suddenly having done a deal with the Iranians. Personally, I think we missed an opportunity. In that period right after the release of the hostages, we should have tried harder to improve our relations. Although we continued to have a declared policy of readiness to engage the Iranians in direct talks about issues of concern, we'd made it very clear that our agenda had a number of issues that would be embarrassing to them. We certainly weren't taking any initiatives to make it easy for them to get this process started.

We also had a lot of unfinished business with the Arab States of the Gulf Cooperation Council. The GCC, as it is commonly called, comprises Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE and Oman. We believed that part of the reason why Saddam Hussein had felt he could get away with mounting the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 was that there was no adequate framework of security in the area. Our view was shared by many in the GCC. I took it upon myself to try to develop such a framework, including not only very close bilateral security relationships between individual states and the United States, but also greater cooperation and coordination among the GCC states. Without being the regional equivalent of NATO, at least they could be a little more cohesive. That, together with their bilateral alliances with the U.S. and other external allies, could provide some deterrence to the Iraqis or Iranians in the future.

In my travels in the GCC area, and the travels of more senior American representatives, we tried to make these points. Frankly, we never got much resonance from the GCC states during the early 1990s. All of the GCC states were prepared to have closer relationships with the United States, including practical military ties. However, due to internal rivalries and lack of confidence in one another, they really weren't prepared to do much more among themselves. The GCC continues to be an important political forum among these states, but it has never amounted to much for military coordination. One of the arguments we made for expending considerable efforts to that end, was that it made it a lot easier for us to get Congressional support for U.S. military efforts in the region in terms of military deployments and bilateral cooperation if we could point to evidence that the GCC states were really working together to do a lot for their own security.

During the war, of course, and particularly the period immediately after the war, we had gone to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other GCC states, as well as other allies like Japan and Germany, to get contributions to defray U.S. military expenses. We did very well in that regard. In the end, we fought the 1990-1991 Gulf War without any incremental U.S. expenses. Of course, we still had the expenses for U.S. personnel salaries and the equipment used by U.S. forces, but we would have had those anyway. The incremental expenses of deployments to the region were covered from various non-U.S. sources. The contributions from Saudi Arabia were a little short of 20 billion dollars. Those from Kuwait were around 14 billion dollars. As a percentage of Kuwait's assets that was really a huge amount. And there were contributions from the other GGC states: 5 billion from the UAE, etc. Raising money in the region created some bitterness, particularly in Saudi Arabia. Not because of the initial round of requests, which everybody understood, but we kept going back to them in subsequent years for everything from compensating Turkey for losses from enforcing economic sanctions, contributions to Bosnian relief, even oil for North Korea as part of our arrangements to deter them from going nuclear. And requests kept landing on my desk from various parts of the U.S. government and from international institutions. Everybody felt the Saudis and the Kuwaitis had unending amounts of wealth. Saudi Arabia did have a per capita income in the mid-1980s which was between half and two-thirds of that of the United States. So Saudi Arabia was relatively wealthy by global standards, and the Saudi government had a fair amount of disposable income. Per capita incomes were falling during the 1990s, however, because of stagnant oil revenues and growing populations. The Saudis did not feel all that wealthy, but we kept going back to them, as well as other GCC states.

Let me give you an example of the requests for GCC funding. This is one that I successfully turned off, but with a great deal of difficulty. Romania, one of the Eastern European states that was newly independent from the Soviet Union, was in bad financial shape. Romania was also a primary conduit for embargoed equipment and oil going into Serbia in the former Yugoslavia. This was a violation of UN sanctions. Officials in the European Bureau came to me, speaking they said with the authority of Larry Eagleburger, the Secretary of State at that time. The EUR officials said that Larry wanted the Saudis and Kuwaitis to provide assistance to Romania. I asked for his rationale. They said it was to compensate Romania for what it would lose if they stopped violating the sanctions against Serbia. I said that was going to be a very hard sell, and at least in my time we successfully turned back the request.

Q: David, when you say there were a lot of requests, we thought we had a rich sugar daddy over there, and anybody who had a problem, or was there a concerted effort coming from some place?

MACK: Such requests did not result from a U.S. government policy decision. It was just that anybody who found that they were under funded for a given activity tended after a while to say, let's ask the Saudis or the Kuwaitis, or sometimes the UAE or Qatar. The break-up of the Soviet Union created many such needs. We organized a conference in Washington to get contributions for the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. We did get contributions or pledges from most of the GCC states. Some of these requests were very meritorious, probably they all were meritorious. But the cumulative effect was being taken very badly by GCC states who felt that our only interest in them was for their deep pockets. They didn't feel that rich anymore, particularly after the Gulf War. It was not only their direct military expenditures and the reimbursement of U.S. military expenditures, but also the loss of business activity during the crisis. On the other side of the economic ledger there were higher oil prices during the period. That compensated a little bit for the losses they were incurring. But both Kuwait, because of the great destruction that took place in Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia because of the very heavy war expenditures that they had made, figured that the war cost them in the area of $50 million each. They've done calculations that go even higher than that. There's a lot of truth to the claim that the war did leave these countries economically less well off.

One of the interesting issues in the post-liberation period was how we would maintain our contacts with the government of Iraq. I was already establishing a dialogue with the various Iraqi opposition groups, but I also felt it was very important if we could maintain at least a thread of contact with Iraq. I was struck by the problems we had because we had no direct dialogue with Iran, and it seemed to me that we shouldn't get in the same situation with Iraq if we could help it. I had worked in the U.S. Interest Section in Baghdad in the late 1970s, and I had dealt with the Iraqi Interest Section in Washington in the early 1980s, so I knew what an Interest Section could do. It is a pretty flexible diplomatic tool. We managed to keep an Iraqi Interest Section in Washington as part of the Algerian embassy with three Iraqi diplomats under very tight controls as to what they could do.

Q: When you say tight controls, could you explain what that was?

MACK: We made it very clear to them that they could conduct consular and administrative activities, and the only political activities that we would find acceptable would be that whenever we wanted to send a message to their government, they were to be available to take that message and transmit it. Sure enough, any number of occasions came up where we wanted to be able to use that facility. Most commonly, we would want to send some kind of ultimatum connected with our forces in northern Iraq, and we needed to set the ground rules for any Iraqi military in the area. But we also had cases where American citizens would stray across the border from Saudi Arabia or Kuwait, and then we would have the difficulty of trying to find them and get them back.

The question arose of what we would do about our now closed embassy in Baghdad. We decided to reopen that office as an Interest Section without resident U.S. diplomats. I came up with the idea of asking the Polish government to be our protecting power. During the occupation of Kuwait, our difficult time leading up to the war, the Polish government had provided us with some important assistance of a covert nature in Iraq. I was also impressed by the quality of political reporting that I had seen from the Polish Embassy in Baghdad. They had a strong embassy staff, including several Arabists. They keeping their nose to the ground, and they would pass the reports on to us.

Uncertain what the reaction would be, I made my proposal to the Bureau of European Affairs. EUR was delighted. They said they had been doing a great deal for the newly independent Polish government and were desperate to find something they could do for us in this post-cold war world. The Poles were equally delighted. They sent a negotiating team to Washington to negotiate an agreement establishing the terms for Poland to be our protecting power in Iraq. Their team was headed by two ambassadorial rank individuals. One of them was Ambassador Piekarski, Poland's former ambassador to Pakistan, who later became a Counselor at the Polish Embassy in Baghdad and the head of the U.S. Interest Section. It was actually front page news in Warsaw with papers reporting bold headlines that Poland was to be the protecting power for the United States. The arrangement made the Poles feel very good, and they were well compensated by us for expenses in Iraq. In fact, they did a very effective job in dealing with U.S. citizen problems that arose from time to time in Iraq, and also in looking after the buildings and other property we continued to own and which I hoped would someday be useful in reestablishing a full U.S. diplomatic presence.

In my view, you should never cut off diplomatic contacts. You should keep some kind of diplomatic liaison with governments, even under the most severely strained situation. I think our relative lack of effective diplomatic contact with Iran, compared to our better record with Iraq, is instructive. Most of the problem, frankly, with Iran is from the Iranian side. They're just very afraid of being exposed for having dealings with The Great Satan.

Q: Did you have a feeling in a way that both the United States and Iran and this groping toward each other, looking at each other, each was having to deal with the same problem. And that was the rather virulent right wing, or left wing whatever you want to call it, a political party that would cut anybody who got too close to the other side of the...

MACK: That's true to a certain degree. I think the domestic opposition in Iran to normal relations is much stronger, however, than domestic opposition in the United States. If it hadn't been for the fact that Bush was entering an election year in 1992, I don't think the Administration would have felt the same constraints about moving ahead. Without knowing the details, it was my understanding that Bush had a somewhat ambiguous role regarding Iran when he was Reagan's vice president during the Irangate controversy. That was something that the White House obviously didn't want to receive too much attention during an election campaign.

One other thing that you mentioned you wanted me to talk about was our dealings with Kuwait.

Q: Yes, right after the war because prior to the war the Kuwaitis had said what you were saying, sort of mind your own business, and that's what we were doing and all of a sudden they got hit in the solar plexus.

MACK: There was a tidal shift in Kuwaiti attitudes towards the United States after the 1990 invasion and, particularly, the country's liberation. Moreover, we had done a fair amount of planning, internally and with the Kuwaiti government in exile, for the reconstruction of Kuwait. The Kuwaitis gratefully embraced our focus on what needed to be done to get Kuwait back on its feet in the immediate post-liberation period. They invited U.S. companies to come in and do needed job work for them, everything from putting out oil fires to getting their roads and sewers repaired. U.S. companies responded magnificently. The Kuwaitis kept shoveling the money out to make it commercially desirable. I can give the Kuwaitis some credit for their own management of reconstruction, but the main factor in the rapid turnaround was a political decision on the part of the Kuwaitis to spare no expense, and whenever possible to go American. In particular, the Kuwaitis realized that if they could get their oil production going again, they would be a very bankable country. So that's what they did.

Q: Did you have a feeling too that the Kuwaitis were not very popular in the Arab world, as well as in the western world, sort of an arrogance and, did you see a change in the way the Kuwaitis operated?

MACK: Regretfully I didn't see much of a change in Kuwaiti attitudes towards the other Arabs. I don't think they changed their style and approach as much as they probably should have. They did become more careful in dealing with Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states. On the other hand, they made very few efforts to reconcile themselves with the Jordanians, the Yemenis and others whom they had seen as the states that had been favorable to the Iraqi occupation. The fault was mixed. Kuwaitis can say with a fair amount of accuracy that some Arab states tried to take advantage of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, and some Arabs had gloated a bit at the Kuwaitis' loss of their country.

Q: Certainly Jordan...

MACK: Kuwaiti resentment toward Jordan ran high and still is.

Within Kuwait, the U.S. had what was for me almost an uncomfortable amount of influence. I say uncomfortable because my feeling was that it was going to be fairly short-term. We had to do things quickly, but it was important to do things right with regard to Kuwaiti internal politics. I wanted us to behave in such a way that it wouldn't cause too much of a negative backlash later. There was a lot of pressure within the Administration, from the Congress and the U.S. public to simply tell the Kuwaitis how to reorganize their country, including their political system, their social and cultural system, etc. I think we managed fairly successfully to channel them toward a resumption of a representative political life with an elected parliament. Kuwait had long had an elected parliament, but the Emir of Kuwait had dissolved it before I arrived on the job in May 1990. Kuwait resumed constitutional life very much at our urging. They conducted pretty free elections with a lot of U.S. observers in the country. They also greatly improved their human rights record with regard to expatriates working in Kuwait, particularly the more vulnerable expatriates, like South Asian female servants.

To some degree, the Kuwaitis took a bum rap for their mistreatment of Palestinians. Mind you, there are a lot of grievances against Palestinians there. Palestinians had a very important role in the pre-war Kuwaiti economy. Many but by no means all Palestinians had been sympathetic initially to the Iraqi occupation. Yasser Arafat, the head of the Palestine Liberation Organization, had openly courted Saddam Hussein during the occupation. But there were a lot of other Palestinians who had been loyal to their Kuwaiti friends and employers. Some had cooperated very well with the Kuwaiti opposition to Iraq's occupation. Other Palestinians collaborated with the Iraqis. So it was a mixed issue. After the war, the Kuwaitis made it very clear that they wanted all or most of the remaining Palestinians to leave. In fact, most of the Palestinians had already left during the occupation period, which you couldn't really blame on the Kuwaitis. The Kuwaitis did not make it easy for any but a few of them to come back, but you couldn't really blame that on the Kuwaitis either. The departure of Palestinians during the occupation was a result of Iraqi acts, not pressure from Kuwaitis.

Well before the end of the occupation, we initiated discussions with the Kuwaitis regarding how they should deal with foreigners in Kuwait at the time of liberation. We urged them strongly to bring in international observers from the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as other reputable international observer groups, in order to monitor the human rights situation. We were pretty blunt with the Kuwaiti government in exile. We told them their emotions were running high and that they could reduce problems by inviting international observers to come in at the onset of liberation. For the most part, the Kuwaitis accepted our advice. Although many Kuwaitis resented the observers with the passage of time, it did save them from having an orgy of score settling. Some incidents took place, but the international observers and our own personnel on the scene helped to check abuses.

During this period, our ambassador in Kuwait was Edward Gnehm, whom most people call Skip Gnehm. Skip is a very interesting personality. He is short, feisty, has incredible energy, and is a real dynamo of activity, very much of an activist diplomat. We predicted Skip was going to draw criticism from Kuwaitis who would resent the heavy hand that we had during that period. Skip knew that he had to be very careful, and he and I worked very closely to deflect Kuwaiti resentment as their country's liberation by U.S. forces took hold. He was already coming under fire for being too heavy handed, for being domineering. Most of it was because Skip was merely carrying out instructions. People in Washington were telling Skip to get Kuwaitis to give this contract to an American company, get Kuwaitis to be nice to South Asian maids, do this, do that.I feared there might be some younger members of the Sabah ruling family that might just decide to assassinate Skip, figuring it would be blamed on Iraqis or Palestinians. So Skip and I worked to reduce his vulnerability to Kuwaiti criticism. Very often, when I had to send one of these blunt instructions from the Administration for Kuwaiti action, we would talk first on the secure telephone. Then I would arrange to have the tough message be delivered in Washington first. I would call in the Kuwaiti ambassador, or we would have a press statement by the Department's spokesperson, and then Skip could go in and say, "Gosh, people in Washington seem to be very concerned about this. I think you'd better do something about it." I think this was a successful way of reducing the predictable criticism that Skip was acting like the U.S pro-consul in Kuwait, and that we were trying to run the country with him as dictator. We did take a strong hand. In the end, I think Kuwait emerged much stronger for it, and relations turned out pretty well.

Q: How about Jordan? This must have been a very difficult piece on your plate at that time.

MACK: Yes. We had real difficulties with a couple of countries, Jordan and Yemen. Washington viewed both countries as having been on the wrong side during the Gulf war. With the Jordanians it was a much more deeply rooted problem. As a country bordering Iraq, the Jordanian economy was geared towards supplying the Iraqi economy with everything from agricultural goods to manufactured items, pharmaceuticals, etc. Jordan produced many goods which were not competitive on the wider international market, but which the Iraqis would buy. Plus, Jordan desperately needed low cost oil, and the Iraqis were prepared to provide it. There was a complementary economic relationship, and a strong Jordanian business lobby supported good relations with Iraq. Many Jordanians sympathized with the Iraqis for other reasons. Despite past difficulties between the two countries, Jordanians felt that the U.S. and the world community judged Iraq and Israel, both neighbors of Jordan, by a double standard. The U.S. had come down very hard on the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait but would do nothing about the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands. So there was political sympathy along with economic self interest.

If pushed, the Jordanian government would always say they would implement the UN sanctions. They weren't prepared to go much further than that. We were constantly getting reports that Jordanian business persons had violated the sanctions in some way. Upon investigation, some of the reports turned out to be true, and we would put pressure on the Jordanians to clean up their act.

In the background was our knowledge that Jordan would be very important to the Arab-Israel peace process that was emerging during this period after the Gulf war. There were people, including some Israeli officials, who had sympathies with Jordan. They would urge us to go easy on the Jordanians over Iraq issues in order to cultivate Jordan for purposes of the Arab-Israeli peace process. How to deal with Jordan's relations with Iraq was an immensely complicated problem. It would have been easier if we could have gotten Saudi Arabia, in particular, to resume some kind of low cost provision of oil to Jordan. But Saudi Arabia, at least the Saudi leadership, felt almost as much animosity toward the Jordanians as the Kuwaitis did. In Saudi Arabia it was less a matter of wide-spread popular feeling against Jordan. It had more to do with the ruling family's feeling that King Hussein had misled them about Iraqi intentions. It was almost a feeling of betrayal and a suspicion that there might have been Jordanian collusion with Iraq. Some Saudis believed that King Hussein wanted to eventually take over part of the Hejaz, or western Saudi Arabia, which is the ancestral home of the King's own family. The Hashemite family had been the rulers of that part of Arabia before World War I. The King's great grandfather had been the Sharif of Mecca. He had led the revolt against the Ottoman Empire but lost out in the end to the Al Saud, the Saudi ruling family which eventually took over the largest part of the Arabian Peninsula. There was a feeling on the part of at least some members of the Saudi ruling family that King Hussein still aspired to resume this kind of patrimony, the core homeland of Islam, including the holy places in Hejaz.

I never found any compelling evidence that King Hussein had been aware of what the Iraqis were planning to do in the summer of 1990. I think he was misled by Saddam Hussein, like everybody else. But there were indications that Jordan did not view the occupation of Kuwait as a total disaster. After it took place, I think that many Jordanians believed they could take advantage of that. It's possible that the King may have had in the back of his mind aspirations to wider Hashemite leadership. Clearly, the belief was an obstacle to what we hoped to accomplish. We never made much progress in getting relations improved at that time between Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

At times, it seemed like nobody but me and the powerless desk officer really cared about Yemen. The Yemenis had been a Security Council member during the war. They voted against, or abstained, on a key resolution in December of 1990, whereby the U.N. authorized use of force to reverse the effects of Iraq's occupation of Kuwait. Secretary James Baker had even gone to Sana'a to encourage them to vote with us. The Secretary thought that he had succeeded, and he was there at the Security Council meeting when the Yemenis voted the wrong way. At the time, Baker said it was the most expensive vote that Yemen would ever make. Baker would have happily cut off the entire relationship. Together with a few other Administration officials, I managed, through a little bit of bureaucratic guerilla warfare, to keep a very shaky, very slim relationship with Yemen. It included full diplomatic relations with ambassadors in both capitals and a tiny bit of an aid program for a very poor country. Our aid program was reduced to about two or three million dollars a year. Those funds were for mother and child feeding programs, that kind of thing. But it was something. The Yemenis were certainly off-limits as far as any high level political contacts. I was the most senior Administration official in Washington authorized to have official contacts with the Yemenis on any kind of a regular basis. I visited the country after the war, received Yemeni visitors in Washington, and would go on USIA media with Yemeni audiences. This was a bare holding action, but we did keep the relationship going at a difficult time.

Now, getting into the Clinton Administration...

Q: By the way, you wanted to talk about the anti-Islam policy. Did that have roots prior to the Clinton administration?

MACK: Formulation of the U.S. government policy toward Islam bridged the two administrations, but it did start during the Bush Administration. After the collapse of the Soviet Union people in the academic community and political think tanks started hunting around for a new paradigm for international politics following the Cold War. Some said the real problem is going to be radical Islam, usually referred to, I think incorrectly, as Islamic Fundamentalism. I don't like either term. There was a degree of pressure on us to have a policy toward Islam based on the premise that it was a great threat to western civilization and to international stability. Critics charged that the U.S. government had not been paying enough attention to it, even after the Islamic revolution in Iran. They said that was because we were obsessed with the Cold War. Now that The Cold War was over and the Soviet Union had been dismantled, they suggested we should focus on Islam as a new enemy. This was a popular idea also among the Europeans for whom an anti-Muslim reaction seems to be almost hereditary. During consultations at NATO and the EU in Brussels, I found that even some very sophisticated European diplomats seemed to think the Turks were still battering at the gates of Vienna. In the United States, such views came from various directions: right wing ideologues, pro-Israeli groups, fundamentalist Christian groups, and sometimes just from academics who wanted to come up with a novel approach.

Q: A lot of them were cut adrift, they had either been Marxists or anti-Marxists and this is no longer an issue.

MACK: The best known of the academic voices was Professor Samuel Huntington of Harvard. He wrote about this issue in The Clash of Civilizations, but obviously these ideas had been churning around for some time.

Q: Of the people who were pushing this, did you also find that, I suppose what you'd call the military-industrial complex looking for an enemy in order to sell more arms? Did this come into that equation?

MACK: That wasn't quite so obvious to me. For one thing, you don't deal with Islam by the sort of big ticket military items that are required for dealing with the Soviet Union or the Iraqi military threat.

In the Department of State, and perhaps in the Bush and later in the Clinton administrations, the person who was most seized with trying to develop a policy toward this supposed Islamic threat was Richard Schifter. He was Jim Baker's Assistant Secretary for Human Rights. Schifter was a neo-conservative. He was a rare official who managed to make the transition from the Bush administration to the Clinton administration, where he has been at the White House on the NSC staff. Schifter actually came up with a policy paper for Secretary Baker on the subject of Islam.

Some months earlier, I had talked with an official in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research about the importance of these ideas, and we agreed that they should receive some consideration by State Department policy makers. This led to an in-house review of what we chose to call Political Islam. It started with a conference under the auspices of NEA, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research and the Foreign Service Institute. We had outside experts of diverse views come in to talk to officials of the State Department, AID, and the Defense Department. I chaired the meetings, and NEA Assistant Secretary Edward Djerejian attended some of our in-house discussions. The gist of our conclusions was that the U.S. government did not have a problem with Islam as a religion, but there were international problems with extreme political manifestations of any ideology whether it was a secular ideology or a religious ideology. In particular, the use of violence to attain political ends in the name of a religion was something we had to be concerned about.

Officials of the Bureau of Human Rights were invited to attend, but our discussions did not turn out to be influential with Assistant Secretary Schifter. A paper that he wrote to Secretary Baker took the view that political Islam was an inherent threat to the U.S., even if its adherents foreswore any violence. That was because Muslims in general didn't accept the basic human rights that were accepted by Western Europe as part of the 18th Century Enlightenment. There's a certain amount of truth in this. The Government of Saudi Arabia has never signed the International Declaration of Human Rights. Other governments, including many Muslim governments, have very strong reservations about the West's view of human rights, even if they are signatories to the Declaration.

Schifter wrote a paper for Secretary Baker proposing a policy that I felt was blatantly hostile toward Muslims. He tried to send this to the Secretary without clearances from other bureaus of the State Department, so the secretariat staff asked for NEA to look at it first. We provided very negative comments, said that the United States should not have a policy on a religion, and that the problem was extremism from various political movements, whether secular or religious. Schifter had advocated a stern public declaration against political Islam. In its place, NEA drafted a carefully nuanced speech for delivery by Djerejian at Meridian House, a Washington center committed to international exchanges. When Djerejian went to Baker to tell him what he planned to say, the Secretary said it would be at Ed's own risk. Baker recognized that there would be some domestic political opposition. Our views were also at odds with the position that a lot of western European governments were taking. To his credit, Djerejian gave the speech anyway. It was fairly well received among Arab and Muslim governments, and since then it has been the policy of the government.

Now I think I should talk a little about the Clinton administration. I can use this as the transition point.

Q: You can, but one thing I'd like to say. What happens when the Secretary of State tells an Assistant Secretary, you can make a speech, but it's at your own risk. What's he really saying?

MACK: Secretary Baker did not leave many tracks. I greatly admired him as a Middle East negotiator, but Jim Baker was often thinking how to protect Jim Baker. Historians of the future will find that there are relatively few written records about what Baker did as Secretary of State. He had a very protective staff, also. A lot of people were thinking how to protect Jim Baker for a future presidential campaign.

Q: All of us had that impression. Margaret Tutwiler was sort of his eminence grise. It was all to make Baker look good, and as a matter of fact during the Gulf War, that he was sort of non-apparent for a while and maybe because he was caught off base.

MACK: That's very true, but the summer of 1990 was a very busy time for other issues, as well, especially in connection with the end of the Cold War. Moreover, Baker had a key role in various things to do with Iraq, like getting the then Soviet Union into part of the coalition. I think Baker was not unhelpful. Moreover, he did absolutely great work with getting the Madrid Conference organized and restarting the Arab-Israeli peace process. So it's a mixed record.

Q: Let's talk about the Clinton...

MACK: In discussing my time in the Clinton Administration, I want to focus first on the policy reviews that you always have with an incoming administration. I'll mention four issues in the transition: the Arab-Israeli peace process, Iraq, Iran and this question of political Islam.

The Bush Administration had launched its peace process effort, I think rather courageously, during an election year. Bush and Baker took risks domestically to do this. Internationally and at home, they capitalized on the momentum built up during the Gulf War. The peace process was well underway when it was briefed to the new administration, and they seemed to appreciate it's importance. For one thing, they kept Dennis Ross on at State. It's relatively rare for a non-career appointee at a high level in a departing administration to be kept on by the administration of another party. They also kept Ed Djerejian, a high ranking career officer as Assistant Secretary for the Near East. So we could already see that there was going to be a lot of continuity. We had started the briefing process shortly after the election with members of the transition team. It appeared that there was a ready acceptance of the desirability of maintaining the peace process, more or less along the lines that had been started by Baker and Bush.

The approach of the new team on Iraq emerged more slowly. There was a little flurry right after the election. President Clinton gave an interview to The New York Times in which he said that as a good Baptist he didn't believe that anybody was beyond redemption. For some, this seemed to suggest that we could have a normal relationship with Saddam Hussein. Clinton backed off that pretty fast. By the time of Clinton's inauguration, we were pretty firm on our policy. The new national security team seemed to accept the basic lines of our existing policy toward Iraq: to maintain full sanctions as long as Saddam Hussein was in power, to use diplomatic isolation and the presence of U.S. forces in the area as other means for deterring future Iraqi aggression. The incoming Clinton Administration also accepted the idea that in addition to keeping up international pressure on the Iraqi regime, we could hope that eventually elements of the Iraqi opposition would take matters in their hands and remove Saddam from power. In this regard, I was not betting on the known opposition movements outside the country and in Iraqi Kurdistan. I did entertain what have so far been unrealistic hopes about the unknown opposition groups we hoped were present in the Iraqi military and other internal institutions.

After our briefings of Secretary Christopher and other members of the new team, it seemed to me they had decided to continue the policy of isolating Saddam Hussein and pressuring his government. The Iraqi regime, however, decided they'd test the new administration. They did so with some skirmishing along the Kuwaiti border and also with an attempt to assassinate former President Bush when he was visiting Kuwait. The response of the Clinton Administration was very tough and unambiguously indicated a desire to continue the kind of sanctions and military pressures that were at the core of the Bush Administration policy.

Q: Excuse me. During the transition, was there anybody in the Clinton administration who seemed to be calling the shots on the...

MACK: For the peace process Dennis Ross had emerged as being very important. Was there anybody calling the shots generally with regard to the Middle East? Not really.

The key briefings for the new administration actually took place shortly after Clinton's inauguration. A Secretary of State normally makes his first foreign trip to Western Europe, but Warren Christopher decided to make his first trip to the Middle East. Christopher submitted himself to a couple of days of briefings by specialists from NEA and INR, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research. I briefed on political Islam. Other people briefed on the peace process, Iraq and Iran, with emphasis on U.S. policy for these issues. Christopher took it all in, and during the course of his trip followed virtually verbatim the talking points we had prepared, both in private meetings in his public remarks. We saw a few small changes. The Kuwaitis were an easy mark, and sure enough when he was in Kuwait Secretary Christopher leaned on them very hard over the Arab boycott of Israel. He went further than the Near Eastern Bureau had been inclined. I think that showed how Dennis Ross could influence the shadings of our policy.

There were people in the Clinton Administration connected with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a pro-Israeli think tank. Dennis Ross had a relationship there when he first came to Washington. Martin Indyk, who had been the Director of the Washington Institute, was chosen for a senior position in the National Security staff. Martin, who was an Australian citizen, needed expeditious naturalization as an American citizen. Laurie Mylroie had been in the Department transition group, and when she accompanied a senior member of the transition team who interviewed me I got the impression she was lusting after my job. She was totally unequipped for it by personality and experience, but she had done some work for the Washington Institute, particularly on Iraq. Wiser heads prevailed in that case, so we didn't really get too many people who had a strong ideological perspective on Middle East issues. In the State Department itself, it was pretty much business as usual. We were seeing a lot of continuity from Bush policies to Clinton policies, which I saw as non-partisan.

We also briefed on our Iran policy. This was a subject about which we knew that Warren Christopher probably had strong views of his own based on his unhappy experiences in the Carter Administration. Basically, we suggested our policy toward Iran should be somewhat like the policy that we had pursued vis-a-vis the Soviet Union, even though Iran was much weaker. Iran was a long-term threat. Militarily it was certainly manageable at the present time, but over the long-term we had to worry about Iranian aspirations for weapons of mass destruction, Iran's long-term desire for hegemony over the Gulf, its opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace process, and its support of terrorism. We also emphasized that the Iranian system was not simply going to go away. It was one thing to talk about the change of a political system in Iraq, which definitely we should all hope for, but there was really very little hope that there would be a fundamental change in the Iranian political system. We argued that we should focus on working for changes in Iranian government behavior, particularly foreign policy behavior. We reiterated that it was important to be open to the possibility of a direct dialogue with the Iranians, at such time as they were ready for it. But we noted they had domestic political impediments against entering into this kind of dialogue.

Christopher listened intently throughout the briefings I attended on Iraq, Iran and political Islam. He did not express any reservations, but I could also see that he had a lawyer's professional poker face. Viscerally, Christopher may have had some problems with the Iran part of the brief, particularly with the idea of eventually having a direct dialogue with the government in Tehran, but he didn't show it.

I thought that Christopher accepted the policy toward Islam quite well. National Security Council Advisor Tony Lake, who was also present for that briefing, seemed to embrace the policy with a degree of enthusiasm. Perhaps, I thought, it was more consistent with the traditional Democratic Party view than Richard Schifter's notion that there was something about Islam which was inherently undemocratic. Lake and Christopher both seemed to accept the NEA view that we could very well with Islamic regimes. In my briefing, I had used the example of Saudi Arabia. It was definitely a state that you'd have to describe as having a system of political Islam. The Koran and the Sharia, Islamic religious law, was their constitution. And you couldn't find a more thoroughly going Islamic state, and yet we had a cooperative political relationship. Christopher accepted that view, and he seemed to make a good intellectual distinction between the Iranian case and what we might face from other Islamist regimes.

After Christopher's trip out in the area, we had another occasion to test his views about Iran. An emerging issue with relating to Iran was how our lack of relations might conflict with the Clinton Administration's policy toward U.S. commercial interests and American jobs. In its overarching foreign policy statements, the Administration had made it clear that the first priority would be helping the U.S. economy. The Administration had seemed to believe that domestic U.S. interests and foreign policy should be seamless.

Q: The key word to the Clinton administration was, its the economy stupid during the campaign.

MACK: Considering the Clinton campaign's emphasis, a desire for commercial dealings with Iran seemed likely to present a policy test. We had maintained throughout the Bush years some fairly substantial commercial dealings. Although we would not permit the imports of oil and other Iranian products, U.S. oil companies could be the middle men between Iranian producers and markets in Western Europe or Japan. As a result, a lot of the Iranian oil that moved on the high seas moved in the ships of companies like Exxon. And we sold a lot of U.S. merchandise to Iran. We had very careful controls on sensitive items, like high-powered computers that could be used for any kind of military applications. But if you were talking about motor vehicles, oil drilling equipment, foodstuffs, there were considerable U.S. exports to Iran. Many argued that these trade relations served as an inducement for the Iranians to eventually develop more normal relations in other areas. Trade was an important way of keeping the two countries from drifting further apart.

Two major U.S. companies, Boeing Corporation and General Electric, had approached the departments of State and Commerce regarding some contacts they had with the Iranians about making a bid for the modernization of Iran Airlines. It would be a sale of Boeing aircraft equipped with General Electric engines. The competition would be from Airbus.

Q: Airbus being European.

MACK: Right. Airbus is a European consortium. Parts of the bureaucracy, including NEA, had a problem with the proposal. Iran was on the State Department's terrorism list. This list is mandated by Congress, and it includes legal restrictions on what kind of commercial relations are acceptable. One of the provisions is that you can't sell aircraft or other aviation related equipment to countries on the terrorism list without getting a special presidential waiver on national security grounds. Officials from Boeing, supported by counterparts from GE Aircraft Engines, argued that we should provide a waiver so that they could compete with Airbus. There was a sharp division of opinion within the bureaucracy. The State Department Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs and the Department of Commerce strongly favored issuing licenses for the sale. Some people in the Department of Defense were making the case that unless we did this the Airbus people would figure out how to reduce the U.S. content of Airbus manufactured aircraft to the point where Airbus would no longer face licensing restrictions from the United States. This would hurt the U.S. competitively in a global sense.

The Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, supported by the Office of Counter Terrorism, was adamantly opposed to making a terrorism list exception for Iran. Syria, a country that we viewed as being more moderate than Iran and very important to the peace process, was another country on the terrorism list. We were not making exceptions for Syria, and couldn't see the foreign policy rationale to make an exception for Iran. Moreover, why should we make an exception for Iran when they wouldn't even consider opening a political dialogue with the United States? So far, up to the level of the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, the NEA position had prevailed within the State Department. Our position was bolster by a Treasury Department opinion that most probably the Iranians didn't have enough money to buy the aircraft, and they were just trying to use Boeing and GE as a way of getting Airbus to lower its price. The Treasury view was that Iran would be a bad credit risk for any country whose firms got such a contract and, predictably, wanted export credits to implement it.

Nobody, even at fairly senior levels, knew how Secretary Christopher was going to react. Whether the Secretary would recommend a presidential waiver of the terrorist list prohibition on aircraft sales to Iran shaped up as a big test of the strong pro-business push Clinton had voiced during the campaign. The Secretary was to meet with the CEOs of Boeing and GE Aircraft Engines. When I went up for the meeting, two of Christopher's immediate deputies were also in the outer office. Talking to them, I realized they didn't know how the Secretary was going to come down on this issue either. Christopher was playing his cards very close to his chest. In the end, Secretary Christopher used the talking points that my office had prepared verbatim. We had included in the talking points, as a consolation for Boeing, that the Administration would support the sale of Boeing aircraft to markets like Saudi Arabia, for example. In many big markets other than Iran, we would give the companies full support. But that seemed to come across as meager consolation.

In watching Secretary Christopher's give and take with these two high powered executives, I felt that I had learned something about Warren Christopher the man. Not only was he convinced that our policy was right, but he enjoyed telling them that under no circumstances would we get involved in this kind of trade with Iran. The Secretary had the reputation of being a very cool, detached and objective lawyer. The mask slipped off just a little bit, and I saw the human Warren Christopher. He had bad memories of dealing with the Iranians.

Q: This was during the Carter administration, he was the point man.

MACK: That's right. Christopher handled negotiations with Iran regarding the hostage U.S. diplomats. This was payback time. From that time on, the Secretary's attitude toward dealing with Iran became increasingly apparent. In public remarks, Christopher would sometimes say we should isolate the Iranian regime and have no contacts with them. There was never a formal reversal of our policy, which was to remind the world that Iran was the one refusing to enter into a direct dialogue. Christopher may have understood the policy and the logic behind it, but viscerally he wanted to be a bit tougher. This played very well with what Martin Indyk over at the National Security Council was thinking about.

The Clinton Administration showed political sensitivity about the continuity of their Middle East policy with that of the previous administration. People connected with the Clinton presidential campaign had made a lot of attacks on the Bush administration for its supposed foreign policy failures. This included the charge that Bush had coddled Iraq in the pre-invasion period. Less prominent were claims that Bush had been soft on Iran. It was not a major issue in the campaign, but it was a theme that came up from time to time. And here they were carrying on the Bush policies without significant change. It was a bit of a political embarrassment for some people at the White House.

With that in the background, Martin Indyk at the National Security Council staff was preparing to make a speech before the Washington Institute, his old think tank. With just a few hours notice, the NSC sent State a speech text in which Indyk described our policy toward Iraq and Iran as one of dual containment. We were bothered by some of the sweeping rhetoric in the text, particularly the term "dual containment." For starters, the State Department did not view U.S. policy toward Iraq as merely one of containment. U.S. policy towards Iraq was to change the regime, not simply to prevent them from bothering their neighbors. Containment was a better way to describe our policy towards Iran, but containment of the Soviet Union, which is where the term had come from, always included full diplomatic relations, something that Indyk's speech text made clear was not what he meant. The State Department had sketched out two very different policies, and we wouldn't really describe either one of them as being containment. We made lots of suggestions for change. Indyk said that he couldn't accept all these changes because the clock was ticking. He was committed to make the speech, and Tony Lake wanted him to do it this way. He suggested this was the new policy of the administration and we should go along with it. In the end, he made some minor changes, toning down the rhetoric, but the term "dual containment" was still there.

Those emotive buzz words, dual containment, took on a life of their own. In subsequent years, the Clinton Administration tried to back away from the term, but it never quite succeeded in doing so. Most recently, Secretary Albright gave a major speech on Iraq where she never used the words "dual containment." But when she was asked a question about it, she said that our policy is still dual containment. So it's a problem.

The Arabs, of course, saw it immediately as something that was associated with the Israelis. They noted that Martin Indyk was the one who enunciated it, and he did so before a Washington Institute audience. It was an illogical way of explaining our policies toward Iraq and Iran. And it also was bad politics with key governments in the region. If we were going to make a major policy proclamation on Iraq and Iran, we should have talked to our allies first, including our Arab Gulf allies like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. We didn't. So its been a bigger problem than probably should have been the case.

I might conclude next time with a couple of things right at the end of my time as a Deputy Assistant Secretary.

Q: Which is when?

MACK: I left that job in June of 1993. I want to talk about Commerce Secretary Ron Brown's first trip out to the area, some economic matters and how U.S.-GCC relations were developing. I should also mention a couple of things I did at the end of that trip with Bahrain and Yemen. And then one final trip that I made to Brussels for consultations with U.S. NATO allies and the European Union political advisers. That will finish up my time as a DAS. Finally, maybe I can say a few brief words about the National War College, where I spent my last two years in government service.

Q: David, one other thing at that time, if you would make a comment about the dealings with the Department under both administrations, and the April Glaspie situation.

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Okay, today is the 16th of May 1997. Well, David, we laid out some of the things to be talked about. Do you want to move ahead then?

MACK: One of the things that I felt I wanted to do before leaving my job as a Deputy Assistant Secretary in June 1995 was to try to improve the economic component of our relations with the Arab States of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and try to revive a fuller strategic dialogue between ourselves and these Arab security partners. Because of the legacy of Operation Earnest Will at the end of the Iraq-Iran war, and then of Desert Shield\Desert Storm, we had built up a considerable amount of cooperation in the security area. With access and pre-positioning agreements rapidly being approved by the various GCC states, we were putting in place what I described as the overlapping and complementary security arrangements that would enable us to deter further aggression in the region. And, if deterrents were to fail because of some mad man like Saddam Hussein, we would be able to fight together with our Arab allies in the Gulf region. Security cooperation had made great strides forward. While there was much still to be done, we were clearly headed in the right direction. We also had established a very significant amount of political cooperation, as we showed by bringing the GCC states into the Arab-Israeli peace process. At and following the Madrid Conference, they became involved in that process in a very constructive manner.

However, the very basis of our relationships, and what had been the whole rationale for even opening embassies in this area, was the economic and commercial relationship. But for years there had really been no high level interchanges of significance in the economic area, and U.S. business interests had lagged their competitors in many fields. During my time as ambassador in the UAE, in three years we managed to get a visit to the countries of the area by only one U.S. cabinet member dealing with economic matters, and that was the Secretary of Energy. As a Deputy Assistant Secretary, moreover, I found it extraordinarily frustrating that under a Republican administration we were unable to get significant attention from the economic side of our government to the states of the Arabian Peninsula. It was as if the only economic interest that would rate a high level discussion was our government's interest in separating them from some of their money for various causes that we deemed desirable. The states of the area clearly felt unhappy that we were neglecting economic and commercial relations, and the U.S. business community was almost beside itself seeing that it was losing market share in the area to East Asian and Western European competitors. Given the role of the United States in defending this area, it seemed quite ironic that we were neglecting commercial matters.

Q: In context, business is business, and business people go out and do their thing. So what difference does it make whether you had a high government official going out there and doing this?

MACK: That's a very good point. I think it's correct that some of the major, well established companies, particularly the oil companies and major U.S. defense companies, were in many respects able to protect their interests and represent themselves well in the area without the involvement of a senior level U.S. economic official. But this was not true for most other companies. In the United States the small and medium companies that create most of the jobs were increasingly turning to foreign trade as a way of growing and sustaining themselves. These companies felt at a disadvantage without U.S. government support in what they found to be an alien environment.

A good example was the Arab boycott of Israel. Major, well established companies had legal staffs and corporate experience in how to do business despite the existence of the Arab oil boycott. As an example, Coca Cola was able to start a bottling plant in the United Arab Emirates even though the Arab boycott was still in force.

Q: We're talking about an Arab boycott designed to isolate Israel.

MACK: Yes, and the boycott provisions that U.S. business felt it could object to most strongly, and in principle the U.S. Government was supportive of them on this, were secondary and tertiary aspects of the boycott. A U.S. company would be boycotted by Arab states if it had even minor investments in Israel. As a result, over the years, the Arab boycott office had developed elaborate measures whereby it required companies to fill out questionnaires regarding any activities that they might have in Israel. The companies had to certify that they were not doing business in Israel, or that there were no Israeli made components in items they were selling. U.S. law prohibited our companies from cooperating in such boycott activities. Most small to medium U.S. companies venturing into the Middle East for the first time took one look at the conflicting Arab and U.S. laws and decided against entry into the market. It looked too hard with too many legal problems, so if they were looking for new markets they would turn elsewhere.

It seemed to me there was a wide range of ways in which senior U.S. government leaders could help. I had seen competitor governments using their political access in the region to benefit their companies. Scarcely a week would pass during the busier seasons of the year when you would not see a European delegation headed by a cabinet level official visiting one or more country of the Arabian Peninsula. The other members of the delegation would be CEOs of companies from that country. This was a very effective way for companies to get into the market. The GCC governments play a big role in their economies, so it was often important for foreign companies to have access to government decision makers. Sometimes, the blatantly commercial focus of other governments could work to their companies' advantage on individual contracts.

In partnership with a counterpart from the Department of Commerce, I proposed we try to restore the U.S.-GCC economic dialogue, a formal annual meeting between the governments. This was something that had been done a couple of times, maybe as long as seven or eight years earlier, but it had petered out. The Iraq-Iran War had reduced Washington's brief enthusiasm during the oil boom for boosting economic relations with the GCC states. To the cautious satisfaction of the GCC governments, we restored the idea. We scheduled the conference for Washington during May 1993, I believe, thinking that by then we could use the conference to get the attention of senior officials in the new Clinton Administration, and most of the GCC states sent large delegations of both economic officials and private business persons. It turned out we were too optimistic about our own leaders. My Commerce counterpart had promised Ron Brown, the new Secretary of Commerce, as keynote speaker, and I had the agreement of the Deputy Secretary of State to speak at the luncheon banquet. Ron Brown came late, delivered a very quick and short statement of welcome, and then left. This was very disappointing to the assembled Arab dignitaries, including at least one cabinet level official. Less of a problem was the last minute cancellation by the Deputy Secretary of State, and the Arabs seemed to accept me well enough as his replacement. At least they were polite enough not to complain. We had fairly good meetings at the governmental level. Mamoun Qurdi, a very capable Deputy Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia for Economic Affairs who enjoyed an established reputation in Washington and among regional leaders, along with officials of the other GCC states and the Arab League joined in the formal talks. State and Commerce had agreed that I would deliver the most confrontational part of our message, which dealt with the Arab economic boycott of Israel, in a meeting of government representatives only. I also gave the luncheon keynote speech before a large gathering that included private sector representatives from the two sides, as well as Arab and U.S. media representatives.

It was my chance to make some public remarks about U.S.-GCC relationships, and the centrality to those relationships of our business and economic relationship. That surprised no one. But I also took the occasion to try to stretch the envelope a little bit on political matters. We were still trying to find out what the Clinton administration meant by its commitment to democracy and human rights, especially in regions like the Arabian Peninsula where the governments were nothing like our own. I said that the U.S. government we had no blueprint for organizing their political systems, and certainly it was not the intention of the U.S. Government to try to push this. I thought it would be natural for them to build on the institutions they already have in their own societies. But we hoped they could broaden the degree of political participation in their societies, and improve the access to government on the part of the citizens of their countries. It was a statement that seemed unremarkable to Americans in Washington, but it got a lot of attention from our foreign guests. The reactions were probably fairly positive from the private sector participants but less so from the GCC officials, and it was what made headlines in the Arab press. Eventually, it became pretty much the formula that the Clinton Administration used. Among the GCC leaders there were questions about what they feared might be an aggressive push on them to open up their political systems. This resulted from a feeling that we had pressured the Kuwaitis quite hard to have elections, which was true. We knew that many members of the Kuwaiti ruling family resented this, but Kuwait was rather a special case. I wanted my careful formulation to put the GCC governments on notice about the U.S. concern for democracy and human rights, without alarming them about our methods.

It seemed normal to me that the U.S. could have a close strategic relationship with countries very different from ours based on mutual interests, and I never apologized for the centrality of economic and business ties. As an ambassador in the GCC area from 1986 to 1989, and then as Deputy Assistant Secretary from 1990 to 1993, I had tried very hard to get the Secretary of Commerce to visit the region. It seemed like a logical thing to do, but I had been unsuccessful during both the Reagan and Bush administrations.

After President Clinton named Ron Brown, a major figure in Democratic Party politics, as his Secretary of Commerce, I sensed an opening. I immediately went to work with like-minded friends in the career bureaucracy of the Department of Commerce to try to get Brown to take an early trip out to the area. Brown's closest aides, the people he brought in with him from outside, were initially totally opposed. They felt that Ron Brown was possible vice presidential or presidential material in the future. They thought that dealing with Arabs was not good politics, and they showed no interest at all in having him take a trip to the Arab world. But we had some major economic issues on our plate, particularly two very large contracts in Saudi Arabia. One was the upgrade and replacement of aircraft for Saudia, the Saudi Arabian state airlines. Both Boeing and McDonald Douglas were bidders on that contract, but they faced competition, particularly from Airbus. The other one was the telecommunications modernization program in Saudi Arabia. AT&T was in the field but facing strong competition from German Siemens and Northern Telecom, a Canadian based company, among others. These were multi-billion dollar contracts. It would be a test for the Clinton Administration, which had started off by saying that its foreign policy was going to be seamless with U.S. domestic policy. Just as job creation had been a big issue in the presidential campaign, this was going to be a big issue in our foreign policy.

I eventually arranged to do a briefing for Peter Tarnoff, who was the Under Secretary for Political Affairs. I told him about the problems we were facing with these two contracts and what it was that I thought we needed in the way of high level administration support. In addition to Ex-Im loans when necessary to meet foreign competition with similar backing, I proposed a visit to the area by a cabinet-level official, naming Commerce Secretary Ron Brown as the appropriate choice. In the end we were able to get Secretary Christopher to call Brown and to make the pitch that this was an important thing for him to do. Brown rather reluctantly agreed to do it. He said he did not want to get involved with any of the political issues, and if he were to take such trip he would want to take along somebody from the State Department to handle any political discussions. The State Department sent me. Noting the interest of the White House, I suggested we also ask Bruce Riedel, to accompany us. Bruce was a very capable career CIA analyst who was then dealing in Gulf affairs on the National Security Council staff. A number of Brown's staffers from Commerce also came along.

Fortunately, Bruce and I had the Secretary's ear for much of the trip to Saudi Arabia. We briefed him on the full range of key issues in our relations with Saudi Arabia. In the beginning, Brown made clear that he was only going to sell aircraft and telephone systems. We could raise these other issues at the end of the meeting, but he would not be the one to bring them up.

Q: What issues were beyond?

MACK: The other matters we wanted him to raise included Iraq, Iran, Gulf security, the Arab-Israeli peace process, and Arab boycott provisions affecting American companies. My pitch to Secretary Brown went sort of like this: Mr. Secretary, I understand fully your position, and you've got the right primary objectives. However, we have asked for meetings with King Fahd and Prince Sultan, Minister of Civil Aviation and Minister of Defense. If either or both of them agree to see you, it will be not because you're coming as the Secretary of Commerce. They will want to see you because you're coming as a principal political adviser of President Clinton. This is your reputation based upon the position you had during the campaign, and this is why they will be interested to see you. They will want you to talk about these political issues. My advice is that you discuss these issues with them briefly and listen to their views. Then, as the meeting is coming to a close, you raise the commercial issues. That's the way to be most successful.

Fortunately, Brown's first meeting was with Foreign Minister Saud Al Faisal, who was very experienced in dealing with Americans. He made things very easy for Brown. He left Secretary Brown with the feeling that the meeting had gone quite well. Brown was clearly beginning to feel quite confident about discussing foreign policy issues. So then he went on to have his meeting with Prince Sultan, and eventually with King Fahd. In the end, the U.S. firms got both of those big contracts. It took a lot more work, including messages from President Clinton, but it was really the case that Brown had demonstrated conclusively to the King and the senior Saudi princes that our interests were integrated. It was reassuring to the Saudis that the U.S. government seemed to have a comprehensive strategy and that U.S. interests in the security of Saudi Arabia were integrally connected with U.S. business interests.

While Brown was in Riyadh, he spoke to an American business group, and they received him warmly. Afterwards, I sent him a personal note saying that he should realize that probably 95% of the people in that audience had voted Republican. However, the fact that he was the first U.S. Secretary of Commerce in over a decade to take the trouble to visit them made a great impact. Brown went back to the area several times thereafter, not only to Saudi Arabia again but other Arab countries as well. He became a key player in U.S. relationships with the Arab States of the Gulf Cooperation Council. I think it did a lot of good in restoring our reputation as a true partner for the GCC states. In time, Brown's new found interest in foreign trade and private investment also underlined the bipartisan nature of our foreign policy around the world.

Q: So he was a little bit reluctant to get involved with the political process?

MACK: Previously, Ron Brown had not been involved in matters of foreign policy. He saw himself as a domestic political figure. I saw him as being a very good possibility for a Secretary of State at some point.

The State Department had assigned me to take a separate trip to Bahrain after the end of Brown's visit to Saudi Arabia. We had some particular problems associated with Bahrain between the State Department and the Pentagon, related to the relatively large presence of the U.S. military in that small country. Moreover, the Embassy was having some credibility difficulties with the government. We were without an ambassador in Bahrain, a matter that caused some irritation with the Bahrainis, who felt they were being slighted. Our Chargï¿½ was a Foreign Service Officer named David Robins. David came across as a little bit shy and retiring. Actually, that was kind of misleading. David had been in the military in Vietnam, where he had lost most of his hearing from some accidents with artillery. This was a handicap for him as an Arabist, he hadn't learned the language very well, and he often seemed very hesitant. At the same time, he understood the region and the motivations of Arab governments.

I had helped David get the assignment in Bahrain at a time when he was finding career difficulties. I had thought because of his military background he might be better able to deal with the military out there. What I had not counted on was David's sense of awe in the presence of a 3-star admiral. As the naval commander of the U.S. Sixth Fleet in the Gulf and the commander of other naval units of the U.S. Central Command, Douglas Katz was a very high energy figure. He had a well deserved reputation as both a military strategist and a manager. At the same time, Doug did not always understand how to deal with Arab leaders, and the way you go about getting their cooperation. Whereas the ambassador in Bahrain ought to be able to provide some serious political advice to the naval commander resident in Manama, David didn't really know whether to tell him to sit down and listen to reason or to salute him. David had been a second lieutenant in Vietnam, and here was this 3-star admiral, a very hard driving guy. Both State and Defense Department officials in Washington wanted me to talk to Admiral Katz and David Robins and to get things sorted out between the two senior U.S. officials on the island of Bahrain.

The Bahrainis were glad to have a visitor from Washington, and they treated me quite well. The Emir and Prime Minister of Bahrain had met me before, and they considered me a friend in Washington. After meeting with the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, the latter took me for a surprise, private audience with the Emir just before I left. I had made sure to include both Robins and Katz in the earlier meetings. After the meeting with the Emir, I briefed Robins and then passed by Katz' office at the U.S. naval headquarters. I briefed him on what the Emir had conveyed, as a way of showing him that there ought to be a partnership between the senior U.S. officials in Bahrain. And I made it very clear that David Robins was speaking for the State Department, he wasn't free-wheeling, he wasn't interfering with what Katz wanted to do, and that Katz ought to listen to him.

While I was in Bahrain we received a telegram from the State Department asking if I could go to Yemen. The Yemenis had just had a parliamentary election. We'd had some U.S. observers there, and they felt that the election had been free and fair. I was still the highest level person who had been allowed to go to Yemen since December 1990. This was a consequence of the positions the Yemenis took during Desert Shield and Desert Storm. The U.S. government, along with the governments of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, were still holding the Yemeni Government responsible for collusion with the Iraqis.

Q: They were certainly the odd man out along with Jordan.

MACK: That's right, and Secretary James Baker had expressed real antipathy toward the Yemenis. We were still uncertain about how President Clinton and Secretary Christopher might view the government in Sana'a, and the parliamentary elections in Yemen presented an opportunity to unfreeze our relations. Like many officials at State, I was still learning about the new President. He had impressed me with his intellect and personal warmth when I accompanied two of the new Arab ambassadors in meetings where they presented their credentials, but whether Clinton would make more than stylistic changes in our relations with the countries of the Middle East was unknown.

As the senior person who had been dealing with the Yemenis, I was well known to them. When I called the State Department on a secure phone to talk about their telegram, I learned that both State and the NSC staff wanted me to go to Yemen and congratulate the government on the election. I said that a visit from me would be a lot more effective if I was carrying a letter from the President. I did not have a lot of hope they could do this on short notice, but we agreed that I would fly to Jeddah before making a final decision. It's difficult getting in and out of Yemen anyway. By commercial air it takes a day to get in and a day to get out. I would have to spend a night in Jeddah to pick up a flight to Sana'a. When I got there, the letter was waiting at the Consulate General. It was a good letter, with personal touches that I knew would go down well with the Yemenis. It was accompanied by some tough and familiar talking points for me to use on the troublesome issues of Iraq and terrorism, but the Yemeni elections and Clinton's letter to Yemeni President Saleh Abdullah would be positive new features in the relationship.

If I had been inclined to worry, it would have been about flying to Sana'a on Yemenia, the trouble prone national airlines, but there was not a lot of choice. The flight was supposed to go to Sana'a via a stop at Hodeidah, one of Yemen's ports on the Red Sea, where I could only pray that the airport would be adequate. It would be an indirect and lengthy trip, even without the unscheduled delays familiar in that part of the world. When I got on the aircraft, I took a Yemeni Arabic language paper with the idea that I would spend some time exercising my Arabic and familiarizing myself with the way the officially guided press handled issues like Iraq. There on the front page was a story that said that Ambassador David Mack, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, is coming to congratulate the government and people of Yemen on the success of their elections. This, I thought to myself, is going to be a good visit.

It was perhaps the best visit I ever had to an Arab country as a U.S. diplomat. For starters, the aircraft went straight to Sana'a. Perhaps there was a problem at the Hodeidah airport, bad weather or something else that led to a change in flight plans. The next thing I knew we were coming into Sana'a airport. We arrived early, at least an hour ahead of the schedule. As I had not checked in any baggage, I was one of the first people to arrive at the immigration line, where they waved me through. From there I went to the customs officer. I noticed he had the same newspaper I had been reading. In my best Arabic, I announced who I was and that I was coming on behalf of the government of the United States to congratulate the people and government of Yemen on their successful election. I said that he was the first Yemeni official to receive my congratulations. "Ahlan wa Sahlan," he responded with the traditional Arabic greeting. I sailed through customs into the airport's front hall. Of course, there was nobody there from the U.S. Embassy or the Foreign Ministry. I went to the Yemenia office from where tried to call the embassy, and they did not have a current phone number. It was the usual Yemeni thing, cordial confusion. The Yemenia office manager offered to deliver me to the embassy, for which I thanked them but said I could take a taxi. I went out, grabbed a rattle-trap taxi, told the driver where I wanted to go, and off we went. He resumed chewing qat, after offering to share his stash with me. It was about 1:00 in the afternoon, and he was already chewing. Qat is a mild narcotic, which gives you a buzz like drinking too much coffee. I declined politely, saying it was a little too early for me. Then I interviewed him about his reaction to the Yemeni elections. My Arabic started flowing, and I was enjoying being back in a place where it looked like the Arab world instead of the spic and span Gulf capitals of Riyadh and Manama. There was debris, ragged kids, lots of dust, and this old rattle-trap taxi bouncing along.

Q: The real thing.

MACK: Yes. On the way to the U.S. Embassy, I saw several official vehicles going the other way. When I got to the embassy, there was great consternation. A half an hour earlier, U.S. Ambassador Arthur Hughes, accompanied by the Chief of Protocol from the Foreign Ministry, had left for the airport, which explained the motorcade we had passed.

The whole trip unrolled as perfectly as ever happens in diplomatic life. I had a wonderful meeting with President Ali Abdullah Saleh and Vice President Ali Salim al-Baidh. The vice president was a southerner. He was in a tactical alliance with the president, and he later led a rebellion against the central government. I started out speaking Arabic, told a lot of jokes, told stories, they both loved it. For the business part of the meeting, I switched into English because Ambassador Hughes was not an Arabist and the Yemenis had a professional interpreter in the meeting. After presenting the letter from President Clinton, I gave them plenty of time to go over it with their interpreter. President Saleh was obviously pleased with it. Then I made serious and firm points about their residual relationships with Iraq, which we wanted them to curtail, about questions in Washington regarding past terrorist activities conducted out of the southern port city of Aden and a few other troubling matters.

Ali Abdullah Saleh came to power through violent means, and he rules with great toughness. His can be brutally blunt. On the other hand, he has a subtle political mind, and he's pretty shrewd. He understood the nature of the criticisms that I was making, and he was not terribly happy to hear them. At the same time, he had probably expected this would be part of my mission, and he knew that he was hearing Washington's views directly. I wanted to make it very clear that these points were not just coming from an ambassador that he could ignore. These were Washington's views, and there were things they would have to do in order to get their relationship with us back on a normal footing. I also told President Saleh that Yemen could not anticipate having a U.S. foreign relationship restored to what it had been before. I suggested that both governments should want a more mature relationship based on trade and investment.

I proceeded to have other meetings with government officials. I also attended a wonderful qat party which included representatives not only of the governing party of President Saleh, but also of the two main opposition parties. Most of the conversations were in Arabic, and the U.S. Embassy public affairs and political officers appreciated having a Washington visitor who could fit into the informal political environment. I also did an interview with the Yemeni and foreign media based in Sana'a that went back and forth between Arabic and English, depending on who was asking the questions. While I knew that our relations with Yemen were not likely to improve quickly, I found myself quite charmed by the combination of Yemeni hospitality and their interesting politics. It made me hopeful that Yemen was moving from a mixture of tribalism and military despotism into some kind of democratic system.

One of the last things I recall doing as a Deputy Assistant Secretary was to make a trip to Brussels to represent the United States in meetings both with the European Community political advisers and the political counselors of the various NATO missions. State's main purpose in sending me was to buttress coalition support of what we were doing in the Arab-Israeli dispute, as well as Iraq and Iran. We were moving pretty fast at that point in trying to build on the success of the Madrid Conference, but it's also true that Washington was keeping the Europeans out of the more political aspects of the Arab-Israel dispute and relegating them to the role of financing some of the economic development that we hoped to see come out of the peace process. They were also skeptical about what the U.S. government wanted to do with regard to Iran, where the Europeans had more normal relations than we did.

The other subject that we discussed at that time, which the Europeans asked to be on the agenda, was the whole question of political Islam. The Europeans were more inclined to describe it the threat of Islam.

Q: This was loaded.

MACK: It was a very loaded issue. Willy Klaus, a former Belgian Foreign Minister who was the NATO Secretary General, had made what I thought was an intemperate and foolish statement. He had suggested that following the end of the Soviet Union, perhaps the next threat to the NATO alliance would be Islam. To both the NATO counselors and the EU political advisers, I explained our view of political Islam. I said it was important that the West not take on Islam as and enemy. Rather, we should focus on extremism, whether it's secular extremism, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, whatever.

Not having spent most of my career dealing with Europeans, I was a bit shocked by the degree of antipathy that some of their representatives expressed toward Islam. It was almost as if they felt that the Muslim armies were still pushing up through Iberia, or the Turks were battering at the gates of Vienna. On the question of European Community expansion, for example, the E.C. folks made it very clear they looked forward to expanding their bloc eastward among former Soviet satellites, but not to include Turkey. Of course, there was a Turkish representative present in the luncheon I had with NATO political counselors, so they had to be a little more discreet. Even so, it seemed that as soon he was out of the room, they would start bad-mouthing the Turks. It's still a big difference between the approach of the Europeans and ourselves on this issue.

You mentioned the last time we should talk a little bit about April Glaspie, and how she was treated.

Q: Yes.

MACK: To a very great degree, some people made April a scapegoat for perceived shortcomings in our policy toward Iraq.

Q: She was our ambassador to Baghdad during the confrontation.

MACK: As I recall, April Glaspie arrived in Baghdad as the U.S. Ambassador in early 1989, at least a year before I became the DAS for the area. She had been there during a period when our relations started to turn sour later in 1989. As the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, she opposed efforts to curtail our relationship. I think this was quite natural and unsurprising, and she worked within the system to affect decisions. April was a disciplined person, and she understood that the Commodity Credit Corporation bank guarantees to U.S. companies selling agricultural commodities to Iraq would be suspended, even if she thought it was an unwise step. The small Ex-Im program would also be suspended, until Iraqi behavior had improved.

Moving forward to the summer of 1990, I think April was doing the best she could to offer sound advice to the State Department and to her Iraqi interlocutors in the lead up to the war in July. She got very little in the way of instructions, mostly the instructions that I developed in my meeting with the Iraqi ambassador on July 17. There was great inattention on the part of the Secretary of State to this issue. That's not a criticism. He had other things at the top of his agenda.

For reasons that are not clear to me, April tended to be identified in the minds of many people with our tilt towards Iraq against Iran. In fact, when April replaced me as Director of ARN in the summer of 1985, Iraq was removed from that office and joined to Iran in a new office, so she was never involved in formulating our policy toward the Iraq-Iran war, so far as I am aware. As it turned out, she became ambassador in Iraq at one of the brief periods when relations between Washington and Baghdad were relatively good, but that was not her doing. There is also the charge that April did not do an effective job either of warning the Iraqis against a military adventure or being prescient enough to realize what they were going to do. That's kind of a heavy load to place on our ambassador in Baghdad. Nobody else was prescient enough to predict the Iraqi actions of 1990. When I say nobody, I include the Arab heads of state, Saudis, Kuwaitis, Egyptians, Jordanians, the Soviets, the Israelis, or our European allies. As a good professional, April felt badly about what had happened, and she did not lay the blame elsewhere. In my view, it was shameful for Secretary Baker to let April Glaspie take the heat. When Larry Eagleburger became Acting Secretary of State, he went out of his way to try to make clear that the Department of State stood behind April. But I'm afraid by that point the damage had been done. So far as I know, Baker never once talked to April Glaspie after she came back from Baghdad, unlike President Bush, who did. Moreover, Baker's staff, led by his spokesperson Margaret Tutwiler, kept April from making any public statements in her own defense. That remained true until the Senate Foreign Relations Committee finally summoned April to a Senate hearing. And even that hearing was in closed session, as I recall.

It was quite clear to me that people around Secretary Baker were happy to let April draw fire as a scapegoat for what was being called a failed policy. First of all, it's an exaggeration to say that the policy had failed. The U.S. government did not succeed in its efforts, beginning in the mid-1980s, to try to moderate Iraqi behavior. In the end, we did not succeed. But it was certainly worth trying. April had nothing to do with our tilt toward Iraq against Iran in the latter years of that conflict, and April was not responsible for the Iraqi treachery that led to their invasion of Kuwait. Or with the comprehensive intelligence failure of the rest of the world to figure out what Saddam was going to do. But April was a good soldier. She kept her mouth shut; she didn't talk to the press. She was shunted off to a diplomat in residence position, after helping us during the war. I brought her into meetings during Desert Shield and Desert Storm, and she provided us advice. George Bush had her over twice to the White House.

After the war was over, April told me she wanted to get away from the Iraq issue, and I urged her to get as far away as possible. She took a short term Diplomat in Residence job at San Diego State. Then she got a job on the staff of the U.S. Mission to the U.N. She was working mostly on economic affairs, not dealing particularly with Middle East, and I understood she was doing well in New York. When Madeleine Albright became Clinton's ambassador to the U.N., Albright let it be known that she wanted many changes made, and one person she wanted to see go was April Glaspie. I'm not sure that was personal on Ambassador Albright's part, but I had a strong supposition she felt it would be a political handicap to have April on her staff. April bounced back, worked for the U.N. for a while in Somalia, and then came back to the State Department. She became the Director of Southern African affairs under Assistant Secretary George Moose. April worked very hard and did very well in that capacity. She was director of that office when we had a great success in our southern Africa policy, and I imagine she was probably quite instrumental in helping us do things well.

Nonetheless, it was pretty clear that April was not going to get named to another ambassadorship. She went to work again for the U.N. in Jerusalem, working on Palestinian refugee relief programs. Recently, I heard April was coming back to the State Department where she will be the director for East African affairs, finishing out her career, I suspect. It does not speak well, frankly, for the way this senior leadership handles career officers who may be a little controversial. April is not the only one. There are other people I could mention that have also had these kinds of problems.

Personally, I cannot make that complaint. I left my Deputy Assistant Secretary job in June of 1993 for my final assignment in the Foreign Service on the faculty at the National War College. For family reasons, I was not ready to go back overseas.

Q: David, before we get to that I wonder if you would comment... Did you see any change? I mean we had two major countries on our plate in your area when the Clinton administration came in. I'm talking about Iran and Iraq, controversial countries. Did you see any difference of approach, or desire for a different approach to either of those countries by the Clinton administration?

MACK: It depends on whether you're talking about reality or rhetoric.

Q: Well, let's talk about both.

MACK: In terms of reality, no. The watch word with regard to the Middle East was continuity. Not only policies but personnel tended to remain as they had been. There were very few changes made, and the changes were not significant. We continued with the same kind of policy we'd had for Iraq and Iran. This was a little awkward for the political people in the Clinton Administration. Members of the Clinton campaign team had been very critical of George Bush for his supposed mismanagement of U.S. relations with Iraq in the run-up to the Gulf War. They could hardly criticize him for the way he had handled the Gulf War, although they were not unhappy for other people to criticize him for having ended the Gulf War too soon. Also, there was a bit of a whisper campaign about George Bush's involvement with Irangate during the Reagan Administration. Vice President Bush had a counter terrorism portfolio at the Reagan White House. The allegation was that he had perhaps been a little too soft on the Iranian mullahs. Frankly, I have no knowledge about that.

But the campaign attacks did not lead to changes in the basic policies - not with regard to the Arab-Israeli peace process, nor Iraq, nor Iran, nor Saudi Arabia. The Clinton White House did make a controversial choice for the National Security Council staff in the person of Martin Indyk. I first met Martin when he was new in Washington, and he was the Director of Research at the Arab-Israel Public Affairs Committee, better known as AIPAC. Martin then became the Director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, which is a not-for-profit think tank. As a non-taxable organization supported by tax deductible charitable contributions, it is also supposed not to lobby. However, WINEP was the offspring of AIPAC, and it looked to many like a legal dodge of the U.S. tax laws. Moreover, Martin was an Australian citizen, so the Clinton Administration had to speed up his naturalization and acquisition of U.S. citizenship in order for him to get this position on the National Security Council staff as a director dealing with the Middle East and South Asia.

No one doubts that Martin Indyk is knowledgeable about the Middle East and capable. Among other things, he has a very fertile mind about public relations and is quite articulate. Martin came up with a hawkish re-statement of our policy toward Iraq and Iran. He called that dual containment, an unfortunately zippy title which is much more of a slogan than a strategy. Our policy toward Iraq was clearly something more than containment, but it is also based on U.N. resolutions, so there are good reasons to be circumspect in how we describe the policy. The Bush Administration was and the Clinton Administration is making efforts to change the government in Baghdad. Such efforts clearly go beyond containment, as the term was used with regard to the Soviet Union and is commonly understood.

Our policy toward Iran was, I would say, fairly close to what I would consider this orthodox view of containment. But the rhetoric about Iran that Martin adopted in his speech was decidedly hawkish. Our stated position was that we were prepared to have a direct dialogue with authorized officials of the Iranian Government, not something back door or secret or through people who claimed to be intermediaries with a back channel to the Iranian leaders. And we had made it clear through public statements and through our official Swiss government channel that it was not our policy to overthrow the Iranian government. We wanted the Iranian government to change its behavior in foreign policy. The way Martin expressed things in his dual containment speech was much more ominous to someone sitting in Tehran. This statement backfired with the Iranian government and with other governments. It went down very badly first of all, because it did not have much intellectual coherence. It was more a slogan than a strategy.

Secondly, it was introduced the wrong way. It was a speech made by a former AIPAC official before an audience of AIPAC supporters. So far as I am aware, there was no prior consultation with any of our NATO allies or Arab friends. Whether there was prior consultation or not with Israel, I don't know. So it had all the appearance of something that had been done at the behest of the Israeli lobby. Martin Indyk was the wrong person to make such a statement, and he chose the wrong venue. A neutral venue like the Council on Foreign Relations would have been better. The dual containment speech started a process of discrediting our policies toward Iraq and Iran internationally. Subsequently, Assistant Secretaries of NEA have tried to walk us back from some of this. These days, people in the Clinton Administration usually try to avoid using the term dual containment. When Madeleine Albright made a speech recently at Georgetown on Iraqi policy, her prepared text never used the words. Unfortunately, somebody asked her the question, does this mean that we're abandoning our dual containment policy? She said something like, Oh my, no, dual containment is still our policy. It spreads the idea that what we do with regard to Iraq and Iran, we do because of Israel's interests, rather than U.S. national interests. That's very unfortunate.

My assignment to the National War College, as International Affairs Advisor, in effect the civilian deputy to the NWC Commandant, was very welcome to me. For family reasons, we didn't want to go overseas at that point. It turned out to be more than a nice thing to do for a couple of years. Teaching about the Middle East and more general issues of foreign policy was a stimulating challenge, plus the assignment taught me a lot about the U.S. military and its various military cultures. It was also a time for me to reflect about U.S. national interests, power and diplomacy, relationships between the State Department and the military establishment, the nature of foreign policy, and how policy is formulated in the real world of Washington.

The legacy of George Kennan, who had been the first International Affairs Adviser, the first senior U.S. diplomat when the National War College was established, had suffered from neglect. At the end of World War II, his position came into being with the idea that NWC would be a partnership between the departments of state and defense. It was there that Kennan developed his doctrine of containment, initially with an anonymous article in Foreign Affairs magazine. Gradually the National War College had gotten less attention from the State Department than I felt it should have. First of all, although we have senior training for a number of our officers at the Foreign Service Institute, or the National Foreign Affairs Training Center, to use its current name, by far the largest number of U.S. diplomats who get senior career training do so at one of the various War Colleges - the National War College and the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, both at the National Defense University in Washington, the Army War College at Carlisle, the Air War College in Montgomery and the Naval War College Newport. Many U.S. diplomats have their senior training at these institutions, and it comes at a helpful time in their careers. They are Foreign Service Officers, usually at the FS-1 level, who have demonstrated potential for ambassadorial and other senior positions. Most of them have had only infrequent dealings with the U.S. military at this point in their careers. Perhaps they have been trade or consular experts. It's almost certain that those who reach senior positions will spend a lot of time dealing with both U.S. and foreign military leaders. So it's a good time for them to rub shoulders with military officers of roughly the same age. It's also really important that the State Department make more input into the training of senior military officers, which Kennan certainly did when he was at the War College in its formative years. Our senior personnel need to understand the military perspective, but we also want to make sure that future generals and admirals do not see the world through a narrow military prism. The State Department ought to give priority to assignments both for senior officers on the war college faculties, and for our most promising FS-1s as students at the war colleges. Instead, at the present time, if an FS-1 is needed for a particular job at the State Department, or the National Security Council, that always takes precedence over going to senior training. This is understandable in the short term, but I think it is unwise in the long term.

An even greater problem in terms of career development of State Department personnel, is that we're not budgeted and staffed to put more people into senior training. The military, of course, has more luxury in a way.

Q: They're waiting for a war, and they might as well train.

MACK: That's right, exactly. Training is something the military services automatically do. Everybody who has a prospect of going on to be a general or an admiral gets senior training, and they benefit from it.

I viewed my own job at NWC in several ways. First of all, the military officers who receive a year's training at one of the war colleges are a great potential resource for the nation. Here were men and women, mostly in their early to mid-40s, and they have the prospect of going on to become an admiral or a general. My unofficial mission statement was that if that happened, I wanted to make sure they would be more like Colin Powell, who was a graduate of the National War College, and less like Curtis Lemay. That may be unfair to Curtis Lemay, but I think it sort of summed up my view. Most of the officers arrived at NWC with a very narrow perspective. Many of them had been trained as engineers, and they had often been working in a largely technical environment. For example, one of my more senior students in my second year at NWC was a Navy Captain who had served in two very demanding submarine commands. He had been in command of an attack submarine, and he had also commanded one of our strategic nuclear missile submarines. Both had been nuclear powered submarines, so he had already had great responsibilities. Obviously, I couldn't teach this man anything about nuclear engineering, and I couldn't teach him anything about leadership. He had managed these things quite well. But he hadn't the faintest idea about international politics or international trade or any of the things in which I was involved in teaching. So I really enjoyed the teaching aspect of my job. I taught not only certain basic courses on foreign policy and international relations, but also I developed an elective course on Security Issues of the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf. This included Iraq, Iran, oil and Islam, giving gave me an opportunity to integrate a lot of the experiences I had had.

The NWC Commandant also looked to me to be the faculty leader to the civilian faculty members from various federal agencies and the 40 civilian students, who constitute something like 18% of the total. Roughly half of the civilian students were Foreign Service Officers from State, AID, USIA, Commerce and a few other agencies. They were especially important at NWC, where their experiences and outlook was particularly important to the education of the military officers. I didn't treat the State Department as being that different from the rest of the U.S. government, but I did treat the U.S. Foreign Service Officers as being different, regardless of their home agencies. I let them and my military faculty colleagues know that the Foreign Service has its own culture, just the way the Marines and the Navy and the Air Force and Army have their cultures. I tried very much to instill in the Foreign Service Officers this pride in their service legacy. One of the things that I regularly would point out to the students, but also to the faculty members, was that of those National War College graduates who had been later killed in the service of their country, a greatly disproportionate number are Foreign Service Officers. The reality is that military officers getting senior training are not likely to ever be on the front lines again. But their Foreign Service classmates are likely to get jobs where they will become a target for terrorists. That's one of the harsh realities of the modern Foreign Service.

In addition to introducing a group of military officers to conditions in Uzbekistan and Turkey and traveling as a State Department speaker to Qatar, Kuwait and Jordan, I did have one diplomatic excursion during my time at NWC. I went out to Riyadh to act as chargï¿½ d'affaires for two weeks at the end of 1993. The circumstances were unusual, but they say something about what was a close knit band of colleagues on the Arabist circuit of the U.S. Foreign Service. When I was a DAS, I had urged our chargï¿½, David Welch, to take the job as deputy chief of mission in Riyadh. David had worked for me as a Lebanon desk officer many years earlier, was very capable and would do very well as a DCM. But I also knew that he could be in charge for a fair period of time between ambassadors to a key country where we needed committed diplomatic leadership.

Our previous ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Chas Freeman, was in Riyadh when David first arrived in late spring of 1992, but he was anxious to leave. Everything after the end of the Gulf War was an anti-climax for Chas, and the State Department understood why he felt that way. When Chas learned that a distinguished retired oil executive was being named as the new U.S. ambassador, Chas said, "I want out." The Saudis wanted, unwisely in my view, to have a political appointee. It was an election year, however, and the Democrats controlled the Senate. I told Chas that I didn't think that George Bush could pull it off. Unfortunately, President Bush tried. The oil executive never got confirmed, and he eventually left Washington in disgust. So, the months that I thought we might have a chargï¿½ between ambassadors were stretching into a much longer period. The Clinton administration proved particularly inept in getting senior appointments through the confirmation process, despite the fact for the first two years it had a Democratic majority in the Senate. By late 1993, the State Department was still waiting for the White House to name a new ambassador, and Washington didn't feel there was anybody other than Welch who could be in charge of that very large diplomatic establishment, including two consulates general and a substantial military presence. The largest part of our military presence was there because of the continuing problems with Iraq. It was very important that the State Department not seem unable to protect through diplomacy what the military had gained through force of arms.

After David Welch had been in Riyadh a little less than a year, in maybe April or May of 1993, when I was still a Deputy Assistant Secretary, I was on a secure phone call with David discussing some critical military cooperation with Saudi Arabia. David said he'd made plans to send his wife and two children back for the summer to see their grandparents and get a break from the Saudi climate. There was kind of a long pause, and then I said, "David, I feel terrible about this." David said, "Don't worry. I know you're working on getting a new ambassador out here, so I'll just plan on taking a long vacation for Christmas and New Year's." Another long pause, and I said, "David, if we don't have an ambassador out there by Christmas, I will come out and take your place," thinking that was an easy promise to make. I thought we'd surely have an ambassador by then. Well, we didn't, and NEA Assistant Secretary Robert Pelletreau asked me to relieve Welch for a couple of weeks. I had to explain to my wife why I was going to spend Christmas and New Year's in Riyadh, a place she had no desire to visit with me.

It was a very interesting two weeks. They had a summit in Riyadh of the heads of the Arab States of the Gulf Cooperation Council in Riyadh, part of which I was able to attend as an observer, and I supervised the embassy's coverage of the event for Washington. In addition to this international event, Saudi Arabia witnessed a rare step of internal political reform. King Fahd inaugurated the Majlis-ash-Shura, or Consultative Council. This was a very cautious step toward the broadening of the political process that we have tried to encourage. It built on the traditional Arab consultative tribal forum where people come and present their views to the Sheikh, or leader of the tribe, and he is supposed to consult with them until he gets a consensus. It was a promising beginning in the kind of process I had broached publicly for the State Department at the luncheon for the G.C.C.-U.S economic dialogue earlier in the year. So it was an interesting period to be in Saudi Arabia, while the National War College was on holiday break and the State Department was taking a breather. In addition to dealing with sensitive matters in then U.S.-Saudi bilateral relationship and regarding Iraq, I was able to attend one of our two weekly community meetings. Every Friday we had two American community meetings in the embassy chancery, one Protestant and one Catholic. So my last diplomatic assignment was a memorable Christmas in Riyadh, including religious services.

During this period I did a lot of public speaking. In retrospect, I was way too cautious and didn't write the articles that people were urging me to write, partly because I still entertained an idea that I might be assigned another ambassadorship. In the end, the ones where my wife would have been willing to go with me did not come my way. It was just as well. My wife's parents had gotten increasingly ill, and she had to spend time with them in the Boston area about once each month. She would not have been able to accompany me overseas, so it was probably well that I took a job offered in the private sector and retired at the end of June 1995.

Leaving the Service left a little bad taste in my mouth. I felt very strongly the importance of what I was doing in the National War College, and the Commandant had asked, unsuccessfully, that I be extended for a third year. As soon as I indicated that I planned to retire at the end of June, my personnel counselor - in total good faith and trying to help me financially, said, "Why don't you take advantage of the Buy Out," That was an administrative mechanism being used to encourage people to leave the Service early before they would have to. I had decided I was going to leave early anyway but wanted to meet my existing obligations to NWC. So I said to my personnel counselor, "But if I do that I'd have to leave at the end of March. I'm teaching a class at the War College. I've got efficiency reports to write on 40 U.S. government civilians, 20 of them Foreign Service Officers. I've got efficiency reports to write on three senior Foreign Service Officers who are working on the faculty. I can't just walk away from that." And he said, "Oh, you're right, I understand, but I just wanted you to be aware of the advantage to you." I thought to myself, it's really too bad at the end of our careers if people make you feel that the work you've been entrusted with is really not that important.

Q: The going out is probably the worst thing that we do. It's not well designed.

MACK: As a result, I've never gone to my retirement ceremony. I was traveling when the first retirement ceremony came up, so I didn't have my ritual handshake with Secretary Warren Christopher. I've watched one of his retirement ceremonies on video and felt that it really wasn't anything I lusted to do for my country. The State Department sent me through the mail not one, but two retirement plaques. I've just kept the second one. I figured it would be too much bureaucratic trouble to return it. The twin plaques would make handsome book ends!

Q: Well, David, this has been great.

End of interview