

AMBASSADOR WILLIAM A. RUGH

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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[Note: This interview was not edited by Ambassador Rugh]

Q: When, and where were you born and could you tell me a little bit about your family?

RUGH: I was born in 1936 in New York City. My father was a professor of zoology at New York University and then at Columbia. My mother was a schoolteacher in New York. I have a sister who became an educational counselor in Baltimore.

Q: So, very much a professional family then. Where did you go to early education, early schools?

RUGH: I went to the Horace Mann School in New York City and graduated in 1954; went to Oberlin College in Ohio, 1954 to 1958. Then I went to Germany for a year on scholarship from the German government, studied at the University of Hamburg 1958, '59. Then I went to the Johns' Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, first to the Bologna Center '59 to '60, and then the second year of the master's program in Washington, D.C. Where I did an MA.

Q: Well, going back to both Horace Mann and then Oberlin. Had you gotten involved in foreign affairs or interested in that or when did this bug bite you?

RUGH: In 1950, when I was 14 I went to Europe for the summer with my parents. In 1956 I went to Europe on a summer program with the Experiment in International Living, spent the summer in Austria in a German language program. In high school I studied German for six years, French for four years. Was interested in languages and I came at the interest in international relations through language study primarily and decided that I wanted to get involved in a profession where I could use the language as a tool rather than as an academic study or as a teacher of language and that would be foreign affairs.

Q: I mean, were people telling you to go to the Foreign; did you know anybody in the Foreign Service?

RUGH: No. My family was all teachers, educators. My father and uncles were all university professors; my mother was a teacher and my sister was a teacher, they were all in education and actually I thought I'd end up in education as well. But I became interested in international relations and decided that I couldn't really teach very well unless I experienced it firsthand. So I decided to try to join the Foreign Service to have the experience of working in diplomacy and living abroad in order later to teach.

Q: Well, by the time you got to Johns' Hopkins which was very much oriented towards foreign service, not necessarily in the State Department, but foreign service, you must have gotten quite a dose of what the Foreign Service was about.

RUGH: More or less. In fact I started taking the Foreign Service examination when I was in college. I took it three times. Failed it the first two times. I passed the written exam and failed the oral. So I was interested in the Foreign Service and was trying to get in, but it took me three tries.

Q: Well this is pretty much par for the course. Well when you took the oral examination the first time could you describe where you feel you did well, where you didn't, and all that because that captures the spirit of this.

RUGH: OK. First time I took it I was an undergraduate and I had focused on foreign affairs, foreign language study, comparative government, and not much on American history or culture and I did poorly on the latter. So I went back and tried again but the second time I had been living in Germany and again I was weak on the American culture side. Ended up joining the U.S. Information Agency whose purpose is partly to explain American history and culture abroad. So I finally made it, I had to study.

Q: I know, I was an examiner for the Foreign Service and I was an American history major, I used to sit there and glower at them that didn't know their American history. (Laughter)

RUGH: Well, I had to do some studying and prepare for it because I wasn't prepared.

Q: Well, how did you get into the Foreign Service then?

RUGH: Well I finally, third time around, after passing the written examination the third time, finally got through the orals. I knew enough about American geography, and history, and culture to satisfy the examiners. And that was in 1964. By that time I had, while waiting to get into the Foreign Service, I had gone through a master's degree program and gotten an M.A. from SAIS (Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies) and then entered a Ph.D. program and I was well along on a Ph.D. program at Columbia University. I had completed all my requirements for a doctorate and was in Germany doing the research for the thesis when I took the oral exam for the third time and finally passed it. So, I entered the Foreign Service in 1964 with an almost completed Ph.D. which was the other track of my career preparation. I went into the Foreign Service. I was sworn in in November 1964 with partially completed research that I had done in Germany in the year 1963-64, a research year, but without the degree. So I had to deal with that and I knew that a lot of people had completed all but the dissertation. I didn't want to stop there; I wanted to complete the dissertation because I thought eventually I'd be teaching and need that Ph.D. So I kept at it and my first assignment in the Foreign Service was to language school in Beirut. I was studying Arabic for a full year, couldn't do much with my dissertation there. But on my second assignment was to Cairo where I was a junior officer trainee in 1965 and there I worked on my dissertation weekends. My professor at Columbia, Otto Kirchheimer, was a very tough task master and he would tell me when I was home on leave or by letter, or by phone, that the material that I had collected for my dissertation was interesting but it wasn't a dissertation and I had to completely rework it. And rewrite it. So I was rewriting in sitting in Cairo on my weekends trying to do a foreign service job during the weekdays and sending pieces to him and he would send them back and say this isn't good enough. That went on from '65 to late '66. Finally Prof. Kirchheimer wrote me a letter saying you finally figured out how to write a dissertation and it's OK, so we can go before the committee. So I planned to go before the committee during home leave in early '67. Then I was notified by the university that Professor Kirchheimer had just died. I was quite concerned, having worked on this dissertation since '63, gathering material and here it was late '66 and I was determined to finish it but my mentor, after giving me a hard time had passed away. Fortunately I found a young professor at Columbia who had been a protégé of Kirchheimer and admired Kirchheimer. I sent him Kirchheimer's last letter saying your dissertation is in finally good shape. He pretty much accepted that and said OK, I won't revisit the whole story, I'll except Kirchheimer's endorsement and you can sit for your orals, in February '67. So I came back and to my great relief I was able to defend the dissertation successfully and get done it and I got my degree in '67.

Q: What was your dissertation? What was the focus of it?

RUGH: The dissertation was on a political aspects of the radio and television in Germany. I had studied the West German Broadcasting system for the years between 1945 and 1963 which in the beginning of that period was under U.S. military control. It was an interesting case because we decided that we had to prevent German Broadcasting from becoming an instrument of Fascist propaganda and it had to become a democratic instrument. That's not easy to organize and my question was "How did it come out? Did it work? Was it democratic?" And so I studied that and wrote a thesis on it. And it was related to my later work because I joined the U.S. Information Agency, and worked in the media field. But I didn't go to Germany. When I joined the Foreign Service they said where would you like to go? And I said I'd like to go to Germany because I know something about it, and speak the language. And they said pick another place, Germany's full. And besides, you need a second language, you need a hard language. So I said well I'll study Arabic because that's spoken in a lot of countries and I'll have an opportunity to go to more than one country if I spend a year or two studying Arabic. They sent me to Beirut in 1964 to the Foreign Service Institute Field School where I studied Arabic.

Q: You studied Arabic from 64 to 1965. How did you find the school at Beirut?

RUGH: I thought it was a terrific school. I liked their approach because they started with the spoken language and drills of spoken Arabic and only later introduced, reading and writing. I thought that was a good approach particularly because it's more suited to the needs of Foreign Service officers. This is a controversial subject, some people say you should start with the written but I happen to believe that this is a better way to do it. And my spoken Arabic is far better than my reading and writing still to this day, but I don't regret that. I think speaking is important.

Q: I agree with you. Were the students at the language school, was there much connection with the embassy there?

RUGH: Not much, not much. We were pretty busy. We had our classes physically in the embassy building in Beirut and we had a monthly meeting with the ambassador who told us what was going on in the country and we had a few social connections with embassy personnel, but it was pretty much an independent operation.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

RUGH: It was Armin Meyer. He then went on to Iran and later assignments. Armin Meyer was a very formidable and respected personality. We were pleased to have the chance to hear his briefing once a month when we did see him.

Q: What was your impression, I mean, here you were, you really were a European, I mean that this is where you had been. And all of a sudden you're plunked down in the middle of the Arab world here and all the currents that are continuing to circulate in that place. What was your impression of the Arab world when you got there, and Israel, and the whole thing?

RUGH: Actually I selected the Arab world partly because of its proximity to Europe and the European connections that are important in understanding the Arab world. But when I got there I found it totally different. The differences were more striking than the similarities to any place I'd ever been before. Beirut at first glance looked like a rather chaotic, disorganized, dirty city. And it was rather bewildering. I spent a year in Beirut and then I spent a year in Cairo. I remember coming back to Beirut after a year in Cairo thinking, you know, they've cleaned this place up, it's really organized and clean and I hadn't remembered it like that. It's all relative. Cairo is dirtier and less organized and much more crowded, so it's all your perspective. I had expected Beirut to be European and it wasn't, and my expectations changed over the years. I was lucky in Beirut because I happened to have an aunt and uncle living there. My aunt is the great granddaughter of Daniel Bliss who founded AUB, the American University of Beirut in the 1860s and her family had stayed in Beirut ever since. Her father was a professor of medicine at AUB and she grew up there and came to the U.S. to go to college and then went back to Beirut and was teaching there as an adult. My uncle, my father's brother, showed up in Beirut in the '20s, met her, married her and also stayed in Beirut. So, by the time I got there in 1964 he was one of the deans at American University in Beirut, and she was there and they introduced me to Lebanese society. She knew a lot of people, was very fond of the country and its people and that kind of personal introduction was very important in my appreciation and my wife's appreciation of Arab society. I couldn't have gotten so quickly into Arab society without that assistance, plus learning the language helped.

Q: When did you get married?

RUGH: 1958, when I graduated.

Q: So your wife was with you through all this Ph.D. search and all that.

RUGH: Right. She raised our three sons and then later she got her Ph.D. in social anthropology, and became an expert on Arab society.

Q: You mentioned getting into Arab society. I've only passed through Beirut but from what I understand, Arab society was sort of difficult to get into in Beirut because the Lebanese Christian community would gobble up anybody connected to the embassy and it was a nice social life and all that, but it was very hard to disentangle. Did you find that a problem?

RUGH: It's true to the extent that even the embassy had a very high proportion of Christians and Armenians and people who were part of Lebanese society but minorities in their own country. So the natural contacts are with minorities. But partly through my aunt and uncle I was able to meet a broader spectrum of Lebanese and Lebanese are very friendly and welcoming and open. In those days there were good relations between the groups. Those were days of harmony among the various Lebanese groups and it was later the situation deteriorated. So it wasn't difficult, if you made an effort to get to know others. We didn't have a lot of social activities, because I was busy studying Arabic but it was possible. Of course later, by 1974-75, the social contract collapsed and the society became very factious and it was much, much harder to get around. But in the sixties, that was the golden era. I remember my aunt saying it was nice earlier, but by the seventies people were looking back on the sixties as being a golden era.

Q: Well what was the political situation there? There had been the uprising, what ever you call it in '58, and that had seemed to settle down. What was, as you saw it, the situation in Lebanon?

RUGH: Well, Americans were very welcome. Relations with the United States were excellent. That was what we believed at the time. Maybe it was a bit starry eyed in the sense that we were talking to friendly factions and we weren't sensitive enough to the discontent of Shiite groups and others who were becoming more and more disaffected. But as far as we knew, Lebanon was a successful experiment in pluralism. I remember very distinguished scholars such Malcolm Kerr writing that Lebanon was a model for harmony among different social groups and we believed that. It was a society that was very friendly to the United States. The 1958 crisis with the American intervention, direct military intervention, seemed to have been a successful use of American military power to help stabilize the situation. Of course we found out later that doesn't always work. But at that time, in 1964, the American University, AUB, was a very positive factor. Later it became faction ridden and had a lot of political difficulties. The American University Hospital was considered the best in the Middle East. The American official presence was considered benign and benevolent by most people. Of course, in those years there was a wave of Arab nationalism led primarily by Nasser, in Egypt, and to some extent people in Lebanon were reflecting that and feeling that. The Palestinian teachers I had at the Foreign Service Institute Field School certainly reflected that. They were by and large sympathetic with Nasser and couldn't understand why Americans didn't appreciate Arab grievances, about Israel primarily, and about American "neo imperialism." I guess we tended to blame that partly at least on Nasser as a demagogue, as an opportunistic political leader who was trying to stir people up. We took it seriously of course, but we also saw or heard a lot of people saying positive things about the United States and assumed that there was at least a strong constituency that was favorable to the United States. The Palestine question, the Arab Israel question was the key issue of course. As students, as students in FSI in Beirut in those days, we quickly became engaged in discussions with Arabs of all political stripes about American support for Israel. That was a discussion that I carried out from 1964, when I went to Beirut, until I left the Foreign Service. But it changed. You know it changed considerably in the nineties. But from '64 right through until the late 1980s it was topic number one in many discussions, though not all. The further you got away from it, I mean if you went to the Gulf or Yemen in any of those years it was less important. But if you're sitting in Beirut or in Amman or certainly in Damascus or Cairo it was topic number one. In 1964 when I first entered the Middle East and the Foreign Service I got my first taste of it from Palestinians teachers; most of my teachers were Palestinian.

Q: One of the things that's been leveled at the Foreign Service, the Arabic core, is that it tends to be pro Arabic and hence, anti Israel. So, in doing these interviews, anybody involved in that area, I tried to catch one, you might say when you start out, your mind set towards basically our support of Israel and then those about you and what were you getting.

RUGH: You mean from Arabs?

Q: Well, I mean really from within the group of people who were studying with you and all. I mean this is an embryonic Arabist nucleus (laughter).

RUGH: Well, I guess, you know, we were new to this discussion. It was something we hadn't really encountered in the United States very much where the discussion tends to be more narrow. I guess all of us found this was a new and interesting experience to be defending Israel. Part of our reaction was to say America isn't Israel, why are you attacking us all the time for what Israel does? And their response was, well, you made Israel what it is and you created the problem and you're perpetuating the problem. We all felt a bit frustrated by that. And then coming home, on home leave, we were equally frustrated by trying to explain to our friends and relatives in America what we had heard in the Arab world. And the gap in perceptions between Arabs and Americans was so big that we felt caught in the middle. We didn't feel that we were biased in the sense that we were taking one side against another. We felt more that we were trying to help each side understand the other. Certainly we felt it was our job professionally to explain the American attitudes to Arabs. Certainly in USIA and State and other agencies of the U.S. government, you are supposed to explain not only American policies but American attitudes. So we found ourselves trying to explain public and Congressional and official attitudes of Americans towards Israel and towards Palestine, Palestinians and toward Nasser and toward Arab nationalism and all these things. But when you come back to the States on home leave you find yourself trying to explain Nasser and Palestinians and Arab nationalism to Americans. The task is equally difficult, if you begin to understand some of the feelings out there. From that comes a perception, I think, that people who spent time in the Arab world and become quote Arabists unquote are biased - the portrait of the Arabists that Robert Kaplan has given us in his book.

Q: Which is called The Arabists.

RUGH: The Arabists. Most of us feel it is distorted and an unfair portrait and it's a book that we have a lot of problems with. His pictures of individual personalities are to some extent beautifully drawn but he's trying to draw conclusions and he develops a thesis to tie it altogether which isn't accurate I think. His portrayal of specific people he puts under the rubric of Arabist, but his definition is flexible to include people who speak Arabic, and people who don't, and people who know the area, and people who don't know it so well and so on. So that's a problem in itself. His overall thesis for one thing implies that Arabists have had an inordinate influence over U.S. foreign policy but we always felt that we had too little influence over U.S. foreign policy and that the basic decisions on the Middle East are made for domestic American political reasons more than for foreign policy reasons. Some people in that book were treated better than others, but he didn't really understand. If I can make just one more comment on that book. He based that book on interviews with Arabists and people who know them, not on an understanding of the Arab world. There's almost nothing in that book about the Arab world per se. It's about people who have dealt with the Arab world and he really doesn't understand the Arab world. He's never spent time in it, more than a few days and has no real understanding of that culture and people's attitudes there. It's very...

Q: I have the feeling, that Kaplan I assume is Jewish, but came out of the very much Israeli and American Jewish perception that if you are not 100 percent with us, you are our enemy.

RUGH: Yes.

Q: And the Foreign Service has always had a difficult time, because we're the ones who try to explain, you know there's not all only another side, but we've got a problem to deal with and a complete subservience to the Israeli position is not necessarily good for American policy and it's the messenger who gets hit and I think Kaplan, one had the feeling he went after the messenger. At the same time, he kind of fell in love with the guy. Very peculiar. Very peculiar book. It started out with one thesis and ended up with at sort of a fascination by these people.

RUGH: That's right.

Q: It's not a very good book. But anyway....

RUGH: I agree with your analysis. Some people have said to some of my Arabist friends and have said to me, "you know it's not as bad as I expected." I think in the end he tried to understand Arabists and he seemed to be making an effort and said, "Well some of them aren't bad". But I guess his definition of not bad means if you've served in Israel and understand both sides, then maybe you're okay. He can't imagine that somebody who hasn't served in Israel has any understanding or any semblance of objectivity. So he has selected a few Foreign Service Officers who served both in Israel and the Arab world and said these people are okay; and one or two others like Hume Horan who is an outstanding Arabist, maybe our best linguist in the Foreign Service. Hume was involved in helping to send the Falashas to Israel.

Q: These are the Ethiopian Jews.

RUGH: Right. The Ethiopian Jews, when he was ambassador in Ethiopia. And Hume was given high praise by Kaplan and one suspects it's because of that. He implies that he's a good guy, he's okay, because he's helped liberate the Falashas. Well, that really is not giving enough credit to people who haven't done something for Israel. (laughter)

Q: I just put in the record here, for anyone who's interested in this. We have a rather major collection, as the interviews of people who have been Arabists and who have dealt with this. At least one Ph.D. has been done on this by a young woman, Terr, she is at Clark University who is doing her dissertation of the Arabists using what we have.

RUGH: Well, I hope it's better than Kaplan's book. It's too bad that he's written the book that sort of defines the debates. He wrote an article first on the subject and it was before he wrote the book and later expanded into a book. I wrote him a letter and said you know you've picked out a few people who are good Arabists, but you've missed several, several key people. And so he went and talked to them and even with the book he missed a couple of absolutely key people that I would have put at the top of the list, like Chris Ross. Chris Ross is today hands down the best Arabic language speaker in the Foreign Service of anybody except for a couple of native speakers who are translators at State. Chris Ross is absolutely brilliant as a diplomat and as a person who has mastered the language and he's not even mentioned in Kaplan's book. So there are gaps. Chris is our ambassador in Damascus.

Q: Well, did you have any, when you were at the language school, did you get a chance to go to Israel?

RUGH: I went to Jerusalem. But Jerusalem was then in Jordanian hands. I didn't go to Israel at that time. I went much later, when I was stationed in Washington. Didn't have the chance to visit Israel, but I did visit other neighboring countries: Jordan in particular, and Syria. We went by car, it was easy then. After I had an assignment in Egypt following my language school I was assigned to back to Washington and from Washington I visited Israel.

Q: Because Israel is going to be topic number one of any time you're at any gathering together, I served in Dhahran at one time. I used to dread parties because I got so bored with the subject. But anyway, was there any attempt to have somebody come and give you lectures on Israel today and looking at Israel so you can understand Israel at all?

RUGH: Not really. The Foreign Service Institute in those days at least concentrated on language and we had very little other substance. We did some reading, and we had a little library. But there wasn't much of anything other than language; it's not like FSI in Washington. The field school in Beirut in those days at least devoted almost all of its time to language study, and that was it.

Q: You finished language study in Cairo, is that right?

RUGH: I did a year of language study in Beirut and then went to Cairo for JOT (Junior Officer Trainee) training.

Q: You were in Cairo from when?

RUGH: '65 to '66.

Q: '65 to '66. What were you doing as a JOT there?

RUGH: I was as an officer with the U.S. Information Agency, I was doing culture and information work, rotating between various sections and it was a big Embassy in those days. It had a huge USIS section including an information officer, an assistant information officer, a cultural officer, and a couple of assistant cultural officers, all Americans, an executive officer, a secretary, and a branch post in Alexandria. So it was perhaps the largest USIS posts in the Middle East. It was a wonderful training post because I worked with senior Foreign Service officers who were experienced and quite talented and I was simply rotated and watched what they did and did some sort of basic work for them. Our PAO (Public Affairs Officer), Jim Halsema, was an outstanding mentor.

Q: Of the USIA work, did anyone particularly strike you as one really interested you, or you felt at the time seemed to be effective. I mean, getting you out other than sort of the administrative side, I mean, you know reaching out and doing what you're supposed to be doing?

RUGH: Well, I was encouraged by the PAO, Jim Halsema. Out of a USIS staff of about 12 or 13 Americans, I was by far the most junior and yet when I went out and began to do some analytical reporting on various aspects of Egyptian society, he read them, commented, and gave me credit for doing that and encouraged me to do more. So I felt pretty good about that. I thought it was the most interesting part of the job; to get out and try to get into people's heads and learn what people were thinking and doing. And if my boss, who was such a senior officer, liked it, that's great. So I didn't focus too much on the in house part of the job. I tried to get out as much as I could because he encouraged me to do so and I was able to use the language that I'd learned. I went to movies and talked to people and got to know people, although it was somewhat difficult in those days to have a lot of social contact with Egyptians because Nasser was in power. He was so clearly hostile to the US. He perceived dangers of American imperialism so that Egyptians were afraid to have a lot of contact with the United States and with American officials in particular. They wouldn't come to the house for dinner or for any reason. I would have to meet them elsewhere because they suspected that my house was being watched. I remember on one occasion I invited a professor from the university to come to dinner and he said, "Well, I can come if you don't invite anybody else because I'm concerned that people will report on what I'm doing and my contact with you."

And I said, "Okay, it will just be you." He came to the house and we had a nice dinner, nice discussion. He was a very intelligent professor of political science which is what I had studied. We had a lot to talk about and it was interesting to hear his views on Egyptian society and foreign policy. When he left I discovered that he didn't have a car parked in front of the house and I said, "Where is your car?"

And he said, "Well I parked it two blocks away because I didn't want the police, the Mukhabarat, to see it."

And I thought that he was brave to come and see me in spite of these restrictions. His name was Boutros Ghali. He was at that time head of the political science department at the University and he had enough courage to be in touch with Americans.

Q: He's now the Secretary General of the United Nations.

RUGH: Secretary General of the UN. But he had enough intellectual curiosity to talk to an American diplomat and find out what we were thinking as well as to tell us what he was thinking. So I have always respected him for a lot of reasons. Later when I went back to Egypt on another assignment, I saw him occasionally, but he was by then being elevated first to a senior position in the Foreign Ministry and then some other assignments. So I didn't have a lot to do with him later, but he's a formidable intellect and a very decent man. I always remembered my first contacts with him.

Q: What were your feelings and many maybe any reflection you might have on sort of the embassy feeling towards Nasser at this time. This is still just on the brink, a little before the '67 War which was such a disaster to Egypt and to Nasser.

RUGH: Well I guess we all had mixed feelings. The people who had been around the area for awhile, and been in Egypt for awhile, came to appreciate to some extent the grievances that the Egyptians had over American support for Israel. But I guess the overwhelming feeling was that America was being treated unfairly and that not only were the attacks, the verbal attacks on Israel, and on the United States for its support of Israel unjustified and exaggerated beyond all proportion, but this spilled over into everything else. The United States had been trying to help Egypt for years with economic assistance and support for Egypt's independence and we got no appreciation for it from the regime. And we felt that Nasser was leading the people off in a direction that exaggerated the grievances and was exploiting them for his own purposes. There were differences of opinion within the embassy staff. Our political counselor, Dick Parker, was one of the great analysts of the Foreign Service in the Near East Bureau and he had a very sober, sensible appreciation of the situation I thought. Luke Battle, our ambassador, had superb judgment and was very balanced and certainly defended and explained American policy as well as anybody could have in those days. Unfortunately Battle left, was reassigned, I believe early in '67 or late in '66, just when I was. And I left also in '66 to go on to another assignment and I wasn't in Egypt when the June war broke out. There is a feeling in the Foreign Service that if he had, as some of us feel, that if Battle had been present as ambassador to Egypt in June 1967, he would have played a major role in trying to avert a war. I can't say that he would have succeeded, but we didn't have an ambassador in June 1967.

Q: The '67 War came about through basically miscalculations on the part of Nasser, sort of a bluff that went awry.

RUGH: Right, and so my point is exactly that, that Nasser misunderstood the situation. The Israelis had their calculations and we didn't have a man of the stature of Luke Battle there to help talk to Nasser; to help talk to Washington and indirectly to the Israelis and to help calm the situation and avert a disaster. I think Battle was such a formidable diplomat that he might have made a difference had he been there, but he wasn't.

Q: Here you are just learning Arabic, which means you're full of piss and vinegar in getting out and wanting to see things, you're young, one of the most important and volatile groups in Arab society, particularly in a place like Cairo, would be the University. Were you able to get to the students, I mean mix and mingle with the students and all that?

RUGH: Yes, to some extent. Directly at the universities, there are huge universities. Cairo University, Ain Shams University, Alexandria University had I guess in those days tens of thousands now hundreds of thousands of students; AUC, the American University, had a few hundred and I was in touch with students in all of those campuses. In addition there was a Strategic Studies Center at Al Ahram which I was in touch with. It was not easy because of the hostility of Nasser and the mood in the country being suspicious of Americans, but we did succeed to some extent. We got out and we had friends. In particular I was trying to reach some of the people in the media. The media was very hostile, a lot of the writers were very vitriolic. And it was my job in USIS to try to work with them. Some of them were reachable and some of them were very difficult to talk to. I had another assignment in Egypt at a later period in my career and some of the people who had been so hostile to us had been tamed by then because it was a different era and a different political situation and Sadat was friendly when Nasser had not been. These same people were in the press, but they were now either muzzled or tamed in what they could say. They then were some of my best contacts because I'd known them in an earlier period when they were able to bash us and now they were not. So I saw them again and I reminded them that they had really given us a hard time before and now the shoe was on the other foot. They're still friends of mine. I still see them what I go to Cairo, so the changing political context didn't change the people, but it changed what they could say and that made it interesting.

Q: In '64 to '66, how did we feel about the influence of the Soviet Union?

RUGH: Oh yes, that was a major issue for us. The competition with the Soviets was very high on our agenda. We were very concerned about what the Soviets were doing with the Egyptians. Supporting the Egyptians and others in the region, but particularly Egypt. Egypt was sort of the primary case of competition with the USSR.

The Soviets were considered by us to be very dangerous. They were taking advantage of discontents over American foreign policy, particularly with respect to Israel which we knew were not only part of Nasser's position, but were touching on real dissatisfaction in Egyptian and Arab society. The Soviet influence in Egypt was in those days very substantial. Our official contact between American diplomats and Soviet diplomats was strained and there were efforts by Soviets, either officials or what we suspected to be officials under cover.

Q: KGB or something like that.

RUGH: KGB types, to contact us. I remember a TASS representative who I suspected was a KGB type invited me a couple of times to his apartment and fed me a lot of vodka. I was very suspicious of his intentions. He seemed to know a lot about my background and my biography. We were very wary of the Soviets and had very little to do with them. We didn't seek them out and they didn't seek us out. We suspected that they were very busy with the military and others in Egypt. But Egyptians are quite open and aside from the fact that they feared their own intelligence people, authority, they were interested in having contacts and they liked to have discussions. Egyptians love to talk and love to hear your ideas and explain their ideas to you so the Soviet issue was worrisome to us but it didn't prevent all Egyptians from having contact with us. I used to know an Egyptian military officer who insisted on meeting in a sporting club, the Gezira Club. I never fully understood that, but he wouldn't meet in a private place. He was afraid that if we met at home the Egyptian authorities would suspect something inappropriate was happening, that he was passing me information. So we could sit out in the lawn of the Gezira Club and have tea in the afternoon and I did that from time to time. He never provided me with a lot of information, but we exchanged views on Egyptian and American foreign policy. We suspected that the Soviets were poisoning the well with Egyptians, particularly with the Egyptian security authorities about the United States and we knew that our telephones were being monitored. In fact we'd periodically tell stories at staff meetings about monitoring of the phones because the Egyptians were not very good at it. They collected miles of recording tape of telephone conversations which must have been innocuous. Stories would be like this, "Well, my wife was on the phone talking with a Swedish diplomat and because we served in Sweden they went into Swedish on the phone and they were interrupted by an Egyptian who came on the line and said, 'please talk English'," because he didn't understand what they were saying. And in another case, a person got a huge phone bill from the phone company and called up to complain about it and they called her back and said, "Well, we know you talked for half an hour with New York, and we can prove it to you." And they played her the recording of her conversation to prove that she ought to pay the bill. So we told each other stories like that in order to remind ourselves that the Egyptian authorities were watching everything we did and we assumed that the Soviets were behind it. When you were talking on the phone you could hear a conversation in the background. I mean they weren't very good about hiding their monitoring and you could hear people playing music, while they were listening to our conversations. And we assumed that the Soviets had helped give them the equipment and the monitoring techniques.

Q: Well, was the feeling that the Soviets were calling the shots? Or were they just going along for the ride and doing what they could to make relations between the United States and Egypt worse?

RUGH: More the latter. In the embassy I think the consensus was that Nasser was taking the lead in his Arab nationalist policy which included a strong dose of anti American imperialism, hostility to American imperialism, and that the Soviets were opportunistically taking advantage of this because it fit exactly with their purposes. And that the Soviets were delighted to be able to aid and abet Nasser in his attacks on us. And of course this was about assistance for the Aswan Dam and all of that played into this. But I think we fairly well understood that there were Arab nationalist sensitivities that we had to take into account. We thought they were being exploited by Nasser as well, but that the man on the street was ready after decades of British colonialism and feeling deprived and not sufficiently respected, that Nasser's pride or focusing on Arab pride was touching a genuine popular feeling. When I was in Egypt the second time, an Egyptian...

Q: This was from when to when?

RUGH: I was there from 1976 to 81. An Egyptian film director made a film about Nasser. It was very interesting because the film, in those days, during the Sadat period, was supposed to be anti Nasser and the director's intention was to show the evil side of Nasser's regime and rule. And he did very well showing detention without habeas corpus and torture and demagoguery and so on. But he made a mistake in his film when he came to the period of the 1967 War. He showed that Egypt was losing but Nasser was claiming victory. That was fine, that served the director's purpose very well. But then he included an excerpt from Nasser's resignation speech, his famous resignation speech of June 1967, when he said, "I take responsibility and I'm going to resign". And the people rose up and demanded that he come back. That speech was so powerful in speaking to the Egyptian psyche that when it was included in the film in 1977 I guess, or 78, the Egyptian audience, most of whom were too young to remember Nasser that much were moved and the whole mood changed. They were affected by Nasser's words a decade or more after it happened, 67 to 77 and the director blew it because he included the words of Nasser. Nasser's delivery, his voice, his choice of words, his rhetoric, his powerful oratory was something you had to experience to appreciate. Even this Egyptian director didn't understand how powerful it was and it was still having an effect on people long after Nasser was gone. So I think at the time we tended to appreciate that.

Q: It's very hard to translate that into getting people in the United States to understand the power of somebody.

RUGH: Yes, yes. You can't. You translate it in English it looks like nonsense.

Q: It looks like, you know, it didn't, those who didn't understand.

RUGH: So I think we appreciated it. Not as much as we could have or should have but we certainly appreciated it more than people sitting in the States who don't have the context, who don't have a daily dose of discussion with Egyptians who would genuinely empathize with what Nasser is saying and his general points. You have to be there. It's almost like listening to Umm Kulthum. I tried to appreciate Umm Kulthum who was then alive and singing every week and was the great Arab singer and she mesmerized millions of Egyptians and other Arabs. And I would sit and listen to her songs. It was hard to understand the words and I wasn't part of the culture so I always felt like an outsider when I listened to her. And it's similar with Nasser and his political rhetoric. I think, unless you grow up in that society you could never fully appreciate the emotional appeal that Nasser has had on people, or the emotional appeal that Umm Kulthum had which was non political. But it's powerful, and it's like Arab poetry. Arab poetry is very, very difficult for Americans, even if you've studied Arabic for a long time, to understand because the words have special meanings and nuances. And an Arab poet can move an Arab audience of native speakers, and this goes completely over our heads or past us because we don't have that knowledge and cultural background.

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Q: Today is March 28, 1996. So you left Egypt in 1966 and you went where?

RUGH: To Saudi Arabia.

Q: And you were there from when to when?

RUGH: I was in Saudi Arabia from 1966 until 1971. I had three different assignments. My first assignment was as Assistant Public Affairs Officer at the American Embassy in Jeddah. In 1967 I went to Riyadh as director of the USIS-run English language center which was nominally under the Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia from 1967 to 1969. The embassy was still in Jeddah and there was no U.S. diplomatic mission in Riyadh in those days, since the Saudis didn't allow it to move to the capital, Riyadh. Then in 1969 I moved back to Jeddah in a third assignment as Public Affairs Officer in the American embassy in Jeddah.

Q: Well, let's start first in Jeddah. When your in Jeddah first, this is '66 to '67. Could you describe a little the embassy, who was that the ambassador and what was the situation in Saudi Arabia at that time?

RUGH: The ambassador was Hermann Eilts. He was one of the great Middle East experts in the Foreign Service and one of the great diplomats that I've ever seen in the Foreign Service. He became for me a role model. I worked for him both in Jeddah and in Cairo later. The deputy chiefs of mission were Talcott Seelye, who later became ambassador to Tunisia and Damascus and I later became his DCM in Damascus, and Bill Stoltzfus who later became ambassador in Kuwait, responsible for the entire Persian Gulf.

Q: I mean this is in a way sort of unusual because we were loading an awful lot of our Arab talents there. Eilts, Stoltzfus, and Seelye were all Arabists.

RUGH: And there were more. Joe Twinam was the political officer. He later became ambassador in the Gulf. And Fran Dickman was the economic officer. He later became ambassador in Abu Dhabi and Kuwait. So there was an extraordinary group of people all under the leadership of Herman Eilts.

Q: So you said: Twinam, Dickman, and the other one?

RUGH: Joe Twinam, Fran Dickman, Bill Stoltzfus, and Talcott Seelye all became ambassadors. And just before I arrived, Dick Murphy was there as political officer. He later became ambassador several times and assistant secretary. So this particular embassy formed a number of people who became ambassadors in the Middle East.

Q: Was Isa Sabbagh there at that time?

RUGH: No. He had been there earlier.

Q: Well, in the first place how did Herman Eilts, from your perspective, obviously you're working in public affairs side, so how did he use it and what was your sense of his operation, how did he operate?

RUGH: From my perspective, he was a person who made effective use of everybody in the mission. He didn't focus only on the diplomatic and political side. He was interested in everything and he was a good listener. He listened to my reports of what I was hearing from my contacts in the press and in the university. And he found that important as part of the overall picture of his attempting to understand Saudi society. I appreciated that he was interested and that when I moved to Riyadh he came frequently to Riyadh and sat with me. He asked my impressions of what was happening in Riyadh and the people I was talking to. So it really encouraged me to do more in the way of reaching out and meeting people and making contacts and finding out what was going on. He stressed that it was important to reach out and make contacts wherever he could. He had his own plate full, meeting officials and writing his reports. But he always had time for us on the lowest levels on the embassy staff to listen and to encourage us to do our work more aggressively. He was a workaholic. He worked every day almost around the clock. He never stopped and this personal devotion and dedication to his own job gave the rest of us encouragement and inspiration to work hard as well.

Q: What was the situation? We're talking about 1966 which was just abutting on 1967 which was a pivotal year in our relations with the Middle East. What was the situation in Saudi Arabia as you saw it? And could you talk about, this is a difficult society to penetrate and how did you go about operations? We are pre the Six Day War of 67.

RUGH: Right. The Saudis had their differences with Egypt in those days and during that period the Saudis were not always in lock step with Nasser and the Egyptian leadership of Arab nationalism. The Saudis for example had sponsored thousands of Egyptian teachers to come to Saudi Arabia, but at one point they decided that this was politically unwise to have Egyptian teachers all over the kingdom. The Saudis decided the Egyptian teachers were bringing with them Arab nationalist ideas ala Nasser which were not suitable for the Saudi approach. And there was some competition between the Saudi King Faisal and Nasser in those days. So we thought, in the embassy, that although the Arab nationalism which was very important throughout the region was a problem for the U.S. and U.S. policy, it was less of the problem in Saudi Arabia because of Faisal's different approach. King Faisal was friendly to America and didn't seem to be affected by the Arab nationalist hostility to the extent that other leaders were. However, in June, 1967 when the Arab-Israeli war broke out and Nasser accused the United States of participating directly in the war, that hostility and that accusation did cause us a problem. Just before the war broke out, a bomb went off in the American embassy in Jeddah, in Saudi Arabia, and we found out later that it was put there by supporters of the Palestinians, the PLO. It caused us some concern because we thought that Saudi Arabia had been immune to the direct effects of the Arab-Israeli conflict and Arab nationalism. But it turned out that because of the presence of Palestinians and other non Saudis in the Kingdom there was some spillover. But we didn't evacuate during the June war in 1967. The State Department gave Ambassador Eilts an instruction as I recall to evacuate and he argued against that. He said we should stay because the Saudi government was asking us to stay and was guaranteeing our security, and the Saudi government said it would be an unfriendly act for us to pull all of our people out. That there was considerable American involvement in the oil business in Saudi Arabia as you recall.

Q: Particularly over in the eastern province.

RUGH: In the eastern province.

Q: ARAMCO.

RUGH: For the American Embassy to evacuate would have led oil workers to be tempted to evacuate. The Americans at ARAMCO might have left and that would hurt oil production and the Saudis felt they had sufficient control over the security situation that we should not go. Now this was a judgment call by Ambassador Eilts. He turned out to be correct in that there wasn't any imminent danger to American personnel living in the Kingdom, and there were quite a few in the eastern province and so we stayed.

Q: What was the feeling within the American community where you were? I've been doing an interview with Clyde Taylor concerning a later date, a decade later or more in Iran where the ambassador made the same call and the community group was mad as hell because they wanted to get out and as it proved, the situation was really dangerous.

RUGH: Well we, in the embassy, relied on Ambassador Eilts' judgment and respected his judgment in these matters and we had no reason to doubt that he was right. The American community in Dhahran was a bit nervous because of what was going on and we all made evacuation plans. But I don't recall that there was any resentment over the decision to stay. As it turned out, the war didn't really effect Saudi Arabia directly at all. So people were, after the first few days of apprehension, they were relaxed.

Q: Could you tell me how you went about your job, we're talking about in Jeddah first?

RUGH: Jeddah first and then Riyadh.

Q: Jeddah first, and this is particularly before the Six Day War, and then things turned sour because Nasser was claiming we had helped with an air strike on them. Because he didn't want to have it known the Israelis had wiped out his air force in a matter of minutes.

RUGH: Well, I had been in Jeddah for a year prior to the war and during that time I had developed contacts primarily in the press and in the university. The people that I met with were Saudis, of various persuasions. Some were conservative. One or two were attracted to Islamic fundamentalism and to the Muslim Brotherhood and they were always cordial and were pleased that I made the effort to go to see them. They were not very active in seeking us out. We had to go to see them. But when we did, they were very willing to talk about American policy.

Q: One policy essentially.

RUGH: One in particular. My public affairs officer, my boss, was George Thompson who was also very outgoing and very active and he taught me to get out and meet people and develop contacts wherever I could. And together the two of us got to know quite a few of the people in the media and in the universities. The June war in 1967 was a moment of intense activity on our part trying to explain that the U.S. was not involved in the conflict. It wasn't easy because the Voice of the Arabs radio coming out of Cairo was carrying the lie that we were involved and most Saudis listened to the Voice of the Arabs. They didn't always believe it, but this story concocted by the leadership in Egypt sounded too plausible because it asserted American participation in the war, which explained how the Israeli air force could have been so devastating. In fact, it was the Israeli air force alone that had done the job. But at the time that was not known, so we had difficulty persuading Saudis, and they really didn't believe us at first, that we weren't involved.

Q: Well, there is a tendency anyway, in that part of the world, isn't there to believe plots and conspiracies and all this? I found when I was there and also in Greece and all, I mean as really in the United States you know people enjoy plots.

RUGH: That's right. And they don't trust the media. They don't trust official media. Neither their own or ours. And so the Voice of America which wasn't really very audible, had technical problems there, because of the distance. Voice of America and BBC which were carrying the true story were not believed because they were seen as official and therefore biased. They don't trust any media. They tend to listen to as many as they can and try to make their own conclusions. They tend to believe that there's much more to the story than they are hearing from official sources or from any sources. So they do believe in conspiracies and when we said this isn't true, about American participation, they just didn't believe us. And so that was our major problem.

Q: Well, could you tell me a bit about, you know when you'll think about Saudi Arabia, you really don't think about the media or universities playing much of a role. You think of the Princes Incorporated, sort of running the place. What was your impression at this time of the media, universities, and also Princes Incorporated?

RUGH: Well, the media were not free of government influence even though they were in private hands, most of them. The Saudi businessmen who owned the media didn't publish editorials or even news stories that were at variance with official policies. So they didn't play a role independent of the state in Saudi Arabia. However, media people were among the more educated and better informed Saudis, having as their profession the requirement to stay abreast of events. And unlike some Saudis who had been pretty isolated from the rest of the world, they had followed international events. So, privately, they were quite interesting to talk to and they had their personal views which once you've got to know them they were not reluctant to express. And they did express various views privately. In the universities it was similar. They didn't get involved in politics at all in a sort of a public sense, but privately they were some of the better educated people. Some of them had been educated in the United States and had doctoral degrees so they were rather sophisticated. So there wasn't much public dialogue about policy issues, but there was a lot of private discussion among the people. If you saw them one on one they wouldn't be shy about expressing their views.

Q: In a way, weren't you plugging in to probably even more important a place and getting it out to the public, in a place like that? Because I would imagine that these people were part of the corporation that kind of ran Saudi Arabia weren't they?

RUGH: Yes, they were. To some extent they were passive, but they were among the elite and were potentially a problem for the regime. The regime was very interested in having their support, sort of the educated middle class if you will. I wrote an article about the new middle class in Saudi Arabia which got some attention from American academics because they'd never heard of an educated middle class in Saudi Arabia. When I came back from the Kingdom I wrote about it because I thought it was an emerging phenomenon. Saudi Arabia wasn't well-known at that time and certainly very little was written about it. So it was an important group we thought to keep in touch with.

Q: What about the universities, and also, did you find a considerable number of Saudis were going to the United States to get educated. Was this having much of an effect? We're getting into early sixties, but students were getting a little bit rambunctious in the United States. Did you see any effect there? Were they creating a different class than say the normal?

RUGH: Yes. And that's absolutely true. Many of my contacts in those days were Saudis who had been to the United States for university education, either a bachelor's degree or masters or doctorate. They felt a bit alienated from their own society. Because they had studied in America they were more accessible to us as Americans. Because there's a huge cultural gap between Saudi Arabia and the United States. There was an even bigger one in those days. Saudis who had been trained in America, some of them came back with American wives, felt that they were sort of between worlds. So they felt comfortable talking to us and they felt a little bit uncomfortable in their own society because the vast majority of Saudi society had never had an experience of the kind that they had had in America, or anywhere abroad. The Saudi government in those days was sending thousands of students abroad and they quickly discovered that to send them to Cairo or to Beirut was more dangerous politically than to send them to the United States. Because in Cairo and Beirut they would hear Arab radical ideas. In America they would hear Western radical ideas which were more easily explained away and more easily dealt with when the Saudi graduate came back to the Kingdom. So the government felt - they never said this publicly - but they said it to us privately, that it was better to send their scholarship students to America, and to some extent to the U.K. but mostly to America. So there was a very large group always in the United States at that time and coming back regularly. Today many of those people are in the cabinet and in senior government positions because they have developed not only expertise which they had from the beginning with that education, but also they developed their careers in the Kingdom and done very well.

Q: Did you sense any alienation with the United States? Sometimes coming to the United States is not a positive for us. Speaking sort of "our side" or whatever you want to call it. People are turned off and all. But how did the Saudi students care for the United States?

RUGH: Well, I guess they admired many things about the United States. They were to some extent critical of the libertarian atmosphere, but at the same time they enjoyed being free and being for a time away from the restrictions of the social pressures of living in Saudi Arabia. The ones I knew fairly easily shifted gears and adapted to American society when they were here in the United States and then when they went back readapted to their own societies. That is to say outwardly. You know they dress differently, they talk differently, they behave differently in front of their parents than they would have in Berkeley or wherever. I knew Saudis who in the United States would dress like Americans and would behave for all intents and purposes like Americans and then when they went home, in front of their fathers, they would never speak unless spoken to, and they would never smoke, and they would certainly never drink at home. So they were dealing with two different worlds. The American women who married Saudis and came back with them were sometimes a little surprised to see the change in their new husbands from California to Riyadh.

Q: You were at that point the new boy on the block in our embassy in Jeddah. What was the feeling towards the Saudi government? King Faisal was the king at that time.

RUGH: Yes.

Q: Towards Faisal and towards the structure, the stability and all of the government?

RUGH: Well we felt it was very stable and King Faisal was universally admired by the Saudis and by us and by the expatriates.

Q: Particularly in contrast to his brother, half brother Saud.

RUGH: Yes, absolutely. And that was the comparison that was made. His predecessor, Saud, the previous King, had a poor reputation amongst Saudis and among Westerners. But King Faisal was very wise and considered to have good judgment about dealing with his own domestic political situation as well as foreign affairs. In his competition, if you will, with Nasser he developed a policy of Islamic solidarity. He sought to develop support among other Muslim nations as the leader of the Kingdom which, of course, has the two holy places of Mecca and Medina. Holy to Muslims. At the time, we didn't regard this as necessarily radical or dangerous to us, the Islamic movement. Because in Faisal's hands it seemed rather benign. We regarded the Arab nationalism of Gamal Abdul Nasser as more dangerous. Faisal never developed a charisma and the international solidarity for his Islamic movement that Nasser developed for his Arab nationalism. We, as I say, saw it as not a threat to the United States really. Domestically he had to deal with conservative elements which in retrospect I believe he dealt with much better than his successors did. He kept them under control. He was devout. He was supportive of the Ulama, the religious authorities, but he didn't let them get out of hand. For example there is, and was at that time in Saudi Arabia, a group that we used to call the religious police, the Mutaween, which in Arabic means volunteers. These were and are people who enforced public behavior according to their version of Islam, which means at prayer time you close your shop and you go to the mosque. It means that women, according to their version of Islam, must be properly dressed and for a Saudi woman that means veiled. And these men patrol the streets of the cities enforcing the prayer times and the dress code. Now when they tried to enforce the dress code with American women, this ran up against our belief about how American women might dress. I believe that at the embassy, that American women should dress so as not to offend the Saudis. But they certainly didn't have to veil. And when one of these religious policemen tried to tell an American woman that she should wear the veil and she reported that to the ambassador he complained directly to the Foreign Minister and the Foreign Minister reported to the King, and the King told the religious police to back off. So, there were lines that were not crossed and the King supported us in that. I believed at the time that the power and the influence of the Mutaween, the religious police, would decline. In fact, it has increased in the past 15 or 20 years. And the government has allowed it to gain more authority and power in the streets of the cities of Saudi Arabia. So in retrospect, King Faisal seems now to have been a person who kept the lid on these religious, right wing, conservative factions and forces much better than his successors have been able to do.

Q: What was the impression of Nasser's influence in Saudi Arabia? Prior to the '67 war and at the time of the '67 war? Did you feel it was on the rise? He had been around for quite a while now. On the decline? No change?

RUGH: We thought it was on the rise. In fact the June 1967 Arab Israeli War, which now we know to have been the peak of Nasser's power - we didn't know that at the time - we were afraid that he was continuing to gain support because his lies about American participation in the war were believed. And we thought that he was going to continue to increase his influence over the Arab world. That didn't happen, but at the time we were afraid that things were going to get worse. They were bad enough in terms of American officials always being on the defensive about Israel and about what we were doing. We felt that we were not properly understood, that we were misunderstood. And we were trying to explain America's case so that our presence was benign and friendly. We were afraid that Nasser's attack on America politically was growing.

Q: Was there any feeling at the time of the June 67 War? Essentially Nasser, outmaneuvered himself by ordering the U.N. to withdraw from, and the way the U.N. responded too promptly on this thing. But at that, time just before the attack, did we see the danger? Was this something where there was sort of an alert went up and said, "Oh my God, we might have another Arab Israeli War", or something like that.

RUGH: We didn't really recognize it to the extent. Just on the eve of the war it seemed to be a very dangerous situation. But we didn't expect a war in the weeks prior to it coming. We thought that it would be averted. We thought that there was once again a crisis going to the brink and that the parties would pull each other back. You see so many shouting matches in the Middle Eastern streets that don't end up in fist fights because the crowd pulls the people apart. And we thought it was another one of those where people were trying to save face by making a lot of noise and they wouldn't actually go to war. And when the war happened we were surprised.

Q: What about the feeling at the embassy towards Israel? Before and just after the war? Was there a case you say of localitis, or almost of non knowledge of Israel at the embassy and all that?

RUGH: We had a daily dose of Arab nationalism, coming not only from Voice of the Arabs and Egyptian sources but also to some extent from the people, the Saudis we talked to. We heard every day that the United States was supporting one side in the conflict and there were two sides to the issue. Why were we arming Israel, why were we supporting Israel, why were we giving Israel the means to be repressive against Palestinians? And that regular discussion had its effect on us. I mean, we hadn't heard, you know as Americans sitting in Washington or any place in the United States you don't hear this on a daily basis. And it's a point of view and an argument that has some merit. So certainly there was some sympathy within the American Embassy to the Arab view that the United States was biased. Now, our job professionally was to explain and defend American policies. We did that to the best of our abilities. Explaining the statements of the President and the Secretary of State and other officials as we received them. And explaining the views of the U.S. Congress and the views of the American public and the American press. That was our job. We could, I think honestly, and I never had difficulty trying to, I mean it was difficult, but I never found it impossible to have an honest discussion in which I explained American views and listened to Arab views in return. Partly because so often the Arab views were exaggerated and based on misinformation or overstated cases. I mean they would say, "all American information media are controlled by Zionists". Well, it's not true, and I would say so. And I would disagree with that. I would say, "the Arabs have an opportunity in America to make their case, and they should make it, it's a free country and Americans who are fair minded will listen". Well, they did not always believe me that, but I believed it. So we could have an honest, intellectually honest discussion about these issues and that was sort of the bread and butter of our work in those days.

Q: You must have had a well honed set of arguments and all this, but after awhile. I mean, my short stint in Saudi Arabia, a decade earlier, I mean, this was the conversation that one had again, and again, and again.

RUGH: Yes, yes, yes. Well, we would argue for peaceful settlement. We would argue for a dialogue and debate between the Arabs and Israelis. Our hearers were not always convinced but we believed, I believed, in the case and could make it. After 1978-79, when President Sadat made an agreement with Israel and regained territory, Egyptian territory, on the basis of a peace agreement and a negotiation, this discussion with Arabs was much easier for me. I could say Nasser had failed, the PLO had failed in their approach. Sadat had succeeded. Here's an Arab leader who negotiated and regained Arab territory. Because they always told me we can only regain our territory by force because the Israelis took it by force. And I always disagreed with that, but I could never sort of cite an example until Sadat did it in '78, '79.

Q: As you were sitting there in the embassy and talking about you and the other officers, looking at Israeli actions and all this of thinking that why couldn't they be a little more understanding or something like that, or was there any?

RUGH: I guess what bothered us most was that the Arabs we talked to saw no difference in policy between Israel and the United States. You know, Israel as a sovereign country made its own decisions. And we were always put in the position of trying to defend Israeli policy when we thought that was unfair. You know, we can defend American policy, that's fair. But why should we also defend everything and anything that Israel does. So, we were always trying to show that American and Israeli policies weren't identical. That was sometimes difficult.

Q: Did you feel the cold hand of political reality from the United States coming in? Because there is a very strong, certainly at that time, there was a very strong pro Israeli, very pro active organization and almost rooted in the American political psyche. Did you feel that at all?

RUGH: That fact was part of our trying to explain American policy and American attitudes, American public and press and congressional attitudes to Arabs. We attempted to explain the atmosphere in America, the discussion in America, the attitude of ordinary Americans towards this issue as best we could. The other answer to that question is that when we went, on home leave, we found ourselves explaining Arabs to our American friends and American attitudes. And that wasn't easy.

Q: No. (laughter)

RUGH: Because, when you start a discussion and try to explain Arab complaints about Israel, the first reaction is often, well, this is an anti-Semitic attitude and you've been brain-washed by those Arab terrorists, who just want to destroy Israel and push it into the sea. So, you have to sort of start from the beginning and try to explain the history and the attitudes that have developed out of the history. And so we felt sort of between worlds. When we were home, we were explaining the Arabs to Americans, and when we were in the Middle East we were explaining Americans to Arabs.

Q: Two very difficult rows to hoe. One last question. At the time of the '67 war, in the first place obviously you were concerned about, "do we have to get the hell out of here, are there going to be mobs in the street and all that". But what was the sense of this? I say this because I was in Yugoslavia at the time and the Tito government was very strongly pro Arab and pro Nasser and all. And yet every Yugoslav took great pleasure in the defeat of Nasser. Particularly I think since one of the division commanders of the Israelis was of Yugoslav background which every Yugoslav told you. I felt some exhilaration, because Nasser was not exactly our favorite person. I was just trying to get your reaction, maybe officers of the embassy at that time.

RUGH: To Nasser's defeat?

Q: To the Arab defeat.

RUGH: I guess we didn't take much satisfaction. We were afraid that this was just one more stage in the Arab nationalism conflict with Zionism and Israeli nationalism and we were caught in the middle of it and it wasn't over, it was getting worse if anything. It wasn't getting any better. So there wasn't any great satisfaction in the fact that they had been beaten. We didn't want Nasser necessarily to win, but we wanted the political temperature to be reduced and we didn't see that that was happening. When Nasser resigned and then came back it looked as if the Egyptian public and the Arab public thought he was a great hero. We thought he was leading the Arabs down the wrong path and it looked as if he was more popular than ever. Turned out that he wasn't. This was the beginning of his downfall, or down slide.

Q: Well why don't we stop at this point and we'll pick it up next time about 1967, the aftermath of the June 1967 War. You moved up to Riyadh.

RUGH: Yes.

Q: And we'll pick it up at that time.

RUGH: Great. Thank you very much.

Q: Today is April 24, 1996. Now we're talking, you're in the aftermath of the '67 war, immediate aftermath. What was sort of the feeling? Had the Saudis ever made any move to get involved in the war?

RUGH: Not directly. The situation in Saudi Arabia was quite removed from the conflict itself, and the conflict was over fairly quickly. There was a lot of Saudi empathy with Egypt as the victim of Israeli attacks. But the war itself didn't really affect us in Saudi Arabia. I moved to Riyadh in the fall of '67 and opened an English language center in the cooperation with the Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia. We began teaching English to Saudi government officials that fall with no problem at all despite the fact that we were the only embassy office in Riyadh, the embassy still being in Jeddah. The Saudi government did support publicly the Egyptians on the occasion of the June War. But there was very little fallout in our bilateral relations by the fall of '67 when I moved up to Riyadh.

Q: Teaching English to government officials, you really in many ways are tapping a certain elite there. These are people who are both in the government and probably pretty well educated and all that. What was your impression of this government bureaucracy, the Saudi government bureaucracy? The people in it, and also their attitude towards Egypt, towards Israel, towards the United States?

RUGH: The Saudis that we were teaching had not been exposed to the United States directly. They were all officials who needed some English for their jobs. They did not have any English from having visited the United States or the U.K. and they had very little English from their schools. So we were probably the first Americans they had met and they didn't have any personal, firsthand knowledge of the United States. They didn't focus on the political issues that were dominant in the region at the time even though when asked they would reflect some sympathy with Arab nationalism and the Nasserist sentiments that were current at the time. But they usually didn't bring it up. Out of courtesy or whatever they tended to separate the personal from the official and regarded us as, after they got to know us as their teachers teachers are respected they regarded us as individuals who could be respected regardless of American policy, which they were, when asked, critical of. So they made a distinction. We tried to convey some understanding of American culture and attitudes and so on. It was very difficult because although they were people who were college graduates, but they were not sophisticated in international affairs.

Q: What was your impression at this sort of like unique view of the Saudi bureaucracy, the role of the Royal Family? I sort of had the impression that you had some rather spoiled princes sitting in a lot of ministries, while an awful lot of people did a lot of work for them down below.

RUGH: There was some of that. But this was when King Faisal was still alive and Faisal was universally respected and that helped to enhance the reputation of the Royal Family as a whole. Nobody criticized Faisal. He was truly admired and respected for his leadership and his intelligence and so on. So nobody that we talked to was critical of Faisal. The other princes were less prominent in those days than they are today. There weren't so many of them and they weren't so prominent. The brothers of Faisal were in senior positions. But it seemed at the time - 1967 - that the merit system was creeping in for senior positions in the government. That is to say the princes still controlled the key jobs. The King was obviously going to be always a Royal, but also the key jobs in Defense, and Interior, and Intelligence, and in Foreign Affairs were held by Princes. But the other jobs seemed to be increasingly open to non-Royals and that gave the non-Royals some hope that they could aspire to some of the top jobs. So there wasn't, at that time, so much of a feeling as there is today of criticism of the princes taking the good jobs away from the others who had better qualifications.

Q: Did sitting in Riyadh at this time with our embassy in Jeddah, did you find yourself acting as a sort of reporting officer too?

RUGH: Yes. Partly because we were the first non-military office to open in Riyadh that belonged to the U.S. government. There was a Military Training Mission in Riyadh that belonged to the U.S. government. They dealt with military affairs. The embassy being in Jeddah didn't have any other connections up there other than the military before we came in. So we opened doors to other parts of the society and we did do quite a bit of reporting too. Ambassador Eilts at the time was very supportive of our work and every time he came to Riyadh, he usually came at least once a month, he would ask me to give him a briefing on what the mood was in the city and he said he found it useful.

Q: I know when I was in Saudi Arabia, in Dhahran, in '58 to '60, prime concern of all of us I think was whether the Palestinians, they seemed to have had at that time a sort of strangle-hold on government positions and also within the military too. What was the situation as you saw it with the Palestinians at that time?

RUGH: The Saudis regard all non-Saudis who are working in the Kingdom as "temporary". They don't have the idea of a "melting pot" and giving citizenship to foreigners, even Arab. And that applied to Palestinians as well as others. So, the contracts that they gave to foreigners were often one year contracts and had to be renewed every summer. This is for thousands of teachers, and for government employees. So they felt they had some control over them, and they wanted to keep the control because they didn't entirely trust any of the foreign workers, even Palestinians and Egyptians. A large number of Egyptians were asked to leave a few years before '67. Palestinians were treated with a little bit more care because of the political connections that they had with the PLO and the other Palestinian organizations. The government itself was careful to try to prevent the Palestinian organizations from becoming hostile to the ruling family and to the Kingdom. So they provided subsidies to the PLO and the other Palestinian organizations. They tried to give them jobs in the Kingdom. There was some sympathy for the Palestinians because of their struggle over Palestine. But on a personal level there was a bit of resentment, there was mixed feeling and a bit of apprehension that Palestinians could cause problems for the Kingdom. Unlike Oman which didn't basically didn't allow any Palestinians in Oman, next door to Saudi Arabia, because they didn't want any trouble, the Saudis allowed a lot of Palestinians in and gave them jobs, but treated them carefully because they regarded it as a potential political problem.

Q: Did you see any attempt by the Palestinians or outside forces to stir up the Palestinians?

RUGH: No, we didn't. I think Faisal's approach worked. That is to say, he bought them off. He gave them jobs. He gave the PLO generous funding, and this kept them at bay. We don't know what would have happened if he hadn't done that. But one assumes that they could have, would have caused problems if he had been less generous and less hospitable.

Q: Could you tell me a little about social life and living conditions in Riyadh? Because you were sort of out there as an outpost at that point.

RUGH: Well for us it was a unique opportunity because there were so few Americans in town. My colleague Bill Royer ran the English language program, and I was director of the Center. We were the only Americans outside of a few at the U.S. Military Training Mission and, I think, one or two with the Ford Foundation which was doing an administrative reform project for the government. The Saudis who had studied in the United States were quite accessible to us, particularly the ones who were not from Riyadh. The Saudis who had families, and parents, and uncles, and aunts, and so on in the Western Province, in Jeddah, and were living in Riyadh, working in the government, teaching in the university who had been in the United States were very friendly and open to us and accessible. We had very good social contact with them because they didn't have the family obligations. For Saudis, if you're living in the same town with your parents, you have to go visit them everyday. And they didn't have that because they weren't living in Jeddah, and their parents were. They knew enough about America to be interested in it and keeping up with what's going on in the States. So we had a number of friends who were in the government and the university and in the business sector who were of that type. Saudis who had never been to the United States or who had family in Riyadh were much more difficult to get to know. But my wife did some teaching of some of the princesses in Riyadh because they were interested in learning English. She was one of the few native speakers around and as a woman she could see and be seen by princesses. So she would be picked up by a limousine and taken out to a palace every couple of days to teach English to some princesses. Which turned out to be, in a two-hour session, about 15 minutes of teaching and two hours of socializing and having tea and a mixture of Arabic and a little bit of English. It was very interesting for her and they were very friendly to her and very curious about America. So she would tell them about America. She would sometimes take our children out, who were very young at the time. So because there were so few Americans, and we were sort of a rarity, access was quite good to certain groups.

Q: From your wife were you gathering that there was any discontent, not on the role of the lot of princesses as far as their role in society?

RUGH: No. We didn't detect really much discontent at all. The Saudis that we knew were quite optimistic about the future, were quite happy with their state. The country was prospering, they were getting good jobs, certainly the educated ones were getting good professional opportunities right away and they seemed to be extremely content with their lot in life at that time. Men and women were very strictly separated and segregated with the exception of those non-Saudi women who were married to Saudis who sometimes went to social functions. But we thought that that would change. It didn't really much, but (Laughter) we thought it would.

Q: You were there until when?

RUGH: I was in Riyadh until '69 and then I moved back to Jeddah and I worked at the embassy for another two years.

Q: So you more than almost anybody else....

RUGH: Five years in the Kingdom.

Q: Five years in the Kingdom. I was wondering, could you just talk, I did an interview a long time ago, and I knew him when I was in Dhahran very briefly, was Isa Sabbagh there when you were there?

RUGH: No, he was there before I was. But the people still remembered him. He actually set up the U.S. Information Service program that I was involved in afterwards. But I know Isa from various encounters in Washington and elsewhere and he was a very distinguished and prominent member of the USIA community.

Q: Well then, when you went back you would this would be '69 to what, '71?

RUGH: '67 to '69 I was in Riyadh. '69 to '71 I was back in Jeddah.

Q: Who was the ambassador at that time?

RUGH: Hermann Eilts was there. When he left, it was Nick Thatcher who replaced him in 1970 before I left.

Q: What was your job in Jeddah?

RUGH: In Jeddah, I went back as public affairs officer. I had been the assistant public affairs officer earlier under George Thompson, went to Riyadh to direct the English Language Center for two years and then came back as the public affairs officer when Thompson left.

Q: During this 1969 1971 period, what were the public affairs issues that you particularly had to deal with?

RUGH: It was a relatively quiet period politically in bilateral relations. Our focus was on attempting to increase Saudi understanding of the United States, to broaden and deepen it. The Saudis who had not studied in the United States had a very limited understanding of what America was all about. A number of Saudis were going to the United States to study at that time. They came back with a pretty good understanding of America, its complexities, and its character and nature. But Saudis who had never been to America really didn't have a clue because it's very hard to convey. They heard things from various Arab sources which were not necessarily accurate. They saw Hollywood movies on trips abroad and that didn't help. So, they really had a very narrow and distorted picture of America. We focused a lot of our attention on trying to deepen that and also trying to keep the Saudis who had been to the United States in touch with America. It was very hard for them to keep up with developments in the States. They didn't have professional journals, magazines, newspapers, or books. The Saudis didn't read many books, but some of the scholars wanted to keep up on the periodical journals in their fields and they didn't have them. So, we had a small information center in downtown Jeddah and a library. We tried to use that to reach out to Saudis, particularly Saudis who had studied in America. There were a number of Saudi Ph.D.s from America at that time. So, we worked primarily with them. We worked with Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, which had just opened. It had a young faculty that was accessible to us. We worked with them. They had a men's campus and a women's campus, so we were working indirectly with the women and directly with the men.

Q: Did we have a woman officer there?

RUGH: No. Our wives, to some extent, filled in. In those days, that's what wives sometimes did: filled in and made some contacts at the university. There were a few Americans who were teaching at the university. But the university, because they had a lot of money, was able to completely segregate men and women and provide duplicate facilities and have men teach by closed circuit television. Some of us felt that if they hadn't had the money they would have had coeducation. The female students would sit in a classroom, watch a television screen and see the man. He would hear their questions on an intercom, an audio circuit, but he couldn't see them. So, they had sort of a one way view and a two way audio and the women were studying. The women did very well. The female students at the university level and in the high school level were consistently doing better than the young men. I think that's still the case.

Q: In a way, it reflects the society, doesn't it?

RUGH: Yes. I think it was for a number of reasons. One is that the women had a lot of time at home to study because they weren't allowed to go out. The young men were out driving around in their cars, having a good time, and not studying. Also, they found this one of the ways that they could demonstrate their individuality and their capabilities, so they really studied hard. They were well motivated.

Q: Was there any thought to getting a woman officer? We're talking about the late 1960s and early 1970s, which was not a high point in American use of women.

RUGH: I don't remember that it came up. In those days, the Foreign Service still regarded wives as unpaid employees. My wife and other wives in the embassy were involved. At the time, Marjorie Ransom, who had been a USIA officer, was there with her husband. She had been required to leave the Service because she married a State Department officer, David Ransom. She was very active in meeting Saudi women. She was interested because she was professionally qualified, but she wasn't on the payroll. Later, Marjorie Ransom came back and rejoined the Foreign Service. She has been very successful. She is now DCM in Damascus and her husband is ambassador in Bahrain. But at the time, David was doing the political job and Marjory as his spouse was unofficially doing this kind of work.

Q: This was the old two for one.

RUGH: That's right.

Q: We in the United States were undergoing a real revolution in civil rights during much of this time. How did we deal with this in Saudi society?

RUGH: The Saudis didn't really follow that issue terribly closely. They were more interested in issues that were linked somehow to the Middle East. The Saudis who had studied in America were interested in those issues, but as a general rule, the issues they focused on had more to do with U.S. Middle East policy, with what they thought was Israeli influence of the American media, and that kind of issue. Your question reminds me of an exchange that took place just before I got to Jeddah between Isa Sabbagh, who was then the public affairs officer in Jeddah, and USIA headquarters. The headquarters sent out a worldwide communication saying, "What do the Saudis and everyone else think of the Berlin problem?" Isa came back and said, "They think as much about it as the Berliners think of the Saudi problem." The horizon of a small country is short, regional.

Q: As a public affairs officer, how did you deal with the Israeli issue? Here we were, a strong supporter of Israel. Stuff must have been coming in every day about Israel, all of which was basically positive. How did we deal with that?

RUGH: We had to try to explain the context, to explain that it wasn't an isolated element in American society, but part of the entire fabric of American discussion about the world and America's familiarity with Europe and with the Jewish issue as it developed during World War II in Germany in contrast to America's relative lack of information and understanding of the Palestine question (That was a British domain and the U.S. hadn't been involved.). We tried to put it in that context and show that Americans didn't really have a great deal of knowledge or understanding of the developments in Palestine itself, but had a lot of sympathy with the Jews arising out of the Jewish experience in Europe, and particularly in Germany. In that discussion, the Saudis and the other Arabs that we encountered were at pains to try to explain to us their interpretation of the history of Palestine. We probably learned a fair amount from them as we hoped they learned from us about American attitudes. So, there was an exchange on it and it wasn't as intense an issue in Jeddah in the 1969-1971 period as it was in Damascus, Beirut, or Cairo. I had been in Cairo and Beirut in previous years and it was usually topic number one. Jeddah was a little bit removed from that. The Saudis had other things on their minds. They were focused more inward, in spite of the fact that the Saudis empathized with other Arabs. They were more focused on development, work, the petroleum industry, and issues of that sort. It was an issue for them and they did empathize with the Arab view, but it wasn't a daily obsession, as it is in other places.

Q: You were there from 1969-1971. This was the time when Richard Nixon was President. He had come in in 1969. Did you feel any movement from the outlook of USIA towards the work you were doing from the Johnson administration?

RUGH: In terms of USIA as an agency?

Q: Yes, in instructions, where you would be pointed towards, and that sort of thing.

RUGH: No, I can't say that I noticed any real difference in terms of the institution of USIA. We did notice, however, a growing interest in the Gulf at that time. It was just beginning. In retrospect, it seems very minor, but in this period, the Director of USIA, Frank Shakespeare, visited the Gulf and was the first Cabinet member ever to go to Saudi Arabia. It was a big event. Nowadays, Cabinet members go there practically every week for one reason or another. Secretaries of Commerce, Secretaries of Defense, and Secretaries of State are always popping into Saudi Arabia. But in those days, Washington didn't pay much attention, at least on that level, to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. President Nixon visited Iran. Then he sent Vice President Agnew to Jeddah. That was an escalation that we were very impressed with, of the attention given to Saudi Arabia, that the Vice President of the United States himself would come to Saudi Arabia. Nowadays, that is commonplace. In those days, we felt that it was a very positive sign that the movers and shakers in Washington were recognizing the importance of Saudi Arabia. Of course, working in the U.S. embassy in Saudi Arabia, we appreciated that, as did the Saudis. Of course, Agnew didn't last very long, but at the moment, it was something that we were all very pleased with.

Q: How did you find the Agnew trip? Was he focused on what we were doing there?

RUGH: He was. He was interested. Ambassador Eilts briefed him on the situation and introduced him to the King and the local leaders. He showed interest. We were pleased that he showed interest. It was a courtesy visit. I don't think that he had a specific mission. The Saudis were very pleased to have access to the White House directly.

Q: What was the role of the Public Affairs office in the embassy during this 1969 1971 period?

RUGH: Ambassador Eilts was one of those people who recognized the role of every single element in the embassy. Not all ambassadors do. Some ambassadors have come up through the political track and become super political officers and pay much more attention to political reporting and, if there is military, a little bit of that. But Ambassador Eilts was interested in everything. So, he gave us a lot of support, as he did all sections of the embassy. He listened carefully when we had something to say and gave us excellent guidance on how to carry out our programs, so we felt that we were really part of the team. That gave us a lot of encouragement. He was interested in what books were in the library, what films we were showing at the Center, what visitor grants we were giving and how we were making the selection in the student exchange program. He was interested in all of that. That really made us feel that we were doing something worthwhile. Not only USIA Washington headquarters was interested, but the ambassador himself. That was very gratifying.

Q: When did Thatcher come in?

RUGH: I believe he came in in 1970.

Q: What was his background?

RUGH: He had been, I believe, deputy chief of mission earlier in Jeddah and had gone off to another assignment, I believe, in Iran, and then came back as ambassador to Jeddah when Eilts left. He was more low key, a very decent man, a very good professional, not as familiar with the Middle East as Eilts, not a workaholic like Eilts (but I don't think anybody is), but a very solid and respected professional.

Q: You mentioned films and books. Saudi society being Saudi society, I think there are at least two predominating subjects in our literature. One references to Israel and the other to sex, romance, intermingling of genders. How did you deal with this?

RUGH: We had to be careful to balance Saudi sensitivities and censorship against being accurate and true to American content in our publications. We didn't put in our library anything that was directly contrary to the censors. We brought in all of the material through the pouch, but we didn't want it to cause us to be shut down by the censors or cause anybody any unnecessary grief. I believe we sent Time and Newsweek through the censors deliberately so that we wouldn't run afoul of the censors, but we brought the other materials in through the pouch. I remember one incident where Life Magazine published an article on Islam and had a picture on the cover or perhaps inside of Mohammad. For Muslims, that is a sacrilege to depict the Prophet. We had brought it in the pouch, didn't think about it, weren't screening everything that carefully. We put the magazine on the shelf and a Pakistani resident in Jeddah went to the police and said, "This American Center is carrying anti Islamic literature." The government seized it and complained to us. They didn't shut us down. That was a warning to us that we ought to be more careful about what we put on our shelves. We didn't see any point in offending people just for the sake of freedom of the press. The Life Magazine people heard about this incident. I think they had trouble also in other places, including in Pakistan in particular. The following issue of Life had a little sidebar in one of the inside pages, which said, "Last week's article on Islam upset some Muslims for some reason. They didn't like the picture of Mohammad" and they reprinted the picture again to show readers what picture had offended Muslims, so we had to yank that picture from the library. But generally speaking, we didn't have a lot of trouble. We watched this issue. A friend of mine who was a professor at the university and had a Ph.D. from Rutgers in economics made a visit to the United States that summer in 1970 and came back with some books that he had bought in the bookstore in the States. The people at the airport in Jeddah confiscated his Plato's Republic, saying that Saudi Arabia is a monarchy and this was not allowed. So, that is the kind of indication... We talked directly to the censorship people. The censors had the practice of taking a broad tipped black marking pen and marking out anything that was slightly revealing in pictures of women. Something like Playboy wasn't allowed at all, but anything in Time or Newsweek such as bathing suits would be blacked out by the censor. Each individual copy would be blacked out by hand by the censor guys over in the Ministry of Information.

Q: How about movies?

RUGH: Saudi Arabia didn't allow public cinemas. There were some private cinemas which were illegal but clandestine which brought in films and showed them. We brought in films and showed them at the Cultural Center, but they were all very tame and unobjectionable from the censor's point of view. These were documentaries about the United States. But the Saudis as a matter of policy allowed television. Anybody could watch all the television they wanted because they controlled the content of the television, but they didn't allow public cinemas. They periodically shut down private cinemas which tried to open.

Q: I suspect that they had, as they had when I was in Saudi Arabia, a rather complex underground where those with money had their own projectors and all sorts of pictures. French pornographic films did very well.

RUGH: Right. We understood the same thing. The Saudis were creative about smuggling them in and showing them privately. They did have projectors at home.

Q: What about novels and things like this? Men and women are in novels.

RUGH: The books and the novels were much less rigorously censored, partly because the censorship staff didn't have the capability of reading anything in English. If it was in Arabic, they could skim it and they might censor it, but they weren't so tough on anything in a foreign language and they weren't so tough on the printed word. They were more after pictures, photographs, drawings, and so on. That was something sort of simple that they could deal with. So, the censors were really focused more on magazines and periodicals than on books. The Saudis didn't, as a general rule at that time, read a lot of books. They read magazines and periodicals and they watched films and so on, but they weren't big book readers. We had about 3,000 volumes in our library and they were used only by a small segment of the population.

Q: You left there in 1971. Whither?

RUGH: I came back to Washington and worked in USIA headquarters for five years from 1971 to 1976. One of those years, I did a year in New York at the Council on Foreign Relations. The other four years, I was at USIA headquarters.

Q: This was during the mid to end of the Nixon Ford administration. What type of work were you doing?

RUGH: I was in the Area Office. It was the Near East and South Asia Bureau of USIA. This corresponds geographically to the State Department's Near East and South Asia Bureau. My first job was policy officer in 1971 for a year. Then I went off to New York to the Council. Then I came back as the deputy director of the area. There were two deputies. I did the Near East and another officer did South Asia. The director of it did the whole area corresponding in geography to the Assistant Secretary of State for NEA.

Q: Did we have in policy almost a schizophrenic approach? We must have had a strong operation on Israel.

RUGH: Right.

Q: Then we had it in the Arab world.

RUGH: Right.

Q: They must have been two different policies.

RUGH: Well, no. We handled it all out of one office, as does the State Department. We saw it as one policy. Our operation in Israel was different on the ground, in the field, because we had different problems and different types of criticism of the United States. Our program in Israel was different partly because the intensity of the interaction was much greater than in a place like Saudi Arabia. There are so many Israelis who know America first hand that you don't have to focus on the basics, as you did in a place like Saudi Arabia. They know the basics (or they think they do because they've been there or were maybe even born and raised there). So, they may be Americans by birth and passport even. So, it is a very different audience from the one we had in Saudi Arabia. When you come to policy on the peace process, on the '67 war, or on shuttle diplomacy, we tried to be consistent and say the same thing to all audiences. If you don't, you get in trouble. It's not intellectually defensible and it's not smart either to say different things to different people. The questions we got were quite different, that's true. The Israelis didn't complain about Zionist control of the media in America as the Arabs did. We had a big Fulbright program there. We sent a lot of cultural presentations to Israel, performing artists, dance troupes, and so on. We never sent a dance troupe to Saudi Arabia.

Q: Did you have any particular problems during your time working on this Middle East or South Asia thing?

RUGH: The constant issue was the Arab-Israeli problem, Palestine and Israel, and why was the U.S., in the Arab view, biased in favor of Israel and unfair to the Palestinians and the Arabs. That was hanging over us all the time. The other issues were not as prominent as they are now. That is to say, issues such as Gulf security and Iran. Iran was a major program country for USIA. We were teaching English. We had a lot of student exchanges. We had scholars going out there, faculty exchanges. We were working with the companies that were there. The Bell Helicopter people and other companies were there. The U.S. military was there. We sent some of our most senior USIA officers to Iran because it was a country which was very important to us strategically, politically, and economically. We were very closely allied with the Shah. Some of us were concerned about the public relations aspects of the large American presence at the time, but we didn't foresee the revolution. This was 1971-1976. We didn't imagine that the Shah would be overthrown. He seemed to be very solid. Our policy in the Gulf was two pillars: Iran and Saudi Arabia. These were staunch anti-communist, pro-American, pro-free enterprise, in close alliance with the United States, so they were the basis of our policy and they seemed to both be very solid. There was a big of concern about too much American presence causing a nationalist criticism of the U.S. in Iran, but we never imagined that it would all come tumbling down as it did.

Q: How about India and Pakistan?

RUGH: We tended to separate India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal from the Middle East in our management of programs. The people who had served in that area and were serving in the area office in the bureau back in Washington had a somewhat different experience. I think in retrospect, it was a mistake to separate them too much. I didn't deal very much with India and Pakistan. My counterpart, the other deputy director, did that area. But he didn't have a lot to do. There wasn't much going on of a crisis nature.

Q: Wasn't there the breakup of Pakistan?

RUGH: It happened a little bit earlier, in 1971. In South Asia, we didn't have major contentious issues as we had in the Near East. We were very, very busy in the Near East dealing with a lot of hot issues, particularly the Arab Israeli conflict, but in South Asia, the programs were more routine. We had large numbers of American USIA personnel in South Asia, hundreds of Indian employees in India, and dozens of Americans carrying out fairly standard and routine information and cultural programs, particularly on the cultural side. India was a problem in the sense that it was, as a leader of the non aligned, highly critical of a lot of things that we did everywhere in the world. That was a political problem. But that had been going on for a long time and it wasn't cyclical and it didn't peak. It just was a constant effort on our part.

Q: What did the Yom Kippur War in October of 1973 do?

RUGH: That was another crisis in U.S.-Middle Eastern relations. The Arabs saw it very differently from the Israelis, as all of the wars are seen. We weren't at the time quite sure how it would come out. It turned out to have some long-term salutary effects on the Arab attitude toward the peace process and so on. But at the time, we weren't quite sure. It was a problem, once again, of trying to explain to Arabs that we were following American national interests and we were seeking a peaceful and a fair settlement. We weren't simply letting the Israelis decide our policy, and we weren't simply providing weapons to Israel to do with whatever they wished. That was the constant discussion. It came up again and again and again. It didn't get any better until later in 1979 with Camp David.

Q: Did you sense any change in attitude toward Egypt with Sadat? With Nasser, we knew where we stood.

RUGH: Oh, yes. Very clearly, and it became much more evident later in the late 1970s. But already in the mid-1970s, there was less animosity in Washington toward the Egyptian leadership. During the Nasser period, there was a feeling that Nasser was leading the hostile forces against American policy and we were just being treated unfairly. Sadat had a different approach. Although he was a prototypical and a successor of Nasser and, to some extent, continued along similar lines, it gradually dawned on us that he was a different kind of person. By 1977, when he went to Jerusalem in November not wanting to wait any longer for the peace process to work, we realized that we were dealing with a different person. So, I think that was the real turning point. In November of 1977 when Sadat went to Jerusalem, everybody realized that we had a different situation on our hands.

Q: Was Frank Shakespeare the head of USIA the whole time you were there?

RUGH: During the Nixon period, he was the head of USIA. He was a vivid and prominent personality.

Q: What was his management style and interest as you saw it?

RUGH: He was a cheerleader, a person of passionate convictions who got excited about issues and motivated people. He was very conservative. Not everybody agreed with him. But he had a certain charm that carried his views quite far. He was very excited and enthusiastic about USIA and its work. He believed deeply in the importance of information programs and wanted to use them for the interest of the United States.

His management style was, to some extent, to get into the details of issues that he liked, but to spot people that he could motivate and to encourage them to be more proactive, aggressive, inventive, and creative. He was somewhat controversial because of his very conservative views. We didn't always agree with that. He sometimes went off and misunderstood things. When he was pushing something that we believed in, we thought he was terrific.

Q: Then you went to Egypt, where you were from 1976 to 1981. You spent a lot of time there.

RUGH: Five years.

Q: What was your job?

RUGH: I was the public affairs officer at the American embassy in Cairo during those five years. That was at the time the biggest USIS program in the Arab world. It was a period in which we saw the Camp David agreements and the negotiations between Egypt and Israel supported by American diplomatic efforts resulting in a peace agreement between Egypt and Israel.

Q: Let's start at the beginning when you arrived in 1976. What was the state of the game in Egypt at that time? You had been there and now were back.

RUGH: Since I had served in Egypt in the 1960s for a year under the Nasser regime, coming back, the contrast was striking for the American embassy. In Egypt under the Nasser period, the host government was overtly hostile to American policy in many respects. This made contact with Egyptians extremely difficult. In 1976 when I came back, the government was quite friendly. The Sadat government in 1976 was in a period of preparation for a peace initiative which came in 1977. There was a major turning point in our relations in the 1977-1978 period.

Q: Was the embassy aware that Sadat was ready to make his move?

RUGH: No, we weren't, but the atmosphere was already different for us. Sadat had in 1973 crossed the Canal, made some military moves which he pointed to with pride. Even though the end of the 1973 conflict resulted in no real gains militarily, the October war of 1973 was used by the regime as a preparation for what later became the peace initiative by Sadat going to Jerusalem in 1977 and signing a peace agreement with Israel. We didn't know that was going to happen, obviously, in 1976. Sadat surprised us in 1977.

But already, the atmosphere was different. He had already initiated a new economic policy which was very different from Nasser's. He never specifically identified what he called the "Infitah," the opening of the economy as a reversal of Nasser's socialism, but that is what it was. He welcomed investment. He supported the private sector and capitalist expansion. It was pretty clear already in 1976 that he was changing the ground rules for the relationship with the West by taking those economic measures. Nasser had taken many steps in the direction of socialism and state control of the economy. Sadat was reversing that but doing it in a way that did not specifically attack Nasser, who was still a folk hero with many Egyptians. But in practice, the situation was different. The people in the media that I was dealing with who during the Nasser period had been very hostile to us were now restricted in what they could say. The people who were more conservative, pro-West, and pro-private enterprise in the media were allowed to speak out. So, it was already clear in 1976 that the atmosphere was better for us. Then in November 1977, after some attempts by the United States to broker an agreement with Israel had been tried and failed, Sadat went to Jerusalem. That really changed the whole basis of the whole atmosphere.

Q: Before we get to that, I am still looking at this 1976 period. Was it your feeling that the Nixon Ford administration had kind of shot its bolt in a way as far as the Middle East was concerned by this time? We're talking about moving into an election year. Did you have the feeling that there was anything going?

RUGH: At the time, since there had been so many failed attempts at a peace settlement, it didn't seem particularly new or surprising that the latest attempts had failed. In retrospect, I think we realized that Sadat was frustrated by the failure of any progress to be made with our intervention and so he took a step of his own. I don't think we realized it in 1976 that he was ready to take that step. Since practically the beginning of the Arab Israeli conflict, the United States had urged countries to get together. We had asked the Arabs to negotiate with the Israelis and that was our policy. That was what we had asked them to do. But they never did it. Certainly Nasser refused to do it. Sadat gave no indication that he was going to break that tradition and go to Jerusalem. In fact, when he offered to go to Jerusalem, there were a lot of people who thought he didn't really mean it. When he went, I think, everybody was surprised and pleased. So, prior to his trip to Jerusalem, it was really more of the same, namely, we were trying, but not succeeding. Nothing was moving. It was the same old stalemate between the Arabs and the Israelis that wasn't getting anywhere.

Q: When you arrived there, you say, it was the largest USIS post in the Arab world. What type of work were you doing?

RUGH: We were doing the whole range of USIS activities, including working with the media, which were more open than they had been in the 1960s when I was there. Journalists and editors were very accessible and they hadn't been in the 1960s. We worked with the universities, which were accessible. We worked with selected departments in Cairo University, Ain Shams University, and Alexandria University doing educational exchanges, faculty and student exchanges, and a Fulbright program. We had the whole range of cultural presentations for Egyptian audiences, dance programs and musical programs. The field was wide open for us and the Egyptians were very receptive to American cultural and educational programming, as well as to information programs. We had money in those days and a budget. We had a large staff of Egyptians and Americans. So, there were opportunities for us. Doors were open. Egyptians were willing to listen to us. There were no political barriers to what we could do.

Q: At the universities or with the media, what about obvious affinity towards Israel and all? This is an election year, particularly when Florida and New York come into play, things are said about Israel that don't reverberate very well in the Arab world. Was that a problem?

RUGH: Yes, it was. It was always a problem. It continued to be the background music for everything we did. But in those days, and this happened elsewhere in the Arab world, once you establish a personal relationship with people, they get past the standard litany of criticism of American support for Israel and talk about other things. It was always there. Every time there was an event or an incident that brought it to the front pages, you talked about it. It was still part of the pre-1977 era in 1976 which had existed for a long time, where we were arguing for a peaceful settlement and direct talks and they were disagreeing. I guess we realized this even more after 1977. A change took place, but it was still a period where we weren't making much headway in debating the question and persuading people intellectually to accept our view. They still supported the PLO, non recognition of Israel, and non negotiation. They still were highly critical of American support for Israel militarily, politically, and economically.

But there were other issues that Egypt was interested in. Egypt had serious economic problems. They were focused on those. This was also a period when the Egyptian government was giving prominence to economic issues and the United States was trying to be helpful. The Egyptian government attempted to solve some of the economic problems by increasing the prices of subsidized commodities or removing some of the subsidies. That caused major political reaction which reminded the regime that it wasn't easy to solve the economic problems. So, we were focused to a large extent on economic issues. There was a huge AID mission there already, although it got much bigger after Camp David. It was already quite large. We were discussing with the Egyptians how to deal with their economic problems.

Q: Did you see a problem with this huge AID mission? Sometimes if you put an awful lot of American experts and support staff into a country, a different culture and all that, it doesn't sit very well.

RUGH: There were some problems, but they became greater later in my tour there as the real increases in aid came. From USIA's perspective, we were interested in getting credit for our economic assistance. Within the mission, there were differences of view. Many AID people were only interested in economic assistance for the sake of development and didn't care about any public relations, political payoff, benefit, and recognition by the public, whereas the front office, USIS, and the Political Section were looking for some political benefit from it. So, we had discussions along those lines.

Q: Who was the ambassador during that time?

RUGH: Herman Eilts was the ambassador at the beginning of the period and then it was Roy Atherton.

Q: So you had two real professionals.

RUGH: Right.

Q: When you arrived there, what was the estimate of Sadat at that point?

RUGH: When he took over from Nasser, he was considered by outsiders and many Egyptians to be fairly weak. He had not yet proven himself to have his own ideas and policies. He was very careful to move gradually. The embassy and the ambassador in particular had quite a bit of contact with him because of the shuttle diplomacy that had been conducted by Henry Kissinger in an attempt to get agreements. I think the embassy was beginning to regard him as a more substantial person in his own right, in contrast to just being in Nasser's shadow. The Egyptians considered him simply a flunky of Nasser when he was Vice President. Many people thought that Nasser had named him Vice President because he was weak and didn't want anybody strong as his Vice President and it was just an accident of fate that he became President when Nasser died unexpectedly. By 1976, people were beginning to see him as having his own ideas, but that was only gradually beginning to dawn on us and the Egyptians.

Q: What about during the election of 1976 in the United States? This was when Carter beat Ford. At the end of 1976 with a new administration, a new democratic Carter administration coming in, did you see anything there that looked promising or unpromising?

RUGH: We didn't know what it would bring for us and for foreign policy. Jimmy Carter did not have, at least as far as we knew, a detailed foreign policy plan, except that he talked about human rights. The Egyptians picked up on that issue. They talked about whether Carter would recognize that Palestinians had human rights as well or would this just be another American President who supported Israelis and not Palestinian human rights. So, there was some interest, but nobody was sure what the new administration would bring. It wasn't until later after Camp David that people saw Carter in a different light and began to realize that he did have a great interest in the Middle East and studied it carefully and understood the Palestinians and Egyptians quite well.

Q: What about the university students? Did you see a change in student orientation? Were they more receptive to America? Were they going to the United States or were they going elsewhere?

RUGH: They were. Egyptians didn't have a lot of money to send students to the United States on scholarships and so on, neither the government or the private sector, but there was a fairly good Fulbright program. There were AID trainees that were going. The Egyptians were increasingly interested in the United States. They often made a distinction between American foreign policy, which they didn't like, and American education, which they admired, especially on the technical side (science, engineering, medicine, and so on). So, there was an interest.

Q: Were you seeing any fundamentalist movement within Egypt at that time?

RUGH: It was just barely beginning. The answer is yes, but it became more visible and more intense as the decade went on. By 1976, there was and there had been for a number of years a growing interest. This goes way back to the 1967 military defeat which gave an impetus in Egypt and elsewhere to Islamic fundamentalism, partly because the Egyptians were trying to explain how they had lost so disastrously in 1967. So, there was that general impetus. The student unions or the student organizations on the campuses showed at that time, and even more so later in the decade, an ability by the Islamic students, the so called Islamic fundamentalist students, to organize and to provide services to students that were quite effective. They began to provide female students with clothing and transportation to classes, which for the less wealthy, lower middle class Egyptian female students was very important. So, you began to see a growing influence of Islamic student groups and they began to win elections on the campus. They were much better organized than the leftist groups, the secular groups, or the moderate groups. They were very determined, very deliberate, and very effective. That was already happening on the campus by 1976.

Q: When Sadat made his announcement that he would go to Jerusalem, how was this seen initially by the embassy by you and by others? Did it seem like a ploy or a real thing?

RUGH: It happened pretty fast. In the few days between the offer, the acceptance, and the trip, I guess we were simply bystanders watching in amazement that this was happening. I think most of us didn't really believe it when we first heard his offer. Even if we thought he was serious, we thought the Israelis wouldn't accept. Then they accepted and then he went. All of that was astonishing. It was historic. No Arab leader had ever done that before. We were simply watching. I am quite sure that our ambassador had a role in conveying the messages back and forth. He may have been more persuaded than the rest of us that it was really going to happen, but when it happened, we were all amazed. We felt he gave a very effective and powerful speech in front of the Knesset. I remember our apprehension that the Egyptian public would not accept what he had done. I went out and watched the return from Jerusalem. He came in from the airport in an open car, standing up in the back, waving at the crowd. The crowd was enormous all the way in from the airport. Just an incredible crowd. It was friendly, welcoming him back, cheering for him, and pleased. This continued for the next months. The welcome was partly relief that something was being done to resolve the conflict, plus another factor, which was an expectation that when the conflict with Israel was over, economic prosperity would come to Egypt. So, those two things. They were tired of the conflict, the fighting, going to war, getting killed, losing treasure and human life. But they also had very high expectations that this would bring sudden prosperity. They were focused on economic problems. Sadat judged the mood of the public correctly. We didn't know if he had or not until we saw the public reaction. The public mood was very positive except for a very small group of intellectuals and others who said, "This is a sellout. This is a concession."

Q: His Foreign Minister resigned, didn't he?

RUGH: Yes. And there were others. In fact, some of the people that we saw at USIS in the universities, the intellectuals, the professors, and some of the people in the media, said, "This is all a big mistake and we shouldn't make a unilateral concession because the Israelis will put it in their pocket and want more." But the mood of the rest of the public was very positive, which was a real relief to us at the embassy because I certainly wasn't sure what it would be. On balance, I felt that this was a real step forward and that Sadat had done us and the region a favor by making this step. The fact that a small group was opposed and was wringing their hands didn't bother us all that much. We felt that he had captured really the mood of the majority in doing this.

Q: Particularly in your position, did you find that there was an increased interest in the state of Israel, how it operated, where it was going, etc.? Were you passing on information about Israel or not?

RUGH: A little bit. Not a great deal. Not as much as you might think. Egyptians were really absorbed with their own problems and they weren't terribly curious about Israel. As time went on and as we got into the negotiations at Camp David and the peace treaty, I guess we expected a lot more interchange between Israel and Egypt and that really didn't happen. A lot of those intellectuals who were opposed to his initiative refused to go to Israel. Some still refuse to this day. So, there wasn't that much curiosity. There was curiosity on the Israeli side. When the peace treaty was finally signed, there were Israelis who came over to Egypt. That was an interesting development. But there weren't a lot of Egyptians who were rushing over or who were asking us what was going on over there.

Q: When one thinks of Egypt, you think of the Nile Valley. I don't know how broad it is. It has a huge population which keeps getting bigger. How were you all thinking about whither Egypt, particularly economically? This was really the key question with Egypt.

RUGH: I guess we were all concerned that a lot of smart people had tried to help Egypt solve its economic problems and nobody had come up with a real solution. The problems were persistent: overpopulation, limited resources, a government owned economy or economic institutions which were very inefficient, guaranteed jobs, the bureaucracy and the government industries full of people they didn't need who were getting in each others' way. There were a lot of inefficiencies in the system. But the Egyptians didn't want to remove the subsidies that had been put on in the Nasser period. They said it was politically dangerous. I guess we began to realize that it was when they had a reaction to the IMF's recommendations and to the removal of the subsidies. We were concerned that the economic problems weren't being solved and nobody really had a solution. There wasn't a simple formula that could be applied that we knew about. We were trying to help the Egyptians sort that out, but without a lot of success.

Q: How was the reaction of the rest of the Arab world where Egypt was put beyond the pale for quite a while? How was that treated within Egypt as you saw it?

RUGH: When we got into negotiations between Egypt and Israel in Camp David and then the peace agreement, we at the embassy were delighted that this had all worked, that there was actually the first agreement between an Arab country and Israel in so many years. However, we were a bit concerned when most of the rest of the Arab world reacted by boycotting Egypt. The boycott wasn't airtight. It was leaky and it wasn't universal, but it was of concern because as a result of that boycott, there was a strengthening of the group within Egypt which was opposed to what Sadat was doing. The Arab nationalists were strengthened, saying, "We told you so. This was a mistake to go to Jerusalem. It was a mistake to surrender at Camp David" (as they saw it). The rest of the Arab world is now isolating Egypt. Sadat said that Egypt was isolated. He said, "The rest of the Arab world is isolated itself because Egypt is bigger than anybody else and we are the mother nation. It's their problem, not ours." But a lot of Egyptians didn't believe that and were worried about it. To some extent, it affected remittances of Egyptians living abroad. In the sector I was working in, which was press and culture, there was a period at least at the beginning of this boycott where the Egyptian film industry suffered, for example, because Egyptian films were the best in the region and they were all over the Arab world. The film industry and the television film industry was exporting to the Gulf, to North Africa, and to the whole region. Those exports were suddenly blocked. The problem was resolved to an extent, but it took time. The resolution happened in this way. Instead of Egypt producing a television film series of 13 weeks of soap operas which were sold to Kuwait Television, the actors, directors, and stage set designers moved to Kuwait and worked in Kuwaiti studios producing soap operas that were written, acted, and produced by Egyptians, paid for by Kuwaitis, and done in a Kuwaiti studio. You could tell this was happening because in the Gulf, they have modern, brand new sets, and in Cairo, they have old shabby sets. So, you could see that something had changed. The title at the beginning of the soap opera each night was "Produced by Kuwait Television," but it was simply transporting all of this Egyptian talent into the Gulf. So, they got a new lease on life in that sense. Egyptian writers, actors, and directors are talented. They found a way around this boycott. Newspaper subscriptions were cut way down for distribution in the Gulf and this was a problem, but they got around it eventually. The bulk of their sales are within Egypt anyway for Al-Ahram and Al Akhbar and Al Gomhuria. So, it affected the Egyptians in the pocketbook at least temporarily and some of them came home, lost their jobs in the Gulf and elsewhere because of the boycott. But it was really more of a political issue than an economic one after the initial shock of boycotting the people and the products of Egypt.

Q: The Camp David negotiations, including preparation, lasted from when to when?

RUGH: I think Sadat went to Jerusalem in November 1977. It took about a year to get to Camp David. It was in the fall of 1978 that we had Camp David. In that year, we were not sure that it was going to move to that next step. We were relieved that Camp David happened, that President Carter took the initiative to invite them to Camp David to resolve the substantive issues. I am sure the American role at Camp David was crucial. It wouldn't have happened without that. But then after the Camp David Accords in the fall of 1978, it took another year before the treaty was actually agreed upon. During this period, we were holding our breath until the agreement was signed. But it was a relief to see the agreement finally signed in 1979. That was a very positive step. In fact, it really helped us a lot in our public affairs program, not only in Cairo, but elsewhere in the region, because in spite of the criticism, the boycott, and the internal opposition to it by some Egyptians, we were now able to say, "The negotiation directly with Israel on substantive issues by an Arab state has led to Israeli withdrawal from Arab territory." That is what we had been arguing for 20 years. So, I felt that it was much easier to advocate American policy positions on the peace process now that Sadat had taken that step. We pointed to Sadat as an example of a successful approach to the problem in contrast to the failure of the PLO to regain any Arab territory by its tactics. So, we made those comparisons and argued for continued peaceful settlement. Not everybody was convinced, but it helped us a lot in our ability to cite examples of what we had been talking about for 20 years. That was the first time we had been able to do that.

Q: Before, it was always, "Look what you've done for Israel."

RUGH: Right. I felt this was a real watershed in American public diplomacy for us.

Q: In this public diplomacy field, did you have much coordination, exchange of information, with our USIS Arab posts and with Tel Aviv?

RUGH: We did. We always communicated laterally on these questions, particularly with the other posts in the other Arab countries. We met from time to time. We had conferences almost annually of public affairs officers either in Washington or in the field and talked about these issues. The chiefs of mission also had meetings and discussed these issues. I think we all felt that Sadat's initiative and President Carter's initiative at Camp David were very helpful to us. Carter's initiative in bringing them together at Camp David showed that the United States was proactive. The Arabs had been asking us to be proactive in an unbiased way. While some of the Arabs that we talked to felt that Sadat had been taken at Camp David and had not won enough concessions from the Israelis, there were others who felt that the United States was at least making an effort. They thought President Carter was reasonably evenhanded, a more or less honest broker. It wasn't a universal Arab view, but there were enough people in the Middle East that felt that we were at least trying in that respect.

Q: Did you find with this both in Egypt and hearing from your colleagues in other Arab posts that there was more interest in the United States and its policy since we really were getting in there and doing some of the nitty gritty?

RUGH: Yes, there was. The Carter administration's focus on human rights also played a role. Some Arabs began to think that perhaps the American President was indeed interested in the rights of the Palestinians. I personally think he was. This came across when he talked to Sadat. He developed a very warm relationship with Sadat personally. That was clear to people in the Middle East. It depended a little bit on what you thought of Sadat, but those who were at least supportive of Sadat or open minded transferred to Jimmy Carter a positive impression of American efforts in the Middle East. So, we were beginning to get some positive responses on American proactive policy.

Q: What was your reaction initially when the Camp David Agreement became known? How did you feel about it?

RUGH: Relieved and pleased that an agreement had actually been achieved. I assumed that since Sadat had agreed to it, he knew what he was doing and that this was another helpful step that he was taking after his trip to Jerusalem. I still feel that he did the right thing. He probably did make more concessions than Begin in order to get it, but he had his eye on the goal of an agreement and withdrawal. He was single minded and he ignored his advisors who recommended against taking this course. We thought he was courageous and we applauded what he was doing. We very much wanted to succeed and we saw him succeeding. We thought that we ought to work on both of them to come together. There were some exchanges between embassy Tel Aviv and embassy Damascus which were fairly heated, partly because each one was headed by a very strong willed and articulate ambassador explaining his host government's view. We thought that we were focused on American interests and not on Arab interests and that we were not being unnecessarily biased and that we were trying to encourage Washington to be evenhanded and to understand where Syria was coming from. We weren't taking Syria's side. There were a lot of things we objected to. Washington had a misunderstanding of Syria, we thought. The Israelis said to Washington, "Syria controls Lebanon and therefore anything that happens in Lebanon, talk to Syria about it." We thought that was an exaggeration. We felt Syria had enormous influence in Lebanon, but they didn't control everything. This came up because there were Americans who had been kidnapped in Lebanon and people in Israel and Washington thought, "If Syria wanted to help us get them released, all they had to do was snap its fingers and they would be released." I was never sure how much Sadat could do to get those hostages released. It may be that Syria had more influence than we admitted, but I don't think it had as much influence as the Israelis claimed.

Q: Camp David was way into '79. How did you see the situation after the post Camp David Period?

RUGH: We were hopeful that the boycott by the other Arab states and the opposition in the Arab world would die down and that others would follow Egypt's example, but we weren't at all sure that was going to happen. Egypt being the largest and most powerful Arab state and a key to the Arab world, having made this agreement that was the good news. The bad news was it didn't spread to others. We had hoped that the Jordanians would follow suit and they didn't. We were less optimistic that the Syrians would follow suit, but the Palestinians didn't follow. There was a good chance the Jordanians would and they didn't do so. We were disappointed in the Jordanians' position particularly because we thought they were most likely to be the next one to follow. The Lebanese always said that they would try to be second in line for a peaceful settlement with Israel, but it turned out the Lebanese weren't free to do so because of Syrian influence on Lebanon. They did try a little bit later in '82 and '83 to make a deal with Israel, but that fell apart with Syrian opposition. We were pleased that this step had been taken, but concerned that we needed another step and that didn't really come at all for more than a decade. We were disappointed in that and then of course by '79 the world was watching the events in Iran with some concern.

Q: We are talking about the seizure of our embassy and the taking of hostages there and the overthrow of the Shah' and the Islamic revolution there.

RUGH: Yes, that had an impact in Egypt, as it did in the region in several ways and most of them were of concern to us. One, it encouraged the Islamic groups in Egypt. They saw a successful coup by an Islamic revolution (they call it), by an Islamic fundamentalist group, not in an Arab country, but a nearby Islamic country. This encouraged them to think it could happen anywhere, even in Egypt. We saw an upsurge of support and enthusiasm for Islamic groups on the campuses of universities in Egypt, more Islamic dress visible in the public, newspapers, publications, organizations and that was of concern. We didn't expect that the revolution would suddenly come to Egypt, but we were concerned that this model, at least in the early months of the revolution, would be imitated, that the people would try to imitate it. The other problem that it caused for us or the other concern we had was that people said "The Shah was your friend; you let him down and didn't help him." If I remember correctly, the Shah came to Egypt when he fled.

Q: Yes, initially he did.

RUGH: He came to Egypt for medical treatment, and then he came to the United States. This had an effect in Egypt of reminding Egyptians of the American-Sadat connection. Some Egyptians were critical of Sadat for making concessions to Israel on Camp David, for being a capitalist, for supporting the private sector in Egypt, for reversing the Nasserite socialist gains that they liked. In other words, the left and the Arab nationalist element in Egypt were reinforced in their criticism of the United States when the Shah came. They said that these are two likeminded authoritarian rulers, who are in the pocket of the Americans and that created a bit of a problem for us. Others who were more inclined to be friendly to the United States said "is America going to let us down, as they let the Shah down? And you did nothing to help. You had such a stake there and you let it go down the drain and did nothing to help prevent the revolution in Iran. Is America a loyal friend in the end?" That created doubt about American reliability at the time and it wasn't helped when we had the hostage situation in Tehran, when we had a rescue attempt that failed. It made us look weak and that was a public affairs problem in Egypt and elsewhere in the region.

Q: After the Camp David, the Iranian Revolution and all, and the fact that Israelis weren't terribly forthcoming, was this a let down for all of you?

RUGH: It was as time passed after the peace agreement. It was a let down for those reasons and the Egypt public began to say "Where is the peace dividend?" They felt Sadat had promised them a peace dividend in terms of economic prosperity. Really, he never made extravagant promises, but they thought in his defense of the Camp David agreements, that he at least implied.

Q: Although it was implicit. I mean, anybody would think that something would happen.

RUGH: Right. If you look back at his speeches, he never promised them anything specific, but everyone expected it would be a peace dividend and it wasn't coming. The positive glow of the peace treaty began to dim and be diminished by the persistent economic problems that Egypt had. The failure of other Arab countries to follow suit on the peace process, the failure for the economic boom to occur, the problems in Iran and the gulf changed the mood and became more pessimistic as we got into 1980 and '81.

Q: You left when in '81?

RUGH: I left in the summer of '81 and went to Damascus.

Q: Next time we will pick it up then. Summer of '81, how did you feel about the survivability of Sadat? And also how he was conducting himself? Was he getting more authoritative, losing touch? How did you feel about this?

RUGH: When I left in the summer of '81, I thought that he was managing his situation in Egypt very well and I thought he was on top of the situation. He had made some moves in the direction of opening up the political system, as well as the economy, and these were welcome to us as Americans. We thought that was good that he allowed more press freedom and more parties to be created. He did it from the top down. He created a new party out of his old party. He decreed that parties could be formed. They weren't growing up organically and naturally, but still, we thought this was a positive development. It turned out later, in retrospect, that he let it get out of hand and he was assassinated. But that was a story that happened after I left in '81.

Q: How did we view Hosni Mubarak, who was his vice president at the time? You already had Sadat, who had been a vice president, who was considered a lightweight under Nasser. What about Mubarak?

RUGH: Same. We didn't know much about him. He was a military man and a pilot. He was the hero of the October war and we didn't know much about him as a political figure independent of Sadat. He was the number two and very much how Sadat had been invisible or indistinguishable from Nasser. He wasn't prominent and he didn't have a political base, but a military base and not a political base. Sadat was calling the shots. Sadat was very much in charge and kept his own counsel to a large extent. He accepted or rejected his advisors' advice as he thought best. He made his own decisions.

Q: Did you reserve some admirations for you being in the public affairs business on how Sadat, I am told he was excellent in treating foreign visitors and make them feel welcome at home and sit down. He seemed to be superb at this.

RUGH: Yes, He was terrific at this. We had a number of occasions to see him in action because various high level visits. Jimmy Carter came a number of times, when I was there. Between the time of the Jerusalem visit in the fall of '77 and Camp David in the fall of '78 and the peace treaty, Carter came many times. Cyrus Vance came many times and with them a whole press contingent. Sadat would meet the press, talk to them, and do it extremely well. He was very effective in talking to Israeli journalists, American journalists, and Western journalists. There were Egyptian and Arab journalists who were less convinced and some of them had felt that he had become an American. That he had sold-out to the Israelis and Americans, and they were often critical of him more than the American journalists. But he was single-minded in this pursuit of an agreement with Israel and a better relationship with the United States and didn't try to be all things to all people. He didn't make a big effort to mend fences with the Arabs and he didn't make a big effort to play the opposition within Egypt because it was a minority opposition. He didn't feel he needed to do so.

Q: We are in the summer of '81 and you're in Damascus. What were you doing in Damascus?

RUGH: I was Deputy Chief of Mission. First, Under Ambassador Talcott Seelye whom I had known in Jeddah, when he was DCM much earlier.

Q: You were there from when to when?

RUGH: I was there from '81 to '84 as a DCM. It was a three year assignment. When I arrived, Seelye had decided to retire from the Foreign Service and he and I overlapped for I think two weeks. Then the new Ambassador Bob Paganelli came after that. I really served under Bob Paganelli for most of the term.

Q: Two Ambassadors who are known for having very strong opinion. Could you describe what the situation was in Syria in '81, when you arrived?

RUGH: Relations were difficult between the United States and Syria, primarily, over Israel and the peace process. And even over Lebanon, which of course is related to the peace process. We re-established relations under Ambassador Murphy. The time after the Camp David, when we were not there at all, was an even more difficult time. It was tough working that account because the Syrians had grievances against us and we had so many grievances against the Syrians. Primarily, relating to the peace process in Lebanon, our positions were far apart and the Congress was very critical of Syrian behavior as was the US administration. These difficulties led during my time there to the Congress canceling the AID program. We had an AID program, a very large one, with about 300 million dollars in the pipeline for Syria. The Congress decided to cancel that and take the money back. Which is a little unusual, but they were so upset with the Syrian government that they did that.

Q: This happened before you arrived?

RUGH: No, this happened during my time but it was symptomatic. When I arrived, there was a lot of tension. And the decision by Congress to take the money back was symptomatic of that tension, which only increased during my time.

Q: What was the tension when you were there? You could talk about the tensions on both sides.

RUGH: The United States felt that Syria should have, in its own interest, the region's interest, and the interest of the United States, been more interested in the peace process. The United States also felt that Syria was to some extent being an obstacle to the settlement of the Lebanese security and internal situation because Syria had a very heavy military presence in eastern Lebanon and a lot of political influence over the Lebanese. The Syrians, for their part, felt that it was not our business what they were doing in Lebanon. They said that Lebanon and Syria were so close that they didn't even need embassies in each other's capitals because they were not one country but practically one country. This led many people in the United States to think that Syria wanted to annex Lebanon. The issue with Lebanon was a contentious point. But, the main issue was Israel and the Palestinians and the peace process, which had not made any progress after Camp David. Only Egypt had made peace with Israel at that point. The Camp David Israeli and Egyptian peace was very new and at that point Egypt was still isolated from the rest of the Arab world, with Syria taking the leading role to isolate Egypt. We were very gratified by the role Egypt had played in the peace process. We were very pleased that Egypt had made peace with Israel, which we felt was in the interest of Israel, Egypt, and the Arabs. But the Syrians took a very different view and thought that peace with Israel was treason and wouldn't agree with any of our arguments to them that this was the way to go. That you would settle the Israel-Arab conflict fairly and with justice if you negotiate directly. They objected to that idea. At the time, it was my view, which has turned out to be incorrect, that Syria was able to take this hard line position on Israel because only Egypt had agreed to negotiate with Israel. I thought that if only other Arab entities, for example Jordan or the Palestinians, or both joined the peace process, that would isolate Syria; and Syrians being practical people over history, seeing the historical trends, would also join the peace process. So, when I was asked by Washington, what do I think of Syria joining the peace process? I said, "As long as the PLO refuses to negotiate with Israel, its going to be almost impossible for the Syrians to do the same. But, once the PLO and the Israeli get together and negotiate then Assad would follow too." It turned out I was wrong.

Q: There must be a lot of pressure on the embassy because there was a saying "there can be no war without Egypt and no peace without Syria." There wasn't going to be a war but there wasn't going to be peace. What were you getting about Assad when you went there? What made him tick? What was his source of strength?

RUGH: It seemed that he was convinced that being a very strong, tough Arab nationalist was important to him and maintaining his power. He represented internally a minority group. The Alawites were in the minority. He had come up through the military. His hold on power depended partly on the control of the military and control of the Syrian Baath party. It was to some extent, tenuous if you consider that he was representing a minority and that may have influenced his desire to preserve himself as a very tough Arab nationalist. He was tough. He would talk about refusal to surrender, as he thought Sadat surrendered to the Israelis. But he was going to insist on no surrender. His control was fairly solid. When I first arrived in 1981, there was some terrorist activity going on in Syria carried out by Islamic fundamentalists against the regime. During the first several months there were a few major car bomb explosions in Damascus and elsewhere. One of them was right behind the American school and caused a lot of damage to the air force headquarters as I recall. In the first months I was there, the Syrian government was able to put an end to that. They were able to arrest and eliminate the opposition. It was fairly stable. The only exception being later when there was an uprising in Hama. It took a couple days for the Syrian army to put it down and they put it down very brutally, destroying a large section of Hama. The press said they destroyed the whole city, which of course wasn't true. They did destroy a large section of it and it happened when I was there.

Q: Were there any tools or elements or ways to get to him.

RUGH: I thought it was an advantage or tool that the Egyptians had made peace with Israel compared to five years earlier when no Arab state had made peace with Israel. This was an advantage. We could point to the fact that Egypt had regained his territory by negotiation.

Q: I think this is often forgotten when we talk about this. This isn't just Egypt acknowledging Israel's presence, they got territory back.

RUGH: The Syrians of course brush that aside. They just countered it and said it didn't matter. It was treason and the Arab world had rejected it. But I think it did help us. It was an arrow in our quiver. We also thought, perhaps mistakenly, that we had a large AID program, a large economic assistance program. We thought that was an interesting carrot for the Syrians. It turned out once we limited it that Assad didn't flinch. He didn't care. (Laughter) But, at the time, we hoped that that Egyptian position, American interest there, American assistance, alleged Syrian desire to have better relations with us would be leverage. The Soviet Union had very close relations with Syria to the extent that the American Embassy was excluded from any contact with the military. The military was entirely supplied with Soviet military equipment, advisors, training, and so on. We saw convoys of Soviet military equipment run by the Syrian Army going through Damascus all the time and our defense attaché<sup>1/2</sup> was on the road, chasing after it, trying to count things and figure out what they had. A lot of the movement was related to Lebanon because the Syrian army had a huge presence in eastern Lebanon. We also had no real access to the party, Assad's party. But the Soviet's did and it was difficult for us to do any culture activities or any normal exchange activities with the Syrians to an extent they wanted to show their friendship with the Russians/Soviets and not to us.

In '81 when I arrived, it was still reasonable relations between Syria and Iraq. They were both controlled by Baath regimes, Baath party. And the terminology they used was that the Baath party was an Arab National Regional party. One branch of it ruled Baghdad and one branch ruled Damascus. So, there was a theoretical brotherhood there. But underneath that rhetoric was a lot of suspicion between Baghdad and Damascus and it grew during my time there to the point that there was an enormous amount of tension. And the border was closed between Iraq and Syria and the pipeline which crossed Syria to Iraq to the Mediterranean was shut down by the Syrians. The hostility was very public. The tension underneath the rhetoric only grew.

Q: What about fundamentalism?

RUGH: That grew as an issue during my time there. When I first arrived it wasn't a major issue there. But it grew for an interesting reason and as the tension increased between Iraq and Syria, Syria became closer to Iran, during the Iran-Iraq war. The Iranians were interested in Syrian support, but they were also interested in other things. There are Shiite shrines in Damascus and they began sending martyrs, that is wives and children of Iranians who had been killed in Iraq. Damascus started to fill up with a steady flow of Iranians, who were very angry at Iraq and also not happy with the United States. This became a very interesting security issue for us because there were Shiite areas in town that were full of angry Iranians.

Q: And changes when the Reagan administration came in?

RUGH: The initial impression we had of the Reagan Administration, as I recall, was very encouraging. The Reagan administration wanted to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict. They were going to be proactive and even handed. Both of which the professional diplomats wanted to see. After an initial meeting, we all thought this was great. He is a reasonable man, sensible, and he is going to have a good policy on the Middle East. In fact, if I recall correctly, he developed for the Reagan administration the Reagan plan for the peace process, which had excellent elements in it. We were optimistic in the beginning. The trouble was he tried to divide up the issue into pieces and deal with them one at a time. He decided that the first piece ought to be with Israel and Lebanon because he heard the Israelis say that they would like to strike a deal with Lebanon and Lebanese say things that lead him to believe there was a possibility of a peace.

Q: Where was this coming from?

RUGH: I think it was not coming from Reagan. I think it was coming from his appointees, primarily Shultz. In the beginning Haig, then Shultz. Shultz and Weinberger in particular. They were focused on peace and expanding the peace from Egypt into the rest of the Arab world. They were starting with Lebanon and Israel and at the time they thought this was a terrific idea. It turned out to be a failure. And we were watching from the sidelines and hearing from Syrians some misgivings that this was going on because Syrians have a very strong interest in Lebanon and weren't too happy to see Lebanon negotiate with Israel. They regarded this whole process as a Christian-Lebanese sell out to the Israelis at the expense on Muslim Lebanese and the rest of the Arab world. We tried to convey that to Washington. That Syria is not happy with what is going on and was not going to go along with it. Washington chose to move ahead and ignore Syria, while they tried to put together the Lebanon-Israel agreement. It wasn't until, I believe, '83 that Washington turned its attention to Syria and that was after an agreement was signed between Israel and Lebanon. Secretary Shultz came to Damascus in March or April of '83, for his first ever meeting with Assad. He had in his pocket the Israel-Lebanon agreement that had been signed - without Syrian involvement. He assumed since he had this agreement that all he had to do was to get Assad to bless it and move on to the next step, which would be a Syria-Israeli agreement. He, in fact, had heard from Ambassador Paganelli in the reporting from Damascus to Washington that the Syrians were very unhappy with this whole process and he saw Ambassador Paganelli at a Cairo conference. Paganelli told him at the Chief of Missions Conference that the Syrians won't go along with this.

Paganelli is a man that talks straight and is a very dedicated public servant and wanted to convey to the boss exactly what the situation was. The Secretary of State misunderstood what he was hearing in two ways. One, he thought Assad's opposition to the peace process was exaggerated and, two, he thought Paganelli was taking the Syrian side, maybe even being disloyal. That was maybe in March of '83, if I remember the dates correctly. Then, shortly thereafter, Shultz came to Damascus to have his first face to face meeting with Hafez Al-Assad and he spent about four hours listening to Assad. At the end of the meeting, he realized, I think, that what he had been hearing from Paganelli was a shorter version of what Assad was saying and Paganelli wasn't making it up. He hadn't gone native and he hadn't become more Arab than the Arabs. In fact, he was faithfully reporting Assad's hostility to the Lebanon-Israeli Agreement and to the whole peace process. And Shultz began to realize that it wasn't going to be easy to sell this to Assad. So, in retrospect, Shultz made a tactical mistake in taking Syria for granted. I think he realized it wasn't going to be so easy. I was posted in Damascus while this was happening and felt that he got very discouraged about the peace process and walked away from it after running into a wall in Damascus with Assad.

I think, in retrospect that we should have tried to work with Syria directly instead of this whole deal with Lebanon. But, the chances were slim because Assad didn't feel it was a necessity to making a deal or allowing a deal to go through. And repeatedly said that the Palestinians reject...

We should abstain relationship with the PLO, because of our relationship with Israel. But I thought it was not in the U.S. interest to repeat a deal with the PLO.

I remember, Terry Anderson, as an AP reporter, came over from Beirut and talked to us several times about this issue. He said, "Can't the Syrians bring about the release of the hostages?" I told him, we don't know how much influence they have. We are asking the Syrians to be helpful. We have asked them repeatedly to help us find and release these Americans, who are in the hands of the Hezbollah and friends of Iran and now that Iran and Syria have good relations, Syria ought to be influential. We said this is inhumanitarian and these are innocent victims. Think of that aspect and their families and so on. But it didn't produce much.

Q: You might explain who Terry Anderson was.

RUGH: Terry Anderson was the Associated Press bureau chief in Beirut at the time. This was before he was kidnapped in 1985.

Q: What was the situation there when you arrived in Syria?

RUGH: Talcott Seelye was one of the great Arabists and one of the great professionals in the Foreign Service. I had always admired him. He knew as much about the Middle East as anybody in the Foreign Service. He had grown up in Beirut, spoke fluent Arabic, talked to President Hafez El Assad in Arabic, presented his credentials in Arabic. He had been born in Beirut. He privately was very concerned about American policy toward the peace process and felt that we were not always evenhanded, that we had not always appreciated Arab concerns. But he was a very loyal American who carried out American policy brilliantly and was very careful not to let his personal views distort his performance as an American ambassador, an American official. Privately, he was often critical of what we were doing.

Shortly after I arrived in Damascus, Seelye was scheduled to leave Syria and retire. He planned to take a few days of leave in Europe and then go back to Washington. He had had a very long and distinguished career. So, he was thinking about the end of his career. He invited two American reporters who happened to be in Damascus, The New York Times and one other newspaper to interview him as he left. He was scheduled to leave in the afternoon or evening and agreed to have the interview in the morning. The night before, he said to me that he was thinking about expressing some of his personal views to them because he was about to retire and would be a private citizen and what did I think? Should he do that? I knew what he meant generally speaking. I didn't know specifically. I said I thought he ought to make that decision himself, but if he felt strongly about it, he should express his views. He had an opportunity to be helpful and if he felt it was in the U.S. interests that he speak out, he should do so. Well, he did. As I recall, the question he was asked was, "Mr. Ambassador, what do you think about relations between the PLO and the United States? How should America deal with the PLO?" His answer was something like, "I think we should pick up the phone and call them." They said something like, "Well, this is off the record, isn't it?" He said, "No, you can print it." They checked again with him to make sure they could quote him as the sitting American ambassador and he said, "Yes." That made headlines: "American official says we should talk to PLO." It hit the fan in Washington. Washington was unhappy, to say the least, that he had said that. But by the time he got back to Washington, it had blown over. There were a few people that were still grumbling, but it was something that he had always said privately and a lot of us had thought and said privately. I think the career people who worked in the Near East area appreciated what he said. Some of them who were in Washington who took the blame for supposedly allowing this ambassador to speak out were not happy.

Q: A major thing during your time was the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

RUGH: That was in May 1982.

Q: Had this been foreseen?

RUGH: No, we didn't anticipate it. It was a surprise to us, to the Syrians as well. It was a major event and a major problem for us, as well as for the Syrians. It helped cause a deterioration in American Syrian relations for a number of reasons, including the Israeli occupation of Beirut and southern Lebanon in the spring and summer of 1982. The United States had an expanded military presence in the area, including flying reconnaissance flights over Lebanon. One of those reconnaissance planes was shot down by the Syrians. One of the pilots was killed. The other pilot, Lieutenant Goodman, was captured and brought to Damascus. The Syrians had an American military officer in their custody. This was a problem. We immediately asked for his release and they held onto him for a number of weeks, through Christmas. The ambassador had access to him and visited him a number of times, took messages from his family, and we requested his release and they refused. Jesse Jackson, a prominent African-American figure, came to Damascus on a special mission with his Rainbow Coalition, a group of political and other community leaders, to help get Lieutenant Goodman released. Jackson conferred with us at the embassy and then went and talked to Assad a couple of times. The upshot was that Lieutenant Goodman was released. The Syrians did the release in an interesting way. One morning, the Foreign Ministry asked the ambassador to come by at 9 o'clock. We went over and the Foreign Minister said, "At 11 o'clock, we're going to release Lieutenant Goodman to you and Jesse Jackson together. Be here at 11." At 10 o'clock, they called Jackson and told him the same thing. So, at 11 o'clock, we showed up. Lieutenant Goodman was at the Foreign Ministry and was handed over to the joint custody of the American ambassador and Jesse Jackson. Then they went down to the hotel and had a joint press conference, which was really mostly Jackson talking. We thought that was interesting because I think Jackson's presence helped give them an excuse to release Goodman. They didn't want to turn him over to the American government. That galled them. But Jackson, emphasizing the humanitarian aspect and as a private citizen, it made it easier for them. But they didn't want to go so far as to turn him over only to Jackson. They wanted to give him to us, too. So, they sort of got the best of both worlds. Goodman was treated well, but he was denied his liberty for a few weeks.

Q: What was the initial reaction to Jackson?

RUGH: Initially, we were hopeful that he would be able to solve the problem. We didn't care who solved it. We just wanted it solved. Until he was released, we weren't sure they were going to release him. Jesse Jackson brought somebody with him in his Rainbow Coalition named Louis Farrakhan, who was very quiet and just observed, but he was part of the team.

Q: He is the leader of the Nation of Islam, the black Muslim leader, who is very anti Semitic. Didn't US forces shell Lebanon?

RUGH: We did, but we didn't target Syrian positions. The battleship was firing 16 inch shells whose accuracy is not precise into Lebanon. They were landing in the villages and in the hills, causing craters in empty fields and in other places. I think there was some Syrian damage, but there wasn't any direct fighting between American and Syrian military, except for this one incident where they shot Goodman's plane down.

Q: During the whole involvement in Lebanon, were we sending messages to Israel saying, "Don't get yourself involved with the Syrians"?

RUGH: Yes. A major initiative on our part was to try to help the Israelis and Syrians communicate with each other about where they were, where they would go, what they would do to avoid a military conflict. We would ask the Syrians what their intentions were and ask the Israelis what their intentions were, where they were, what they were going to do, and where their lines were. I think we helped the communication process.

Q: How did this come about?

RUGH: There were messages from Washington instructing us to "Pass the following message to the Syrians that the Israelis have said to us." During those days, we were basically working 24 hours a day. We were all night and all day at the embassy.

We were concerned that it was out of control, that we weren't getting the whole story. It was a very unpredictable situation. We didn't know where the Israelis were going to go. We originally thought they were just going to make an incursion into southern Lebanon, where they already had a presence, and then they went beyond that and went all the way to Beirut and surrounded Beirut. That was a surprise and a concern. How far are they going to go? If they keep going and if they push into eastern Lebanon, they're going to have a direct conflict with the Syrians. What would the Russians do?

My understanding was that there was also a conversation between Washington and Moscow and Moscow was involved and embarrassed that the Syrians were put in this tight position being threatened by Israel inside of Lebanon, which had been Syrian turf. The Israelis had not had a presence in this Arab country except in the very south.

Q: Didn't Syria have a presence in Lebanon?

RUGH: Yes, but we did not know much about what they were doing inside of Lebanon, but we could watch them a little bit better inside of Syria. They had the surface-to-air missile. I think it was a SAM V, which had the capability of reaching into the Mediterranean where we were flying our aircraft. So, we were not relaxed about the possibility that the Syrians would not only go against Israel, but would go against American forces.

Q: What were you getting from the Syrians?

RUGH: We were getting a lot of anger and a lot of accusations that the United States was behind this and was not only allowing it, but encouraging Israeli action, that the United States was ignoring the innocent Lebanese civilian victims, and that we were revealed as being totally biased because we didn't stop the Israelis. The Syrians assumed that we could have stopped the Israelis if we had wanted to.

Q: Were the Syrians saying, "Do something about this?"

RUGH: Well, it wasn't quite in that vein. We took most of the initiatives in discussing the question. But whenever we raised issues and expressed our concern about the escalation that was taking place and the possible further escalation of the violence that would bring Israel and Syria into direct confrontation, they would very strongly reject our approach. They would say, "Israel invaded. Tell your friends in Israel to leave." It was pretty simple from their point of view. They were saying to us on a daily basis, "It's Israel's fault and it's your fault. Get out of there." But most of the conversations really were initiated by us. They weren't coming to us screaming about the danger. They took a posture of saying "Lebanon invited us, that's why we're there. Nobody invited Israel in. They invaded unilaterally. The problem is yours to resolve. You Americans and Israelis get out of there." That was the nature of the discussion.

The Syrians would say, "We're not Lebanon. If you want to talk about Lebanon, talk to the Lebanese." We thought that was a little bit disingenuous because we thought they had a lot of influence. But we did talk to Lebanese parties. A number of Lebanese officials came to Damascus on a regular basis to talk to the Syrians and we talked to them as well. It was primarily the job of our embassy in Beirut to do, but we also supported them.

Q: Was there much interaction between our embassies in Beirut and Damascus?

RUGH: To some extent, members of the embassy staff and families came over to Damascus from Beirut because Beirut was really in a war zone and Damascus was very quiet. So, it was sort of an R&R.

Q: What about kidnapping in Lebanon of Americans?

RUGH: The Syrians really didn't comment. The issue was who did it. Because of American suspicions about and hostility to Syria and Israeli hostility to Syria, the immediate suspicion was that Syria was behind all of this. We felt that it was possible that Syria was involved, but we needed to look at it more carefully to see if we could figure out whether that was true or not. So, there were discussions between our embassy in Damascus and Washington and our embassy in Tel Aviv over responsibility for terrorism. This was a very common, repeated theme. Our embassy in Damascus took the position that Syria might have been involved, but let's look at it more carefully, not just assume that all the bad things that happened in Lebanon had a Syrian hand. There were a lot of bad people who weren't Syrian.

Q: Did you have a feeling of why the US sent troops back in the second time around? It did seem like the mission was never questioned.

RUGH: To be honest, I don't think we sounded the alarm and expressed our strong reservations about this move. I think we tended to assume that Washington knew what it was doing. It turned out that wasn't the case.

Q: What were you reporting and what were you finding out? You think of Syria and Assad. How did this play out?

RUGH: We heard about the Hama siege when it started. We tried to monitor it, but it was difficult because it was closed off by the Syrians. They didn't allow our attachés or anybody to go up there and look at it. But we did get some people up there and looked at it while it was still going on. This was before the international press knew it was happening. There were lots of American and foreign journalists sitting in Beirut, but there weren't any correspondents sitting in Damascus. The Syrians weren't about to report it. So, it didn't get into the international press until after it was just about over. But the embassy knew about it and was reporting on it. What happened was that Hama is a very old city and the oldest parts of it have very narrow streets and it's sort of a rabbit warren of little narrow alleys and houses piled on top of each other. The Islamic fundamentalists who were in revolt against the local government of Hama were able to resist being arrested by the local police and military because they holed up in these small houses and streets. That was a security problem for the Syrians because they couldn't get them out of there. It was easier to be snipers in a window of a little old house than it was to arrest them, kill them. So the army surrounded the city and they tried to root them out. After a few days, they realized that they were failing to do so, so they began to bombard this particular residential section of the city which had the resisting Islamic fundamentalists in it. They pretty much leveled one section of town. It was a district of the city that they destroyed. It was all over. Then the press came in and discovered it and said that they had destroyed a whole town.

One aspect of it that was important was that during the cleanup of the city after the rebellion was put down, the Syrians discovered quite a few weapons that had been supplied by Iraq. Assad told us that. That really caused a major deterioration in Iraqi-Syrian relations. This really was something that Assad could not tolerate. He didn't trust the Iraqis. To see them supply an insurrection inside Syria was just more than he could stand. Since that time, he has been very hostile to Baghdad.

Q: What about Assad? Visits to Syria are sort of obligatory for justifiable reasons by US officials, no? Was there an acceptance of people coming from the United States?

RUGH: There was. There weren't as many visits to Syria as there were to Israel and even Cairo, but there were some. We had a few congressional delegations. John Tower, Senator from Texas, came, as did John Warner from Virginia, who was on the Arms Services Committee. He welcomed those. He liked to have a chance to talk to American congressman. But it was mostly from our side. We had some American officials come. Shultz came a few times. They got a chance to talk directly to Syrians and understood Syria a lot better after they visited Syria. Assad spent a lot of time explaining the roots of his grievances. One issue that was important to Washington and with the Syrians and especially with Congress was the question of Syrian Jews. The Syrian Jewish community was of great interest to many members of Congress. I discovered very quickly that it's a small community. There are fewer Jews in Syria than there are in Brooklyn, but the Syrian Jewish community had the ability to communicate with the Syrian Jewish community in the United States. Whenever there was an incident involving a Syrian Jewish person, we would find out about it through Washington. The State Department would say, "Congressman so and so has just told us that yesterday a Syrian Jew was beaten up in the souk in Aleppo. What do you know about it? We didn't know anything about it." We had to go find out. So, we would contact the head of the Syrian Jewish community and say, "Is this true?" The Congressmen wanted us to go and see Assad and tell him to stop harassing Jews. But first we wanted to find out what the Jewish community in Syria would say about it. Often, it was a wildly exaggerated story. Sometimes it was true. If it was true, we would raise the issue with the Syrian government. That was an issue that we were instructed many times to raise.

Q: One of the interviews I'm doing right now is with Stephen Solarz, who talks about getting a bunch of Syrian Jewish women out of Syria to get married.

RUGH: Right, he did that before I was there. By that time, he was not allowed to come to Syria by the Syrians. He tried several times to follow up on that effort, but the Syrians didn't want him to come. Before I arrived, he had made a visit and he had said some things which they felt were insulting and uncalled for and they didn't grant him a visa after that. So, I never saw him in Damascus.

Q: You left Damascus in 1984. You went to Yemen as ambassador. How did you get the appointment?

RUGH: I was DCM in Damascus under Ambassador Robert Paganelli. He encouraged me to think about another State Department assignment. As a USIA officer, I didn't necessarily have all of the connections and supporters that a State Department officer might have in that. You don't apply for an ambassadorship, but Paganelli recommended me for an ambassadorship. The circumstances were that several people who knew my work were in Washington and other places at the time and also made phone calls in support of my candidacy. I think I was competitive largely because of the luck of circumstances and having supporters like Paganelli, Herman Eilts, and Talcott Seelye who knew me, and also because I had Arabic. I think that helped.

Q: I would hope so!

RUGH: So, I was nominated, got the appointment, got a phone call from President Reagan in Damascus asking me if I would accept the appointment, which, of course, I did. In the fall of 1984, I went off to Sanaa, Yemen after going through the nomination, clearance, and senatorial confirmation process.

Q: As a USIA officer, was there sort of a State Department mafia that would stand in your way? Were USIA officers somewhat outside the loop?

RUGH: I don't think there was an active conspiracy against us, but it was just assumed by many people that ambassadorships go to State Department officers. There were exceptions to that rule. Other USIA officers had gotten ambassadorships before, but not many. Some of my colleagues in USIA were not interested in being ambassador. One assumed that a State Department political officer's goal was to become ambassador someday. Very often, the choice for ambassador is made out of the ranks of the political officers in the State Department. It is very competitive, but there is a lot of luck involved. I was lucky that time.

Q: Did you have any problem with confirmation?

RUGH: No substantive problem. There was a delay, as there has been in recent years for many of these appointments. I received my phone call from President Reagan in March of 1984 and I didn't get out to post until September or early October of 1984. I didn't mind having some time off for holiday, but I was anxious to get to post. The delay was simply the Senate getting around to dealing with a group of us who came up. The confirmation hearing was fairly straightforward. There were only two or three senators in attendance. They were as interested in my view of Syria as they were in Yemen, or maybe more so. Syria was a more contentious relationship, so they asked me about that assignment rather than what I expected to find in Yemen. But there were a few questions on Yemen. It went very quickly and there was no problem.

Q: Before you went out, what were you getting from the desk and from the bureau about Yemen and our interests there? Did you carry anything as you went out there saying "This is something I want to get done?"

RUGH: Yes. The situation at the time was that Yemen was still a divided country. North and South were separate. North Yemen, to which I was being accredited, was a country that was more or less non aligned in the sense that North Yemen had relations with the United States, with the Soviet Union, with China, with the Gulf states, with Asia, with any country that would provide assistance to Yemen or any country that would support Yemen's independence and sovereignty. South Yemen, where we had no diplomatic relations, was a country that we regarded as a Marxist state in the pocket of the Soviet Union. At the time, it was the state that was the most hostile to the United States politically. It was not a terribly important state, but its political coloration marked it as a country that was a threat to American interests. So, I was being accredited to North Yemen right next door to a country that was seen as an outpost of the Soviet Union. This was still Cold War times. So, the background music of the assignment was work closely with North Yemen, strengthen American-North Yemeni ties, and keep an eye on South Yemen, which we regarded as a threat not only to the United States, but to our friends in the region, including the Saudis. The Saudis were very concerned about South Yemen. South Yemen, for example, maintained training camps for terrorists of various kinds, including Palestinian terrorists who were sent north after receiving training. We regarded this as a threat to our friends in the region and ultimately a threat to the United States. So, we were watching that very carefully. The relationship between North and South Yemen we knew was a tense one. North Yemen was not really in the American camp and didn't have a pro-American regime the way some others in the region did (Saudi Arabia, for example), but it was not aligned with the Soviet Union. The Department of State regarded it as important to help keep the North Yemenis cooperating with us and working also with their neighbors. Another factor in this mix was our very strong relationship with Saudi Arabia, the largest and wealthiest and most powerful on the Arabian Peninsula, and a country which on the surface had cordial relations with Yemen, but underneath there was always a certain amount of tension between Saudi Arabia and North Yemen. Since Saudi Arabia was considered as more important to the United States, that put Yemen in an interesting position. That is to say, we had good relations with North Yemen, but we had even better relations with the Saudis. It was in our interest to maintain cordial relations between those two countries. We wanted good relations with both.

Q: What was the thinking of why you had South Yemen turn so radical? It was from the very beginning when it was revolting in Aden against the British and all that. But not only was it radical, but it seemed to be much more Soviet radical than anywhere else.

RUGH: Yes. I guess our analysis was fairly simple. The regime in Yemen was an Arab nationalist regime which had thrown the British out and then continued on the path of hostility to foreign intervention and was persuaded by Moscow that the Soviets could help them in maintaining their independence. The Soviets invested in South Yemen by providing military assistance in the form of military equipment and in providing military advisors in return for military access. So, the Soviets over the years after the expulsion of the British in the mid-1960 developed a very close relationship with South Yemen playing on Arab nationalism and hostility to British colonialism. There was some self interest on the part of the South Yemeni leaders who profited from the relationship with the Soviet Union and as a poor country found it helpful to be hostile to the West in order to get Soviet assistance. I guess we didn't realize at the time (Certainly I didn't, even sitting in Sanaa.) how one sided the Soviet relationship was. That is to say, it was entirely military and political, but not economic. The Soviets did not invest in the economic development of South Yemen. I visited South Yemen later, just a couple of years ago. It was pretty clear from spending a week there that the Soviets in their long association in South Yemen between the mid-1960s and the late 1980s had not built South Yemeni infrastructure, had not invested in anything except the military. They had given or sold the latest military equipment to the South Yemenis and trained their military so that this tiny country had for its size a fairly respectable military force, but the economic infrastructure wasn't there. The Soviets had simply exploited it as a military base. Their presence was fairly substantial. They had Soviet military advisors, aircraft, listening posts, and monitoring facilities in the country as their quid pro quo for providing military assistance. I had assumed sitting in Sanaa when I got there that the Soviets were also providing them with economic assistance. The propaganda coming out of the South was that this was a wonderful economic and social experiment in modernization and socialist revolution, but that was all propaganda. There wasn't anything there except a military relationship.

Q: Did we have anybody there using a third power? Were there any relations with South Yemen that we could get reports from?

RUGH: Yes. The British were there, curiously, having been thrown out originally and being the target of South Yemeni nationalist sentiment and anti-imperialist hostility. The British were originally thrown out. Then they were allowed back in and we were thrown out. This all happened in the 1960s. We never were allowed back in. The British had a fairly modest presence. They weren't on terribly good terms with the South Yemeni government. The French and Italians were there also. None of the Western ambassadors were favored clients. The Soviets were. But they did have a presence and from that presence they were able to observe a good deal of what went on and they shared a lot of that with us.

Q: Just by being in North Yemen rather than South Yemen, did you have any residual responsibility for South Yemen at all?

RUGH: Not officially in terms of running a consular district or anything. There weren't any Americans, as far as we knew, in South Yemen. But we had a watching brief. That is to say, we were the only embassy that was supposed to be doing something to keep track of what was going on in South Yemen. It was a natural because the North Yemenis were watching South Yemen very closely. We shared some information with the North Yemeni government from time to time on what was going on in the South. They asked us questions, assuming that we, being a superpower, knew what was going on there, and we asked them questions. They, in fact, had quite a bit of human intelligence because they were able to go fairly easily into the South and send people fairly easily into the South. They didn't share it all with us, but they had some very interesting political information that they shared with us. So, we learned from them a type of information that we didn't learn from the British and French and vice versa.

Q: You were in North Yemen from when to when?

RUGH: I was there from the fall of 1984 until July of 1987.

Q: Could you describe when you arrived there how you found Yemen, both government, economy, and living conditions?

RUGH: Yemen is a very traditional country, poor, has not had the oil wealth that all of the other states of the Arabian Peninsula have had. It has the largest population of any country on the Arabian Peninsula. At the time, it was about seven million people, more than Saudi Arabia or any other country. The oil that had been discovered in 1984 was limited. That oil wealth didn't go around very far. A major source of wealth was remittances from Yemeni workers in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. So, it was a country that was dependent on its remittances, on the labor of its labor force, and to a very large extent on foreign assistance. At that time, in 1984, Yemen was receiving about \$300 million a year from Saudi Arabia as a subsidy. It was receiving economic assistance from the United States in an AID program, a strictly economic one, not a military one. It was receiving military assistance from the Soviet Union. It was receiving subsidies for its university and other facilities from the Kuwaitis. The UAE built the dam in Marib, which was at the site of the ancient dam in that eastern part of the country. Most of the states of the Arabian Peninsula were given subsidies, including Iraq. The Chinese were there. They had been there for a long time. The Chinese had built one of the major roads in the country. So, Yemen was truly successful in persuading most of the major donor nations, including many Western European countries, to give them economic assistance.

One thing that struck me when I arrived was that they were asking each of us for assistance of all kinds. To some extent, they would ask several countries for the same money for the same project. So, we realized that we needed to get together and have an informal donors group to compare notes. We met once a month. We all talked. The Russians weren't included. They didn't want to join us because their assistance was military and they didn't believe in sharing information. But the Europeans got together. The UN was there. Informally, we talked to the Arabian Peninsula Arab countries to see what the Yemenis had asked for lately and to try to coordinate our policies and decide if they asked two or three countries for the same project, we would decide who would respond. We shared that.

It was a country which was different in some respects from other places I had been. For example, it is a very decentralized country. There are 50,000 villages in Yemen. The average village has 100 people in it. The Yemenis have not migrated to the cities in large numbers and created huge urban metropolises. They don't like the cities. They prefer to stay in the village even if they don't have any water or electricity in the village. They like their privacy and independence. That, of course, had an effect on the economy, as did their habit of chewing qat every afternoon, which meant that the plantations that used to produce coffee for export were now producing qat, which is only locally consumed.

Q: This was the original source of coffee, wasn't it?

RUGH: Yemen was the original source of coffee. It was a very successful foreign exchange earner until the Yemenis discovered that they liked to chew qat in the afternoon - it is a very mild stimulant - so they replaced the coffee plants with qat. Qat is a product that is not exported. It is a leaf that you have to chew when it's fresh, so you pick it in the morning and chew it in the early afternoon. The money for qat stays in the country and it doesn't help the country develop foreign exchange. So, that was an issue. The Yemeni economy was very heavily dependent on foreign assistance, plus a little bit of oil.

One thing that surprised me a little bit when I arrived was the heavy security influence over our activities as an embassy. I didn't expect that. I had lived in Egypt during the Nasser period and that was expected. I didn't think Yemen would be like that, but in fact the Yemeni security authorities were watching us so closely and watching every embassy so closely that it made contact work difficult. I lived on the embassy compound in a nice old Yemeni house, a beautiful house. I would invite Yemenis to come to lunch or dinner and every one would be stopped at the gate by a Yemeni security officer asking him for his ID (identification) card and writing down his name in a little book and asking why he wanted to come and see the American ambassador. So, this had a deterrent effect on contacts. I found it much easier to meet Yemenis outside of the compound, which limited my access.

In my first few months in Sanaa, I had an experience that reinforced this concern about contacts. I talked to the commercial attaché and said, "Why don't we invite a group of Yemeni businessmen to a lunch to get to know them and to promote American commercial interests and establish closer personal ties with the business community?" So, he got together a list of Yemeni businessmen. We hired a hall in the local hotel, the best hotel, sent out invitations. The Foreign Ministry heard about it and said that I should not have done that because the invitations should go through the Foreign Ministry. So, I sent them out again through the Foreign Ministry, hoping that they would be passed on, but not relying entirely on them. I made phone calls around to the invitees to say, "If you didn't get an invitation, you're invited on such and such a day to lunch and we would like to meet you." There were about four of us from the embassy who went to the lunch expecting a crowd of 30 40 businessmen out of an invitation list of maybe 50. Only one showed up. The reason was that the ones who came were intercepted at the door by a Yemeni plainclothes security officer who whispered in their ear, "Don't go to the American lunch if you know what's good for you." The one who did show up ignored those warnings, came to the lunch. We had a lunch of five people, four of us from the embassy and one Yemeni. After the lunch, that brave businessman was taken off to the intelligence headquarters and interrogated until midnight as to why he was fraternizing with the Americans. Well, I thought that was an unfriendly thing for the Yemeni authorities to do and I protested to the Foreign Ministry. They never responded in a satisfactory way. They were overzealous in their concern about our contacts with Yemenis. This was a disappointment in the conduct of our official business in Yemen. We weren't targeting dissidents in particular. These were perfectly respectable businessmen and other Yemenis who in other countries where I had served would have no trouble coming to the embassy or coming to an embassy lunch. I raised it with ministers and others in the senior levels of the government and protested to the Foreign Minister. I never changed it very much.

Q: Were the other Western embassies having the same problem?

RUGH: They had the same problem. We felt that we were never sure about the Russians. The Russians had very good contacts among the military because most of the Yemeni military officers had been trained in the Soviet Union. It was a curious bifurcation of the senior leadership in Yemen, I thought. If you look at the background of the top level, the elite, in Yemen, all of the military almost without exception at the top levels were trained in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. They had never been to the United States. They were getting Soviet military equipment which they knew and they had been trained on. So, they were totally oriented in that direction. We found it difficult to even communicate with them. I didn't find them very friendly.

The other half of the government, the civilian side, the Economic Minister, the Foreign Minister, the Prime Minister, were all Western trained. The Foreign Minister had a Ph.D. from Yale. The Prime Minister had a master's degree from Colorado. They spoke fluent English. They understood us when we talked to them. When I made a demarche with the Foreign Minister about American policy, I didn't have to explain very much. He knew exactly what I was saying and where I was coming from. He was a very talented and effective foreign minister, who understood Americans. That was a big advantage to us for starters. He wasn't an American agent or anything like that, but he was easy to talk to. The military was not. So there was a real split in the government and it was an unusual situation.

Q: I find it interesting with the very heavy dependence on foreign assistance and yet having the military in the hands of the Soviets and with the Soviets hand-in-glove with the regime, which was sort of the hostile regime of South Yemen. I would have thought that there would have been concern all along about when the North Yemeni military was going to take over and when they do, it will obviously be a Soviet thing.

RUGH: Yes. That is a good point. We thought about that a lot. We tried to encourage others in the government that would talk to us, including the President, to think carefully about their close relationship with the USSR for this very reason and to be wary of the Soviet connection. So, that was a factor. President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who is still in power, was a person who bridged both of these groups. He had not been trained in the Soviet Union and he had not been trained in the United States. He was a tribal person who rose up through the military ranks and had some vested interest in the Soviet relationship because of the military connection. But he was not a person who was pro Soviet in that sense. I think he was maybe innately suspicious of all foreigners, including the Soviets. So, over the course of his career, which has been quite a long one now, he has been skillful in balancing groups and in bringing coalitions together and in having people under him who support different philosophies and different views. So, he presided over a cabinet and a regime which had different tendencies, but I think you're right that there may have been some suspicion on his part of the Soviets. We tried to reinforce that.

Q: How did the Saudis feel about that?

RUGH: That was the most interesting aspect of the whole relationship. President Saleh in almost every conversation I had with him talked about the Saudis. That was his primary foreign policy concern. Saudi Arabia was providing economic assistance, but he didn't trust them. When he talked to me, he frequently said, "You Americans take your Yemen policy from Riyadh, from the Saudis." He believed that we were so close to the Saudis that whenever he had a difference of opinion or a dispute with Saudi Arabia, we would take the Saudi side. I tried to dissuade him from this view. I don't think I succeeded. He was convinced that we were automatically supporting the Saudis if there was any dispute. I would say to him, "We make our own decisions in Washington about our bilateral relationships. We have excellent relations with Saudi Arabia, but it is not a zero sum game. It doesn't mean we have bad relations with you. We support your independence as we support the independence of Saudi Arabia." He was never quite convinced because he was so concerned about Saudi intervention in Yemen. It was a curious fact that while he was receiving direct subsidies from the Saudi government, tribes along the northern border were also receiving subsidies under the table from the government. He knew that and that worried him. He had had connections with the Saudis from the beginning. They supported him when he came to power in the late 1970s. He told me that the Saudis didn't respect his independence. He said, "The Saudis don't realize that Yemen has grown up. They are treating me like a child instead of a brother." That rankled. From time to time, there was a period of increasing tension between Saudi Arabia and Yemen and he hoped that we would support him. There were questions about where the border was, for example. These are classic Arabian Peninsula questions. The official border according to our understanding had been delineated only part way between Najran and Jizan. That was back in the 1930s. There was a black line on the maps. But east of Najran through the desert, north of the area which was now an oil concession in North Yemen, there was no officially demarcated border. When there was a dispute, Washington instructed me to go to Ali Abdullah Saleh and discuss it with him, ask him what his intentions were, what his view was of where the border was, and so on. So, one day, I went to see him and I brought a map with me to try to pin him down as to where he asserted his border was. It was one of those large State Department maps of the entire peninsula. I said, "I would like to have your comment on the border." So, I laid it out on the floor. It was so big that he and I were kneeling on the floor looking at the map. He looked at the map and said, "Who did this map?" I said, "It was produced at the State Department." He said, "You've done a terrible thing in doing this map. You've put this border right here." He pointed to where we had indicated the border was. I said, "Mr. President, the caveat on the bottom of the map says that where there is a dotted line or no line at all, just two different colors coming together, the border is undemarcated and the U.S. government takes no official position on that line." He said, "But you've put a line here between Yemen and Saudi Arabia and there is no border." I said, "Mr. President, we have to show two different countries somehow by doing them in two different colors. We've got to put it somewhere. It's totally arbitrary and we just put it where it is generally agreed, we thought, that the Saudis stopped and the Yemenis began." He said, "That is a violation of our sovereignty and it's an unfriendly act for you to have put that line there." I said, "Mr. President, where should the line be? Where would you put it?" He said, "Well, it could be anywhere. There is no line. It could be up here." He pointed to just south of Riyadh. I knew that he was trying to make a point that we shouldn't interfere and arbitrarily give the Saudis any more than he wanted to bargain for. My view at the time (still is) was that he was not saying that he wanted to take over southern Saudi Arabia, but that he wanted to leave his options open in any negotiation with the Saudis and didn't want anybody to preempt him. I happened to know at the time that a map had been published in Saudi Arabia showing Saudi Arabia encroaching way down into Yemen. I didn't mention that to him, but I thought he probably knew that. So, it was a matter of some sensitivity. When the Saudis came even a few kilometers across the arbitrary line that we had on our map, he reacted, complained, and protested. So, I knew that our line was pretty accurate, but he didn't want to make any official concession until the issue was sorted out. It still hasn't been sorted out.

Q: Did we make any attempt through our satellites and all this to help do the border while you were there?

RUGH: No. We only intervened politically in encouraging both the Saudis and the Yemenis to come to agreement between themselves, to negotiate it in a friendly fashion. The Yemenis asked us to put pressure on the Saudis to be reasonable. The Saudis, in effect, told our embassy in Riyadh that it was none of our business, to stay out of it completely.

Q: Did you have much contact with our embassy in Riyadh of trying to make sure that you weren't stepping on each other's toes?

RUGH: Yes. All of our reporting on any of these issues went laterally as well to our ambassador in Riyadh. He reciprocated, gave us his reporting on Saudi conversations relating to Yemen. I went up there and Ambassador Cutler came down to Yemen. We consulted often. But the two protagonists didn't really want us involved unless we were going to take their side. So, our main effort was to try to get them to talk together in a friendly fashion.

Q: How were relations between South and North Yemen?

RUGH: They were tense. Since they were two different types of regime and two competing Yemeni administrations who knew each other well personally but didn't trust each other, they were always tense. The tension reached a crisis stage in January of 1986 when there was a coup d'etat attempted in South Yemen, a very bloody one. A cabinet meeting was shot up by one of the political leaders in the South and a number of South Yemeni ministers were killed. The Prime Minister fled to North Yemen and took refuge in the North, which didn't improve relations. In fact, it was a cause of some tension. North Yemen supported him in exile and officially, publicly declared their support for him. That made things worse. The South Yemenis were sending people North who were regarded by the Northerners as threats, assassination teams. As far as I recall, there weren't any assassinations carried out by North Yemenis, but the North Yemenis were convinced that that was going on. The South Yemenis expected that the North was doing the same. So, it was a very tense period in early 1986. This went on for some time. North Yemen asked us for assistance in watching South Yemeni military deployments because the two military forces moved toward the border facing each other and they were concerned about each other. South Yemen has a small population, but they had a fairly substantial military. We thought at the time that the militaries were roughly comparable. The North had more men, but the South, we thought, in any conflict, would be able to hold its own - certainly, if the conflict were carried out on South Yemeni territory. We were concerned that a conflict might break out, the Soviets might intervene, and then we would be faced with the choice of how to deal with that question of a North-South conflict with the Soviets on the side of the South. It didn't happen, but there were thousands of South Yemeni refugees who came North and were in camps along the border. They were itching to go back and fight against the regime. The North was tempted to send them back in, but hesitated because they weren't convinced that they could overwhelm the South. So, it was a very tense period in the spring of 1986.

Q: What role did the United States and your embassy play during that time?

RUGH: Since we had good relations with North Yemen and no relations with South Yemen, we conferred very closely with the North on the crisis, on the conflict. The North Yemenis wanted our assistance. We had provided a little bit of military assistance in the form of mostly some F 5 fighter planes, and they wanted more. They wanted intelligence about what was going on in the South and we discussed that with them. They wanted our undivided attention and support against the South. We didn't want to provoke a conflict or encourage a conflict. In fact, we encouraged a peaceful settlement of the dispute. But we didn't want to indicate that we were uninterested in a dispute between a Marxist Soviet-controlled South Yemen and a nonaligned North Yemen. So, we gave what diplomatic and political support we could to the North.

Q: I would have thought that this might have raised some questions within the Yemeni military. Here you have a very Marxist military force down there and they were being supplied. I think they would feel either they'd better find another patron, at least for this time, or they might get cut off at the knees because of what the Soviets did.

RUGH: Yes, that's right. In fact, there were some tensions between North Yemen and the Soviets. The North Yemenis were accusing the Soviets of backing the wrong horse and there were words exchanged between the senior officials in North Yemen and the Soviets as far as our reporting could find out what was going on in those conversations. So, it was a period of tension between North Yemen and the USSR. The Soviets had trouble explaining what was going on in the South because the North Yemenis assumed that the Soviets were in control in the South and could restrain the South Yemenis if they wanted to and why weren't they doing so? It is a little bit parallel to the Arab belief that the United States can control the Israelis and why aren't we doing it? So, there was a bad patch for the Soviets in North Yemen during this period.

Q: Were we trying to move in at all and take advantage of that?

RUGH: We certainly didn't hesitate to remind the North Yemenis that South Yemen was a Marxist Soviet outpost. They knew that. They were more focused on the tribal and personal conflict, but we pointed out that the South Yemenis were fully armed by the Soviets and we encouraged them to put pressure on the Soviets to put pressure on the South Yemenis, which they did, or tried to.

Q: Your concern there was not to be one up. It was to keep them from both going at each other.

RUGH: Right. Exactly. And we didn't want an escalation which would draw the Soviets in. That would have confronted us with a policy dilemma.

Q: Did the Iraq-Iran war, which was really going at that time, have any reflections?

RUGH: That is an interesting question in light of what happened later. The North Yemenis supported Iraq. I have forgotten what the connection was between South Yemen and Iraq. I think it was also a cordial one.

Q: I would imagine so.

RUGH: I'm pretty sure it was. I know that North Yemen actually sent troops to Iraq. We thought at the time that it was the only contingent of actual fighting forces from any Arab country that went to the front and tried to help Iraq. There was a very cordial and mutually supportive relationship between Iraq and North Yemen. The North Yemenis had received economic assistance from Iraq and, in return, Ali Abdullah Saleh had sent military assistance and was giving them political support. This became important later during the 1990 Gulf Crisis when Saddam called in that chip and got North Yemen to support his venture.

Q: That put them really at odds with all of their other...

RUGH: Right. This is jumping ahead of the story, but one of the reasons President Saleh supported Saddam Hussein in 1990-1991 was because of Saleh's distrust of the Saudis. The Saudis were clearly hostile to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and it made it easier for Ali Abdullah to support Saddam knowing that this would be a thorn in the side of the Saudis. That was one of the factors.

Q: With your USIA background, talking about how difficult it was to make personal contacts there, what about through the traditional broadcast films, books, etc.?

RUGH: That is a good question because the Yemenis distinguished between different people at the embassy, assuming that the USIS personnel were not the threat that the ambassador and the political officer were. So, the political officer, the DCM, and I had a difficult time making contacts, but the PAO didn't. He had very good access. They regarded him as a benign cultural officer. In fact, this distinction was so apparent that the political officer who was at post when I first arrived, Jack McCreary, a superb State Department political officer who had served with distinction in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, ended his tour and said, "I really wish I had been PAO instead of political officer here because the PAO has contacts and the political officer doesn't." I said, "Why don't you stay on as PAO" and he did. We worked it out with the Agency so that he would have an assignment as PAO. He liked it so much that he converted to USIA from State and he is still with USIA and has had a very distinguished career. He was pleasantly rewarded with very good contacts. He was the same guy who had been there as political officer and nobody would talk to him and now he was the PAO and he had contacts all over town.

Q: When you're talking about contacts, how were these used? What was the purpose?

RUGH: We wanted to track Yemeni political, economic, and foreign policy developments, their relations with the various other countries, including in particular the Soviet Union. The hardest information to collect was what was going on between North Yemen and the Soviet Union. But we were also interested in knowing what the North Yemenis were thinking with respect to South Yemen and to Saudi Arabia, their two immediate neighbors. Those were more important to them than anything else. So, we sought through official channels to keep track of these relationships and through personal contacts to the extent that we could. Yemenis are, if you can generalize, independent of their own government and, in private, willing to talk and, to the extent that they knew what was going on, they would talk, if we could sit with them. The Yemeni qat chew is an occasion where people of all kinds come together. It is very democratic. Ministers, drivers, and others sit together and chew qat. They tend to talk. So, we went to qat chews.

Q: What is the effect of qat?

RUGH: The effect of qat is very mild compared to almost any other kind of stimulant. If you chew qat for three or four hours, it's like drinking a few cups of coffee. It's a stimulant. It keeps you awake. The way to get the effect of this is to stuff qat leaves in your mouth and chew them and chew them and leave the leaves in your cheek and the juice from the leaf is swallowed. You can chew for an hour and not feel any effect at all. It affects people differently. If you chew for two or three hours, you begin to feel slightly euphoric, more talkative than usual, and it makes you feel good. But certainly nothing compared to more serious drugs and the effect takes so long that you have to sit there and chew for a long time. I went to several qat chews and only chewed a little bit and didn't feel anything at all at first. It was only after chewing for hours that I felt it.

Q: I was thinking it would be hard to carry on a conversation with that wad of leaves in your mouth.

RUGH: It is. It's not easy particularly for a novice and it's not terribly pleasant. You get very thirsty, so you have to drink a lot of water or Pepsi Cola. They tend to smoke a lot when they're chewing. If you're not a smoker, that's not great. But they were wonderful occasions to meet people. It was a good excuse. Typically, they have a big heavy meal at lunchtime at one o'clock. By two o'clock, they're done and breaking out the qat and sitting around. They may sit there until five or six.

Q: That takes care of the work of the afternoon.

RUGH: Right. It wipes out the afternoon. If you go into the bazaar, the souk, in the afternoon, typically, you'll see a shop owner sitting on the floor in the back of his shop chewing qat and he won't have the slightest interest in selling you anything. You sort of have to make your way around the shop and persuade him to take your money because he is enjoying his afternoon qat chew. It's better to go in the morning when he's interested in bargaining and talking to you.

Q: Was there much of a political life there?

RUGH: No. It was an authoritarian regime, no elections, no political parties, no interest groups, no independent newspapers, all of the media were controlled. The political life was behind the scenes. It really involved tribal leaders and other political leaders who made deals with the government and with each other behind the scenes. The Yemeni government was not entirely in control of the whole country of North Yemen because the tribal leaders had enormous authority outside of the major cities. For example, rural criminal cases were adjudicated, in effect, by the tribal leader, not by the court system. The police didn't do law enforcement outside of the major cities. If somebody committed a crime (theft, murder, assault, etc.), the tribe dealt with it outside the cities, not the central government. So, that, in a sense, was the politics of North Yemen.

In a couple of conversations I had with the President of North Yemen, we discussed democracy and elections. He told me in no uncertain terms that he was opposed to both. The idea of competing political parties was inappropriate because it would divide the nation and you needed national unity. He didn't see why you needed an opposition party when you could have one party that represented the national will. Why have more than one because there is only one national will and you certainly don't need elections. This was in the period 1984-1987, and three years after I left they had elections, parties, opposition newspapers, the whole nine yards. That has continued to this day. At the time I was there, he said flatly, "We will have no political parties, no opposition parties, no elections. It's not good for us."

Q: Did you get any delegations or visits from the United States while you were there?

RUGH: Not many. We had one very effective one, one very important one. That was by Vice President Bush. Vice President Bush in early 1986 was making a tour of the Arabian Peninsula. He was visiting Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, and Kuwait, and didn't intend to come to our part of the peninsula. I requested that he add on Yemen to his itinerary and he did so. He came just at the time when the Hunt Oil Company was ready to inaugurate with the President of Yemen the refinery that they had built in the desert in the eastern part of Yemen. It was the first refinery that Yemen had. It had just been completed. So, he came and participated in that. It was a good occasion. He spent three days in Yemen. He enjoyed it very much, learned a lot about Yemen. It was terrific for our relationship because it was the first vice presidential visit to Yemen ever, as far as I know.

Q: I suspect he got on the phone to the ruling president during the Kuwait Gulf Crisis later because of that contact, but to no avail.

RUGH: That is correct. They liked each other. They established a cordial relationship. But you're right. He did make those phone calls later, but it didn't dissuade the President.

Q: Was there any role for women in the society? Were there any women officers at the embassy?

RUGH: Yes and yes. The Yemeni women participated in the government. There weren't any ministers, but they were in some important positions in the various ministries. And they were in business. Yemeni women, unlike Saudi women, were allowed to drive cars. Yemeni women certainly throughout the country in the rural areas provided most of the workforce. They were working in the fields while the men were chewing qat. The men did some agricultural work, too, but the women certainly carried the bulk of it. If you lived in a small village on top of a mountain and the only water supply was down in the valley, it was a woman who went down the mountain and carried the bucket of water back up on her head. They were tough, independent, hardworking, and industrious. But also in the cities, women were involved. They dressed modestly in public and they were conservative in their social behavior, but they were involved in the economy.

On the other question, we had a woman administrative officer at the embassy who was terrific and very, very effective, Georgia DeBell, who later went on to be DCM in Kuwait and came back to Yemen as DCM. She worked extremely well with her Yemeni local staff and negotiated important agreements for the embassies with Yemeni officials, landlords, businesspeople. She spoke Arabic. She had very strong interpersonal skills and the fact that she was a woman was not a deterrent to her or to the Yemenis. The Yemenis to some extent regard foreign women, particularly Western women, in a different category. They know that women in American society have a different place from women in Yemeni society. So, they regarded her with respect and she was very effective.

Q: How did you find life there?

RUGH: It was very pleasant, very interesting, very satisfying with the exception of the difficulties in making official contacts that I mentioned. It was interesting to travel in and visit. I made a lot of trips around the countryside to observe and understand what was going on in the country because so much of the economy is in the rural areas. We had a wonderful Peace Corps contingent in Yemen and many of them were women and were very successful. They were all over the country. I would use the excuse of a Peace Corps volunteer being in a remote village to visit the village and spend some time there, spend the night and get to know the people. I did that for a couple of reasons. One, I wanted to show support for the Peace Corps volunteers' work, but also, it was very useful for me to visit a village where the Peace Corps was because they would know the village well and be able to give me a quick briefing on what was going on in the village, what was interesting about the village, and they were always prominent visitors in the village, and so it opened doors for me. So, one of the most pleasant and rewarding aspects of working in Yemen was having the Peace Corps there. We had about 50 volunteers. Without exception, they were terrific. They weren't all young. Some of them were retired. Two women were in their late 60s teaching typing in a local school for public administration and secretarial personnel. They loved it. Every single Peace Corps volunteer loved living in Yemen. If their particular assignment didn't work out, they would say to the Peace Corps, "Find me another job in Yemen. Don't transfer me to another country because I love it here." They got into the local culture. They would chew qat and they trekked around the country and learned Arabic very well. The only small problem I had with the Peace Corps was a curious one. There was a group of about three assigned to teach English in a center in Yemen run by USIS called the Yemen American Language Institute. All of the students were Yemenis. It was a very well-run center managed by USIS and USIS had some of its own teachers, but was glad to have Peace Corps volunteers to supplement their teaching staff. These teachers taught there for a few weeks and then said, "We don't want to teach in this place anymore." I said, "Why?" They said, "In the first place, there are pictures of the President of the United States on the wall and this is a propaganda center. That is not what we came here for. We came here to teach English, not to spread American political propaganda." I said, "You're free to say what you like in the classroom. Nobody is writing your script. But if you want to leave, that's up to you. What is the other reason that you're not happy here?" They said, "Well, it's too nice. When we joined the Peace Corps, we were told that we were going to have to sit under a tree and maybe sleep out of doors and not have even a blackboard and it was going to be very tough, primitive conditions. Here we have air conditioning, lights, running water, and toilets. That is not what we came here for." I said, "It's up to you. If you want worse conditions, maybe that can be arranged." So, they demanded a transfer out of this nice facility, this "propaganda center" and they were transferred over to a Yemeni training school which satisfied their conditions. But they very quickly realized that along with those primitive conditions and the absence of President Reagan's picture were sort of a disorganized management and a lack of motivation on the part of the students and not a very satisfying teaching environment. They decided that they wanted to come back to the USIS-run, well lit, and air conditioned center. But that was the only little flap.

Q: If those were the only problems we had to solve! Is there anything else that we should cover about the Yemen?

RUGH: We've covered all of the major issues. There is only one other issue that might be of some importance and that is that we started constructing a new embassy facility during that period. Congress had provided very generous funding for new embassies based on security after the Inman Report. The security people came out from Washington, looked at our compound, and were shocked at the lack of security. We had a collection of old Yemeni buildings which were partly stone and partly mud. The perimeter wall was mud, which blew down in a heavy wind. The wall was six feet away from the ambassador's office. We were surrounded by other tall Yemeni buildings. They said, "This is a disaster. You have to move. We'll give you x million dollars to build a new compound" so we did. During the time that I was there, we broke ground and began the construction. I left before it was completed, but the major problem for me was arguing with the security people over the characteristics of the building. They insisted on making it a fortress and I was trying to argue for some aesthetic and practical features. For example, they insisted that the chancery building have reinforced concrete with windows that had ballistic glass and couldn't be opened. I said, "This will be the only building in all of Yemen where the windows don't open. The weather in Sanaa, which is high in the mountains, is beautiful year round. You have beautiful fresh air that goes right through the building. In our current chancery, you just open the windows and lovely fresh breezes blow through. If you seal the windows closed and you have an electric power failure, which happens every week, you'll have to leave the building. It will be impossible to stay inside." They said, "We'll build a redundant power system and a generator," so they did. So, I lost that battle. That was a bureaucratic skirmish, but I always thought it was very shortsighted of the security people to insist. They were paying for it, but they shouldn't control everything.

Q: Where did you go then?

RUGH: In 1987, I came back to the United States.

Q: What were you coming back to do in Washington?

RUGH: I was reassigned to USIA headquarters, which in turn gave me a year as diplomat in residence at the Fletcher School. USIA has had for many years a slot at the Murrow Center of the Fletcher School which at that time was supervised by Hewson Ryan, a retired USIA officer who had an assignment at the Fletcher School at Tufts as a professor of public diplomacy. Within his shop at Fletcher, there was a one year diplomat in residence position that traditionally went to a USIS officer. I had that for a year and then was able to get it for a second year. I taught public diplomacy and I also developed a course on U.S. policy in the Middle East, which I offered to Fletcher students. I had a class of about 30 from all over the world, graduate students who were interested in U.S. policy in the Middle East.

Q: What was your impression of the academic world as it looked at foreign policy? I am into the oral history, so I sample some of the wares that are produced. I am not overly impressed. There seems to be an attempt to have a logic in what is almost (at least in the details) an illogical affair responding to events. What was your impression?

RUGH: I have always thought that there ought to be more cooperation and involvement between academics and practitioners on the Middle East and there hasn't been much. I found that not many academics really have a good understanding of the policymaking process and the constraints on policymakers. There are few exceptions. Bill Quandt, who is at the University of Virginia, was at Brookings, and was at Rand, also served in the government twice in the National Security Council. He has an excellent understanding of the policy process and the constraints on policymakers. His writing on U.S. policy in the Middle East is outstanding, but he is an exception. There aren't many exceptions. Much of the academic writing on the Middle East really doesn't understand the policy process very well at all. There are academics who have a good understanding of individual Middle Eastern countries, but when it comes to the Arab-American relationship, they often take one slice of it or they don't really have a good grasp of the whole picture. It's too bad. INR at State and USIA had tried to bring in academics to have a useful exchange. I tried to do that from time to time. There are some academics who are very helpful, but their audience is different and their perception of the world is often different from that of a person involved in daily policymaking. They don't appreciate what we do and we don't appreciate what they do very much. I have tried to do some writing myself of a sort of an academic nature in order to try to bridge that gap. Now in my present occupation, I am trying to do more of that. But there isn't a great deal that is coming out of academic writers that is terribly useful for policymakers. The policymakers focus on today's crisis. For example, one of the main journals, The International Journal of Middle East Studies, has really nothing of value to a policymaker except some of the book reviews in the back. The articles are historical, academic, and arcane. The Middle East Journal is quite a bit better. Many of their articles are useful, but some of them where they talk about politics reflect a lack of understanding of what a policymaker faces in real choices. However, The Middle East Journal is a useful journal. I read it regularly. Policymakers don't have time or don't take time to read books very much and they don't read all the journal articles. If you're sitting in an embassy, you have so many telegrams to read and so much other material to deal with that very few embassy officers on any level take the time to read what is coming out of academia. So, there isn't a lot of impact on the policy process. I think even in Washington, the policymakers sitting here don't read a great deal of that. Some do. People in INR tend to. Middle East Policy, which is published quarterly by the Middle East Policy Council, has some policy relevant material and a lot of it is academic and a lot of it is political, so that tends to be more useful. There isn't a lot of material. I have gone to conferences of academics, but the main one is the Middle East Studies Association. Most of the papers there are pretty esoteric and academic and are not useful to policymakers.

Q: You were teaching in what has always been one of the two trickiest areas. The Middle East is probably the trickiest. The next one is probably the China policy. You have an extremely important organization which is the American Israeli Public Affairs Council (AIPAC) and also with an Israeli government which is very aggressively working every media to pursue its policy. Did you, particularly coming from dealing with the Arab world, find any impact, pressures, or influence when you were going to what essentially is a (I am not using this in the pejorative) trade school of people who really are interested in foreign policy and are more likely to end up dealing with foreign affairs either from the business or government point of view than almost any other school at Fletcher. Can you comment on this at that time?

RUGH: The students at Fletcher are outstanding. Fletcher has the ability to select from a very large pool of applicants. They take one out of six or seven candidates. They have some terrific students and a lot of them are much more mature than the average student, in their 30s. They've had a career and are coming back for some more study. Plus, they have a very large foreign student population at Fletcher. So, in my class on Middle East policy, I had a lot of Arabs, some Israelis, some Pakistanis, and a minority of Americans. The Arabs and the Israelis were much better informed than the Americans. We had a very high level of discussion because of their background and their base of information. I didn't really have the problem of starting from zero, which I understand happens in many classes on the Middle East with a strictly American student body; zero or minus zero if you want to start with prejudices and misinformation. Some American students are well informed. They have a good understanding of what is going on in the region. The American press doesn't give a complete picture of the Middle East by any means. Unless you search for information and make an effort to inform yourself or unless you've lived abroad and followed up, it's hard for an American to have a lot of basic information. The organizations you mentioned are active in putting out their side of the story. In those days, in the 1980s, there was no Internet access to Arab newspapers as there is now.

Q: We're talking about first electronic way of reaching out and getting information via this huge electronic off the air (Internet).

RUGH: Right. The Internet sources that American students now have and use include quite a number of Arab newspapers, weekly and daily, in English as well as in Arabic. So, a student who wants to inform himself or herself about the Arab world or about Israel or about the Middle East in general, has an opportunity to do so. That didn't exist in the 1980s when I was teaching. Among my students at Fletcher, the Americans who had never lived abroad didn't really know much about the Middle East and lacked a basic understanding of what the situation was there. Of course, the Arab and Israeli students had information, but they had their own perspectives, so it was a fascinating opportunity to bring together people from very different viewpoints to talk about American policy and try to explain what policymakers go through in developing policy. I found that there were even differences in attitude about what is proper in the classroom. Some of the American and Israeli students would question my statements in my lecture very vigorously and a few of the Arab students would come up afterwards and apologize for their colleagues having been rude to me. I would have to explain that that is normal in an American classroom, and said they could express their strong views and criticism of American policy. I think because of the nature of the student body, they were much better informed than the typical class that you find in the United States.

Q: Away from the student body at the faculty level, and not just at Fletcher, but beyond, that the academic world was making efforts to come at the Middle East problem with a certain amount of objectivity in looking at it rather than particularly from the Israeli point of view or from the Arab point of view?

RUGH: A lot of people in general, including academics, have biases based on their own experience, on their own personal preferences, on their own background. Many American academics have connections with Israel, have visited Israel and no other place in the Middle East. Some American academics have connections with the Arab world and have never visited Israel. They tend to have strong opinions about American policy and about what is going on in the region and certainly will express them in private. I didn't find that there was a lot of exchange of substance among professors. I guess that was a big disappointment to me. I assumed, having been a student for a long time, that professors got together and had these high level very erudite discussions about issues of public concern. They don't. They may be insecure about doing that in front of their peers and it's more comfortable to stand up in front of a class and be the professor and profess than it is with your peers. But they don't seem to give much time to having exchanges with other professors. They devote most of their attention to teaching and to writing.

Q: In 1989, where did you go?

RUGH: I came back to Washington and took over at USIA as director of Near East/North Africa/South Asia Bureau.

Q: This was moderately late into the Bush administration. Who was the director of USIA? Could you characterize how you saw USIA being run at that time?

RUGH: The director was Bruce Gelb, a political appointee, as almost all USIA directors have been. He didn't know a great deal about foreign affairs, was eager to learn, was eager to make USIA a player in Washington among foreign affairs agencies and had his staff trying to develop USIA's special role. He attended the meetings of the Secretary of State every morning and would call on some of us to provide him with talking points that he could take to the Secretary's meeting to enhance the role of USIA as a policymaking organization or at least an advisory agency that could help the Secretary of State. That had only limited success. He was dealing with our long tradition of USIA playing a very subordinate role in Washington. It played a much bigger role in the field at embassies. In an embassy, where you have a public affairs officer representing USIA who has a lot of good contacts and knows a lot about what is going on in the country, the ambassador, the DCM, or the political officer values participation of that USIA officer. In Washington, the director of USIA can't really play that same role. He is sitting in Washington where he doesn't have that expertise to bring to bear. Gelb tried to develop that role along similar lines. He instructed his PAOs throughout the world to send him hot items that he could carry over to the Secretary of State's morning meeting so he could be a player. He received some items from the field, but they were usually not of the caliber to raise with the Secretary of State in a short meeting in the morning. Sometimes when they were, others in the room resented his bringing them up because the items seemed to be sort of political reporting that the Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East should have been reporting on.

On my level, I dealt with the State Department's Bureau of Near East/North Africa/South Asian Affairs until South Asia was split off and then I dealt with both of them. I found that I could make a contribution to the meetings that I went to, particularly in the area of public opinion. Whenever an opinion poll was taken in Israel or occasionally in one of the Arab countries, I would report it. That was of interest to the Assistant Secretary and his staff. Whenever we had some special report from our PAOs that reflected transient opinion that might be related to American policy, I reported that and that was of interest.

Q: This was during the Baker time at the State Department. At least since World War II, there was never a more almost closed group around a Secretary of State. He had people who were very good, but there didn't seem to be an awful lot of give and take. One had the feeling he wasn't reaching down very much. I would imagine that the USIA contribution... This would have been the hardest administration to break as opposed to many other Secretaries who were more open.

RUGH: That's correct. So, it wasn't a very successful effort. We all thought it was important that USIA be a player and we all tried to help Bruce Gelb and we all tried to do it on our own levels. But it was tough. It was very tough. That changed a bit when the Gulf Crisis erupted in August of 1990.

Q: You were at USIA from 1989 to 1992. Could you talk about the Gulf Crisis?

RUGH: When the Gulf Crisis began in August of 1990 as a result of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, an interagency task force was set up to deal with public diplomacy issues. I co-chaired it with a State Department officer, and USIA had a major role. I was deputy chairman of the task force as the USIA representative, but there were other USIA representatives coming from the Voice of America, our Research Office at USIA, and some others. The Pentagon was included. April Glaspie, our ambassador in Baghdad, who was in Washington during the crisis, was on it. We had about 20 people who met regularly, once a week at least. Then we had an executive group that met even more often. We coordinated public diplomacy during the Gulf Crisis for those months between August of 1990 and March of 1991. We attempted to develop themes for all of us to stress in USIA's output as well as the State Department spokesman's output. We gave them recommendations. My office developed a monitoring system for Middle East, South Asia, and North Africa reaction to American policy. We turned out papers almost on a daily basis summarizing what the region was saying both in media and in private conversations. I sent those papers to the Secretary of State, to the Assistant Secretary, and to others around the government, all of the participants in the task force, including the Department of Defense (DOD). I know that those were read by policymakers at State and DOD. We developed some projects. For example, we decided to do a film which would carry the theme directed at Saddam Hussein, "If you go to war with the United States, Iraq will be severely punished." The reason we thought that was important was because Saddam was giving everybody the impression that he was unafraid of engaging in a military conflict and that he was not flinching, he was not willing to withdraw. There was a period from August into January of 1991 where the Secretary of State, the President, and all of our friends and allies tried to persuade Saddam to withdraw and he didn't and the war eventually came. We were trying in our public diplomacy effort to prevent the outbreak of war by persuading him to withdraw because it would be foolish of him to fight the allies, including the United States. So, with the help of DOD, we put together a film that was produced by USIA's Film Division. We developed a script and visuals which conveyed the power of the American military. Our purpose was to produce this and have it distributed all over the region and get it into Iraq. We had ways of getting it into Iraq, we thought. We thought we would get it to Saddam. We did the film. It took longer than it should have because we ended up getting clearances. The Assistant Secretary of State gave it to the Under Secretary, who gave it to the Secretary, who showed it to the President. It shouldn't have gone through all of those clearances. We should have just done it at our level and gotten it out. But it eventually got out. Obviously, it didn't prevent Saddam from going to the brink. That was one example of the kind of thing we were doing.

Q: I would like to go back a bit. Here you were, dealing with the Middle East and the seizure of Kuwait took place. At your level, were there intimations that this was coming? Prior to the actual event, what was the administrative reading on Saddam Hussein?

RUGH: No, we were all surprised. In the last few days before the actual invasion, in the last week of July, the intelligence assessment was that, yes, he might well invade. But until that time, we thought it was bluff. We thought that the Iraqis would not actually go in, certainly not to take over the entire country of Kuwait. There was some thought that there was a possibility that he might make a small incursion into northern Kuwait and occupy part of it, but never take over the whole country. That was not expected for a lot of reasons. It wasn't expected by the Saudis, the Kuwaitis, or the American intelligence community. There are some people who, after the fact, claim that they expected it, but there is not a lot of evidence, certainly up until the middle of July. So, we were surprised. No Arab country had ever done this before and the Saudis thought that they understood Saddam and the Kuwaitis did, too, and that he was just rattling his saber and wouldn't actually use it. So, we were surprised.

I was in Baghdad myself on the first of April when Saddam made a talk in front of some of his senior military people in which he issued some threats against Israel. I watched it on Iraqi TV, and I regarded it as serious, but it wasn't that much out of line from what we had heard before from Saddam and some others about threats to Israel. At that time, I didn't think it was conceivable that he would be firing Scuds in the beginning of 1991 into Israel.

Q: Scuds being relatively short-range missiles.

RUGH: Right. In February of 1991, Iraq was actually firing Scud missiles into Israel. That was inconceivable in the spring of 1990. We didn't think it would come to that and we didn't expect anything like that. I visited our embassy in Baghdad, talked to our ambassador, the PAO, the intelligence people, and the military attaché, all of whom were very smart professionals doing their best to find out what was going on in Iraq. It was one of the most closed societies that we dealt with. There was more information coming out of Iran, where we had no embassy, than there was out of Iraq just because of the difficulty of finding out what was going on. Saddam didn't tip his hand when he went in. When I was there in March and April just before the invasion, the embassy and we in USIA and State all saw hopeful signs. Saddam had lifted the travel ban for scholars and students to come to the United States. USIA was teaching English in Baghdad and we thought that this was an opening that was the beginning of a thaw, that the long period of estrangement between America and Iraq was beginning to come to an end and we were looking for opportunities to expand those contacts. We were hopeful. We just didn't expect that Saddam would do what he did.

Q: On the August 1, 1990, Saddam's army came in and took over all of Kuwait. I would have thought that, particularly at the beginning outside of the military buildup, this would have put tremendous pressure, particularly on your area, dealing with the majority of the Islamic world, to build up a coalition and to bring your old friends, the Yemenis, and also the Jordanians and Palestinians into line, to make sure the Islamic world did not see this as the West versus Islam and all that.

RUGH: Yes. Those were central issues to our concern. Saddam was playing the Islamic card, the Arab nationalist card, and the anti-Israel card for all they were worth in his propaganda. We were afraid that this was going to have an effect throughout the region. We were reassured when Egypt gave the United States strong support. Egypt is crucial in this equation. It has always played a leadership role. The Egyptian position of strong support for the American-led confrontation of Saddam was a relief to us. We knew that that would be helpful. Of course, the first prerequisite for the coalition in terms of Arab support for it was that the Gulf states, the Saudis and the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, the small states on the Persian Gulf, all strongly supported the confrontation of Saddam. That was prerequisite number one. When that was achieved and the Egyptians supported it, we were in much better shape than we could have been otherwise. Then, as for the states you mentioned, Jordan and Yemen, we in USIA worked to support the State Department and the White House in trying to persuade them to join the coalition and we failed. We all failed. Yemen was a big disappointment. For its own reasons, Yemen decided to support Saddam. In Jordan, King Hussein felt he was in a difficult position depending economically on Iraq, being contiguous with Iraq, being far weaker than Iraq militarily. He was afraid to oppose Saddam. So, that was a disappointment.

Syria was helpful. Syria joined the coalition. The lack of enthusiasm in North Africa was less of a problem because they were more remote from the conflict. The key states really were the ones I mentioned, particularly the GCC states of the Arabian Peninsula, and Egypt, plus Syria. That was enough to sustain a strong coalition.

USIA played a minor role in all of this. The secret of the success of that coalition was the active involvement of the President of the United States, the Secretary of State, our terrific ambassador to the UN, Tom Pickering, and a lot of work on the part of our ambassadors and PAOs throughout the region. We got enough support to make it work. We got UN votes. Our work with the Russians was also very helpful. Keeping the Russians on our side instead of supporting Saddam was very important as well. The President, however, was never sure until January 1991 that this coalition was strong enough to sustain an American-led military action against Iraq. In retrospect, it looked easy. The war was over quickly and with limited casualties. But there was a lot of uncertainty. You can't predict in advance how well you're going to do in a conflict like that. Iraq had an enormous army and was well equipped. It was the most powerful state in the region militarily. Even though the United States has the most modern, advanced, and well trained military, there were people in the Pentagon who were warning that this was not going to be a cakewalk. This was going to be very tough. One part of this was the question of "Do we have the support of the Arabs, not only the government, but the Arab public?" That was a question that we asked every day. We tried to help the President, the Secretary of State, the Assistant Secretary, and the Defense Department get a good handle on that. I had two meetings in the Oval Office with the President, George Bush, to talk about that issue specifically, how much support do we have from the Arabs now and in the case of a military conflict? Will the Arabs support us? I testified on the Hill on that question. There were some in Congress who thought that we did not have sufficient Arab support in the streets and among the Arab public to make us confident that we could prosecute the confrontation with Saddam. So, this was a very important issue.

Q: I was watching television, as everyone else was, at the time. One after another of people, many of whom I've interviewed for this program, would get up and they all talked about the Arab mob as though the Arabs were so volatile that they would come out and storm the streets. This is one of those myths that goes around. In our time, we've really only had about two. One was in Egypt when they burned the Shepherd's Hotel and the other was in Iran. Maybe it's not the myth, but at least the specter of the Arab mob is something that anybody who talks about the Middle East thinks, that these are very volatile people and they really hate us. What were you getting from the field and how were you translating it to the President, to Congress, and elsewhere?

RUGH: We were trying to get as much specific detail as possible about not only what the media were saying, but also what was happening in the streets. Our public affairs officers and our staffs throughout the region were out and about looking at the situation, engaging the situation. I remember on some occasions, there would be a press report saying, "There is a mob in Cairo demonstrating against American involvement in the crisis." Our PAO would report from Cairo that they had seen that mob and it was 100 people and there are that many waiting for a bus every day in the middle of Cairo, so it was no big deal. So, you put it in perspective. You put it in historical perspective and in the context of what the political situation is in that particular country. Some countries have more of a tradition of public riots and some don't. So, we tried to gauge the public mood as best we could from all of those indicators. We put those assessments into daily wrap ups that we sent to the Assistant Secretary of State and on to others. They were usually two pages, which gave not only quotes from editorials, but also information about public demonstrations and how we assessed those, how serious they were. It varied from country to country. It was a complicated situation. It varied from day to day. You don't generalize. But one generalization that I recall was that those countries that were closest to Iraq in the Arab world tended to be by far the most supportive of our effort, with the exception of Jordan. Those countries that were further away, such as Morocco or Tunisia, tended to have more editorial hostility to what we were doing and more street demonstrations - possibly because of their remoteness from the region, less appreciation of the threat that Saddam was posing to stability, security, and Arab interests, and more susceptibility to Saddam's claims that he was supporting Palestinian causes and Arab nationalism and more willingness to accept some of the lies that he was putting out in his propaganda. For example, Saddam said that there were American Christians defiling the holy places in Mecca and Medina. It wasn't true. There weren't any American soldiers in Mecca and Medina. The American military presence was mostly in the eastern province, far away from Mecca and Medina. If you were a Saudi, you knew that. If you were a Moroccan, you might not know that or might not believe the Voice of America. You might believe Radio Baghdad just as well. So, we tried to gauge public opinion as best we could.

The Arab American community tended to have a higher percentage of critics of our policy than the Arab world taken as a whole. There were lots of Iraqi-Americans who were very upset that we were going into the Gulf, and Palestinian-Americans as well. The support of the Chairman of the PLO, Yasser Arafat, for Saddam Hussein helped to encourage Palestinians both in the Middle East and in the United States to be very critical of our policy.

Q: Was USIA using the Voice of America initially to focus on Yemen, Palestine, Morocco, and Tunisia to get them to get on board or was it more just a matter of giving out information?

RUGH: It was the latter. Our primary effort on the Voice of America, which has two functions, one as a news service and one to present policy, was in the policy sense to deal with the distortions and disinformation/misinformation coming out of Baghdad. When there was an accusation that American troops were in Mecca or, later, during the war, that we had bombed a civilian target in Iraq, we tried to get out the denial and the correction as quickly as possible. VOA was very responsive in doing that. Some of the Arab governments during the crisis were not 100 percent satisfied with the VOA material, but I thought they did a good job. The Saudis and some others have a different standard of broadcast ethics. For example, when the VOA interviewed the Iraqi ambassador to Washington, they got very upset. That was something that was debated within the State Department and USIA. The Saudis thought that this was inappropriate and some others did, too, but VOA thought it was news.

Q: What about what you were doing regarding reporting on and any direction towards Israel? A key factor in this whole thing was to make sure that Israel kept out of the business. It is somewhat ironic when we talk about our firmest ally in the Middle East and the one time when we really got involved militarily, the whole thing was "Stay away. Don't do anything. Keep down," which was rather difficult. How did USIA deal with this?

RUGH: Indirectly. The effort was to show that the United States had overwhelming power and if it came to a conflict, the Iraqis would not be able to do anything militarily. This was not, therefore, a real threat to Israel. In private discussions within the U.S. government, the issue came up in conversations that I was involved in with respect to the following question: If Israel intervenes in any way in this crisis directly, either by sending personnel to the Gulf or by attacking Iraq militarily, what effect would that have on the Arab world's support of the coalition? I argued in-house, within U.S. government circles, that it would have a disastrous effect and that it would be very unwise to have that happen. It would help undermine the coalition because it would help give credence to Saddam's propaganda that this whole effort was just an Israeli Trojan horse and that the Americans were only involved because of Israel. This was not true, but if Israel became involved, which it didn't need to be, then it would give some credence to Saddam's claim. It would also make it more difficult for the Arabs to continue to support the coalition. The presence of Israeli forces in the Gulf would be an embarrassment. The Saudis wanted to defend their own territory and it was difficult enough for them to accept American troops. It would have been impossible to accept Israeli troops. So, this was a crucial issue. There was a diplomatic effort to persuade the Israelis to stay out and it was successful.

Q: Leading up to the war, from the perspective of USIA and particularly yours, could you talk about the role of the Cable News Network (CNN)? Particularly when the war started, during the bombing, I was told that in places in Africa, the government shut down. Around the world, people were watching. So, this had a tremendous effect. How did you all see CNN and its role during the buildup and thereafter?

RUGH: I have very mixed feelings about CNN. As an American who believes in free press and free speech, I have to applaud any news organization that does more to expand information and increase the amount of information available to the world's public about what is going on. But I have to say that many of the CNN reports during the crisis were misleading, were based on naive acceptance of propaganda, were not properly checked out, and weren't helpful. I'm not saying all of them were, but enough of them were so that it caused us concern. Peter Arnett in particular was claiming to report the facts in Baghdad and he was being fed Iraqi propaganda, which he swallowed without understanding what he was being fed. He still to this day argues that he was right and the whole U.S. government was wrong in some cases, particularly the famous baby milk factory which supposedly was bombed. I heard him just as recently as this year stand up before an international conference and say that he was right in that case. I'm sure he was wrong. It wasn't a baby milk factory, but he still argues that it was. He did us some harm by not being sufficiently skeptical and balanced. It wasn't just a question of his being forced to say things because he was in danger or threatened by the Iraqis. He was naive. He did us a disservice by putting out Iraqi disinformation. He, on some occasions, would interview people that he claimed were randomly selected people on the street who, in fact, were Iraqi government information officials who gave him the party line. In addition to that, every time he interviewed a genuine randomly selected person on the street, that person for fear of his/her own life, would have to give the party line. He didn't sufficiently convey that to the American public and to the world's public. He was allowed to continue broadcasting in Baghdad. He says this was because of the brilliance of his reporting. I think it was largely because the Iraqis found him useful. He was more credible than Baghdad Radio. So, he was used by the Iraqis. I'm not saying that all of his reporting was bad. Some of it was okay. But there was an element there of distortion of the reality in favor of Saddam Hussein that we had to deal with. We couldn't counter it. The American government can't shut off CNN and we wouldn't have. It would have been against our principles.

Q: You can't counter it. You can't go to the American public. That is part of the ground rules for USIA. Did you find that USIA and its subset, the Voice of America, was having to watch CNN and then go out with a refutation of Peter Arnett or other people on CNN from time to time?

RUGH: Yes, absolutely. I don't want to pick on CNN unnecessarily, but, yes, we did have to do that. We had to do it for other distortions as well, coming from other sources. So, we monitored CNN. We monitored all of the broadcasters and we monitored Baghdad as well. The Voice of America carried corrections. When there was something that was of major importance, we recommended to the spokesman of the State Department that they deal with it. They often did. Or the Pentagon. The Pentagon spokespeople were dealing with a lot of this as well. Part of our problem in public diplomacy at USIA was getting our message into Iraq. The Iraqis had (and still have) almost total control over information within Iraq. CNN was not being seen in Iraq. Satellite dishes are not allowed in Iraq and weren't then. The Voice of America signal, for technical reasons, was pretty weak in Iraq. So, we spent a lot of time, effort, and money trying to enhance the VOA signal into Iraq in various ways. But there were other audiences as well that we were trying to reach with the truth.

Q: Was USIA finding any particular areas around the world where you felt maybe our support was getting weak or we had to be concerned about, Europe, Russia, Japan, etc.?

RUGH: We were primarily concerned about the immediate region. There was varied support in other regions of the world. The Islamic world was important, Indonesia and other countries were Islam is an important factor, but frankly, in the last analysis, the most important areas in terms of public opinion on the Gulf Crisis were the Arab states and Israel. After that, the Soviet Union and the European states. But we knew we had to have the support of the Arab states and Israel, at least the ones closest to the actual area of crisis in order for the coalition to succeed. So, that was our area. I worked with the other area directors in USIA on this question of the rest of the world. They were supportive. We all met regularly and discussed strategy and worked it out. The various departments of USIA, including VOA, the Television and Film Service, and the media reaction people, were all very cooperative. We worked pretty well together.

Q: During this whole period, were there any times of real crisis that concerned you?

RUGH: There were several periods of crisis. I guess the time we were most nervous was in January when the ultimatum deadline was coming due. War was about to start and we didn't know how that was going to go. There were some other periods that we were concerned about in terms of public diplomacy. One was the "baby milk factory" and another was the bombing of a bunker in Baghdad, which the Iraqis claimed was a civilian shelter and we said was a command post. That attack caused us some bad press throughout the region and some bad public reaction throughout the region. The Iraqis fairly successfully showed civilian casualties. We were skeptical. We thought the Iraqis had staged that reaction. But it was widely believed that we had attacked it. There were other charges that we were bombing mosques and other civilian installations. We didn't and we denied it, but it is hard to prove a negative. We did manage to obtain some photographs from intelligence sources that showed Iraqis parking aircraft next to mosques, which we managed to get declassified so that we could release them and show that the Iraqis were trying to protect their military equipment by hiding them next to mosques. That was helpful. So, there were periodic crises and there was disinformation that would float around and we would try to chase after it and deal with it. These came up practically every week.

Q: You left this job in 1992. After the war, was there any particular emphasis? The war was over at the end of February 1991.

RUGH: The next major issue that we were dealing with was a follow-on to one of our problems in the Gulf Crisis. That was the question of the Arab-Israeli conflict. During the crisis before the war, Saddam tried to arouse Arab hostility to the United States and to the coalition by talking about the Palestinians. In the middle of the crisis, there was an incident in Jerusalem that helped him in that regard. Saddam said, "Let's put these two issues together, have a big conference, and settle both Palestine and Kuwait together." The President refused. He said, "These are two separate issues. We have to deal with Kuwait and after that issue is over, we will deal with Arab-Israel." A lot of people didn't believe that. They said, "Oh, he just doesn't want to deal with Arab-Israel." In fact, to his credit, President Bush, right after the Gulf Crisis was over, said, "Alright, let's deal with Arab-Israel." Secretary Baker, President Bush, and his team put together an effort which led to the Madrid Conference of 1991 within six months of the end of the Gulf Crisis. This started us on the path to what I think will be a resolution of the Arab-Israeli crisis eventually. It doesn't look very good right now, but it was a start. The Madrid Conference was the focus of our attention between the end of the Gulf Crisis in 1991 and the time I left in 1992.

Q: You had been dealing with the Arab-Israeli problem for a long time. When the Madrid Conference came up, what was your gut feeling at the beginning?

RUGH: It was terrific. It was a wonderful step forward. We were very relieved that, finally, progress was being made that was on a comprehensive level. Camp David back in 1978-1979 and the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement had been just with Egypt. Now, the Madrid Conference included literally the entire Arab world. That was a wonderful positive step forward in the peace process. We were all very gratified.

Q: With the Madrid Conference, were there special efforts to bring both the Arab world and Israel into line and we were serious about this, that this was not just another thing? Was there something concrete that you could hang onto?

RUGH: At USIA, we did everything we could to support the Madrid Conference. It was a diplomatic event. It was an event that was managed, organized, and implemented by the State Department with the support of the White House, so we didn't have a leading role in it by any means. But we directed a lot of our effort to publicizing it, to supporting it, and to portraying it as a positive step forward. We made the point in editorials that President Bush had kept his word and had not ignored the Arab-Israeli conflict during the Gulf Crisis. He had promised to deal with it afterwards and he did. So, that was a very helpful point that we made.

Q: What was your impression from the polls you were taking and from the reports you were getting from embassies about the Arab mood after the Gulf War and the beginning of this Israeli-Palestinian peace process up to the time you left the job in 1992?

RUGH: Among the Arab states, there was still some residue left over from the Gulf Crisis because Saddam was still in power. We thought he would leave power. It turns out he didn't. We thought he would fall after that crisis. There was still resentment by the Gulf states against Jordan and Yemen for being on the wrong side. That colored their relationship. That wasn't directly our business, but it was something that affected the climate in the region. We were trying to focus on the peace process, but the Gulf states were primarily concerned about cleaning up the aftermath of the Gulf Crisis. There was a focus by the Gulf states on Iran. The threat that they perceived from Iran had been temporarily overshadowed by the threat from Iraq, but now they remembered it and focused on it again. So the concerns were varied. There were other local issues.

The Gulf Crisis was so overwhelming that it sort of dominated everything throughout the Middle East and North Africa, but when it was over, people remembered there were other problems. In Algeria, there were internal problems. Morocco and Algeria had border problems. The Palestinian area was again focused primarily on the Arab-Israeli question. But further afield, people were looking at economic and other issues that again became much more diverse.

Q: Was there any effort to identify and to focus what we were doing on the problem as we saw it of fundamentalism within the Islamic world? One thinks in particular of Egypt and Algeria, but it is one of those specters that is a concern.

RUGH: There were some in the region who saw the United States as being hostile to Islam because of American concern or worry about fundamentalism. We tried to correct that misimpression. One Assistant Secretary of State, Ed Djerejian, made an important speech at Meridian House during this period in which he clearly stated the official American position as being hostile only to extremism, not to Islam - extremism in any form, whether it's Islamic or other - and the use of violent means, that Americans are not anti-Islamic by any means and are, in fact, respectful of Islamic traditions. We tried to get that message out. That particular speech was very important. We used that as much as we could. It helps to repeat that. It's not enough just to say it once, so we tried to keep that going.

Q: In an interview I did rather recently with David Mack, also an Arabist, he was saying that he went to a meeting around this time in Europe and was amazed to find that the Europeans much more than the Americans were talking as though Islamic hordes were at the gates of Vienna and Tours. They were talking about, now that the Cold War is over, Islam is perhaps going to be the enemy. Did you see any manifestations of this?

RUGH: Yes, I think particularly in France there is the strong feeling. They have their own special experience with many guest workers and with the association with North Africa and particularly Algeria. The French don't know how to deal with Algeria. It's close by and they're concerned about it. I think the Algerian situation focuses their attention on it more than on others. There is a lot of misunderstanding of Islam around the world and some difficulty in knowing how to deal with it. Even among smart American academics, there is a lot of debate.

Q: Where did you go next?

RUGH: In 1992, I went out as ambassador to the United Arab Emirates.

Q: How did you get the job?

RUGH: Ambassadorial assignments are always a mysterious process. I was interested in doing another ambassadorship because I had such a nice experience in Yemen in the 1980s. Obviously, it is an honor and a privilege to run an embassy, even a small one. In talking to my friends in the State Department when I said I would like to be a candidate to be an ambassador, they said, "You're not a candidate. Nobody is a candidate. You don't apply for the job. You get chosen."

Q: That is one of the great misstatements of all time.

RUGH: Right, so I ignored that and lobbied a little bit with my friends. There is a lot of luck involved. I was fortunate to be in a position in 1990-1991 where I had a lot of exposure to senior people in the State Department who later in 1992 had something to do with my assignment as ambassador. That was because I was director of the Near East and South Asia Bureau of USIA. Saddam's invasion of Kuwait came along in August 1990. Between August 1990 and through the following year until the spring of 1991, I had a lot of contact at senior levels in the State Department, including the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Bob Kimmitt. I attended a lot of his morning meetings in which he discussed strategy and tactics to deal with Saddam. I was able to speak up and represent USIA at those meetings. I was the co-chair of a task force dealing with public diplomacy at the State Department. It was an interagency group. Every week I attended the NEA Assistant Secretary's meetings at State and got to know the Assistant Secretary well and speak up and give him some useful material from USIA sources.

Q: Who was the Assistant Secretary?

RUGH: John Kelly (during the Crisis). So, he got to know me. He started the nomination process. He sent my name up to the seventh floor. He said he believed in the principle of having agencies other than the State Department represented in the ambassadorial ranks, so that helped that he believed in that. So, when he sent up a list of nominees for NEA ambassadorships, he put my name on it for the UAE. When it came to Bob Kimmitt, he knew me from those meetings. There were some others who knew me also, so that didn't hurt. I don't know if it helped or not, but I had had a couple of encounters with the President during the Gulf Crisis in the Oval Office and with the NSC staff. Richard Haass was the senior Near East NSC person then. I don't know if he was involved in the process, but he knew me and had selected me to meet with the President on two occasions. So, just by good luck during the period prior to when I was ready to make another move, I had been exposed to these folks. So, that is really how it happened. I had Arabic, had been ambassador before, and had served in the area. All of those things helped. I don't know who else was on the list.

Q: That would not have been an area where you would have found a political appointee planning to go.

RUGH: Right, exactly.

Q: That's one nice thing about the Middle East.

RUGH: Right. It's not Paris or London, so the competition is from other career people and from State Department people who are good people and very talented. Sitting in USIA, you always think State Department people have an advantage in getting ambassadorships and they probably do, but I was lucky and I got it.

Q: You were in the UAE from when to when?

RUGH: From the fall of 1992 until the summer of 1995.

Q: Before you went out there, what initiatives or goals were you putting in your mental attaché case about what needed to be done?

RUGH: The relationship with the UAE since the Gulf Crisis (after 1991 when the war was over) had become a very heavily military one. I thought it was important to do two things. One was to solidify that military relationship. In the past, the Gulf countries and, in fact, all of the Arab countries, have been reluctant to have any military bases or any close association with American military. I knew that bases still were not possible, but I thought that it would be important to work closely with the American military and help them develop the closest possible relationship with the UAE because the danger still remained. Iran was still a threat and Iraq was still a threat because Saddam was still in power. So, I thought that high on my agenda would be the role of the U.S. military in dealing with that, which I hadn't dealt with in Yemen very much as ambassador because it was a very small part of our mission.

Secondly, I thought it would be important to expand the relationship beyond the military because it was so heavily military already that it needed some other aspects. So, both of those goals: solidifying the military relationship and expanding it into other areas (economic, commercial, and cultural) and take advantage of America's prestige from the Gulf Crisis in ways that could help American companies on the commercial side. America had not been a major economic player in the UAE; the British had. It was a British domain and it still was even after the British left in 1971.

Q: What comprised the UAE? What was the government structures and political forces there?

RUGH: The UAE is a small country. It used to be called "Trucial States" when Britain was running their foreign affairs and defense up until 1971 when it became independent. Seven small emirates combine in a federation. The largest, richest, and most powerful emirate was Abu Dhabi. The second largest and richest was Dubai. There were five others. These seven emirates were located on the Persian Gulf near the Strait of Hormuz. They were and are economically very important because of their huge petroleum reserves. They have about 100 billion barrels of petroleum reserves, which is four times what we have in North America. Their oil policy was very moderate and prudent and they basically recycled their oil revenues into investments in the United States and elsewhere, so the petrodollars were very important to us.

In addition to the economic interests for the United States, they also occupied a very important piece of real estate on the Persian Gulf and also there is a piece of the UAE which is on the Indian Ocean. So, from a strategic point of view, the U.S. military looked at the UAE as very important territory for us. For example, if the Strait of Hormuz were closed and bottling up the Persian Gulf, if the UAE were friendly, the U.S. still could have access to the Persian Gulf through the Indian Ocean side. There is an airfield in Fujairah on the Indian Ocean side where the U.S. Navy brings in people and supplies on a regular basis in quiet times. If there were a crisis, that would become very important, providing us very easy air access to the Persian Gulf to supply the fleet. You have to remember that there were, on an average, 20 American naval vessels in the Persian Gulf at any one time, including from time to time a carrier task force. This was a very important commitment of American military personnel and equipment to peacekeeping in the Persian Gulf. The lines keeping contact with those ships were important. A lot of that went through the UAE, including to the airfields. We never had an airbase there. We still don't. But they were open to us. For example, when we were flying Southern Watch (We're still doing that.), which is the air flights of U.S. military planes over southern Iraq to maintain the sanctions on Iraq. The Southern Watch missions had to be fueled by U.S. tanker planes called KC-10s. These KC-10s were based in the UAE in airfields. We couldn't have flown those missions over southern Iraq without basing these planes in the UAE. Although there wasn't an American base there, it was through the UAE we were allowed to do that. That was something useful to the military, so that was important.

In addition, American exports to the UAE had grown over the years so that it had become an important market. In fact, it is an entrepôt. Dubai in particular had become an entrepôt for South Asia and for the Arab world. Really in the last decade, Dubai has taken over the role of Bahrain as the entrepôt, transit point, and most active and vibrant commercial center of the entire Gulf. Dubai has the largest man-made port in the world, Jebel Ali, with a free port, an aluminum plant, and a lot of commercial activities. A lot of American companies went into the free port and went into Dubai and used Dubai as a transit point for shipments all over the world. Dubai merchants are very clever and very experienced and have really taken advantage of opportunities in the last few years.

Q: They used to dominate the gold smuggling business during my time as commercial officer in the Gulf from 1958-1960. You would go to Dubai and you would see four men carrying one very small box.

RUGH: That is still true. Smuggling and commerce. From Dubai's point of view, it's commerce. Smuggling is sort of a pejorative term. In Dubai, you don't have to smuggle because everything is tax free and free trade prevails. They have almost zero duties and controls over what you can bring in and bring out, so you bring in large amounts of gold to Dubai and you resell it to Indians, Pakistanis, Saudis, people from all over the world. People from Europe go to Dubai to buy European made gold because it's cheaper. For some of those countries, it's not legal to bring in gold without paying a tax, but for Dubai it's perfectly legal to export it without paying a tax so that they benefit by people taking a risk in their own home countries. There is a lot of smuggling of other things that goes on between Dubai and Iran. There are boats that go every day from Dubai across to Iran and evade the Iranian customs people and go into Iran bringing goods and come out of Iran bringing carpets, pistachios, and so on. It's only 50 miles across the water, so it is a very active trade.

Q: Could you explain the government situation?

RUGH: The government is legally and constitutionally headed by a council of the seven emirs, the seven sheikhs who rule each of the seven Emirates. So, it is as if in the United States that the governor's conference of 50 governors would get together and run the country. That is the theory in the UAE. In practice, Sheikh Zayid, who is the ruler of Abu Dhabi, is really in charge, certainly of foreign affairs and defense policy. He has much more weight in national decisions than any other ruler because of the wealth and size of Abu Dhabi Emirate. Sheikh Zayid was one of the founders of the UAE in 1971 and is now about 80 years old. He is universally respected as a leader. He has enormous charisma. Everybody in the UAE looks up to him. He is sort of the George Washington, the founding father who is holding the country together by force of his personality. There was another major figure, Sheikh Rashid of Dubai, who was almost as powerful, as prominent, and as respected as Sheikh Zayid at the time of the founding, but he died a few years ago, so that leaves Sheikh Zayid as the towering figure in the country.

Formally, the seven rulers get together and discuss national policy on a regular basis, but major decisions like whether to allow the Americans to base their aircraft in the UAE, those were made by Sheikh Zayid and his family, his sons. His sons have become very prominent. One of his sons is the Chief of Staff of the armed forces. Another is the head of the Security Service. Another is the number two in the Foreign Ministry. Another runs the Ports Authority. So, his sons are being groomed to succeed him.

Q: Have they been trained abroad at all?

RUGH: Some of them have, yes. The Chief of Staff, Sheikh Mohammad, has had military training at Sandhurst in the UK. Some of his other sons who have been trained in the United States have gone to school here. His oldest son, who is in his late 40s, had a traditional education, has not been trained abroad. The rest of his sons have had training abroad.

Q: I would have thought that when you went out, both on the United Emirates side and also from the American side, that it was pretty well understood that there are times when the United States is really up against national interest and national interest is that the UAE is not going to fall into unfriendly hands. Was this one of these things that was unsaid but always there whenever you were talking, dealing with this?

RUGH: The overwhelming threat as seen by the UAE leadership in Abu Dhabi is Iran. The United States saw and sees Iran as the overwhelming threat to the region. So, we had a parallel of interests. I was fortunate to be there at a time when the leadership in Abu Dhabi and in Washington really had a threat perception that was similar. The second most important threat as seen by both countries was Iraq. Again, we had a parallel threat assessment. As time went on, the perception of the Iraqi threat began to change a bit. In the UAE, the leadership as time went on began to become very uncomfortable with the status quo. Saddam Hussein stayed in power. The embargo was hurting the Iraqi people very badly and not hurting Saddam. The United States takes the lead in the embargo against Saddam. We had expected Saddam to fall and be replaced by a more benign Iraqi leadership. Everybody had expected that. It didn't happen. We continued our policy of a tough embargo on Iraq. The UAE continued to support it, but became increasingly worried that it wasn't doing the job, that it wasn't bringing about a change of behavior in the Iraqi leadership and the departure of Saddam. They didn't have an alternative to suggest. They weren't saying, "You ought to stop the embargo and do the following." They wanted us to keep up the pressure on Saddam, but they felt the pressure wasn't on Saddam; it was on the Iraqi people. So, at the end of my tour, by 1995, there began to be a discussion over "What are you going to do about Saddam and why haven't you gotten rid of him? Why are you punishing the Iraqi people?" Well, we weren't intentionally punishing the Iraqi people. In Washington and the American embassy, we felt that Saddam was the one who was punishing the Iraqi people. So, in terms of threat perception, both Washington and Abu Dhabi continued to believe that Saddam was the problem, but the solution that we were applying, namely a total embargo, pressure on Saddam, a no fly zone in the south, and support for the Kurds in the north, wasn't bringing relief for the Iraqi people. That hurt Sheikh Zayid. As an Arab, he felt a lot of sympathy for the suffering of the Iraqi people. So, that continues to this day, a discussion along the lines of Zayid and his people saying "What are you going to do to fix the Iraqi situation" and us saying "Well, it's Saddam's fault."

Q: Always with an embargo, which seems to be the weapon of choice of the United States, what you do is, you put an embargo on and hope somebody will depose the leader. We're doing this in Bosnia, too.

RUGH: Or change the policy.

Q: It has proved to be extremely ineffective. What had the UAE done during the Gulf War? What was their participation?

RUGH: UAE was very supportive of the allied position during the Gulf War. It was part of the coalition against Saddam Hussein. Thousands of American troops were allowed to have access to the UAE. Aircraft were stationed in the UAE. UAE hospitality was total in terms of providing support for the American military effort. The UAE provided some military forces for the coalition. So, it was a very strong support. Even before Saddam invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, the UAE, I think, perceived almost before anybody else that there was a real crisis. The Saudis and the Kuwaitis thought that Saddam was bluffing, and we thought Saddam was bluffing. He never would invade all of Kuwait. Sheikh Zayid in July 1990 asked us to conduct a military exercise, an air exercise, a joint exercise, between UAE Air Force and the United States Air Force as a demonstration of American willingness to support the UAE in a time of crisis. That was quite perceptive. It didn't stop Saddam from invading Kuwait, however.

Q: In fact, he got kind of annoyed about it.

RUGH: Right. He was very upset with the UAE in particular. To my mind, it shows that Sheikh Zayid had an instinct and a feeling that something terrible was happening and we needed to draw the line. As I say, it didn't stop Saddam, but it showed Sheikh Zayid's concern. He was totally against Saddam's invasion of Kuwait and totally in support of the effort.

Q: What about the influence of Iran? I know in Bahrain, one of the problems has been the Shias have been coming in, which has turned into sort of a disruptive force on Bahrain. This is not just recently, but has been going on over the centuries. Has the UAE had that same problem?

RUGH: The demographics in the UAE are very interesting. The total resident population in the UAE is just over two million. The number of UAE nationals, UAE citizens, is about 400,000 out of that two million. That means foreigners living in the UAE make up 80 percent of the population. They are not given citizenship. It is not a melting pot. They don't believe that these people should stay around after they finish working, but they're very hospitable to them while they're there working. So, these are guest workers whether they're Indians, who are about 450,000 and Pakistanis, who are about 350,00. There are more Indians than UAE nationals. Or they are Americans, Brits, or Bangladeshis, etc. They are all there temporarily. When they're finished working, they are to leave. So, that is an odd and unusual arrangement because there are so many foreigners living there. Among those foreigners are more than 60,000 Iranians. Those Iranians are mostly in Dubai. Many of them are working in business and commerce, working as laborers, or working in fishing and so on. Among those 60,000 Iranians are, we believe, a number of Iranian intelligence officers from the MOIS (Ministry of Intelligence and Security, Iran). They are there under cover of business or other types of employment that attempt to disguise their true intent, but they are there for purposes of surveillance and watching, watching the UAE, collecting data, collecting intelligence, and they are a potential fifth column. Certainly the ones who work for the Iranian government could cause trouble. There have been some incidents in the past involving those Iranian agents directed, however, against other Iranians. There was one incident where they kidnapped an Iran dissident in Dubai and bundled him off to Iran. They have the potential of causing trouble. The UAE security authorities keep a close watch on them. We try to keep a watch on the Iranians. In fact, since we don't have an embassy in Teheran, we tend to do a little bit of reporting on Iranians who come to our consulate and apply for visas, as they do in large numbers. But the most active Iran watchers in the UAE are UAE authorities themselves. They keep very close tabs on them. The UAE doesn't have a very strong, tight border. It doesn't have much of a coast guard. So, it's very easy for Iranians to slip into the country. They can come over in a small boat and get in without any trouble. Sometimes residence permits and work permits are sold by various authorities. So, you can slip into the country and this is a potential security problem.

In addition to those 60,000 Iranian nationals who live in the UAE out of a resident population of only two million, there are thousands of UAE nationals who have as their national origin southern Iran. Arab tribes and Arab peoples of southern Iran immigrated to the UAE (then the Trucial States) over the centuries and make up a sizeable number of the population, particularly of Dubai. Some of them still speak Farsi or a version of Farsi. Many of them are in business. Some of them even speak Farsi at home. But they consider themselves Iranian nationals. They are full-fledged UAE citizens and they have citizenship because their grandparents were there forever, but they really are sort of a class by themselves. They have Iranian connections. These are the people who are most effective in maintaining trade between Dubai and Iran. They have family ties. They speak Farsi. They know people back in the village and in the cities of southern Iran. So, they have old commercial connections with Iran and they keep the trade going very nicely. So, it's a very mixed population. Why isn't there more conflict between ethnic groups? Why isn't there unrest among the foreigners? I think the simple answer is prosperity. Every one of the foreigners working there is earning more money than they would be earning back home. The Indians and Pakistanis in particular are really well off compared to what they would be making back at home.

There was an incident while I was there, a spillover from a problem in India. A mosque in Ayodhya India was attacked and destroyed in 1993 or 1994. Muslims in India were very upset about it. Indian and Pakistani Muslims living in the UAE also were upset about it. There were some incidents for about two days in the UAE, demonstrations and clashes between Indians and Pakistanis. This only lasted two days. It lasted much longer in India. This was because the UAE rounded up some of the troublemakers, put them on a plane, sent them back home, and they realized that they had lost their jobs. Immediately word spread that if you made trouble over Ayodhya, you were going to be deported and you would lose your job. That stopped it cold. So, the people there realized that if they got into any political demonstrations or involved in anything other than just making a living and keeping quiet, they would be deported.

Q: When you were there, or prior to when you were there, did Iran make any geographic demands on the UAE?

RUGH: Yes. That is an important point. Iran and the UAE both lay claim to three small islands. One is called Abu Musa and the other two are the Greater and Lesser Tunbs. These are tiny islands, only five or six miles wide. But they lie exactly in the Middle of the Persian Gulf halfway between Iran and the UAE. In 1971, just hours before the UAE became independent, when the British were still in charge, Iran forcibly occupied the Two Tunbs, which had been Arab islands all along, and took over Abu Musa as well. Abu Musa was regulated by a memorandum of understanding between the Shah and the UAE, which said that the sovereignty will be put aside and this Abu Musa island will be divided administratively between Iran and the UAE. After that 1971 memorandum of understanding, which the UAE didn't like because they thought all Abu Musa was their island, the Iranians gradually militarized all three islands. Particularly during the Iran-Iraq War, they put garrisons up. In 1991, the UAE said, "Halt. You're talking over our island. You're militarizing Abu Musa and the Tunbs you stole from us. We want them back." Since 1991, there has been an ongoing dispute in public in the UN in every forum that the UAE goes to, the Arab League, the Gulf Cooperation Council, etc. Every time they make a speech, they say, "These three islands are Arab. They're ours. Iran has been taking them over gradually, annexing them. We object. We want to go to the international court. We want to go to the UN mediation. We have legality on our side." Why are they making such a big issue over these tiny islands? There is a little bit of oil, but it's really symbolic. Sheikh Zayid and the UAE leadership are afraid that if they make concessions and allow Iran to take over these three little islands at the midline of the Gulf, then Iran will not hesitate to try to take over more islands. Half of the UAE's oil reserves are offshore on other islands close to these three. So, the UAE is afraid that Iran will have an appetite for more islands with more oil if they don't draw a line and say "Halt." So, this has been an ongoing dispute. The UAE has the backing of practically everybody in the world and Iran doesn't, but Iran is not giving up its de facto hold on these islands.

Q: Did we get involved in that at all? We had no relations with Iran.

RUGH: We have been asked from time to time what is our position on the islands. We have said that we recommend a peaceful settlement of the dispute. We have never been asked which side do we come down on. I don't know what we would say if we were asked. My personal opinion is that the UAE legal case is much stronger than the Iranian case. The Iranians have been there really only since 1971 and they occupied two of them by force. But we have never been asked that. The British have been asked. The British were very much involved. They allowed it to happen. They allowed Iran to take over these three islands. The UAE wants the British to say that this was a mistake and "We have right on our side." When I was there, the UAE asked the British ambassador for the documents. He dragged his feet. He didn't want to give them the documents. He didn't want to get involved. He said, "It's your dispute. This is an old story." But the British were culpable. The British were responsible for allowing it to happen.

Q: What were the main issues you dealt with and how did you deal with them?

RUGH: One of the main issues was sort of a technical one, but it had a lot of symbolism. There was a request by the U.S. government to sign a defense cooperation agreement with the UAE. This request goes back to the end of the Saddam crisis in 1991. As soon as this crisis with Saddam, Desert Storm, was over, we decided that we wanted defense cooperation agreements with all of the Arab states in the Gulf, all six of the GCC states, and we got one immediately with Kuwait. We got one rather promptly with Bahrain. We already had one with Oman. We got one rather promptly with Qatar. The Saudis said they really didn't need one because we had close cooperation. That left the UAE as the one country besides the Saudis that had not signed a defense agreement. We requested it immediately. It was taken under advisement. When I got there in 1992, there had been a year and a half of discussion of the agreement, but it hadn't been concluded. I spent two years working on that and finally did sign a defense cooperation agreement before I left. It was a problem for them because we were asking them to give up a portion of their sovereignty. It was a Status of Forces Agreement which said that an American military person who commits a crime in UAE territory would be handed over to the United States for trial, not to the UAE. Under normal international law, the crime would be tried under UAE law. We were saying, "No, hand him over to us." So, for example, if a sailor off an American ship kills a UAE national, he is not tried in a UAE court. He is tried by an American court martial. We were asking for that. They had trouble accepting that. They said, "This could cause political problems and this is difficult for us to swallow." We had long discussions and a lot of delegations that came out. I spent a lot of time on it. Finally, we persuaded them that in the context of everything that we were doing to provide security for the UAE and the other countries of the Gulf, this was something that they could give us and they did do it. But, frankly, they weren't happy about it. Particularly the folks in Dubai, where most of the American sailors are on leave, said, "We don't need this. We are hospitable. If anything goes wrong, don't worry. We're friendly to Americans. Nothing will happen." Well, the lawyers in the Pentagon didn't believe that. So, we had literal-minded lawyers in the Pentagon versus tribal chiefs in Dubai having different views of what would happen if an American sailor killed somebody. The tribal leaders said, "Don't worry, we'll take care of it. There may be a brief period where this guy is locked up, but we'll deal with it because we like Americans." That wasn't enough for the lawyers in the Pentagon. They said, "No, we've got to have something in writing."

Q: In the interviews I've done, one of the most difficult negotiations on base rights always seems to be between the Department of State and the Pentagon lawyers. Spain, Greece, anywhere else.

RUGH: Right.

Q: They want to get everything nailed down for their client.

RUGH: That's right.

Q: As those of us in the Foreign Service know, most of the time, arrangements are made which aren't spelled out. You sort of get the person out of the country.

RUGH: That's right. There were a few people in the Pentagon, bless them, who understood the situation in the region. I think General Joe Hoar, who was the Commander in CENTCOM (United States Central Command) during most of the time I was out there, was one of them. He really understood and he was not pushing. He said, "Don't twist their arm. If you have to twist their arm the agreement won't be worth anything. If they want to sign it, if they know what they're doing and they're happy with signing it, fine. But we don't want an agreement that they will sign under duress." There were others. We found a few lawyers in the Pentagon who were able to talk to people out there, but it wasn't easy. The State Department was supportive, but the Pentagon regarded this as their issue. They sent their lawyers out and they were hardliners. So, it was tough. To tell you the truth, after I signed the agreement, we had difficulty implementing it. The implementation phase of it lasted for quite a while. It wasn't really implemented until quite a while after I signed it. The story wasn't over when I signed it, even though I thought it was.

Q: You said that one of the things you wanted to achieve was to strengthen the military relationship, which I assume that part of the baggage you had to do would be this Status of Forces Agreement. How did the rest of this come across on the military side?

RUGH: The other major issue on the military side was sales of military equipment and services and joint exercises. The joint exercises were fairly easy to work out. The sales of equipment was tougher. I and Washington believed that American military equipment was the best in the world. The UAE was not automatically signing up to every deal that was proposed. They were taking a lot of time. They were looking at French, British, and even Russian equipment. So, I spent a lot of my time trying to advise and counsel American companies, the Pentagon, the Department of Commerce, and everybody else who got involved on military sales. There was one major one that we lost. The UAE bought over 300 main battle tanks. I thought it would be fairly easy to sell the M 1, which had won the Gulf War, to the UAE. The French came along and made an offer which had a lot of claims in it. It hadn't been built yet. It was a paper tank. The UAE bought it. I think that the French didn't tell the truth in their sales pitch and we did. In addition, the French offered them an offset program which was required in the sale, which was much more attractive than our offset program. So, the French tank won a multibillion dollar sale and we lost it.

There is another contract that is still being considered that was active when I arrived in 1992 and was active when I left in 1995 and has still not been concluded. That is the fighter aircraft. The UAE wants to buy 30-60 fighter aircraft. I thought when I arrived that this was an easy sale because McDonnell Douglas makes a wonderful F-15 and Lockheed makes a wonderful F-16 and who can match that? Well, the Russians had some MIGs and the French had some Mirage and other planes. The British had some planes. It was by no means an easy sell. It is still not decided. As we speak, the UAE has narrowed the sale down to Lockheed plus a European competitor and it's still not concluded. This is long after I thought it would have been concluded. So, that was tough. We spent a lot of time trying to help the American companies with this.

Q: Did you find that after the Gulf War, where American equipment had demonstrated its superiority, that our selling people the equipment had maybe lost their edge as far as being good salesmen?

RUGH: Yes. They're not used to selling to people in the Arab world. They don't have the patience. They don't have knowledge of the thought patterns of Arab officials. The French and British have a lot more experience with selling in the Arab world. Plus, frankly, the French and the British had a lot more direct government support. We tried at the embassy to give the companies as much support as we could, but the British embassy got Prince Charles and Diana, the Defense Minister, the Foreign Minister, and Margaret Thatcher, and all these people to come out to the UAE regularly and make high level visits and see the President. They got treated royally. By the way, they were selling British goods and services. The French did the same thing. The French Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and Defense Minister all came out. They invited them back. When they went to Paris, middle level officials going to Paris would see the Defense Minister. They would come to Washington and try to see the American Secretary of Defense and you can't get in the door unless you're of equal rank. So, that helped the Europeans and it hurt us. Americans wanted to sell. As a matter of policy, we increasingly were told by the State Department that trade is important, but we weren't able to match the European political effort. Frankly, there is a Foreign Corrupt Practices Act in the United States which prevents American companies from paying bribes and the French don't have anything like that. That makes a difference. All of those factors made it difficult for us. We argued quality. We said, "You get what we say you're going to get. The French don't always deliver on their promises."

Q: This has been true even back when I was in Athens in the early 1970s with the Greek government. The French were loading up the deal with all sorts of things, but the equipment really is isn't that good.

RUGH: Right. As people say, the French will sell you something and forget to add in spares and say, "Oh, you want spares?" Spares are automatically included in our package, as is maintenance and all kinds of things. We just give a better deal.

The other problem is releasability. We have some special equipment on our aircraft that the UAE wants. They want the best. They want everything that we have - radars, and so on. The Pentagon doesn't release all of that to everybody. They may release it to nobody, they may release it only to NATO, or they may release it to NATO and Israel, but not anybody else. That sticks in the craw of people in the UAE who say, "We're a cash customer. We're ready to pay you for this. We want top of the line. We don't want second-rate stuff that isn't the best." Congress gets involved and you have to get the Pentagon to release the stuff. Sometimes, people in the Pentagon at the highest levels say, "We haven't given it to Israel, so we can't give it to you" or "We just gave it to Israel and Israel needs a qualitative edge, so we won't give it to the UAE." That doesn't go down very well in the UAE.

Q: Did you find yourself getting into arguments or trying to work with the Pentagon and also with Congress?

RUGH: Yes, we worked with the Pentagon. We pointed out the material advantages of making the sale, the income, and the job creation. In addition, there was the interoperability. The Pentagon likes the argument of interoperability. That is to say, if the UAE has American equipment, that if we go to war again, you can work more closely with the UAE military because they have the same equipment. So, interoperability was an argument we made to the UAE, but we also made it to the Pentagon to encourage them. Of course, the American companies were lobbying the Pentagon, the White House, and the State Department to get support, but they didn't always have that much clout, as much as one imagines they do. In comparison to the French and the British, there is a much tighter relationship between business and government than there is in the United States.

Q: What about the other side, of increasing ties and influence on the non-military side? How did that work?

RUGH: That didn't progress as far as I had hoped. The overwhelming character of the relationship was military. I had hoped that there would be more political connections, more State Department connections, and more Department of Commerce connections with the UAE. In my time, we got very few visits from any non-military people. We had general officers every month coming up from the Pentagon and from CENTCOM. We had colonels and majors there every day visiting us. We had thousands and thousands of troops coming in for port calls. So, the American military connection with the UAE in terms of visits, personnel, connections, conferences, discussions, and consultations was enormous, whereas the connections on the political side were fairly weak. In my time, the Assistant Secretary of State came twice. We had the Secretary of Transportation, Mr. Pena, come, but we didn't get anybody else really of a senior political nature who came out and had serious discussions with the UAE leadership. We had one Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Peter Tarnoff, come. But we never got the Secretary of State. We certainly never got the President or Vice President. In contrast to the Europeans, we didn't have that kind of high level visibility. I was disappointed that we didn't have more of a political dialogue with the UAE. They wanted it. They resented the lack of it. We would send envoys out to ask for money. We would send a special envoy to see Sheikh Zayid and say, "We have a project in North Korea to help persuade the Koreans to stop building nuclear weapons. Will you pay for it?" Well, they would get a puzzled look from the UAE officials, who would say, "What does this have to do with us?" Well, the only thing that it had to do with them was that they had a lot of money. We were carrying a tin cup to collect money. I had to try to persuade the people that were visiting to try to make a link between North Korea and the UAE to put a good face on it to make the people think that we weren't just coming because they were rich. But we were, frankly, in many cases. We hit them for money for the Palestinians, which is a little bit more logical. We pressed them hard for money for Turkey, for the Palestinians, and for a whole list of other causes just because they had money. So, we tended only to show up when we wanted money and not when we wanted a serious political dialogue. That was a problem.

Q: You had been dealing with the State Department and American administrations over a long period of time. Did you have a feeling that when the Clinton administration came in in 1993 that it really had very little interest in the Middle East, except for the normal Israeli thing?

RUGH: Right. That is true. Secretary Christopher spent a lot of time working on the peace process. He shuttled back and forth to Syria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, even Lebanon. He never came to Abu Dhabi. I think he went once to Kuwait, but occasionally, he would come to Saudi Arabia and announce that he was visiting the Gulf. People in Abu Dhabi didn't think he was visiting them. Saudi Arabia is part of the Gulf, but it's only one country. It is the biggest, wealthiest, and most important to us, but he really neglected the Gulf. The rest of the Clinton administration completely neglected the Gulf. Vice President Gore stopped off in Oman for a refueling stop once, but other than that, senior Clinton administration officials didn't pay much attention to the Arab world, except for the Arab-Israeli conflict, and it was a disappointment. I think it started with the President. I don't think the President really is interested in foreign affairs very much and this is reflected in the rest of his administration.

Q: Were there any other issues that you were dealing with while you were there?

RUGH: We dealt with intellectual property rights and working with them to pass a law and then to implement the law. We dealt with visas. I went to the Minister of Interior and said, "You only give an American businessmen a three month visa and he has to have a sponsor. You don't require the British to have any visa." I knew this went back to the time when the British ran the place. The first time I said this, the Minister said, "Frankly, we could give you a longer visa if it doesn't apply to Arab-Americans." I said, "Whoa, wait a minute. We can't do that." It was clear that they didn't trust Arab-Americans. So, that discussion collapsed. Then a new Minister of Interior was appointed. I went to him and made the same pitch and he was more open-minded. He said, "Okay" and we made a deal. We agreed on a 10 year visa with no sponsor. UAE was the first Gulf state to do that. Some of the other Gulf states have now done that. They realized that it was hampering trade and business to have only a three month sponsored visa, so we opened that up a bit.

We didn't have any other major issues. We had quite a few sailors coming through and no major incidents, fortunately and to my surprise. Somehow, they behaved themselves. They were all told that if they misbehaved, they would forever lose liberty, so they wanted to come and enjoy the beaches, the hotels, and the beer in the hotels. These were the best ports in the Gulf. If you go to Saudi Arabia, you can't drink. If you come to Abu Dhabi, you can drink in the hotels. We discovered that the few sailors who got in trouble were the young sailors on their first night ashore. They would go and get plastered and might get into trouble somehow. They would steal a car and joyride around, that kind of thing.

Q: This is really the very young kids trying to show off and show how tough they are. It's like fraternity initiations.

RUGH: Yes. We dealt with that. We set up a beer tent on the pier next to the ship. The first night, they were allowed to go onto the pier, drink all they wanted, but then they couldn't go into town. They had to go back on the ship. That dealt with their initial splurge and spree. The second night, they were allowed to go into town. That took care of that. So, there were very few problems.

Q: With intellectual property, I take it the problem was copying videotapes, music, etc.

RUGH: Right. And textiles. What happened was that Pakistan and India were up against their quota in textiles for export to the United States, so the additional textiles that they wanted to ship to the United States they would transship to the UAE. In the UAE, they would sew a label in a Pakistani shirt saying "Made in the UAE" and then ship it off to the United States because the UAE didn't meet the textile production quota. So, that was a violation of intellectual property. We had to police that. But it was also videotapes and audiotapes and even computer programs that were made in some apartment in Dubai by Indians who were cranking these out and selling them very cheaply on the market. And fake Rolexes and so on. So, we worked with the government and they passed a law, but that was only the first stage. We had to get people to police it. They were inexperienced in policing that kind of a law. I had many discussions with the Commerce Minister and with others trying to persuade them that it was in their interest to stop this piracy because there wasn't any gain for the UAE and they were hurting their reputation and losing by this pirate activity. They finally did enforce the law.

Q: What about banking? Banking came up before your time.

RUGH: The BCCI (Bank of Credit and Commerce and Industry) problem, yes, that happened before I arrived. The BCCI was a Pakistani bank which Sheikh Zayid bought into and then at the end when they were having difficulty, he bought a controlling share. That was before the British revealed that there was a lot of corruption in the bank and the whole bank collapsed. So, Sheikh Zayid was left holding the bag and there were a lot of creditors who wanted to get paid back. He put the Pakistanis who had started this whole scheme, this fraud, in jail in Abu Dhabi, but there were still creditors out there demanding retribution. The New York Attorney's Office was interested in investigation whether there was any criminal activity involving American banks, so they were investigating it. The U.S. Department of Justice was involved. I asked about this before I went out because it was a big story just as I was going out. The State Department said, "Try to stay out of it. Let Justice and the New York attorney deal with it. If it comes across your screen, report, but don't get involved. It's a legal matter and you don't want to muck up the case. Besides, it's New York. They're fairly aggressive and they're not Washington." So, I did try to stay out. I kept informed and I informed Washington as much as I knew. At one point, even Jimmy Carter came out. He had been involved with BCCI earlier. He asked me what was going on. I told him what I knew. We saw the attorneys for both sides regularly. They would come out and talk to us, but we sort of kept at arm's length at the embassy. Finally, it was resolved by some of the Pakistanis who were in jail in Abu Dhabi being transferred to American custody and tried in the United States. That happened when I was there. It went smoothly. But it was an embarrassment for Sheikh Zayid, who wasn't knowingly culpable. He didn't know that it was fraudulent. But, of course, the New York attorney was not going to accept my word on that. He was suspicious of everybody, including Sheikh Zayid, and wanted to cross examine him and everything else. During most of this period, Sheikh Zayid didn't come to the United States when he would have come here for a visit and for medical treatment. His advisors thought he might get embarrassed by somebody slapping a subpoena on him in the hospital or something. But then it was cleared up and he did come. The whole matter was settled between the lawyers on the UAE side and the lawyers in New York and in the Department of Justice.

Q: What about your original specialty, which is USIA? Were you able to have much of a program going there? It's always difficult in an Arab country.

RUGH: The program there focused on the information side rather than the cultural side. It was difficult, if not impossible, to do what USIA calls "cultural presentations," dance groups, singing groups, that kind of thing. It just didn't have an audience in the UAE. But there was a lot of interest in American education. The educational counselor at USIS/Abu Dhabi did a lot of educational counseling. There was a lot of interest in American policy, so we dealt with the press, all of the media. The journalists there were in close touch with the USIS office. The newspapers had proliferated in the UAE. Nearly every emirate has its own paper in English and Arabic. There are television stations all over the country. So, there is a lot of media activity. That was the main focus, in addition to the education work. Those were the two main avenues.

Q: Where did the young sons and daughters of the up and coming classes go to school?

RUGH: On the university level, the daughters tended to go to the UAE University in country. Most of them went there. The sons tended to go abroad to the United States primarily, but also to the UK and some to Germany and France. The daughters stayed in the country for social reasons. Their families didn't like them to go abroad. They were afraid of what terrible things might happen to them if they came to America or even went to London. If they sent them abroad, they usually sent them to Cairo, where they thought it was a bit safer. It's culturally similar. But the sons went abroad. The university now has over 12,000 students. About 10,000 of those are women.

Q: With the young men going to university in the United States, were they more likely to go for technical education?

RUGH: Both. A lot of them went for undergraduate education. But they liked to study engineering. A lot of them did undergraduate education there. Quite a few of them had a very good education, very good English, very good training. There are some Ph.D.s. They have over 100 university faculty with Ph.D.s and many of those degrees are American. So, they've gotten the full range.

Q: Is there anything else we should cover?

RUGH: I guess that pretty much covers it. It was a quiet period. My predecessor, Ned Walker, had dealt with the Gulf War. He went off to the UN and then to Egypt as ambassador and now he's going to Israel as ambassador. So, Ned had the Gulf War to deal with. His predecessor had the Iran-Iraq War to deal with. I had peace! So, it was a pleasant occasion.

The UAE and Abu Dhabi in particular is a surprisingly civilized and pleasant place to live. It's very quiet and peaceful. Sheikh Zayid has done a lot in planting millions of trees and building gardens. He is concerned about the environment. It is, I think, the most pleasant place on the peninsula to live. The quality of life is very good. People who go there don't want to leave. In fact, I even know a Foreign Service officer who was assigned to Dubai and when he was told to go to his next assignment, he quit the service and stayed in Dubai. It is a nice living.

Q: When you left there in 1995, whither?

RUGH: In 1995, I returned to the United States and retired from the Foreign Service.

Q: Were there any outstanding problems when you left Abu Dhabi?

RUGH: There weren't any huge problems. The one that I mentioned earlier, the implementation of a defense cooperation agreement, was a problem that nagged the U.S. government and the embassy after I left for quite a while. But relations were good. I felt comfortable leaving, that the relationship was in very good shape.

Q: What about the equivalent of Wahhabis or fundamentalists? Was that a problem there?

RUGH: It really wasn't. We kept looking for it and didn't find it. UAE nationals are religious. They are observant. They observe the fast. They pray. They go to the mosque. They are believers. But they're not fanatic. Political Islam is not attractive to them. I think it's partly prosperity, partly a lifestyle, and partly Sheikh Zayid's example of tolerance and his approach to life, which is very philosophic.

Q: I want to thank you very much.

End of interview