

DAVID MICHAEL ADAMSON

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Your grandfather was Brazilian?

ADAMSON: My grandfather was a Brazilian diplomat. His male forebears had come from Portugal really at the time of the discovery of Brazil in the 16th century although they did not stay permanently until the Napoleonic invasion of Iberia in the early 1800s.

Q: Did Brazil weigh heavily on your upbringing?

ADAMSON: I wouldn't say it weighed heavily, but I was certainly conscious of that link.

Q: Where did your mother go to school?

ADAMSON: She went to school in Brazil. She also went to school abroad, including the United States and Britain, because her father was serving there. She had some university education, in Brazil.

Q: Where did your father go to school?

ADAMSON: He went to school at New York University. He received a MA and then a Ph.D. from The Fletcher School at Tufts University.

Q: Was he looking at the Foreign Service?

ADAMSON: I don't know whether he ever looked at the Foreign Service. He didn't serve in the State Department Foreign Service. He did serve some years in USAID, which of course, is a close cousin.

Q: Oh, yes.

ADAMSON: He also served in the World Bank. He served in educational institutions, Central Connecticut College first, and then much later, Bridgewater State College.

Q: Were you brought up pretty much in Bridgewater?

ADAMSON: I was brought up, until I was six, in Connecticut, until I was eleven, in Northern Virginia. My father was working here at the Department of Education, as it was then. Then, he served with AID in Central America. So, I was in Guatemala and Costa Rica, between 1961 and 1964. Then, we spent a year in California, and then back to Virginia. Then, I went to Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania. I got my doctorate at the Fletcher School at Tufts.

Q: Let's go back a time. When you were in elementary school, you were mainly in Northern Virginia then?

ADAMSON: Correct.

Q: How did you find the school system at that time?

ADAMSON: I found it good. As a child, I wasn't the best judge of that. I certainly found it quite adequate. Q: What were your interests early on?

ADAMSON: In elementary school, I wasn't particularly academically oriented, although I was interested in the world, I suppose, because of my background. But, I was more interested in sports and fun, than academics. Of course, that changed later.

Q: Was school segregated when you were there?

ADAMSON: Well, this was northern Virginia, so I don't think they were officially segregated, but de facto there were no blacks living in my neighborhood. These were neighborhood schools. They were de facto segregated, but I don't think they were segregated de jure.

Q: Because I'm not sure what had happened at that time. Virginia went through a period of absolute rejection of the idea of a segregated school system. But, you didn't feel any impact?

ADAMSON: There was no impact that I was aware of. It was non-issue, as far as I was concerned.

Q: It may have been taken care of before you got there. Now, your father was a Naval attaché?

ADAMSON: Yes, in the 1940s, when he met my mother. Later, he was with USAID, Central America.

Q: Where were you then?

ADAMSON: Guatemala for a year and a half, and Costa Rica for a year and a half. Q: Did you go to school there?

ADAMSON: Yes.

Q: How did you find that? What type of school?

ADAMSON: I went to the American School in Guatemala, and then I went to a bilingual school in Costa Rica, both private schools. Those were excellent experiences for me, because I became aware more of the outside world. I became aware of foreign languages and cultures. So, those were very eye-opening and interesting years for me.

Q: Had you picked up any Portuguese from your mother?

ADAMSON: I picked up no Portuguese from my mother, unfortunately.

Q: My mother spoke German before she spoke English, but I was at the FSI, sweating away, because I had to learn the language from the beginning. It's unfortunate.

ADAMSON: Yes.

Q: I assume that by the time you got through these experiences, you were pretty good in Spanish?

ADAMSON: Yes. I became quite good in Spanish, testing four plus, four plus on the State Department scale.

Q: Where did you go to high school?

ADAMSON: I went one year in California, at a public high school, and then three years here in northern Virginia, Annandale High School.

Q: How did you find it?

ADAMSON: In retrospect, I liked the California high school more. I think both had plenty to offer, but I found the Virginia high school more cliquish and harder to integrate myself into.

Q: There's the problem with so many kids from the Foreign Service, and when they come back to Washington, it's hard to get into. They don't welcome with open arms.

ADAMSON: It's a difficult stage in life, but if you don't have a network when you enter high school, particularly if you enter as a sophomore, as I did in northern Virginia, it can be difficult to integrate yourself.

Q: What courses particularly interested you?

ADAMSON: Well, I took the broad range of courses you needed to get into college, but I would say that I was most interested in social studies, first, languages, second, and then science and math, third, although I did most of the math and science that was required to get into college, with the exception of physics.

Q: How about reading? Did you read much?

ADAMSON: I read an awful lot. I love to read.

Q: Can you think of any books that particularly stick in your mind?

ADAMSON: Well, we had to read a fair amount of literature, Hemingway, Poe, Steinbeck and other American writers, Shakespeare. I think in Spanish and French, I had some contact with poets and writers like Cervantes, in Spanish and Baudelaire, in French, who impressed me greatly. I think I was reading more literature in those years than I was history or social science.

Q: How about extracurricular activities, such as sports or drama, or band?

ADAMSON: I was involved in drama. I was involved in the literary magazine, and various honor societies, and so on. But, I think the first two were the primary ones. I tried out for cross country running, but had no idea how to get myself in shape for that, so I didn't make it.

Q: While you were in high school, were you pointed toward anything?

ADAMSON: I was certainly encouraged by my family to think in terms of an international career, as well as languages. I also was encouraged to think in terms of a small college, in terms of higher education, perhaps because my father had attended such a large institution (NYU).

Q: At home, were foreign events a subject of conversation at the dinner table?

ADAMSON: Yes, definitely. Foreign affairs were always a topic of interest, including when my grandfather, a retired ambassador, came to visit.

Q: Was the family Republican, Democrat, or mixed?

ADAMSON: It was mixed. One parent leaned more toward the Republicans, one more toward the Democrats.

Q: Do you have brothers/sisters?

ADAMSON: I have one brother, and one sister.

Q: So, I guess, from the time you were graduating from Annandal High School, you were pointed toward Swarthmore?

ADAMSON: That is correct.

Q: Well, how did you hear about it?

ADAMSON: Well, that's where my brother went to college. I think both he and I had the elite, big colleges, and the elite, small colleges on our list. In the end, I had to make a decision between Stanford and Swarthmore. I chose Swarthmore.

Q: You were at Swarthmore from when to when?

ADAMSON: From 1968 to 1972.

Q: What was Swarthmore like in those days?

ADAMSON: Swarthmore was very much a small college, kind of a small town environment, although Philadelphia was not far away. It had about 1,200 students. Politically, it was very far to the left. It was very liberal Democrat. In terms of the issues of those days, it was very anti-war, counter-culture. There was a culture that was very intellectual, and a culture that was very oriented toward service, toward idealism, away generally from business. It was something of an anti-government, certainly anti-Nixon/Johnson presidencies environment.

Q: In the first place, I guess the protest of the Vietnam War must have been boiling over while you were there?

ADAMSON: Absolutely. It was boiling over, particularly in 1969, 1970. Of course, there were the big demonstrations of the spring in 1970, in the U.S., because of the incursion into Cambodia. We had an academic strike. In fact, to complete my sophomore year, I had to do a lot of work that summer, because basically Swarthmore was shut down, in May of 1970.

Q: I'm wondering how a student felt about this? It's kind of fun to shut down the school, but at the same time, you're there for a limited period of time, to get a degree.

ADAMSON: In retrospect, it doesn't seem like such a great idea. At the time, I think we were all swept by events. There was a little bit of mob psychology. It became very difficult to oppose striking. Not that I would have opposed it in any case, but striking became identified as the only way that we could protest what was going on, or the highest visibility way we could protest. In retrospect, again, it doesn't seem to make as much sense as it did at the time.

Q: How did you feel about Vietnam, at the time?

ADAMSON: I think 95% of the students at Swarthmore at the time, just to take a stab at a number, probably opposed the war. There was probably a small nucleus that was pro-government policy. But, within the 95% who opposed the war, there were very different currents of thought. I was opposed to the war well before I went to Swarthmore. I was opposed to it in high school. I opposed it for reasons of realpolitik. I opposed it for the same kinds of reasons Hans Morgenthau opposed it, because I didn't see it as being in our core national interest. Other people opposed the war from what might be called a left wing perspective, a socialist perspective, or even an anti-U.S. perspective, where they believed that American values were negative, undesirable. That the United States played an unfavorable, unconstructive role in the world was not my attitude, but my attitude was rather that the war simply did not make sense, in terms of U.S. interests - that it was undermining U.S. interests, rather than supporting the U.S. national interest, to be engaged in this war.

Q: If you have an anti-business, anti-government cast to you school, where did you envisage your future?

ADAMSON: I belonged to a generation that had the luxury of taking the material for granted, and in fact did not think so much in terms of concrete, career aspirations, when they were studying in college. College was sort of an island where people followed their interests, was my perception at Swarthmore. That was certainly my case. They weren't thinking too concretely, until they became juniors or seniors, about where that might take them, in terms of vocation. But, in terms of vocation, to the degree people thought about it, I think they did think a lot about academia, and they thought about going on to professional schools, preparing themselves for a professional school, and going into things like law, which might take them into directions which they couldn't necessarily foresee while they were in college, or medicine, I might add.

Q: As you were getting ready to graduate in 1972, what were you heading toward?

ADAMSON: I was actually heading toward public service, and toward the foreign service. I suppose that was not in the mainstream of Swarthmore's value system, though arguably consistent with the idea of service. I was always among the more conservative students at Swarthmore, although on the national political spectrum, I would have been identified as a liberal Democrat. But, in terms of Swarthmore's political spectrum, I guess I would have been on the right side of the spectrum, or perhaps center-right. I did believe in my country, and its constructive role in the world, even if I didn't support particular policies. By 1972, the U.S. was headed out of Vietnam, and foreign policy was being reoriented. I was oriented, basically, toward the Foreign Service, although I was thinking of law school too. I did apply to law schools and did get into law schools, such as the University of California at Berkeley and the University of Virginia (and later into Harvard and Columbia), but I could never summon up enough interest in the law to actually go to law school. This was, perhaps in part, because I didn't have a clear picture of what lawyers did. Instead, I went to graduate school in international affairs. I also did apply and take the Foreign Service exam, at that time, in 1972. I passed the written, but I didn't pass the oral exam; I think I was viewed as lacking maturity.

Q: While you were at school, particularly during the Vietnam thing, being somewhat to the right, within the Swarthmore spectrum, did you find that there was dictation of how you should think? I mean, was Swarthmore open to ideas, or was it that your ideas better be what was the equivalent of right, at the time?

ADAMSON: What later came to be called "political correctness" was certainly in vogue at Swarthmore. On the other hand, one of the most fundamental values of Swarthmore is free inquiry, free thought and debate, and so on. I would say that everyone's thinking was tolerated, and those who were at the right of the spectrum were certainly tolerated, but it was probably easier to get along if you were politically correct, than if you were not politically correct. Certainly I was not politically correct on some issues, and didn't suffer for it. On Vietnam, I was essentially politically correct, even if my rationale wasn't the same as others'.

Q: You say you took the Foreign Service oral exam, but didn't pass the first one. How did it go, looking back on it?

ADAMSON: I took the written exam and scored quite well. In fact, I scored higher than I did two years later, when I eventually did get into the Foreign Service. On the oral exam, I guess I was burdened by the fact that I really had no real world experience. I was 21 or 22 years old. I guess I was perceived as not having the maturity that was desired at that juncture. Of course, it was a disappointment for me, because I had basically gone from academic success to academic success. In retrospect, it is easier to understand how at that age I might have been perceived as not quite ready.

Q: Yes. I served on the panel of the Board of Examiners. It was difficult, because for the most part, these were people like yourself, who always had been given a "gold star." Then, all of a sudden, we were having to say, "No." Maturity was often the major consideration. Well then, you went to The Fletcher School at Tufts. Is that right?

ADAMSON: That is correct.

Q: How did you find Fletcher?

ADAMSON: Fletcher was very similar, and yet, very different from Swarthmore. It was very similar, in that it was a small institution. It's a small graduate school. In my day, it just had a couple hundred students. I think it maybe has doubled in size since then, or almost doubled in size. It's small, it's very academically rigorous, with small classes like Swarthmore, and with a stellar faculty, like Swarthmore. Yet it was pretty different, in terms of the environment. People at Swarthmore were oriented toward academics, just for the love of ideas, and for the love of intellectual development. My perception - and I was coming in as a 22 year old, at Fletcher, while many of my fellow students were three, four, five, or even ten years older - was it had a much more vocational and professional orientation. Students were looking at their graduate education as a meal ticket, and so were looking at it in a more pragmatic and instrumental way, than I was used to looking at education. I was somewhat put off by that. Also, it was a much more conservative environment, politically.

I remember going to the first welcome lecture given by the then-Dean of the school, the late ambassador Ed Gullion, who gave a speech that was really, in the jargon of the day, to the right of Atilla the Hun, in terms of its politics. It was a very different environment from Swarthmore, where you would never have heard that language from, say, a president, or a dean. So, I was somewhat alienated by those features of Fletcher. However, I did find that the professors, even if they were further to the right on the political spectrum than many at Swarthmore (though there were some at Swarthmore who were quite conservative) were generally excellent, though a few were well past their prime. The education were first rate.

Q: How long were you there?

ADAMSON: I was in residence for two years. Then, I worked on my dissertation afterward, but not in residence.

Q: Did you concentrate on anything while you were there?

ADAMSON: I concentrated on American foreign policy and diplomatic history, and on international economic and political development - in other words, the third world. You were required to identify several fields for your Ph.D. oral exams. Those were my fields.

Q: When you did your dissertation, what was the subject?

ADAMSON: I did it on a political analysis of the North/South economic negotiations of the mid-1970s. To fast forward a bit, I had worked on this while I was in the Foreign Service, between 1975 and 1977.

Q: You were doing this during the Nixon/Ford administration. How did you find things, when you started looking beyond Vietnam and the national politics of Nixon/Ford? Did you find it progressive, bad?

ADAMSON: Naturally, given the background I described, I was not a fan of Richard Nixon. Again, to fast forward a bit, he resigned eight days after I joined the Foreign Service, so I never served, really, under him. Ford was a more innocuous man, who was exiting Vietnam, within my first year in the Foreign Service. Again, to fast forward, I served my first year in the Foreign Service in Vietnam. I think that leaving aside Vietnam, I'm not aware that I had any strong difficulties with the foreign policy orientation of the Ford administration.

Q: At Fletcher, they had people who were from other countries, some diplomats, some aspiring, and all that?

ADAMSON: Yes. And we had had some at Swarthmore, too, such as Yukio Okamoto, current foreign policy adviser to the Japanese cabinet, and Hiroyasu Ando, Japanese DCM in Washington.

Q: How did you find that mix? Did it sort of open your eyes a bit?

ADAMSON: I think that was a good mix, but it wasn't something that was novel to me, given that at Swarthmore, we also had quite a number of foreign students. Also, given that during my college years, I spent two summers in Brazil, one summer in Peru, and one summer in the Middle East. I already had quite an international orientation by the time I got to Fletcher.

Q: In the Middle East, where did you go?

ADAMSON: Primarily to Iran, which of course at that time was under the Shah, and also to Israel and Turkey.

Q: What were you doing there?

ADAMSON: I was really just doing tourism and visiting friends. One of my college roommates was then Iranian. He is now a U.S. citizen, but was then Iranian. So, I visited his family in Tehran.

Q: Did you come back with any impressions about the area?

ADAMSON: I came back with a certain feel for Israel, for the ancient nature of the culture there, and a little more direct understanding of what the conflict there was all about. I also had some perceptions of Iran, of the culture, of the nature of the Shah's regime - the superficiality of the "democracy," although I certainly had no inkling what would happen there politically, in terms of the Khomeini revolution.

Q: How about your Iranian roommate? So many of the Iranian students in the United States were not so evil, the families may have been, but they were not supporters of the Shah? Was the Shah considered a "bad guy?"

ADAMSON: I don't recall if the Shah was particularly on our radar screen, certainly not at Swarthmore. He came onto the radar screen, maybe in 1973, 1974, with the oil embargo, and so on. It was a very brief embargo. But, no, I don't think there was any anti-Shah movement or sentiment that I was aware of. Most of the Iranians that I knew in college, including my roommate, were members of minority groups, Jews or Zoroastrians, or what have you, who were essentially protected by the Shah. So, they didn't have an anti-Shah orientation.

Q: Do you remember any of the questions on the oral exam when you took it a second time?

ADAMSON: No, I really don't remember the questions. My distant perception, which may or may not be accurate, is that I felt more comfortable, at that stage, handling the questions, whatever they were, because of the added experience, knowledge, maturity I had in going to graduate school for a couple years.

Q: Well, you came into the Foreign Service when?

ADAMSON: I came in August 1, 1974. The process was relatively fast for me, because I got high on the register. I guess I had taken the exam sometime in the spring. I was called in July to join a class that started the first of August.

Q: At that time, did one choose one's cone or specialty?

ADAMSON: At that time, one indicated when one took the exam what cone one preferred. I preferred the political cone, which I think is why I had some difficulty two years earlier. Perhaps if I had chosen, say, the consular cone, I would have done better.

Q: What was your A100 course, the junior officer course like? mean, the group?

ADAMSON: I liked the group. It was a diverse group. It had a few women and a few blacks. It was not as diverse as classes would become later, but it was also diverse, just in terms of parts of the country where people came from, where people studied, their interests and skills, and so on. It was a very good group. People perhaps, not unlike the people I went to graduate school with.

Q: When you were there, did you have any choice in where you wanted to go?

ADAMSON: I was the one member of my A100 class that went to Vietnam. The way that worked was I still wasn't real-world oriented... The classes previous to mine... I entered in 1974, but I think until 1972 or 1973, virtually the entirety of many Foreign Service classes went to or were at least candidates for going to Vietnam. That had turned around completely, by the time I came in. But they were still looking for some people to go to Vietnam. The question was asked who would consider going to Vietnam. I took "consider" as the operative word in that sentence. Actually "Vietnam" was the operative word. I raised my hand, and looked around, because I was the only member of my class, out of 25, or 30, who had raised their hand. So, basically, I wrote my ticket at that point.

Q: So, I suppose you got out toward the end of 1974?

ADAMSON: I got out there about October 1, 1974. I had a brief stay in Saigon to study the language. I had insisted on this, but the four weeks I was given was insufficient and anyway I did not take to the tonal nature of the language. Then I went to my duty assignment, which was Nha Trang, where I actually filled two positions, one as a consular officer and one as a political officer. It really turned out to be one of the best jobs I ever had in the Foreign Service, and one of the best jobs I could have aspired to as a junior officer. I was then, what was an FSO-7, I guess now that would be a five. Anyway, I went as a seven, and went into an FSO-4, political slot, as well as an FSO-5 or -6 consular slot. I had a Vietnamese translator and military analyst, working for me in the political job. I also had two Vietnamese consular assistants. So, there I was at 24 supervising three people and holding two jobs, and being involved in politico-military reporting from Vietnam, which was very challenging.

Q: So, let's go back. When you arrived out there, what was the situation in South Vietnam?

ADAMSON: The situation was that we were hanging on for dear life. Of course, I was pretty well schooled in Vietnam, because Vietnam was the foreign policy issue as I reached maturity in high school and college. I had read quite a few books about Vietnam, and was generally familiar with the history of our presence there. In fact, I was quite familiar, because I had taken courses in graduate school, too. I was very well versed. When I had my pre-departure interviews in Washington, including at INR (the Intelligence Bureau), I found quite a diversity of views. There were the positive thinkers who were on the desk, who were towing the line that somehow we would make it through Vietnam all right, and somehow the two regimes, in Saigon and in Phnom Penh, we supported would hang on - though there was certainly a perception that the regimes were under a great deal of pressure.

The other school of thought was what I heard in INR. A fellow by the last name of "Buck" (Ralph Buck?) briefed me there. He turned out to be prescient. He said that this regime could not hold on for very much longer. That it was an issue of months, not years, and that eventually a push would come from the North Vietnamese. This fellow was able to cite all kinds of weaknesses of the regime, and American assistance was already being attenuated. Watergate was taking place. By August 8, 1974, Nixon was gone. His level of support for the Thieu government could not be expected from Ford. Besides, the presidency had been weakened, and the Congress had passed legislation which basically tied the president's hands, in terms of air support. So, for these kinds of reasons, plus the somewhat putrid nature of the regime in South Vietnam - they did not have the kind of fundamental sources of strength that you would hope for - Buck and others were anticipating the regime would crumble. When I got out there, I got caught up in the "can do," positive thinking environment that Graham Martin was sustaining under the guidance of Secretary of State Kissinger.

Q: You got there when?

ADAMSON: I arrived, roughly October 1, 1974.

Q: You were in Saigon first?

ADAMSON: I was in Saigon for a few weeks for some abbreviated and accelerated language training, which, as I noted earlier, really didn't turn out to be very valuable.

Q: In the political section, were these true believers?

ADAMSON: Some of them were true believers. I recall that Graham Martin was a distant figure, so I didn't have a meeting with him, but I did meet with the DCM, Wolf Lehman, and with the political minister counselor, Josiah Bennett, who just died in the last couple years. He was an old Asia hand - China hand, I think. I think he was a smart guy, but had blinders on like Lehman, like Martin. He only saw what was most positive in the environment, and certainly he was very optimistic about the prospects of the South Vietnamese regime.

Q: When you went out to Nha Trang, what was the situation? Nha Trang was in II Corps, I guess, wasn't it? We no longer called it "corps" over there?

ADAMSON: Well, the South Vietnamese called it "II Corps," so we called it that, or military region II, I think. I might add, parenthetically, that although at the higher levels of the embassy, they were very positive about prospects of the regime, at lower levels, there was certainly greater doubt. I recall being briefed by the CIA's Frank Snepp, who later gained notoriety through his book, *Decent Interval*, and he was predicting that hard times were on their way. He was certainly seeing a lot of the signs that Ralph Buck was seeing. Perhaps Buck was reading Snepp's reports from Saigon. In fact, he must have been. Snepp was certainly dubious about the viability of the regime. When I got to Nha Trang, the consul general, Monty Spear, who I see occasionally at the officer's club at Ft. McNair, had the same Graham Martin/Wolf Lehman mindset of positive thinking. But, if you went under him, closer to the working level, people could see some of the tea leaves.

Q:Q: What area did Nha Trang cover?

ADAMSON: It covered the two corps area. At that point in Vietnam, the U.S. had four consulates, which corresponded to each of the military zones. We had a consulate in Da Nang that covered military region one. In Nha Trang, we covered military region two. Military region IV was covered from Can Tho in the Mekong delta, and III was covered from Bien Hoa.

Q: These consulate generals were established to observe how the truce was going.

ADAMSON: Yes.

Q: Was that still the main job?

ADAMSON: At that point, no one, I don't think, was really thinking in terms of the truce existing. We had had a fairly substantial Foreign Service presence in the first year, I think, after the January 1973 peace accord, to monitor the accord. By the fall of 1974, that heavy Foreign Service presence had disappeared. We really just had a light Foreign Service presence. There were only three FSOs in MR-II. We were really covering the war, not monitoring a peace which didn't exist. Nobody thought of it, as I can recall, as covering a truce. I recall that every week I had to do a situation report that went to the Embassy. I wrote mine on the basis of reports that came from our province reps. We had a U. S. rep in every province. These people may have been USAID employees, they were not Foreign Service officers. They were sort of the residue of the very heavy presence that we had had in the 1960s and the early 1970s. My report went to the Embassy, which in turn wrote a weekly cable to Washington based on the inputs from the four consulates. One serious flaw in this process was that the weeklies did not look at underlying conditions and trends, only at what had transpired that week, as filtered from South Vietnamese military sources through the province reps and then the consulates and embassy.

Q: Also included in your consulate's area of responsibility, was the central highlands, correct?

ADAMSON: Correct.

Q: Where the whole thing sort of came apart.

ADAMSON: Correct.

Q: Did you travel around?

ADAMSON: Yes. In the end, I was only at that assignment from the 1st of November 1974, until the 1st of April 1975, when Nha Trang fell. In that brief period of time, four or five months, it had been my intention, and had been my marching order, to visit all the provinces. In the first four or five months, I was not able to visit all, but I did visit many. I visited Ban Me Thuot, Kontum, Pleiku, Qui Nhon and, and perhaps a few other province capitals. I visited, at least, the principal provincial capitals. Principal in terms of where Vietnamese military forces were deployed, and in terms of where the fighting was taking place.

Q: Did you get any feel for what was happening?

ADAMSON: Basically, the image that I had was that the South Vietnamese were fully engaged everywhere. They were fully deployed, and had no reserves to speak of, and were fully deployed against North Vietnamese forces that matched them in terms of manpower and strength. At that point, the South Vietnamese seemed to be holding their own, but they didn't have any reserve, they didn't have any residual capacity. So that if they were pushed in one area and succumbed, it's easy to see in retrospect how they could collapse. At the time, we were thinking in terms of a stalemate, rather than a potential collapse. I was caught up in this mentality. As I say, in retrospect, it's easy to see how a collapse could be forthcoming, once they were overcome in one area.

Q: With the Vietnamese that you were coming into contact with, how were they looking at the Americans? Did they feel we were selling them out?

ADAMSON: The South Vietnamese were nervous. You didn't get a sense of much confidence on their part, or for the most part even of much courage on their part. This varied, of course. Sometimes I would visit lower level officers, in the captain to major range, who were out on the front lines, and who clearly were men of great valor, and doing a very hard job, and doing it well. At the higher levels, you didn't get the sense that these were general or colonel officers who had a great deal of confidence, who had a great deal of conviction, who had a great deal of commitment. That was not encouraging.

Q: There was you and the consul general?

ADAMSON: There were just three of us. There was the consul general, Moncrieff J. Spear. There was the deputy principal officer, Philip Remington Cook, and there was me, filling two positions. Both jobs I was filling really got heavy when the North Vietnamese offensive began in March. So an FSO from Saigon, by the name of Dick Slott, came up and took over the consular job, and I continued with the pol-mil position. There was someone scheduled to come in and take the consular position permanently, but he never arrived, because the country fell before he could arrive. That was Edmund McWilliams, I think.

Q: Well, how did things develop, from your perspective?

ADAMSON: From my perspective, they developed quickly. One South Vietnamese province, Phuoc Binh, fell in January 1975. That was a bellwether. The North Vietnamese took a provincial capital to see what the reaction would be. There was no particular reaction from Saigon or Washington. The South Vietnamese were not able to take it back. The United States did not react strongly. That sort of set up in March 1975, what became the final offense by the North Vietnamese, which we had some inkling of, though we didn't have detailed information that it was coming.

Q: Well, the situation in the highlands, turned out to be one othe... Didn't the whole thing sort of begin to collapse?

ADAMSON: Yes, that is correct. That was where the North Vietnamese offensive started. It started in Ban Me Thuot around March 10, and BMT quickly fell to the North Vietnamese. I remember our province representative, Paul Struharik, was trapped there. The heaviest South Vietnamese troop concentrations, if memory serves, were around Kontum and Pleiku. So, even with Ban Me Thuot falling, there was theoretically some prospect that the South Vietnamese could counterattack. As it happened, in my initial report - of course, I was the politico-military reporting officer - I reported that Ban Me Thuot was falling and I wanted to add the analysis that there was no immediate prospect that the South Vietnamese would take it back. This turned out to be accurate. I guess I had a sense then of the state of morale among the South Vietnamese, that although they did have substantial forces in Kontum and Pleiku, they had no will to fight back. However, my consul general, Monty Spear, crossed out the language that they had no prospect of taking back the city. Instead he wrote something like "the South Vietnamese are clearing," the implication being that they would take it back. As it happened, the commanding general of MR II, Major General Phu, under direct orders from President Thieu, made what was a calamitous error in withdrawing the South Vietnamese divisions, and there were a good number of them, from the central highlands, and bringing them down to the lowlands. This was a grievous mistake, because they were not able to execute a withdrawal in good order and because it set a rout in motion. The withdrawal became a mad, mob race to the sea, in the course of which, even without much harassment from the North Vietnamese, the South Vietnamese lost most of their constituted military capability not to mention civilian losses. By the time those divisions got to the lowlands, they were no longer militarily capable. The ability of the South Vietnamese to resist was virtually nil. Thus, we were swept up in a whirlwind, which we really didn't adequately anticipate, but in a matter of days, the region was gone. We evacuated on April 1, 1975. We evacuated after we learned that the South Vietnamese military staff had left. We learned this from the South Vietnamese province chief, who too was in the process of leaving, once he saw that his umbrella, in terms of military forces, had already left.

Q: What were you getting from Saigon? Were they telling you to hang on? Was there any direction there?

ADAMSON: Well, there was some direction, but unfortunately, Saigon was still shaped by the Graham Martin mentality of whatever happens, we're going to hang on to this country. So, we did not adequately prepare to evacuate. Of course, I was kind of raw at that time, inexperienced. I should have known better. I didn't prepare particularly well, either for my personal evacuation, or for getting the people out that we should have tried to get out. Once the South Vietnamese had abandoned ship, as it were, then there was no choice other than to evacuate. We did, quite precipitously, not in good order, and we didn't get all the South Vietnamese we should have tried to get out, out.

Q: How did you get out?

ADAMSON: What we did was, on the 1st of April, we went to work that day with our bags packed, after sleeping in our compounds that night. I remember I had my two male Vietnamese assistants with me that last night (I believe the female had already left, to marry an American I believe). I had a handgun, but there was no trouble that night, before the 1st of April. On April 1 as things deteriorated, we prepared an area for helicopters to land at the Consulate. Helicopters came in. The half a dozen or so marine guards that we had provided protection. At that point, we needed it, because the South Vietnamese were losing their discipline, and there were marauding gangs of South Vietnamese soldiers. In fact, I left my belongings, my suitcase in my car, which was not more than a few meters from the consulate entrance. I foolishly, however, did not take that into my office that day probably because I didn't fully grasp we would have to leave that day. By the time we evacuated that day, which was some hours after the opening of business, I could no longer leave through the front door. I could no longer even go out in the parking lot. My car was looted and my belongings were taken away. So, I left for Saigon with the clothes that were on my back.

Q: Was there any move toward the sea? I kind of remember Nha Trang being on the sea.

ADAMSON: Nha Trang is on the sea. For the Americans, there were no ships that we evacuated to. We all just evacuated by fixed-wing aircraft, down to Saigon. The airbase in Nha Trang still had security, although I don't think that that security existed much beyond the 1st of April. We choppered to the air base, then went by fixed wing aircraft to Saigon where we were greeted cheerily by Americans from the Embassy who had no comprehension of what we had just been through.

Q: Was there any American liaison or military attaches, or anything like that, in your area?

ADAMSON: Oh, yes. We had a defense attaché's office representative at our Consulate. Steven Mayfield was his name; I believe he was retired military. There were a lot of CIA officers. I don't recall what planes evacuated us, but I don't think they were U.S. military aircraft. I'm not aware that they were American military aircraft, perhaps they were "Air America."

Q: When you got to Saigon, what was the situation?

ADAMSON: Well, it was sort of surrealistic, because we were met at the airport by very kind Embassy people. I think they were probably dependents, volunteers, who very kindly took us into their arms, and helped us with whatever we needed help with. We were housed at a U.S.-run hotel, I think. We were treated very well. We were taken to the PX to get clothes, and so on. It was surreal in the sense that they didn't seem to have any sense of the gravity of the situation. I recall that when we got to the embassy, we were all received by Graham Martin, very cordially. He then was talking about Cochinchina as a viable entity, and about how attractive it should be to U.S. investors.

So, it was quite apparent that he was living in a never-never world - that he didn't realize the gravity of the situation. I was invited to stay and work at the Embassy. There certainly was a lot that needed doing, including planning for evacuation, though Graham Martin wasn't talking about evacuating at that point. I could see the handwriting on the wall. I could see that given this guy's mind-set, we were not going to do things the right way. I also was traumatized by the evacuation from Nha Trang. So, I wanted no part of this. I only stayed in Saigon for a week. I bailed out as soon as I could, and left on the 8th of April, on a flight to Japan.

Q: How did you bail out? What did you do?

ADAMSON: I was in cable communication with the Department. I think my counselor was still Gib Lanpher, who had actually assigned me to Vietnam in the first place. He very kindly sent me a telegram indicating various posts where I could potentially serve. Those included Angola and France. I was initially being pushed to Angola, because I had actually picked up Portuguese while I was in college, studying a couple summers in Brazil. My first inclination was to be led in that direction. But, when I got to Washington, I thought better of that, and opted for a calmer post, France; I cashed in my chips, as it were.

Q: When did Saigon actually fall?

ADAMSON: It fell on the 30th of April.

Q: Among the people who were not part of Ambassador Martin's immediate circle, did they understand what was happening?

ADAMSON: I don't recall, at that stage, having a whole lot of conversations with people. I think at some levels there was a very acute understanding. I think people like Frank Snepp, people like Ken Moorefield, who I just see was nominated to an ambassadorship in Africa, now in 2002. He was a young officer at that time. At that level, they understood very well the gravity of the situation.

Q: One hears stories of people plucking at the big tree that grew near the embassy. It should have been cut down in order to allow helicopters to land there.

ADAMSON: According to what I have heard and read, that sort of thing was only done at the very last possible moment, simply because Graham Martin didn't want to give any sign that he thought the Republic of (South) Vietnam was not viable, that he thought this country was going to collapse. Given that mindset, we didn't prepare adequately, obviously, for the evacuation.

Q: When you came back to Washington, did you get any debriefing, oanything like that?

ADAMSON: I spent three weeks in Japan. I think I only got to Washington on the day Saigon was falling. I think I got there on the 29th or 30th. I got to Washington in time to see that Saigon was collapsing. So, it was over by the time I got to Washington. I don't recall that I was debriefed by anyone. I could be mistaken. I think I simply started orienting myself to my new assignment. First, I had to determine my new assignment. Although, I was being wooed for Angola, I decided I was not ready for that situation. It turned out, it would have eventually involved another evacuation. I opted for Strasbourg, France, which was a good choice.

Q: So, you went to Strasbourg, France? You were there from when twhen?

ADAMSON: I arrived, I think, around the 1st of August 1975. I stayed only until the following May or so, because I was pulled into Paris, which was good, professionally, but not so good, personally, because Strasbourg was a wonderful place to serve on a personal basis.

Q: Where did Strasbourg fit in those days? What was its importance?

ADAMSON: At that point, the Department was in a process of reducing personnel and presence, a process that went on during most of my career, and particularly reducing it in the outlying area, outside of Paris. The reason why Strasbourg continued to exist as a post, although albeit a two officer post, and now I think a one officer post, unless things have changed very recently, was because of the international institutions there. Notably, the Council of Europe. Also, there was a Commission of the Rhine, and also the European Parliament would meet in Strasbourg, periodically, although the Consulate didn't cover that. That was the rationale for having Strasbourg.

Q: How was the Consulate General set up?

ADAMSON: It was set up with just two American officers, the Consul General, and then the so-called deputy principal officer, who was really a junior officer, a Vice Consul. The Consul General handled what little political reporting and political contacts we did. He handled that primarily, although the deputy also did some of that. The deputy's primary charge was to handle the economic, commercial and consular work in the district. For each of those functions, I had one or more French national employees, who worked for me.

Q: Who was the Consul General?

ADAMSON: At that time it was Woodward Romine.

Q: What job did you have?

ADAMSON: I was the deputy principal officer and vice consul, who as I say, handled primarily economic-commercial and consular work.

Q: How did you find France at that time - your corner of France? How were Americans perceived?

ADAMSON: I found it to be a wonderful place to serve because Strasbourg and its surrounding province of Alsace were a fairly conservative part of France, very pro-American, because they still had vivid memories of being liberated by American soldiers in 1944-1945. We were very well received there. We had a very good relationship with the local French authorities.

Q: It's an awful event that this long, long, troubled or mixed relationship with France exists. That was more Paris centered, would you say?

ADAMSON: I would say it's Paris and political elite centered. Alsace was basically, as I say, favorably oriented toward the U.S. Of course, by that time, de Gaulle had left power, indeed he was deceased. I guess Pompidou would have just left the presidency of France and Giscard d'Estaing was coming into the presidency. Giscard had a somewhat more pro-American, more modernist, orientation. At the same time, there was no question of France going back into the military side of NATO at that juncture. Still, France was a favorable environment for the U.S. in general terms in those days.

Q: Was the German heritage sort of shunned, or was this a factor?

ADAMSON: The German heritage was certainly very much alive in a number of respects. You could see it in the culture, in the architecture, in the food, in the wines, in the patois, the dialect that people spoke. Many Alsatians at that time spoke what was called Alsatian, which is, as I understand it, a German dialect. I never learned to speak it, but I did speak French. The local newspaper was printed both in French and Alsatian. I think at that time they published more copies in Alsatian than in French, although I could be mistaken about that.

Right across the Rhine was Germany. Germany was very accessible, although the European Community, at that stage, had not gotten to the point where you could cross the bridge into Kehl, Germany, without showing your passport. Generally, it was a very hassle free border crossing. So, I did get into Germany with some frequency. Relations had greatly improved over the course of the post-war period between Germany and France. They were then essentially allies, even if at a personal and social level the Germans still did not have the best reputation in France, at that time.

Q: Did you have any contact with the French university students aall?

ADAMSON: I did not have very much. I had some contact. I was still young, 25 at that point. I had some contact with some higher level, medical and other students, who were basically in my age bracket. But, in my official functions, as far as I can recall, I never went to speak to the university, or taught a course, or anything like that. I interacted with them strictly on a personal level. There, the interaction was good.

Q: Any problems with American tourists, consular problems?

ADAMSON: No, it was a very amenable, attractive, welcoming environment for American tourists. The only security problems we had, as I recall, in 1975, 1976, were when Franco was on his deathbed. Franco was perceived as an American friend and ally. He was seen as very close to the United States, and the United States as very close to him. I recall that he was going through his death throes. Somehow this ignited threats against U.S. consular personnel in Strasbourg. We had death threats against us, which we didn't take too seriously. The French stepped up their patrolling outside the Consulate. Actually, some years later, there was an apparent attempt against the life of the American Consul General. Things didn't get that bad when I was there. Even then, I think the later assassination attempt was an isolated act. It did not reflect popular sentiment.

Q: Did you ever find out where this sentiment was coming from?Strasbourg is very far from Spain.

ADAMSON: Yes, it is far from Spain. I suppose it was "student radicals," whoever that might be. Also, whether it was any kind of offshoot of the ETA Basque movement, or other such terrorist organizations, I really don't know. I can remember seeing graffiti and so on, but I just don't have any sense from where that emanated.

Q: Obviously Strasbourg is in the heart of the embryonic European Union. Was it called the European Community at that time?

ADAMSON: Yes, I believe it was called the European Community. It was not called the European Union, in any case, as the Union did not come into being until the early 1990s.

Q: Was this seen as something that was bound to develop? What were you getting?

ADAMSON: It was seen as a good thing that was developing, and that would no doubt develop further. I'm not sure that in 1975 people anticipated that it would go as far as it has gone by now, 2002. Yet certainly there was a perception that it was developing, that it was a positive thing, and that it would be developing further.

Q: Was there much of a European Community in Strasbourg?

ADAMSON: Since the Council of Europe was there, which is a European intergovernmental institution separate from the European Community, Strasbourg was a very "European" city. There were a lot of international civil servants, European civil servants, and a lot of consciousness of the evolving nature of European integration. But, the primary presence was of the Council of Europe, not of the European Community. There was this sort of peripatetic European Parliament, which would meet in the Council of Europe's headquarters building from time to time. Still, basically the "European" presence that was there was the Council of Europe, which was a very pronounced presence. There was certainly a sense of European integration. There was also a sense by then that the European community was becoming the place where the action was, and that the Council of Europe was being marginalized except perhaps in its central area of effort, the protection of human rights.

How long should we continue?

Q: I'm thinking that this may be a good place to stop. I'll put at the end here, where we are going. We'll stop here. We are going to pick this up with May 1976, when you are off to Paris.

ADAMSON: Okay. ***

Q: Today is the 26th of June 2002. David, you went to Paris in 1976?

ADAMSON: That is correct.

Q: You were there from when to when?

ADAMSON: I was there from April 1976 to roughly July 1977.

Q: What was your job?

ADAMSON: My job was to serve as executive secretary for the U.S. delegation to the Conference on International Economic Cooperation (CIEC), also known as the North-South Conference. This was a conference that emerged from the international economic turbulence associated with the 1973 Arab/Israeli war and the oil embargo that ensued. There was intensive diplomacy thereafter, trying to get the oil embargo, such as it was, removed. The Arab countries used that as leverage to try to develop a negotiating framework in which concessions would be made to them and to others in the "Third World." Of course, there was pressure on the oil exporters for solidarity from others in the Third World. These were poor countries who did not have oil resources to use as the so-called "oil weapon," which proved to be less than that, to get concessions from the developed countries that would assist in the development of the less developed countries. So, I was the executive secretary of this delegation, which was headed, on a day-to-day basis, by a deputy assistant secretary from the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs at State, by the name of Steve Bosworth, who by the way, is currently the Dean of the Fletcher School at Tufts University, where I went to graduate school.

Q: We're talking about the end of the administration, when you went out there.

ADAMSON: Yes, we're talking about the end of the Ford administration. Kissinger was Secretary of State.

Q: Kissinger was Secretary. One thing, Kissinger - this not being a prime concern of his, as he was interested in east-west, not north-south relations - how dedicated were we to doing something about North-South issues?

ADAMSON: Kissinger was actually quite interested in this, because this tied into the Arab-Israeli dispute as well as the developed world's so important oil imports. As you will recall, he engaged in all kinds of shuttle diplomacy, in the 1974 to 1976 period, to try to make progress. He also participated in various meetings and negotiations that really gave birth to CIEC, also known as the north-south dialogue. He was actually more interested in this, than he had been in the past in what were seen as economic matters. This really was a political-economic conference. He was not, and the U.S. was not interested in making deep concessions. We were interested in getting a process going that would help to manage these issues, but we were not interested in making enormous concessions. I don't think we believed that this kind of a negotiating forum could really bear fruit. We agreed to this kind of a forum, because it would help to mollify the Third World, and hopefully stabilize the oil markets and lead to a more stable economic climate.

Q: What was our sounding of the European delegations, I mean the major ones?

ADAMSON: The European delegations and the Japanese were probably more interested in this kind of process than we were because of their greater dependence on Middle East oil. The Japanese, of course, were very nervous, because they were totally dependent on oil imports. The Europeans were more dependent than the United States, and they were very interested. Plus, the Europeans and Japanese generally have a more accommodative foreign policy, because they are less self-sufficient in various areas of power than the United States.

Q: Did you find the Europeans and the Japanese a bloc, or were they all sort of doing their own thing?

ADAMSON: The Europeans, at least the European Community nations, were a bloc. In fact, the EC countries were represented in the conference collectively, by the European Community. There were no doubt differences among them, but they did try to negotiate as a block. The Japanese were entirely separate. I would say, they certainly were as close to us as they were to the Europeans, if not closer to us.

Q: Now the representation from the south, where were they coming from?

ADAMSON: There was one other actor from the north. That was Canada. Canada was actually co-chair of the conference, along with Venezuela.

Q: What was Canada's position?

ADAMSON: They saw a leadership role in CIEC as consistent with their foreign policy. They saw themselves, and still do, as being a moderating force in international affairs. They were, however, at that point, and may still be, essentially self-sufficient in energy. They didn't feel directly the pressure from the third world. The Arab countries had limited leverage over them. Nevertheless, their foreign policy was attuned to the third world. They saw themselves and see themselves today as more responsive to the third world than the United States. The third world was represented by various groupings. First, the OPEC countries were very influential. Venezuela was co-chairman of the conference. Saudi Arabia was co-chairman of one of the four commissions - on energy - perhaps the most important one. They co-chaired that with the United States. There were various and sundry third world countries. These represented a pretty wide gamut of both resource rich and resource poor countries.

Q: How did our delegation work? Was it a strong delegation?

ADAMSON: It was a strong delegation. Bosworth was a savvy leader. When we had more senior meetings, the Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs, first William Rogers, under Kissinger, then Richard Cooper under Cyrus Vance, led the U.S. delegation. They were a knowledgeable group. There was a deputy assistant secretary from the Treasury, John Niehuss, who was there. At the higher level meetings, the Undersecretary of the Treasury, Tony Solomon, was present. So, we had a very capable delegation. Underneath those leaders, we had office directors from State, Treasury, Commerce, and the Energy Administration that existed at that time. The Energy Department didn't yet exist.

Q: What was your impression of the delegations from the oil-producing countries? Were they sort of "one," or were they varied?

ADAMSON: They were varied in their outlook. The Saudis were certainly very cooperative with us. The Venezuelans, who co-chaired the conference, had a ministerial level guy, by the name of Manuel Perez Guerrero, leading their delegation. He could be a bit fiery and oratorical, but I think beneath that, he was a practical guy. Some countries like Algeria were more radical in orientation. Others were not so radical. They were more heterogeneous than the developed countries' delegations. The South generally was a heterogeneous group with deep cleavages in it, including between those who had resources such as oil and those who were resource-poor. Of course, they came from many different continents, many different political systems. They were a group that I think had some difficulty coalescing and really exerting significant and coherent leverage.

Q: It sounds like a three-sided school here. You have the major consumers, but they were industrial consumers. You have the oil producers. Then, you have the poor folk, who are out there for an awfully long time, who don't have much to work with, except moral suasion.

ADAMSON: Yes, moral suasion and their link to the OPEC countries. That link was a one-way street. They were really dependent upon the oil producers to pressure the developed countries on their behalf. There was only so far that the producers were willing to go in that direction.

Q: So, how did it work? In the first place, what were you doing? What was your role?

ADAMSON: My role was basically the junior man on the U.S. delegation. So, I did some reporting. I did some note taking. I made sure that reporting went out, that various managerial tasks were taken care of. I was not, by any means, a decision maker or leader, quite the contrary. I was a 25-year old junior officer, basically doing the dirty work.

Q: Of course, from an oral history point of view, this is interesting, because you are the "fly on the wall." This view is as important as somebody who is the decision maker. How did the conference go?

ADAMSON: I would say that in the end, the conference wasn't a hugely productive conference. When these conferences take place, even if they don't produce much, there is always one point of view that says it's better that these people were talking, and letting off steam that way, than being out there acting unilaterally without a larger cooperative framework. That is probably the most you could say about the utility of this conference. I actually studied this conference quite closely and later wrote my doctoral dissertation on it. I came to the conclusion that these kinds of conferences are not generally very effective venues for negotiation because there are too many players with too many disparate interests, to really be able to negotiate effectively. You get into situations with the lowest common denominator results. Generally, from a point of view of achieving concrete results, it tends to not be very useful. In terms of improving the international atmosphere and managing international problems, in a negotiating framework, these kinds of exercises could have some utility. I think this conference did in that respect. It did peter out without achieving the aims of the developing countries. On the other hand, there weren't any great repercussions from that.

Q: Was there any difference with the election of 1976 and the Carter administration? The conference obviously continued. Was there any change, other than the people?

ADAMSON: Yes, there was a change. When the Carter people came in, they were marginally more prepared to accommodate the third world, than the Republican administration had been. So, you had the United States, the Europeans, and the Japanese a little more willing, at the margins, to give at least on paper, what the third world seemed to want, or indicated it wanted. But, I would say, these were marginal changes. They were not really a quantum leap up. Maybe they were sufficient to allow the conference to conclude, even though the conference concluded on a whimper, rather than a very positive bang. Without those marginal changes in U.S. policy, it would have been more difficult to reach a final conclusion.

Q: Was there also a time factor and that by doing this, we could avoid being hit by this oil crunch? How far up was the oil weapon? By doing this, it was occupying time when everybody had to see what the fallout was going to be, and help dissipate the effect.

ADAMSON: This conference was part of a larger diplomatic process that had begun really in late 1973, or early 1974. It helped contain the broader problem. So, I think from the U.S. point of view, it was useful in that respect. Of course, you never know what would have happened had you not taken the road that you took, had this conference not taken place. It's difficult to say. But, I think from our point of view, it was a useful way to manage North-South relations

Q: Well, then, you finished up in summer 1977. Whither?

ADAMSON: At that point, with the conference over, and my assignment over, I returned to Washington. At this point, having become even more interested than before, having served as an observer at the Council of Europe, and then as an officer of our Mission to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (which managed the U.S. delegation to CIEC), I continued my work in multilateral affairs, by going to the Bureau of International Organization Affairs, and the Office of UN Political Affairs, where I was one of two essentially political-military and arms control officers.

Q: You did that from when to when?

ADAMSON: I did that from 1977 to 1979.

Q: Did you feel that there had already developed, or was developing a core of multilateral Foreign Service officers who had been dealing with multilateral issues?

ADAMSON: At this point, there was a great deal of talk about the importance of multilateral diplomacy, the increasing importance of multilateral diplomacy, and the need to develop a cadre of people with expertise in it. The Department, however, really didn't do very much to cement that. There may have been talk of creating a cone along those lines. That did not happen. There were some marginal steps. For example, the Bureau of International Organization Affairs set up an annual scholarship at Columbia University for a younger FSO to go and study multilateral affairs at Columbia for a year. In fact, I subsequently did this. I did that from 1979 to 1980, coming out of IO. Then, I went to the UN. So, I developed an expertise in this area at that juncture.

Q: We were talking about the 1977 period, and all?

ADAMSON: Yes.

Q: You were still selective. Were you looking at this as sort of the wave of the future, or were you particularly looking at Europe, as sort of interesting, or how did you see it?

ADAMSON: At this stage, in the Foreign Service, there was not very much by way of career guidance. Later in my career, it became important - Deputy Chiefs of Mission were judged, in part, on their taking junior officers under their wing and really counseling them on career issues. CDOs, career development officers, simply didn't have the time or the continuity to do that. Plus, they didn't know their people very well. But, at this stage, that sort of transformation hadn't taken place. I was sort of on my own, groping around. I had developed substantive and I also had personal interests relating to the UN. That is what took me there, more than anything else.

Q: From 1977 to 1979, you were working in IO's politico- militarshop?

ADAMSON: Yes. As one of two officers focused on arms control and politico-military issues in UN fora.

Q: Now, this was a great period. There were various attempts to limit arms and all. What were you concentrating on? What was happening?

ADAMSON: Of course, the real action took place elsewhere than in the UN. It took place first and foremost on a bilateral level between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. NATO was important as a consultative body for the United States in this process. The universal organizations, notably the United Nations, constituted an outer or peripheral ring.

Q: This is tape two, side one, with David Adamson.

ADAMSON: So, we were in a defensive, a mollifying mode at a time when the broader international community was ever more interested in getting involved and having influence on what the great powers, particularly the two superpowers, were doing in the area of arms control and disarmament. In 1978, the United Nations had its first special session on disarmament, which was a special General Assembly session. It was devoted only to arms control and disarmament. The purpose was to develop a document that would at least be "politically binding" on the great powers, but it wasn't a legally binding document. I represented the U.S. in one of the subcommittees - in fact, arguably the most important subcommittee, which was on strategic weapons. It was kind of ironic, because I was very wet behind the ears. We negotiated this document in the summer of 1978, in this first special session on disarmament. There was a second one in 1982. I believe there have been more subsequently. The U.S. purpose was to hold the line as much as possible. On the one hand, give as much as we could, so that we could hopefully reduce pressure in other fora, such as the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference, but also not compromise our positions on the key bilateral and multilateral issues such as SALT, and what became START, and the Comprehensive Test Ban, and other issues like that.

Q: In the first place, what was the U.S. attitude toward the UN picking this disarmament thing? Did they say, "Oh, my God," and try to limit the damage? In so many ways, it already had a very strong... I mean that we had been working with the Soviets for a long time. We were sort of joined at the waist, practically, with the Soviets.

ADAMSON: Yes, that's right. We sometimes found ourselves united with the Soviets in trying to hold off the third world, and even sometimes our own allies, on some issues. For example, both we and the Soviets had an interest in keeping SALT and SALT II a bilateral process, and not a multilateral process. So, that certainly was an issue.

Q: You're sitting on this U.S. delegation. I would think there would be all sorts of minders to make sure for the Pentagon... We're talking about, practically a priesthood of people who had been working on strategic arms limitations, and all this.

ADAMSON: Yes, we had to consult closely with the experts in the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, the State Department, and the Pentagon. In fact, during the session we had advisors from all these agencies on our delegation. We were led by the U.S. Ambassador to the Geneva Committee on Disarmament, who at that time was Adrian (Butch) Fisher, a wonderful gentleman and former Deputy Director of ACDA. As head of our delegation, he reported to the Director of ACDA. We were negotiating on behalf of the entire U.S. government. The various agencies had the call basically as to how far we could go on the issues.

Q: The U.S. ambassador to the UN at this point was still Andy Young?

ADAMSON: Yes, he was still there. As you know, he did get sacked in 1979 for meeting with the PLO. The guy who really oversaw us was his top deputy, whose name was Jim Leonard, whom I believe is still alive. He was the Deputy Permanent Representative, also with the rank of ambassador, and a former assistant director of ACDA. He had worked for Butch Fisher; their working relationship was fine. Jim Leonard was really the guy who oversaw the operation, and he was a top flight professional.

Q: Now, were you working out of Washington or New York?

ADAMSON: I was working out of Washington, but I spent very extensive periods of time in New York.

Q: How did you feel as a State person on there? Was the Pentagon watching you and others? I mean, did you have the feeling that within the delegation there were divisions and concerns?

ADAMSON: No, I didn't get that sense, for the most part. I think there were deeper divisions in our delegation to the CIEC, than there were among State, Defense, and ACDA. Actually, the agency that had the biggest role was ACDA. I didn't detect that there were significant problems with DOD on the questions we were working. Perhaps DOD didn't take this all that seriously, or understand it that much. Of course, it was the director of ACDA, Paul Warnke, who was our primary strategic arms negotiator. ACDA had the lead in the comprehensive test band, and most of the important disarmament and arms control negotiations.

Q: Well, how did this work? How many countries were in the United Nations?

ADAMSON: At that time, there must have been 170 to 180. I think it has reached 191.

Q: Did you all sit around the table, or how did this work?

ADAMSON: It varied, but most real negotiation took place in small groups, with plenaries reserved for speeches. I mentioned that one of the conclusions of my dissertation was the larger the group you have negotiating, the more difficult it is. In practice, what would happen, for example, on the strategic issues group in which I represented the United States, is that it would break down into a small working group that didn't have more than a dozen people actively involved, maybe even smaller than that. Maybe six to ten - the U.S., the UK, the Soviet Union, and three or four from the developing world, and maybe France and China, and the chair, who was from Nigeria.

Q: Well, how were the others represented?

ADAMSON: They had representatives from one or another country that would formally or informally represent the others. I remember in this subcommittee that I sat on, it wasn't really a subcommittee, it was an informal work group. The chairman was a Nigerian. There was a Brazilian by the name of Bustani, who you may recall, was recently sacked as the head of the Chemical Weapons Organization, because the U.S. and others judged him not to be a very good leader. This guy was just viscerally anti-American, and apparently still is. He was almost irrationally so. His mission's deputy permanent representative had to kind of pull him in. There were one or two others, but the developing countries had a relatively small number of their people represent them. Sometimes when issues of particular interest, or related to a particular region would come up, then one or two more representatives with a special interest or from that region would participate in the group. It was a so-called open-ended group, which is to say that nobody was or could be formally excluded, but on a de facto basis, usually only a very small group showed up.

Q: This is strategic arms that you were with?

ADAMSON: Strategic - really nuclear weapon - issues.

Q: At that time, there was the United States, the UK, France, Soviet Union and China?

ADAMSON: Right, those were the declared and acknowledged nucleaeweapon states.

Q: Wasn't that it?

ADAMSON: That was it, in terms of formal nuclear powers. China did not participate that actively. France did participate actively, although less than Britain. What would happen is a very small group would meet. They would report back in some fashion to a much larger group. Then, finally, to the entire plenary group. Of course, the further the issue got removed from the small group, the harder it was to change anything. The Chinese who were relatively new to the UN...

Q: They were brand new, practically...

ADAMSON: They were still inexperienced. They were not very adroit at managing these kinds of situations. They tended not to have good linguistic skills. They didn't have good interpersonal skills. They were kind of "out of it" as it were. So, they would observe, from afar. Then, things would go to a larger grouping. They usually didn't have much to say. They liked to call themselves a third world power, although they were also in a different camp, being a nuclear power, being a great power. They straddled, but they didn't want to alienate the third world, because they claimed to be sort of representing the third world. In short, they weren't a very active player.

Q: Did the big boys, U.S., the Soviet Union, the Brits, the French, sort of get together and act in unison, in a way, while all these other countries seemed to be yapping around them?

ADAMSON: Yes, it was more or less that way. Although, of course, the Soviet Union might separate themselves from the Western powers, and showboat a little bit on some issues. The French might do so a little bit. The UK and the U.S. were very tight. But, basically, the major nuclear powers had a lot in common.

Q: When you get to a drafting thing, was this a bland thing, or did it have some bite? What came out of this?

ADAMSON: It was generally a fairly bland document, a lowest common denominator document. Basically, I think the developed countries, the nuclear powers, gave as far as they could, aimed for as loose language as possible. Language that looked like it was going further than it did. Of course, it was recognized that this was only a "politically binding" document. In any case, it was not a formal, legal commitment. It was an indication of a direction in which countries would like to move. So, the great powers gave what they could because they didn't want this thing to blow up in their face, the way some special sessions of the UN had in the past. On the other hand, the developing countries knew that if it did blow up, they got nothing. So, they had some incentive to try to get something, and not press things to a point where the developing countries couldn't agree and consensus had to be broken.

Q: Now, the developing countries in this particular instance were the ones that you thought were the leaders, the ones that took a real interest and had some influence?

ADAMSON: Yes. Basically, the larger third world countries tended to lead among the developing countries; for example, the chairman of this special session was from Argentina. So, obviously, he had a great deal of influence on the process. There were various chairmen and various working groups, the Nigerian ambassador in my group. The Brazilians and Mexicans had influence. India, Pakistan and Egypt had influence. Basically, it amounted to the larger countries, and maybe some smaller countries that happened to have very adept diplomats at the UN.

Q: What about issues such as proliferation? India, I guess at that time was working on a nuclear bomb. It was always assumed by everyone that they had a nuclear capability. I don't know if Argentina and Brazil had started that rather particular little race, working on weapons, or not?

ADAMSON: Yes. At that point, it was the Carter administration, which was leaning on Argentina and Brazil, perhaps with excessive zeal, because we are still paying a price, I think, in terms of our bilateral relationship with Brazil for that pressure. Although it was, in some sense, successful. Yes, proliferation was an issue. It was one of the few issues where the developed countries were pressuring in reverse on the developing countries, such as Argentina, Brazil, Pakistan, India, to try to keep them from going too far in developing military nuclear capabilities. We did get some language in there that was useful, although there certainly was a great deal of counter-pressure.

Q: How did everyone treat Israel at that time?

ADAMSON: Israel and South Africa were the pariahs. South Africa, even more than Israel. I think in the document there must have been greater pressure on South Africa, because they basically didn't have any friends, particularly with Jimmy Carter in office. Israel had a staunch friend in the United States, so there was a limit to how far, in a consensus document, they could be singled out. South Africa was singled out in a rather negative way. Of course, at this point, they did not participate in the General Assembly. Yes, both those countries were under pressure, but South Africa more than Israel. South Africa had been suspended from General Assembly membership, but the Third World knew that if they suspended Israel the U.S. would react severely.

Q: Who was head of IO when you were there?

ADAMSON: Charles William Maynes, a political appointee, and a vercapable one.

Q: Known as Bill Maynes. How did things operate between the delegation or the mission in New York and the bureau in Washington? Sometimes this is a troubled relationship, and sometimes it works well.

ADAMSON: It was a relationship with some difficulties, but not as troubled as it may have been under some administrations. Andy Young was the ambassador. He had cabinet rank. If you looked at the State Department organizational chart, he was listed second, after the Secretary of State. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance was not a megalomaniac, and he accepted this arrangement. Maynes was very much an assistant to Andy Young, rather than a supervisor. I recall that Andy Young used to have a weekly meeting, or at least a periodic meeting with the Secretary. Maynes would go along, essentially in the capacity as notetaker. Young not only had a line to the Secretary, but he had a line to the President. There was not any question who was boss in this arrangement, even if the instruction cables might come from Maynes. Young was clearly in the driver's seat. Maynes seemed to accept that with good grace. I don't know what background he had, in terms of a relationship with Andy Young. I also was in a different bind, in the sense that IO has a very limited expertise, in most areas, except for very UN specific issues, such as the UN budget and so on, where they really do have a monopoly, or at least they're in the lead on expertise. But, for example, in disarmament, there were two of us in IO. One of us had to go to New York to be on the delegation, and one stayed back. The real people who drove the substance were from ACDA, or occasionally from State's political-military bureau. ACDA had an office of multilateral issues that had 10 people in it. Then, they had a CD delegation with another group of people. So, they had the manpower and the expertise to really manage this.

IO was virtually in a secretarial position. This is sort of IO's general problem, if you will. Say, they are working an African issue in the UN, they will have one African expert in their UN political office. The Bureau of African Affairs with dozens of African experts will really be driving the policy for the most part, and almost in every functional area, or geographic area, it is that way. What IO brings to the table is knowledge of how things are done in multilateral fora.

Q: Well, IO is... Well, maybe it isn't quite the right term, but more a secretariat for many issues.

ADAMSON: That's right.

Q: I must say, apparently people who dealt with Andy Young said he was a very nice guy, and sort of an elemental force. He wasn't somebody who was trying to take over everything and trying to be nasty about it. This was just his style of working.

ADAMSON: That's right. In my area, he basically deferred to JiLeonard. Young was more interested in such issues as Africa.

Q: Did you get involved in any other matters, or was this pretty much your concentration and experience?

ADAMSON: Disarmament and arms control was my concentration for those two years. I then had a year off at Columbia, studying multilateral affairs, which I actually used to complete my doctorate, among other things.

Q: I was just wondering, at Columbia, while you were there, dealing in the academic world, how did you find the academics looked at what we were doing in the State Department at that time?

ADAMSON: For example, if you looked at international organization issues - I took John Gerard Ruggie's course in international organizations. He was already, although he was young at the time, an increasingly well-known analyst of international organizations. He later became an assistant secretary-general of the UN. He is now a professor at Harvard. But, if you read his articles, they were exceptionally difficult to understand, because he was highly theoretical and conceptual and used a vocabulary very far removed from that of the practitioner. I found there was a real breach between what the practitioners were doing and what the academics, at least the cutting edge academics, were writing about. Often, even for me, who was neither uneducated nor inexperienced at that point, it was difficult for me to understand what in the hell he was saying in his articles or during his class. Never mind what my view of it was, I couldn't often even understand what he was saying. Although, there were some very basic ideas, like the increasing importance of multilateralism, and so on, that were accessible. There were some considerable communication gaps. Other courses, such as on arms control and on the international role of the Third World, I found more accessible and they dovetailed more clearly with my expertise and experience.

Q: This is something I find as a retired Foreign Service officer doing oral history, I'm on the Internet, I subscribe to the Diplomatic Historians' web site. I find that the subjects discussed there and all... I mean, this is dealing with the trade I've been in, and I don't see any real connect. There are people off talking about doing diplomacy, and those who are doing diplomacy. Some of the theories don't seem to penetrate the thought process of either side. In fact, it's one of the things that I'm hoping will happen with this oral history, that it will expose the academics to the viewpoint of the practitioner. But, it doesn't seem to go the other way.

ADAMSON: I don't think it goes in either way, very much. I was impressed, while I was in the State Department, that so little effort was made to bring into our own work what academics, scholars, and experts on the outside were writing, thinking about the issues that we were working on. Conversely, there is what you say. That the people on the outside didn't seem to have, at least those who were more theoretically inclined didn't seem to be able to write in a way that translated very clearly into something that was understandable and that paralleled what was happening on the ground, as it were. Perhaps that is changing. I think you've had more practitioners getting into academics and more academics getting involved in concrete matters of state. But, it is a big gap, and I think both sides could make a better effort to work with the other. With State now becoming more fully staffed and with the greater resources being devoted to training, maybe the academic/practitioner gap will be narrowed.

Q: Did you find in class discussions and all that you were able to make a contribution, by sort of having gotten your hands dirty?

ADAMSON: Yes, I think so. More in some classes than others. For example, Ruggie's lecture class at Columbia, was just a gargantuan class. I don't remember how many students, but it was something I was unaccustomed to coming out of Swarthmore and Fletcher, where I probably never had a class with more than 20-25 students, and most had considerably less. Maybe there were 100 in this class. There were no, as far as I can recall, discussion group meetings at all, just these gargantuan lectures. So, there was very little opportunity for input. I did take, I recall vividly, seminars on arms control and on the Third World. There was much more of an opportunity for me to give my own input.

Q: Well, you came out of there in 1980, then?

ADAMSON: Yes.

Q: Whither?

ADAMSON: Then, I did something that is a bit unusual in the Foreign Service. That is, I was in hoc to IO [the Bureau of International Organization Affairs of the State Department], because they had sent me to Columbia for this year. I was also interested in IO still, and wanted to stay in New York, where I was then living. I was given a three year assignment as a political officer at the mission. I wanted actually to move out of the disarmament area, and broaden my expertise. Nevertheless, the bureau decided they would put me into the disarmament and arms control slot, because they knew that I knew it very well, and could move into it seamlessly. So, that is what I did. For the next three years, I continued in that mode. I think it was very beneficial to the U.S. government, because by that point, I had become pretty much a true expert, and became even more so, in that subject area, in that UN context. I knew the players, knew the issues. We had another change of administration in 1981. So, I was continuity there. It probably didn't help my career, particularly, to stay in the same area.

Q: Looking back at my own career, one makes choices all the time, with the so-called career, when you look back on it, the so-called great rewards, being an ambassador, or this and that, look a little bit paltry sometimes when you consider what you were doing. Have you been doing things where you have made a contribution, rather than getting a title?

ADAMSON: Right.

Q: Tell me, while you were doing this with the UN... This would be from 1980 to 1983.

ADAMSON: That's right.

Q: Was there much cross-fertilization? I guess you have these things going on from Geneva, and may still be going on. The people who were doing, in a way, the heavy lifting, arms control between the Soviet Union and the United States. Here you are at the UN trying to keep this in line, and let people know. We'll talk about that in a minute. But, was there cross-fertilization of what was happening?

ADAMSON: Between our UN delegation and what was going on in the bilateral START talks, and INF talks, and so on?

Q: Yes.

ADAMSON: There was some. We did not get their message traffic. I would have been overwhelmed reading it anyway, because I was the only person there following this issue. But when we had the second special session on disarmament in 1982, I recall that people such as Paul Nitze and Ed Rowney, who were our head negotiators in the INF and START talks, respectively, came up and consulted with us and consulted with other delegations. They participated, at least for a little while, in the negotiations. Eugene Rostow (recently deceased), the director of ACDA, and at least nominally the boss of both of those individuals, came up actually more extensively. In that sense, there was interaction.

Q: During this 1980 to 1983 period, what were the issues you were dealing with at the UN?

ADAMSON: They were pretty much the same issues as in the 1977 to 1979 period. Nuclear issues were always the most important, from the point of view, particularly, of the developing countries, but also from ours'. Their only leverage over us in the nuclear area was basically through the UN, or through the Conference on Disarmament, in Geneva, which was loosely connected to the UN, or through the NPT review conference process. Also, for us, the main importance of the third world in all this was the nonproliferation connection. So, that was probably the biggest issue. There were other issues, such as proposals for "zones of peace," in sundry parts of the world. The concept never was very clear, but it was a third world proposed concept. The concept of nuclear weapons free zones, in which we had some interest, provided they didn't gore any ox of our own, had some traction. There were some conventional weapons issues, such as limiting or at least monitoring arms transfers, that were of interest to us, less to the third world. So, there was a gamut of arms control and disarmament issues that continued. As I said, the range of issues didn't change radically between 1977 and 1983, although the U.S. position changed. After 1981, it became, obviously, more difficult to advocate and explain convincingly the U.S. position, because Reagan came in, initially, very skeptical of arms control, although he later did an about-face, and became a great proponent of arms control.

Q: This is interesting, being at the UN delegation in New York, when the Reagan administration came in, Jeane Kirkpatrick became the U.S. Ambassador. More than most, I think the Reagan Administration came in with a certain amount of fire in their eyes. Sort of the money changers out of the temple kind of thing. I mean, did you feel it there?

ADAMSON: Absolutely. There was a very strong change in underlying philosophy. The philosophy of Bill Maynes, Andy Young, Don McHenry, who succeeded Young as Ambassador, was accommodationist. It was, "We need the third world to achieve a lot of what we want to achieve in the world. We need multilateral diplomacy, and multilateral solutions. Let's try to accommodate these people to the degree that we can." There was also a little bit of guilt associated with our consciousness that maybe we owed these countries a little bit more than we had been giving them. On the other hand, the Reagan Administration came into a power with a very different philosophy. A philosophy that the Cold War was still the central issue, that it was an absolutely critical contest, far from being won. That there was a global ideological competition. The Soviets had successfully penetrated the third world movement, in this view. The third world movement was tilted in a completely unacceptable way toward Soviet interests, and we had to counterattack, on an intellectual level, and second, on a diplomatic level, and if need be, on a military level. So, our emphasis shifted from being accommodationist, and let's try to talk through these issues with the third world, to being combative, not least in debate. Let's not let anything pass. We were instructed that at any criticism of the U.S., we were to fire back, full blast. Notably at the Soviets, but really at anybody who took aim at us.

Jean Kirkpatrick was a scholar. She believed very much in intellectual debate, and that it really was what tended to drive behavior. Ideas drove a lot of other things in foreign affairs, in her estimation. So, we had really a radical shift in our approach.

Q: Did you find there was a difference in where you were dealing? Did you find that you were nose-to-nose with people?

ADAMSON: We were nose-to-nose with people. Even more than we had been. Cooperation with the Soviet Union diminished. We published a book about the Soviet threat, Soviet Military Power. They countered with something called From Whence the Threat to Peace. In our booklet and their booklet, we each set out all the details, in our judgment, of the military programs of the other side, and their various objectives and so on. We were involved in a very serious, ideological and propaganda campaign. We were also engaged in very strong rhetoric, in UN fora. I would say, however, that we also gained some respect, because it was clear we were defending our positions with conviction and with energy. We were no longer in the least apologetic about where we stood. I think, if it didn't gain affection for us, it did gain respect, maybe a little admiration. I remember being locked in public debate with Third World reps in a UN committee, and having a Third World representative - not from a country I was debating - comment to me admiringly that while he didn't necessarily agree with my country, at least the U.S. was standing up for its convictions when they came under attack, something he accurately said other Western countries were not doing in that committee.

Q: Was there pride in this? Had the United States been so big that they could go out and "kiss on the ankle" and we wouldn't respond? Sort of gratuitous attacks on us?

ADAMSON: Yes, there were certainly gratuitous attacks and we were given, at that point, to counterfire. The attitude in the Carter Administration to some degree was, "These pygmies want to throw a little dust at us, let them do it. Let them blow off steam." Whereas, we were under very clear instructions from Jeane Kirkpatrick that nobody was going to throw anything at us, whether it was a pebble, without our responding.

Q: In a way, was this a difficult thing to do, or was it kind of fun to get on the counterattack?

ADAMSON: It was both, but it was mostly fun once one got used to it. I for one kind of liked it, because as Jeane Kirkpatrick said, a lot of these countries that were zapping us all the time, were dictatorships, were repressing their own people, didn't have anything to boast about, in these areas. I thought that we were on the high ground on many issues.

Q: What about prior to, and then after the advent of the Reagan administration? I'm told that so much of the work is really done in a delicate style, twirling around meeting people, going to receptions. It's a full, long working day of contacts, and making points. Did this change at all?

ADAMSON: It changed a little bit. I would say that Kirkpatrick and her team, particularly the gentleman who became her top deputy, Ken Adelman, really didn't understand this side of the UN process very well. The Andy Young approach was, "Let's work with these guys, and see if we can come up with some good solutions." The emphasis was on practical diplomacy, not on the rhetorical dimension of the UN. The Kirkpatrick attitude, at least initially was, the converse. "Let's show these characters where we stand. That we are in the right. We are not going to take any guff from them. Let's strike a new balance in this organization." So, I was specifically ordered by my new boss, who was the Deputy Permanent Representative, Ken Adelman, to reduce my contacts and concentrate on preparing debating points, because what he cared about primarily was the debate, not the results in terms of resolutions or treaties. Although at a later stage when he wanted other countries' support on a resolution on chemical weapons use, he found that support was lacking because he had frittered away a lot of good will from other delegations. He wanted me to be back writing speeches and talking points that could be used in a rhetorical debate. We went really to an extreme, initially, that I think was a mistake. But, the people who were leading us, like Kirkpatrick, were intellectuals coming out of think tanks and universities, who didn't have any practical experience, didn't see the UN as a place to achieve solutions for the most part, with the possible exception of the Security Council. They really saw the oratorical contest as what was most important, and put everything else behind it in terms of priority.

Q: Yesterday at noon, I was interviewing Alec Watson. We were covering the time when he was a deputy to Madeleine Albright in the UN, and who also had worked with Tom Pickering. We were saying how, particularly Pickering, was talking to everyone there, building personal relationships. This is what made it go. There seems to be a gap that happens when certain administrations come in. The ideologues sort of take over at the beginning. They know how things are going to work, particularly for the United States. There is an arrogance of unfamiliarity. Were you there long enough to see the gradual grinding down of the initial arrogance, you might say, and that the system is people?

ADAMSON: I'm not sure I was there long enough to appreciate that change, if that change took place. I left in 1983, which was still only two years into the Kirkpatrick years. Adelman, who was the most crude of the leadership, had left at that point to become director of ACDA. Jose Sorzano became her deputy. He is a Latino, and I think just naturally by personality and culture, more disposed to personal interaction, even if he was a hardliner. Whether Jeane ever mellowed much, I don't know. I think she must have mellowed a bit but perhaps not much. What I can say is that when I left, she was still in a pretty fierce mode. Of course, with regard to the second Reagan administration, she chose not to be part of it. Things changed very much in terms of our diplomacy and so on, our inclination toward negotiating; this is well described in Secretary of State George Shultz' memoirs. Anyway, she left and that must have changed things.

Q: You know, when I think about it, one is aware of Jeane Kirkpatrick coming in at the beginning, very much so. Things seemed to be happening elsewhere, and she didn't seem to make a mark, right or wrong.

ADAMSON: She may have hit her apex early, when she sort of outmaneuvered Al Haig on the Falklands. She certainly did put her stamp on our behavior at the UN, and since she sat on the National Security Council, she must have had an impact on policy - though I suspect one of the reasons she left in '85 was her frustration at not being closer to policy-making. For my part, in 1983 I went to the Council on Foreign Relations for a year. Then, I went to Panama, where I was no longer, of course, in a position to observe very directly. I must say, I need to conclude now, but we can have our next session at your place.

Q: Well, great. Okay, we'll pick this up when you have left the United Nations. Just one last question.

ADAMSON: Yes.

Q: In your particular field on disarmament and all, other than counter-country and all, was there much change and significance with the new Reagan administration, in your particular field?

ADAMSON: Well, in multilateral forums, it became more of a propaganda war. There was a hardening of our positions, a greater reluctance to concede anything. We were helped by the fact that the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan undercut the Soviets' pro-Third World credentials. At the UN, it really did become a battle of ideas. Everything changed in the second administration. I recall my farewell lunch with Sergey Kislyak, my counterpart at the Soviet Mission, later Soviet Ambassador to NATO and now their Deputy Foreign Minister. The Soviets had broken off many of our arms control negotiations, such as INF (intermediate range nuclear forces), on the grounds the U.S. negotiating position and our INF weapon deployments in Europe made negotiation impossible. Kislyak reiterated this stance at our lunch and predicted dark days ahead. Yet after Gorbachev came into power shortly thereafter, they turned around completely on this.

Q: We'll pick this up then, next time. You left the United Nations when?

ADAMSON: I left the United Nations in the summer of 1983, and went to a fellowship at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York.

Q: Okay, we'll pick it up at that point.

ADAMSON: Okay.

Q: Today is the 18th of July 2002. So, it's 1983, and you got fellowship. How did that come about? What was that about?

ADAMSON: That came about when I was actually a term member of the Council on Foreign Relations, so I was familiar with their programs. I applied to do a study of, essentially, the Soviet gas pipeline that was the subject of controversy at the time as to whether the Europeans should buy into that, or not. I submitted a proposal and that was accepted. I spent a better part of a year at the Council on Foreign Relations, researching and publishing an article on that subject, and also publishing a couple other articles on arms control in Europe - on intermediate range nuclear forces, which was another hot issue at the time. So, that is how I spent 1983, 1984.

Q: How did you find working within the Council on Foreign Relations? Did it have an outlook? Did it have an agenda, when you were there?

ADAMSON: The Council was generally regarded as being somewhat left of center, but still in the center, politically. I think that is generally true. They had excellent scholars. Of course, they had something of an elitist group of members, but they were making, at that time, real efforts to broaden their membership base to get younger members and to get more diverse members, and they were having success in doing so. I thought, basically, bottom line, it was a first-rate institution, trying to marry scholarship and intellect with a policy orientation.

Q: Did you notice there the gap that I think we have talked about before, between the practitioners of foreign affairs and the academics?

ADAMSON: I would say that there is less of a gap at the Council than you might find in a purely academic institution. At the Council, many of the people, beginning with the chief operating officer, the president, have governmental and policy-making experience. At that time, Winston Lord, former head of State's Policy Planning office under Kissinger, was president. Most of the senior people at the Council had been in government, notably in the State Department or elsewhere. The director of studies, Paul Kreisberg, had been a senior foreign service officer, and when I ran into resistance at State over the prospect of publishing an article, he intervened, successfully, on my behalf.

Q: Both of those I have interviewed, by the way.

ADAMSON: Yes. They're both first-rate individuals. Paul is now deceased. I think the Council fulfills an important role in helping to bridge the gap between practitioners and scholars.

Q: By the way, on the pipeline, how did you come out on that?

ADAMSON: I came out on seeing the pipeline actually as not a negative, as the Reagan administration had seen it, and I guess did still see it at that point. It was positive, in the sense that it diversified the energy supplies of western Europe, away from the Middle East, toward another source that, arguably, may also have been unstable but at least offered an opportunity for diversification and thus risk reduction. As we see in the current stock market, if you diversify your holdings, even if each of them may have its own problems, the more you diversify, the less your risk. That was essentially my argument. I published an article in, I guess, a London-based journal - Energy Policy - said to be the premier journal in the field. That article must have come out in late 1984.

Q: The pipeline issue was a major issue. I think it was almost the first one of these new administrations coming in, particularly a Republican one... We're going through that now, being tough and all. Then, things just sort of disappear. What happened with it?

ADAMSON: I think that's right. I think it was sort of part of the teething process of the Reagan administration. It, in time, really left the scene as an issue. The Europeans did not pay heed to us, in any case. Of courses, with all the changes that occurred, half a decade later, it really became a total non-issue.

Q: So, in 1984, you're up again?

ADAMSON: In 1984, I was up again. I actually had a position to go teach at West Point for two years, but the department - as was the wont of the Department - told me that I was being too academic in my orientation, I needed to go abroad. I took the position as deputy political counselor in Panama for three years, from 1984 to 1987.

Q: Okay, Panama from 1984 to 1987. When you arrived in 1984, what was the situation in Panama?

ADAMSON: The situation was that Panama was supposedly coming out of a period of authoritarian rule. The military had taken power there in a coup, against President Arnulfo Arias, in 1968. General Omar Torrijos had been in power, until he died in a plane crash in 1981. Then, one of his principal associates, General Manuel Antonio Noriega, took over as the strongman. There had just been elections, which supposedly were free, and which the United States, because it suited its own interests, basically accepted as free even though there was substantial evidence of fraud on behalf of the government's candidate, and Noriega's candidate, who was Nicholas Ardito Barletta, an economist trained at the University of Chicago under then-Secretary of State Shultz when he taught economics there. Barletta, then, had very strong U.S. ties. He defeated ex-President Arias, who at that point was in his eighties, but who commanded great popularity, and who was said never to have lost a presidential election though some, including this one, had been stolen from him. Barletta probably didn't really beat him. We were hoping we could buck up Barletta and establish a strong, independent, democratically-oriented president, who would eventually command the military. It didn't turn out that way, but the policy was to treat him as a democratically elected civilian president in the hope that he would emerge as the true leader of his country.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?

ADAMSON: The ambassador was Everett E. "Ted" Briggs, a distinguished professional.

Q: Can you describe the embassy? How it was set up, and what its tasks were?

ADAMSON: It was a very large embassy in Panama at the time. This was Briggs' first ambassadorship. He was bilingual in Spanish, and a very strong Latin Americanist. We had a pro-consular role in Panama, because of our role in establishing the country in 1903, and because of the Panama Canal, which at that point, we still ran, although we were to turn it over to the Panamanians, according to the treaty that existed, in 1999. We really had three loci of U.S. power in the country at the time. The U.S. ambassador, the administrator of the canal, who was Dennis McCauliffe, a retired U.S. Army Lieutenant General who had been the head of Southern Command in Panama, where about 10,000 U.S. troops were deployed. The third senior U.S. leader was the General commanding Southern Command, who at that point was John Galvin, who went on to become Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (and Dean of Fletcher after he retired). So, you had a lot of Americans in Panama.

The U.S. had a very important role there, sort of a proconsular role. At the Embassy, we had a substantial political section, in which I was the second ranking. My primary responsibility was following the government-oriented parties. As I say, our policy, at that point, was to try to buck up Barletta, who really had no background as a politician and actually didn't have a base in the pro-government parties. He emerged as a presidential candidate because he was seen by the pro-government parties and Noriega as somebody who could command U.S. support, and who would look pretty good on a marquee, which he did. He also had pro-government credentials as a former economic adviser to Torrijos.

Q: How did you see the relationship, while you were there, of the American military? Did that change while you were there, toward both the embassy and toward Panama?

ADAMSON: Well, the military had a very important role there. We had a military presence of 10,000, or close to that. They were the largest U.S. entity, certainly the largest U.S. government entity. Of course, the U.S. military is disciplined and accepts civilian authority, but according to our laws, policies, and practices, the commanding general of SOUTHCOM did not report to the ambassador, was independent, and the people who worked for him reported to him, and not to the ambassador. To coordinate, however, there was a troika, namely the ambassador, the SOUTHCOM commander, and the administrator of the canal, who met about once a month. I think generally that worked pretty well.

Q: How about the administrator and the Zonians? They had been sort of a thorn in the side of our relations there, for a long time. At least, that's the way I perceived it. How did you find it?

ADAMSON: Well, by 1984, that was changing, because the canal treaty came into effect in 1979. That was a new framework. Although the U.S. still had the ultimate say in the administration of the canal, there was substantial Panamanian participation, not only at the top echelon, but throughout the commission that managed the canal. A Panamanian, Fernando Manfredo, was deputy administrator, and the vast majority of the employees of the Panama Canal Commission were of Panamanian nationality. There were less and less so-called "Zonians," Americans who had grown up in the canal area, who in many cases didn't speak Spanish. That was kind of a breed that was dying out. You had increasingly either Panamanians or bilingual U.S. citizens in the canal commission.

Q: Well, let's talk about your work. How did you go about doing what you were doing?

ADAMSON: The way I went about doing what I was doing, was really establishing close relationships with politicians in the government. There was one principal government party, the PRD, which is now the main opposition party in Panama. There were a couple other, much smaller pro-government parties, one of them headed by the brother-in-law of General Noriega. It was principally a vehicle for Noriega, although there were some elements, such as the Eleta brothers, that were independent of Noriega. Still, it was eventually taken over by Noriega's brother-in-law. The PRD party was a large umbrella party that embraced people of a very broad range of ideologies. One thing they shared was an allegiance to the military, and to General Noriega personally, but even more fundamentally, to the military institution. There were many conservatives who were pro-American. There was also an important far-left current. It was really an umbrella organization. I was able to establish close relationships with almost all factions of the party.

Q: Was this a working government, a parliament and all, or not?

ADAMSON: No, it was pretty much a facade. When push came to shove, General Noriega and his associates in the military - which was a small military, but big enough to dominate Panama, called the shots. This all came to a head toward the end of the year that Barletta ruled, when Noriega went too far and had an opponent, Hugo Spadafora, murdered - beheaded. Spadafora was a cantankerous maverick, and made a lot of noise criticizing the Noriega regime. In approximately late August 1984, Spadafora returned to the country by bus from Costa Rica, where he had married and lived. The military took him off a bus. They tortured him and then beheaded him. They didn't conceal this very well. It was clear fairly early on that he probably had perished as a result of foul play by the military. Nicky Barletta, despite being something of a creature of the military, and having been put there by the military, was basically an honorable man. He promised, publicly, that this would be fully investigated, this disappearance, and what turned out to be a murder. Noriega couldn't stomach this, so Noriega forced Barletta to resign. With the support of the legislature, which he controlled, Noriega staged a "constitutional" coup against Barletta, and put the first vice president, Eric Arturo Delvalle, in power. Barletta left in September 1985, a year after having been inaugurated.

At that point, the facade basically fell. The true nature of power there was evident. That was no surprise to the Panamanians, but it put the Noriega regime on the road to confrontation both with society and with the U.S.

Q: How did we react when this abduction and murder took place? What kind of role were we taking?

ADAMSON: Very much following the recommendations of Ambassador Briggs, we did an about-face. We had been supporting the regime, but we had really identified the regime as Barletta, and we had had this really false hope that Barletta would turn into an independent source of power. Once Noriega ousted him, we turned on Noriega. Not totally at first, but over time, we turned on him more and more. The new president, Delvalle, initially seemed to be a puppet of Noriega, but over time he began to display some independence. We supported him in that respect. Things eventually came to a head, whereby Delvalle declared that he was firing Noriega. Noriega didn't accept this, and Delvalle went underground at one of our bases. We continued to recognize him as the president of Panama, and got ourselves into a very anomalous situation, that we lived for several years, until of course, we eventually ousted Noriega by military force. The policy we adopted in 1984 came a cropper, as many had predicted. We hesitated for a long time about whether to use force, but over time it became clear no other option would work.

Q: Well, you had this policy in reverse. Were you able to sit around and think about where this might go? I mean, was this being directed from Washington?

ADAMSON: This was being directed from Washington, by Assistant Secretary Abrams, but very much following the advice of the "man on the spot" - Ambassador Briggs. In fact, eventually the issue got presidential attention, first from President Reagan, then from President Bush. It was out of our hands. There, of course, was debate in the Embassy. We had a strong ambassador. I would say that in the political section, we were very skeptical of the policy of say, 1984, when we were bucking up Barletta and so on. Whereas, the ambassador was strongly behind that policy. By 1985, at the ouster of Barletta, I think the ambassador became as strong a proponent as anyone in the Embassy of squeezing the Panamanian military and forcing a change, if need be, by using military force. Eventually, that is what it came to, after we tried other sanctions. We did a lot of reporting, and made a lot of recommendations to Washington, but this was something that had the attention of senior policymakers in Washington from Assistant Secretary Abrams to Secretary Shultz to the Secretary of Defense to the President himself.

Q: What were you getting from your contacts within the Panamanian political family? Did you get candid opinions or were they pretty much creatures of Noriega?

ADAMSON: One was able to maintain a good dialogue with the Panamanians. With the opposition, there was absolutely no problem in getting their views in crystal clear form. Our relationship with the government party deteriorated as a result of the deterioration of our relationship with Noriega. So, it became somewhat more difficult to interact candidly with them. By the time I left in mid-1987, our communication with the government parties had really taken a significant step back. Communication was more difficult. The ambassador, for some time since the ouster of Barletta, and even before, had declined to interact directly with Noriega. Briggs' successor, Arthur Davis, who came in 1986, did meet with Noriega, but obviously had troubled relations with him. Our communication with the erstwhile government parties - of course, we no longer recognized them as the government - was increasingly limited by 1987.

Q: When you got there in 1984, what was the evaluation of Noriega, by the embassy, your colleagues, and that you were developing, too?

ADAMSON: Noriega was a difficult guy to read. There were very different interpretations of him. He had had a close, direct relationship with the CIA. He still had that when I first arrived. He was on their payroll - I think he valued the symbolism more than the money, which would have meant little to him at that point - and would see the station chief with some frequency. He spoke with him pretty candidly. When push would come to shove, he would generally be helpful to the United States, but Noriega played all angles. When it suited him, he cozied up to the left. His primary concern, I think, in the end was not ideological, but simply maximizing his own power and influence. The ambassador read him as highly undesirable. His connections to the drug trade became clearer over time. There was always the suspicion that he was involved in a range of nefarious activity, more than a suspicion. It was well-established that the senior echelons of the military were highly corrupt. I think the drug link didn't become clear until sometime after 1984. But there were always fears to that effect. Our relation to him turned, to some degree, on the traditional argument, "Well, he may be an SOB, but he's our SOB." Then, there were others who felt that he was not only an SOB, but someone who really wasn't in our interest to see remain in power.

Q: Well, was the abduction and murder of Spadafora the tipping point, would you say?

ADAMSON: That was the tipping point, yes. If there had been any doubt about the nature of Noriega, I think that was eliminated. That kind of a cold-blooded killing, even if it was one killing, and even if that wasn't typical of how the Panamanian military acted, I think it was so brutal and so obvious, and so unsettling, that those who had had any sympathy for Noriega as a vehicle for U.S. interests, lost it at that point. It was connected, of course, to the ouster of Barletta. It became crystal clear that not only was this guy a thug, but that he was not going to accept democracy. That was part of the Panama Canal negotiation. We had had an understanding with General Torrijos that he would devolve power back to a democratic regime. It was plain that that was simply not happening.

Q: While you were there, were there efforts made by Noriega to promote anti-Americanism, or were they endemic within the system anyway, or what?

ADAMSON: I would say the Panamanians were generally fundamentally friendly to the United States. They coexisted with us generally amicably for so long, except for the left of the spectrum, which was certainly a very anti-American minority. That said, there was always a certain residual resentment, even among many who were otherwise pro-American, over the overbearing nature of U.S. influence in Panama. This resentment was something that could be stimulated, and was stimulated by Noriega, as it had been by Torrijos when it suited him. By 1987, Noriega was using thugs to try to physically intimidate the embassy. I recall a month or so before I left, in the summer of 1987, he sent a mob, which clearly was his thugs, down to the embassy to throw rocks. They destroyed all the vehicles parked at the embassy. They did a pretty good job of destroying the cars and the property of the exterior of the embassy. They didn't attempt to physically invade the embassy. He was using his thugs at that point to try to exert counter-influence.

Q: Were there people there, Panamanians or Americans, who were saying, "This guy is poking with a stick." Obviously, the United States really got pissed off. Noriega would end up dead or in jail, where he is now. The power was so overwhelming. I'm talking about miscalculation.

ADAMSON: Yes, there was an enormous miscalculation on Noriega's part. What is surprising to me is he was able to push the U.S. for as long as he did, really for three or four years. Only at the end of that, when his forces went over the precipice in their treatment of American military people, would he meet his demise. He just miscalculated hugely, the way that Saddam Hussein miscalculated after his invasion of Kuwait, once we had deployed substantial troops to the region. He was just not able to see what was coming. Noriega should have understood that the one entity that he could not afford to lean on too hard was the United States. Really, he would still be in power, perhaps, had he not pushed us too hard. There are two things that are surprising to me: (1) that he didn't understand that, and those around him didn't understand that well enough to prevail upon to be more restrained; and (2) that we took as long as we did to get mobilized, to use force against him, which we didn't do until the end of 1989. I would have thought we would have moved much more swiftly to throw him out of power.

Q: Did you get any feel, while you were at the embassy, why we had restraints from the CIA? Was there reluctance to do this because of the treaty?

ADAMSON: The U.S. military, and perhaps the CIA, were a restraining influence. Fred Woerner became the commanding general there. He was very reluctant to use force. Of course, the United States is basically, as we Americans see it, essentially a law-abiding country. We don't use force easily, internationally. The U.S. military at that stage and the U.S. in general was still in kind of a post-Vietnam phase about using the military as an instrument of international power. So, there was real reluctance among the U.S. military to get involved in a confrontation with the Panamanians, even though we are talking about a giant and a pygmy, here. It was nothing like the Gulf War, in terms of the dimensions of the adversary. I think it was post-Vietnam hangover. Also, I think there was a reluctance to recognize that nonmilitary means were just not likely to do the job.

Q: When you all were sitting around the political section, the economics section, with a country team, were you trying to figure out ways to make the Panamanians behave?

ADAMSON: Absolutely. We came up with really quite novel methods of exerting pressure on the Panamanians. A lot of the credit goes to John Maisto, who was the Deputy Chief of Mission under Arthur Davis and is now the senior director for Latin America for the National Security Council, under this current President Bush. He was one of the promoters, and perhaps one of the architects of the policy of recognizing Delvalle as president, and paying our canal fees to the so-called Delvalle government, which did not exert effective control over the country, and really denying the legitimacy of Noriega, and exerting influence through that methodology.

Q: Were the funds essentially put in escrow?

ADAMSON: I think so, yes.

Q: What happened now? We didn't accept the legitimacy of the government that came in. You're a political officer. Who did you talk to? Was there a problem there?

ADAMSON: I think actually Delvalle's denunciation and firing of Noriega took place after I departed in the summer of 1987. I myself didn't have to deal with it. I think we interacted with Delvalle, who shuttled between military bases in Panama and the continental United States. We dealt a lot with the opposition: the Panamenista party of Arnulfo Arias, the Christian Democratic party of Ricardo Arias Calderon, and other opposition parties. We managed to put enough pressure on the regime. They actually held elections, as you know, in 1989. The opposition won, even though Noriega manipulated the result, and proclaimed that his candidates had won. Having those elections helped to further undermine the legitimacy of Noriega's regime. It was difficult to communicate directly with Noriega at this point, though there were methods of doing that, to some degree.

Q: Within Panama, was there a class structure? How did the various groups respond?

ADAMSON: Yes, there was a class structure. The schism between Delvalle and Noriega, and Barletta earlier, reflected that class structure. Delvalle was from one of the wealthy, very European, Caucasian elite families. The military, including Noriega, had a base in the poorer and the darker-skin segments of society. The opposition was heavily supported by the modern business class, which also tended to be obviously wealthier and have a lighter skin coloration. Many of them were educated in the United States. So, there was a class divide in Panamanian society, which Noriega tried to play on because, of course, there were more people in the lower and lower-middle class, than there were in the middle and upper classes. But, eventually, he lost support among the poor, just as he lost it among the rich, and there always was a substantial part of the lower class that was attracted to Arnulfo Arias' Panamenista party.

Q: During the time you were there, what was the situation up in El Salvador and Nicaragua?

ADAMSON: There was continuing turmoil. The Sandinistas were in power in Nicaragua. We were beginning to support the opposition to them, militarily. El Salvador was in the midst of a civil war/insurgency. We were heavily engaged in supporting the government there, and also trying to reform the government there. Panama played a role in this, in the so-called Contadora group, of which they were one of the members. Although the U.S. was not in this group, we helped diplomatically to move this process and to manage this process, which we weren't entirely happy with. We didn't think the Contadora group's mindset was entirely compatible, in many respects, with our own. So, we interacted diplomatically with the Panamanians on that. Although that issue, in terms of the Panamanian angle, receded as our relationship with the Panamanian government grew more and more difficult.

Q: I take it that because of where Noriega was coming from, you weren't seeing anything comparable to the El Salvador thing of right versus left, or something like that? Like a guerrilla war breaking out?

ADAMSON: No, because Noriega had basically co-opted the left, and the center right, where the opposition to him was most evident, were not people who were likely to take up arms. They were prepared to hold the coat of the U.S. while we got this guy out of there, but they weren't going to take up arms against him.

Q: So, they didn't see that as fitting into the east/west struggle, or anything?

ADAMSON: No, not at all. There was no question of supporting the opposition to Noriega with arms, except insofar as we could encourage fissures within the military. After my time, there was a coup attempt against Noriega, which failed. But we had a great deal of difficulty seeing inside the military. We didn't have very good intelligence on internal differences within the military. We had some idea. It was probably easier to penetrate them than Al Qaeda, because at least we had plenty of people who had the language and could fit into the culture well. We had some sense of some of the personalities. But, the inner circle of the military was hermetically sealed, at least until one of their number, Roberto Diaz Herrera, broke with Noriega. Diaz theoretically was number two after Noriega, but actually he was not a member of the inner circle and when Noriega forced him to retire he went public against Noriega around June of 1987.

Q: While you were there, did you see that the CIA station chief and his officers, or her officers, were off to one side? Was it a team effort, or were they playing a different game? I was just wondering what your impression was?

ADAMSON: I think they were team players, but with a somewhat different perspective. If there was a last bastion of support for Noriega within the embassy, it probably would have been them. Although as I said, they were team players. As long as Bill Casey was director of the CIA, support for Noriega in Washington was, I think, assured. When he died that picture changed somewhat. I think that was felt more in Washington and in the interagency process than at the embassy in Panama, although the CIA has its own procedures and processes, and didn't always fill in the political section entirely on what they knew and what they were doing. Still, they were supposed to keep the ambassador fully enlightened, and operated under his guidance. Of course, you never know what you don't know, but the presumption is that they did that.

Q: Did Cuba enter the situation at all?

ADAMSON: There were occasional flurries of concern about the possible potential relationship between Panama and Cuba, because as I mentioned, there were in the PRD party, the main government party, some people who were sympathetic to Cuba, who had a similar ideological orientation. Still, I think at this juncture, it wasn't a serious concern that Panama would become a Cuban clone, or a base for pro-communist subversion of, say, Costa Rica. That wasn't a serious concern.

Q: Were you finding it difficult?

ADAMSON: About the time I left, things started to get tighter, more difficult. As I mentioned, Noriega sent a group of thugs down to the embassy and they destroyed everybody's car. Happily, I had been tipped off that day by embassy security people that there might be these thugs coming down, so I did not park at the embassy. If I had, I would have had a nice car destroyed. There was not concern yet for the physical security of embassy people. Later on, there was. Of course, when we invaded, there was even more. Although, as far as embassy personnel were concerned, apparently luck was on our side, because the U.S. military was not primed to defend the embassy quite the way they should have been. Eventually, physical security of Americans became an issue, I think primarily for the top people, such as the deputy chief of mission, but not at the time I was there.

Q: You mentioned Arthur Davis, who came in as ambassador?

ADAMSON: Yes.

Q: What was his style of operation?

ADAMSON: Arthur Davis was a political appointee. He was not as brilliant or skilled a diplomat as Ted Briggs, but having been ambassador in Paraguay previously, for some three years, and having workable Spanish, and being a smart individual, he was able to operate effectively. Also, he had a very strong number two, in John Maisto. When our relationship with Noriega got really bad, we pulled him out. Maisto became the charge d'affaires. So, when the going got really rough, we had a first-rate professional in charge.

Q: When you were there, did the Zonians cause any problems? It used to be that you could always depend on the high school kids to pull down a Panamanian flag, or something like that?

ADAMSON: By the mid-1980s, there really wasn't a problem along those lines. The Zonians had either left the country, or had accepted reality, or their very nature had changed, and they became more bilingual and so on. That really was not a problem or an issue.

Q: What about sold American troops? Did they get off base much?

ADAMSON: That could occasionally be a problem. We had issues about not wearing a uniform when they weren't working and so on. There were well-defined rules that regulated U.S. military presence. Of course, that is what eventually sparked the U.S. invasion in December of 1989, when Noriega made the huge mistake of messing with some individual service members. It's almost impossible to understand how he could make the mistake of physically intimidating, shooting at, and molesting American servicemen and their wives.

Q: In 1987, I assume you were ready to get the hell out?

ADAMSON: Yes, it was a good time to go, though I had really enjoyed my tour.

Q: Go where?

ADAMSON: I went back to Washington. At John Maisto's recommendation, I sought and got an assignment on the seventh floor of the Department, in the operations center, as a senior watch officer. I was actually in a position to watch the situation in Panama very closely, since the sensitive reporting came through the operations center, on its way to the principals of the department.

Q: This is tape three, side one, with David Adamson. What were you doing?

ADAMSON: Well, a senior watch officer basically managed the department's emergency operations center, which, during daytime hours, was fairly routine, because the department was operating. On nights and weekends, however, you might be channeling information to the secretary or the deputy secretary, and to the under secretary for political affairs, and preparing briefs for them, and facilitating and monitoring their phone conversations, or other kinds of interactions. I found it quite interesting and a broadening kind of job.

Q: So, while you were doing this, from 1987 to 1988, did anything happen on the weekend, or during the week?

ADAMSON: Probably the biggest things that happened were one crisis after another with Panama, as our relationship skated ever closer to the abyss. I think that was probably the hottest issue in 1987/1988. I remember vividly when Secretary Shultz came into the ops center one day for a very tense secure phone conversation with someone in Panama, I think Mike Kozak, his special envoy. Kozak was trying to negotiate Noriega's exit, but when Kozak explained the situation the Secretary called the whole thing off, and the negotiating route collapsed. Of course, on the east/west level, we were into our love affair with Gorbachev, so east/west tensions had receded very considerably. Although there were important things happening on the U.S./Soviet front, they were generally of a positive nature, whereas the real thorn in the U.S. side at that point was Panama.

Q: You're in the eye of the storm, in Panama City. When you came back, and were not on the Panamanian desk, but were dealing with the issue and I assume talking to people, did you find they had a different perspective about what was happening there?

ADAMSON: No. We had a very professional Panama team, Dick Wyrrough, Vince Mayer, and others, who knew Panama very well. Certainly those two had had long experience in Panama. They had a good understanding of Panama. Elliot Abrams was a controversial figure, but nobody would deny he was a very bright guy. He also had a good understanding of Panama.

Q: After doing this from 1987 to 1988, where did you go?

ADAMSON: I went to the Department's Office of European Security and Political Affairs, EUR/RPM, essentially the NATO desk in the Department. I had had a long ambition to get involved in European security matters, and gave up a plum offer of an assignment to the National War College to take this EUR job. I was able to realize that ambition by taking the job, which I held from 1988 to 1991, at a time of great change in European security. I managed a section of five or six officers, which varied over the few years I was there. We worked on NATO nuclear issues, European nuclear weapons issues, and NATO strategy issues. All of that was in enormous flux at that time. It really was a fascinating job.

Q: When you got there in 1988, as far as strategy in nuclear matters, was everything pretty much the way it had been? There was a change in thinking, but basically things were set in concrete?

ADAMSON: Things were changing and people were beginning to think in different terms. The INF Treaty had been completed and that class of nuclear weapons was disappearing. But there was still skepticism. I must say that I shared that skepticism about whether Gorbachev was the real thing or not. I would say that there was a substantial current of opinion, and probably the dominant current of opinion, that was skeptical about Gorbachev. After all, we had a Republican administration and fairly conservative policymakers at the time. There was a lot of feeling that his true ambitions were the same as had traditionally obtained in the Soviet state, but that he had recognized the need for different methods, because of a variety of factors, including economic interests of the Soviet Union. That view proved to be incorrect. Even if there may have been some truth to them, in the sense that Gorbachev's thinking and attitude was itself changing over time. I think even now, in retrospect, the evidence would suggest that Gorbachev wasn't entirely sure of where he was going. Even though he turned into a liberal democrat, or at least professing that, it's not clear exactly when he made that transition in his own thinking.

I took that job in 1988. I guess it was in 1988 or 1989 that he made a speech saying the Soviets would pull a very substantial number of their troops out of Europe, out of Germany. We were initially skeptical about that, but he did follow through. It became increasingly clear that this guy was qualitatively different and so we had to begin to rethink policies. I think initially they changed more on the conventional forces level, than on the nuclear level. You're correct, when I first took that job in 1988, our traditional policy still hung very heavily over everything.

Q: What were the developments? I mean, how did we see the Soviet Union, on the NATO desk?

ADAMSON: On the NATO desk, we were always primarily concerned about our relationships with our allies and especially our major allies. We were concerned about not getting seduced by the Soviets. There was always skepticism, perhaps more than in other parts of the Department, and a concern to protect our relationships with our allies, and not to go too far too fast with the Soviets, without consulting fully and closely with our allies.

Q: Was there concern at that time, that if the Soviets started easing up and all, they might come up with something like, "Okay, Germany, you can unify, as long as you're out of NATO and out of the Warsaw Pact?" Was that something you were thinking about?

ADAMSON: Yes, that was definitely a concern once Gorbachev withdrew support from the East German regime, and we got the process of German unification going. There was clear concern that Germany not become a neutral country. Of course, for some decades, the Soviets had been arguing for a neutralized, demilitarized Germany, which was something we did not see as being in our interest. There was very keen interest in 1989, to make sure that nothing like that happened. Of course, with German unification, there were some qualifiers put on it, in terms of not "moving NATO east," but they were fairly minimal. They haven't really held up over time. But, yes, that was a preoccupation of ours.

Q: Did you find the European bureau had a different view than the military view?

ADAMSON: Yes. The interagency process in Washington is always rife with tensions. At least in my own experience, sometimes greater, sometimes lesser. There was a cleavage between the European bureau and the Political-Military bureau. In my perception, the European bureau understood that politico-military developments had to be understood in the context of history, regions, countries and political cultures. The political-military bureau had much less regional expertise and tended to look more at the technical side of arms control and pol-mil affairs. My own view, coming out of this is that it is very important to put functional issues in their regional and historical context. As long as NATO remains important to us, which I think it still is, even if less important than it was, I think that it's important that responsibility for that organization be lodged in a bureau that has regional and not just functional expertise. By the same token, I would argue that regional and not functional bureaus should have primacy in dealing with global hotspots - Korea, the Middle East, whatever - because they have the critical regional expertise.

Q: Did you get the feeling that our political military people and the Soviet political military people were both talking the same language, or was there much contact?

ADAMSON: I interacted more with the Soviets when I was with the United Nations than I did in the European bureau, because my brief was really to work the allies. My experience in the UN was that in this area, because we each had these huge nuclear arsenals, which were unique to those two countries, we understood those weapons, and had a perception of those weapons, and of arms control, that was kind of unique. We had a lot of mutual understandings on those issues that came from the fact that we had these large arsenals. I think we were always able to communicate, at least by the 1980s, when we had a history of arms control discussion that already went back a couple decades, we were able to communicate quite effectively in that area with the Soviets.

Q: Again, you were dealing, from the Washington perspective, with the allies. How did you find the Germans, the French, the British, the Dutch, others?

ADAMSON: Generally, the British tended to be the ones with the perspective that was the closest to ours, particularly on nuclear issues. The French, because they were also a nuclear power, tended to have views that were close to ours, at least on nuclear issues. There was always a concern with the Germans, being out there in the middle of Europe and being divided, that they might drift away from our current thinking. Happily, that never happened. They were in hock a bit to the Soviets, because the Soviets controlled East Germany. The Germans always wanted to reunify. Particularly under Helmut Kohl, the Germans were always solid as an ally. The Italians were also solid, although subject to Mediterranean ups and downs.

Q: Were Greece and Turkey kind of out of it?

ADAMSON: During the time I was in that office, I don't recall there being any sharp problems there, although that was sort of always an open sore in the alliance.

Q: What about the events in November, December 1989? Was that a nervous time, from your perspective, not knowing quite what was going to happen? We're talking about exodus into Czechoslovakia, Germans seeking refuge there? East Germany wasn't quite sure whether they were going to fire on their people. Was this a point where you thought we were reaching a flashpoint, or not?

ADAMSON: We watched that process with great interest. But not the way we would have seen it a decade or two earlier, with a Brezhnev or a Kosygin or an Andropov in power, because it was clear that things were fundamentally different. It became less a question of fearing what might happen, than of seizing opportunities. To their credit, President Bush and Secretary Baker did so.

Q: I must say it really was a remarkable job. It's not a foregone conclusion that things would have come out the way they did, united Germany within NATO, and all that.

ADAMSON: That is correct.

Q: After the events of 1989, unification and all this, it really must have been back to the drawing board, wasn't it, on NATO?

ADAMSON: It was back to the drawing board, particularly in the area of NATO strategy, because at this time, with German unification and so on, the security panorama in Europe had been transformed. A process was begun while I was in the NATO office, re-looking NATO strategy. Of course, the strategy at the time was flexible response. But, we wanted to develop a strategy that envisioned a much broader range of contingencies than just dealing with a Soviet invasion. So, we had to begin rethinking NATO strategy. That is a process that is ongoing, even now, 12, 13 years after, since rapid change has continued. I lived through the first wave of changes to NATO strategy, that involved developing a more flexible one, a less Soviet-focused strategy, reducing reliance on nuclear weapons, contemplating a greater range of threats, many of which may not emanate from the Soviet Union or Soviet bloc, which disappeared soon enough anyway. I think the Department of Defense, which has a great deal of resources, many more than the State Department, and SHAPE, the people who work for Supreme Allied Commander Europe, were really in the forefront of developing a different kind of strategy.

Q: Once Germany was unified, and given developments in Poland, a confrontation with the Soviet Union, certainly the ground forces, was unthinkable. It was impossible, essentially.

ADAMSON: Yes. Once the Soviets had pulled all their troops out of Germany...

Q: The situation was such that they couldn't do anything.

ADAMSON: That whole specter disappeared, although there was an overhang. There was always a certain residual skepticism about what the Soviets would do, all these troops who would pull east, and to what degree they would attempt to have kind of a shadow hand over central Europe, even as they withdrew forces. There was also always concern about a coup against Gorbachev. Of course, there was one, even though it was unsuccessful.

Q: I'm 74 years old, and I belong to the World War II, Cold War generation. NATO is obviously a shield against the Soviet Union, but in many ways, NATO and the European Union, as I see it, would go at these damn wars between Germany and France. By keeping everybody in that tent. For no other reason, NATO makes a lot of sense because it means the French and Germans aren't looking at each other and saying, "Oh, gee, they've got more tanks than we've got." If we didn't have NATO, it's not unthinkable that for some reason, the two might have gone off in a different course. You could take it away, and it could happen. Was that at all the thinking, or am I speaking from my generation?

ADAMSON: No, that was definitely a concern at the time of German reunification. I forget which Frenchman said that France loved Germany so much that they loved having two Germanies. The U.S. was much more enthusiastic about German unification than either Britain or especially France. The French had to swallow it. There was concern that Germany would bulk too large in a new Europe. That's why it was important to keep Germany locked into Europe, into European security arrangements, through NATO, also through the European Union. By 1989, the European Community, what became the European Union, and Franco-German relations had evolved sufficiently, that this was less of a concern than it would have been had this process of unification taken place a generation earlier.

Q: Was there concern that the United States, through Congress, might say, "Okay, it's all taken care of, let's get the hell out."

ADAMSON: Yes, definitely, which was one of the reasons there was interest in developing a new NATO strategy. Eventually, also, an interest in expanding the alliance, to show that it was an evolving alliance that met not only past needs, but would continue to meet important security needs of the United States. So far, I think, we have been able to persuade Congress of that, and that continues to be the case. There was definitely concern that some people might say, "Let's declare victory and go home."

Q: Maybe it wasn't expressed, but was NATO seen as a way of keeping peace within Europe?

ADAMSON: Yes. After all, both world wars in the 20th century had emanated from central Europe. At this point, the concern was not so much about tension between the big countries of western Europe, but rather concern that countries in central Europe, from Poland south, might become destabilized in this process of change, and that this might somehow trigger conflict. The concern was to consolidate NATO and the European Community in western Europe, but also bring central and eastern Europe into these institutions to ensure that what had happened in 1914, and what had happened in 1939, would not repeat themselves.

Q: Did Yugoslavia enter the picture when you were there? Was this concern?

ADAMSON: Yes. The Yugoslav problem was emerging about the time I was leaving, 1990, 1991. The first reaction among most NATO office people was that we wanted to stay out of that, that that was a can of worms we should allow the Europeans to handle, that it was not what NATO was for, primarily, and that getting involved in the Balkans was a way to get NATO and the U.S. involved in intractable problems, that were marginal, and that would detract from our ability to focus on more important issues. Frankly, we were wrong, and I was among those who were wrong. Of course, that is what the administration happened to think at the time. Eventually, the United States had to reverse course, but that was the thought at the time.

Q: I was with you. The Europeans were saying, "Well, let us take care of this one." Our response was sort of, "Be my guest."

ADAMSON: Exactly.

Q: How did you find the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and its call upon NATO troops? Did this put quite a strain on you all?

ADAMSON: No. Let's see, the invasion of the 1st of August 1990. I was still in the NATO office until the summer of 1991, but NATO as such did not work that issue much. Certainly, my office and my unit did not get involved.

Q: I was just thinking, essentially we took a lot of troops out of NATO, as part of our draw down anyway. The attitude was sort of, "Oh, by the way, while you're going back to the United States, why don't you go to the Persian Gulf and take care of matters there?"

ADAMSON: That's right. We had agreed somewhat earlier to a draw down of U.S. troops in Europe. This was a process that was underway. If Saddam had to attack Kuwait, he picked a good time, from the U.S. perspective, because we just happened to have loads of troops who were about to come home anyway, and whom we could ship to the Middle East.

Q: How did you find working with the Department of Defense, from your perspective?

ADAMSON: They were actually easier to work with than the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, because they had a lot of regional expertise. They understood Europe well. They tended to come at issues from a perspective that was quite close to our own, in the European Bureau. I think this was because they had a large footprint in Europe. SACEUR and his staff heavily influenced them, and they were interacting on a daily basis with the allies. We were getting our advice from the U.S. Mission to NATO. Those were generally like-minded fonts of knowledge, in that they were all very European-oriented. So, we got along quite well with them.

Stu, I'm going to have to pull out.

Q: I think this is a good place to stop anyway. We'll pick this up in 1991. Where did you go?

ADAMSON: I went to Lisbon, Portugal.

Q: Well, we're off to Portugal next time.

Today is the 13th of December 2002, Friday the 13th. David, you were in Portugal from 1991 to when?

ADAMSON: 1995.

Q: What was your job?

ADAMSON: I was political consular at the U.S. embassy.

Q: Who was our ambassador at the time?

ADAMSON: Our ambassador initially was Everett Ellis (Ted) Briggs, the distinguished career diplomat in his third and final ambassadorial post and who had been my ambassador in Panama.

Q: What was the status of Portuguese/American relations in 1991?

ADAMSON: Relations were very good. The Portuguese, traditionally, are Atlanticist in orientation. They were a member of NATO. The United States had played what they saw in Portugal as a constructive role during the Portuguese revolution during the mid-1970s, when the dictator was thrown out, and democratic institutions took hold.

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

ADAMSON: Actually, they were about to have elections when I got there. The government of Prime Minister Cavaco Silva, which was a center-right government, was re-elected. He served two full terms as prime minister. He was quite a popular prime minister. He was helped by the fact that Portugal had joined the European Community, later the European Union, in the 1980s, and received a great deal of funding from them. It was in the midst of a modernization effort, so Portugal was coming up in the world, although it was one of the poorer countries of the European Union.

Q: How did you operate there?

ADAMSON: Well, Portugal had the presidency of the European Community in the first half of 1992. That was a major challenge because we were a medium sized embassy. But, for those six months, we served as the interface, if you will, between the United States and Europe. Much communication was channeled between us. We had to do running reporting and analysis of what was going on in the European Community. That was very active and challenging work. So, it was generally very agreeable, because we had a good relationship with the Europeans and specifically with the Portuguese.

Q: What was your impression of the European Union, at that time? guess we're talking about the European Community at that time.

ADAMSON: It was the European Community until about 1993. There was a lot of energy in the European Community. It was budding into something progressively more important, particularly economically, but also at this point, the European Community was taking on political and even security dimensions. So, it was becoming more and more integrated, while at the same time, the fifteen nation states who were members still retained their individual identities. So, it was a curious kind of hybrid, and still is, between being a true supranational state and being composed of sovereign member states. At this point, it still seems that the European Union will be a collective of individual, sovereign states with pooled sovereignty in some areas, that will never become a United States of Europe the way we are a United States of America.

Q: Did you find any concern on the part of the Portuguese about the European parliament passing regulations that affected the entire European thing?

ADAMSON: There wasn't too much concern about that. The Portuguese were basically tickled pink to be inside this club, and to be receiving as much assistance as they were. The fact that there were certain inconveniences, like having to accept regulations that weren't ideal, you didn't hear much about that. The positive side dominated.

Q: While you were there, it seems like we had perpetual negotiations over the Azores. What was that like while you were there? Did you get involved?

ADAMSON: Yes. That was one of our big issues, along with the European Union, and following domestic politics, the election and so on. The issue of most immediate importance to us was our base negotiations. While I was there, we were negotiating a new accord between the U.S. and Portugal that would regulate our use of the air base, at Lajes, in the Azores. The U.S. executive branch had originally pledged to make its "best efforts" with the U.S. Congress to finance the purchase by Portugal of some 20 F-16 aircraft, more or less in exchange for base access. The U.S. Congress later backed away from that. That produced some real tension, bilaterally. This was communicated to us by Portuguese Defense Minister Fernando Nogueira, Cavaco's deputy and later a candidate for prime minister, a failed candidate. So, there was tension, but eventually we got over this hurdle, by proposing a broadened agreement creating various committees and commissions, a bilateral commission with various subcommissions that would attempt to deepen, strengthen relations in a number of functional areas between the U.S. and Portugal. Basically, it was a way of hiding the fact that the U.S. didn't have really any money to provide other than the indirect economic benefits of our presence, but we could offer them a broadened, strengthened bilateral relationship. It was on that basis that the agreement was eventually consummated in 1995.

Q: Hearing you talk, and knowing nothing about it, you want some F-16s, and you get a bunch of committees, that doesn't strike me that you're getting much if you are the Portuguese.

ADAMSON: It was a bitter pill for them to swallow. But they only had two options. One of them was to break off the negotiations and tell the Americans to go home. This would have been painful for the U.S., but ultimately less painful for us than for them, because it was their major contribution to NATO and the tangible manifestation of their close relationship with the U.S. By this time, as I have noted, they were being richly financed by the European Community anyway, so their need for U.S. aid was mitigated, which was what drove the U.S. Congress to eliminate the F-16 financing. So, European monies were coming in. They ended up paying for the F-16s with their own money, and settling for this second best kind of agreement.

Q: While the U.S. Congress was digging in its heels... For example, Senator Pell has strong connections to Portugal, because he comes from Rhode Island, where there are a lot of Portuguese.

ADAMSON: I think basically there was a feeling in Congress that Portugal had grown up, was a member of the European Community, had access to rich financing, and the whole paradigm with the U.S. sort of indirectly paying for base rights, by financing weapons acquisitions, was obsolete. So, Congress just cut off the monies. This was at a time when the U.S. was dealing with a budget deficit. That was the rationale.

Q: You got there in 1991, and there were going to be elections. Did you have any interest in this election, other than watching it?

ADAMSON: We really didn't, because the opposition party, the socialist party, was also very much a moderate party, with which the U.S. had very good relations. So, it didn't matter, from our point of view, which one of the parties won. Democratic institutions were strongly embedded at this point in Portugal, so we didn't have concerns that the rules of the game wouldn't be respected. In the end, it was kind of a ho-hum election from our point of view.

Q: What happened to the individuals who caused so much concern in Portugal in the late 1970s? The young officers, and the communists, and all that?

ADAMSON: A couple things had happened. By 1991, the military had become de-politicized. They no longer had any role whatsoever in politics. They were completely subordinate to the defense minister and to the prime minister. On the one hand, there was absolutely no question of intervention by the military, who probably at this point no longer had very many leftists anyway. On the other hand, the communist party, run by Alvaro Cunhal, although he was aging at this point, was still active but commanded little support, in the neighborhood of five percent of the electorate. They were simply not a threat. The major party on the left, the socialist party, which was about as socialist as the democratic party in the U.S., was a congenial party from our point of view.

Q: Did the Portuguese keep an eye on Africa?

ADAMSON: Yes, very much so. The Portuguese had an intense interest in Africa, which derived from the fact that they were active colonialists in Africa for about five centuries, from the late 1400s, until they left Africa in 1974, 1975. They were our primary European partner in trying to broker peace accords in the former Portuguese colonies of Mozambique and, particularly, Angola. Angola was a resource rich country but had been in civil war since the Portuguese left in haste in 1975.

Q: Did you and our embassy find yourself involved in this thing?

ADAMSON: There had been accords brokered by Portugal, the U.S. and Russia, which were signed in Lisbon, but slightly before I arrived in 1991. Those accords, unfortunately, broke down. We were still active in the sense that the embassy conducted a lot of consultation with the Portuguese on Africa. We had senior Department of State Africanists, including the assistant secretary, coming through, and consulting with the African specialists, even the Portuguese foreign minister. So, there was a lot of diplomatic contact, facilitation and negotiations with the Angolan parties, taking place in Lisbon.

Q: How were relations with Spain at that time?

ADAMSON: Relations were good. That is an understatement. They were excellent between Portugal and Spain, probably the best in their histories. Nevertheless, the relationship between Portugal and Spain is a little bit like the one between the U.S. and Canada. We're good friends, but the Portuguese have a certain reserve about their neighbor, which is much larger than they are and which historically had designs on them. The Portuguese imagine, I think, that the Spanish have a certain arrogance about Portugal, that it should be just another one of their provinces. When the Portuguese look toward Europe, it's almost as if Spain doesn't exist. They sort of look as if their border is with France, with some kind of no man's land in-between. They travel through Spain without paying much attention to it. Their orientation, as far as it is to Europe, is toward Britain, with which they have a historic if somewhat controversial alliance, and toward France. Spain is often ignored, even if there is fundamentally a good relationship.

Q: Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think during this period Spain was undergoing sort of a renaissance. Affluent is probably not the right word, but it was hitting its stride as part of Europe, and shunning the old Franco times. Was that met with a certain amount of unhappiness by the Portuguese, or were they going along on a parallel?

ADAMSON: They were going along on a parallel, but perhaps on a slightly less vibrant course. The Portuguese and the Spanish actually shared very strong interests, such as insisting on structural adjustment funding from the European Community. They were two of the primary beneficiaries.

Q: You were saying that Spain was a couple steps ahead.

ADAMSON: Yes, they were a couple steps ahead of Portugal in terms of development, but they were on a parallel course. They had shared interests, in terms of continuing to lobby strongly for funding from the European Community, in terms of wanting strong European links with Latin America.

Q: Was there much communication between our embassy in Madrid and the embassy in Lisbon?

ADAMSON: Surprisingly perhaps, but very little.

Q: It's not surprising. I think this is usually the case. I would think there would be a certain Iberian unity, or something like that.

ADAMSON: Traditionally, the Portuguese want to maintain a very strong, separate identity from the Spanish. They don't think of an Iberian entity. They think in terms perhaps of a Portuguese-speaking world identity and especially in terms of a close relationship between Portugal and the Portuguese speaking African countries. They don't seek, and they don't perceive, an Iberian entity. Although they did work with the Spanish in terms of lobbying and pressing the European Community to continue substantial structural adjustment funding for them.

Q: How about Brazil?

ADAMSON: I suppose there is a certain parallel between the relationship between Britain and the U.S., and between Brazil and Portugal, except that perhaps the gulf between Brazil and Portugal is bigger, because Portugal is a country of 10 million, Brazil 170, 180 million. It really is a giant, compared to a relatively small country. The Portuguese were concerned, and remain concerned, I expect, not to be overshadowed in the Portuguese-speaking world by Brazil's economic strength, by Brazil's cultural and linguistic strength. There is a bit of an uneasy relationship, even though Portugal does seek to cement a close relationship among the Portuguese speaking countries of the world.

Q: Did you feel any emanation from the Portuguese descent community in New England, basically, maybe elsewhere? Were there any issues?

ADAMSON: That certainly was an issue the embassy focused on. In the context of the base negotiation, the U.S. had helped Portugal finance the establishment of a Luso-American foundation, known as FLAD, in the English acronym. It encouraged close cultural interaction between the two countries. A lot of that interaction from the U.S. side came from New England, and also from California, another area from the U.S. where there has been a lot of Portuguese immigration. We were certainly conscious of the Portuguese-American community. We even encouraged the Portuguese to work with the Portuguese-American community as a way to increase their influence in the U.S. Congress.

Q: Did you get the feeling that sometimes you were trying to get the State Department, the rest of the U.S., to pay more attention to Portugal?

ADAMSON: A little bit, although we didn't have any illusions that Portugal was that important. When the Portuguese had the presidency of the European Community or of the Western European Union, then they did get attention in Washington. I suppose what was more frustrating for us was the base negotiation. It was pretty difficult to get Washington's attention. The attitude ultimately in Washington was, "Well, if the Portuguese didn't want to play the game, according to the new rules, then we would take our marbles and go home."

Q: How did you find the American military base personnel fit into the community in the Azores?

ADAMSON: Not really a problem, no. The base commander was sensitive to the Portuguese. Of course, there were certain frictions, mainly having to do with the Portuguese labor force at the base. There were always complications and frictions over our relationship with Portuguese workers. That was probably the touchiest issue. Sometimes there were landing rights issues, transit issues. The Portuguese were sticklers on having adequate notice and things of that kind, protecting their sovereignty from their point of view. Generally speaking, the U.S. military was quite sensitive to Portuguese concerns.

Q: I guess you got there after it was over, but had the Portuguese played any role in the Gulf War?

ADAMSON: No. They didn't seem to feel particularly bad about that. Of course, they have limited military assets, but still they really hadn't played a significant role in the Gulf War.

Q: During this 1991 - 1995 period, were there any other issues that came up?

ADAMSON: Not too many. The key issues were the base negotiations, interaction with Portugal in its European Community and Western European Union roles, following domestic politics, and Africa. Those were kind of the four crown jewels of the relationship. Other issues were secondary.

Q: Well, looking at the European Community at this time, was there any feeling by you or others in our embassy about the way the European Community was developing? In a way, it was our creature. In the beginning, we wanted to get these people together so they wouldn't fight each other. But, at the same time, we were building another economic super power. Were we looking at it thinking that it was getting too successful, and they cut out our market?

ADAMSON: No, there wasn't too much concern in the economic area. Even if there were, and still are, trade frictions from time to time on particular issues, the main concern at this point was the fact that the European Union was working toward developing some kind of a defense capability, defense identity, earlier known as a security identity. There was continuing concern in Washington that this might undercut NATO. We always worked to assure that that didn't happen. That is to say, even if the identity developed and strengthened, that it didn't undercut NATO. I think we were successful in that. That was the main concern, as far as Europe was concerned.

Q: Well then, you left there in 1995?

ADAMSON: Yes. I should add one other issue, in the context of the European Union, primarily, how to deal with the Balkans and the emerging problems in that region. There we worked very intensively with the European Community and with the Portuguese when they were in the chair. By and large, this interaction between us and the Europeans worked well. We had parallel interests and generally had parallel perceptions of the situation. The Portuguese, from time to time, were an important influence on that issue.

Q: There was this period, as Yugoslavia started to break up, and fighting broke out, the Europeans said, "We'll take over, it's a European problem." We were delighted with this. Of course, it didn't work. Were the Portuguese ready to shoulder the responsibility or were they sort of observers in bemusement of what was happening there?

ADAMSON: You're quite right that we were initially happy to see the Europeans try to take on this problem. Of course, the Europeans were not successful, and eventually had to bring us and NATO in. It was a complicating factor for us, but ultimately, I think we saw that as the only way to go. It came out all right in the end, but getting there was difficult. There had been a great deal of reluctance in Washington, particularly in the George Herbert Walker Bush administration, to get involved.

Q: Were you going over to the Foreign Ministry, encouraging the Portuguese to get involved in this Balkans thing, and we'll sit back and cheer you on?

ADAMSON: Not so much. Really by the time I was working the issue intensively, the U.S. was becoming more involved. We were working together with the Portuguese. The Balkans is not an area of the world in which the Portuguese traditionally have any interest. The main problem was trying to find an adequate interlocutor on the Portuguese side, because the Portuguese wanted to talk about Africa. We eventually did find interlocutors, and the issue was handled.

Q: Where did you find Balkan experts?

ADAMSON: They didn't have people with a great deal of experience there, but they had some excellent diplomats, such as Ambassador Cutileiro, a distinguished Portuguese diplomat who had been educated in Britain. He was given the Balkans portfolio during their presidency of the European Community. He handled it very effectively. He was a quick study and he learned the issue quite well, and later became head of the Western European Union.

Q: What was your impression of the Portuguese Foreign Service?

ADAMSON: It was mixed. They had some very capable people, and then they had some less capable, less motivated people. They tended to be followers rather than leaders within Europe. Sometimes it was a little difficult to get into vigorous discussions with them, except on issues where they had a special concern, such as Africa. Their work habits weren't always the most impressive. They could come into the office as late as 11:00 or 12:00, and take long lunches. They worked into the evening somewhat. They generally had smart if not always dynamic people.

Q: Looking at the Portuguese government, how were decisions made? Did they have a parliament, a presidency? Where did you look for the pressure points for power?

ADAMSON: Power was primarily in the prime minister's office. The prime minister was in the position of being a strong leader of his party, having a majority in Parliament during the period I was there. This meant that it was almost one man rule, in the sense that he not only controlled the executive branch, but also the legislative branch. Portugal had a curious arrangement, and still has that arrangement. Whereby, they have a popularly elected president as chief of state, above the chief of government. The chief of state, however, doesn't have many formal powers, but he can make life a little uncomfortable for the prime minister if he wishes to. The chief of state while I was there, Mario Soares, was a socialist, from a different political party than the social democrats under Prime Minister Anibal Cavaco Silva. So, friction was quite commonplace between those personalities, and those institutions, but ultimately Soares didn't have enough power to really change most things. He could present roadblocks, delays, and he could speak out in a loud dissenting voice. In the embassy, there were two different schools of thought on this. One viewed Soares' presidency as a necessary and desirable check on the prime minister's power. The other, minority school of thought, to which I adhered, was that the Portuguese system didn't really need that check, that Soares was a nuisance, that the prime minister should be allowed to govern without the president nipping at his heels, and then the prime minister should be held to account when there were general elections. I did not see a strong prime minister as a threat to democracy but rather as a vehicle for getting things done, but among official Americans, perhaps not surprisingly given our own system, I was a minority.

Q: Soares had an international reputation at that point, didn't he, as being the one who brought Portugal out of times of trouble?

ADAMSON: That's right. He was a key player in the mid-1970s process of democratizing Portugal and making sure it didn't fall into the hands of the far left. He had always had a good relationship with the U.S., and that continued in the years I was in Lisbon. I called on him once at the presidency when the Ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission were away, and I had a good chat with Soares; he is a great man in many ways. We didn't have any problem with Soares, quite to the contrary. For the most part, we were just bemused observers at this intermittent struggle between Soares and Cavaco.

Q: Did the changeover from the Bush administration to the Clinton administration make any difference, from your perspective?

ADAMSON: Whenever there is a change in the administration, there is always kind of a blip on the screen. There was a substantial blip on the screen when Clinton took office. This was not because his policies were radically different from Bush's. Because his emphasis was on the U.S. economy, however, he wasn't in his initial period very interested in foreign affairs. I don't think we got him to a NATO meeting until his second year in power. The Europeans were really dissatisfied in 1993 with the degree of attention they were getting from Clinton. There were all kinds of stories about how European leaders would go to see him, and the Clinton White House was disorderly, chaotic, and they were always left waiting. They would have a 10:00 meeting with the president, and they wouldn't be on until 11:00. So, there was dissatisfaction with the amount of attention they were getting. Over time, that sorted itself out.

Q: Well, in 1995, whither?

ADAMSON: In 1995, I went off to Tegucigalpa, Honduras, as political counselor there.

Q: From when to when?

ADAMSON: 1995 to 1998.

Q: What was the situation in Honduras then?

ADAMSON: Honduras was at a much more basic level of consolidating its democracy than Portugal. Honduras had had a long period of military rule, which only ended in the 1980s. Even when I arrived in 1995, the military still retained very considerable political influence. They were still somewhat politicized, although the President of Honduras, Carlos Roberto Reina, was taking strong, and ultimately effective measures to reduce the political role of the military.

Q: What was the situation in Central America at this time? There had been a period of tremendous concern to the U.S., and other places, because of the various left/right wars.

ADAMSON: The situation in Central America had changed radically from when I was there from 1984 to 1987, when I was in Panama. We had, by this point, peace agreements in place, throughout the area. The Salvador/Nicaragua wars were over. The problem with Noriega was over. We had budding democracies, fraught with difficulties, but nevertheless budding democracies all over the region. The situation had changed quite dramatically. As elsewhere on the globe, one wouldn't have expected in the 1980s, that there would have been this favorable turn of events. The main problems at this juncture in Honduras and elsewhere in the region were in consolidating democratic institutions and then reducing poverty and achieving economic development. Here, the problem was very serious in Honduras, even more than in most of the other countries. Honduras and Nicaragua were lacking the most in terms of economic development.

Q: Who was our ambassador?

ADAMSON: Our ambassador was Bill Pryce, who had been my deputy chief mission in Panama.

Q: What were our main concerns there?

ADAMSON: Our top concern was the relationship between the Honduran military and the Honduran civilians. Our effort was to buck up the civilians, strengthen their control over the political system, enhance the subordination of the military to the political leadership. We were active in bolstering the presidency of Carlos Roberto Reina. Secondly, economic development. We had a substantial USAID mission in Honduras. We were working very hard in that area as well.

Q: What tools did you have to work on the democracy and the military?

ADAMSON: We had some concrete resources. Primarily, I'm sad to say, through the Department of Defense, rather than through State. But we didn't have a whole lot in terms of concrete resources. We had some monies that could be used to train Honduran military, to take them to conferences, conduct military exercises in Honduras, and promote a kind of interaction with our military that we felt was beneficial, in terms of inculcating in them our view of how a military operates in a democracy. Above and beyond that, we had our own prestige and ultimately our own national power. Whenever the rumblings in the military got too loud, and we sensed any possibility that they would step out of their subordinate role, that they would either overthrow a president, or make some kind of an effort that would be inconsistent with our view of how a military should comport itself in a democracy, we were quick to advise them not to do this, or to warn them that there would be serious consequences. These consequences could include reduction or elimination of U.S. assistance, and a process of ostracizing them internationally.

It was through that kind of pressure that our influence was most important in making sure that Honduras stayed on track in terms of democratization. We were front and center, publicly supporting the elected, civilian president. We also had some assistance through the Department of Justice, and other channels to help the police there strengthen their role and to help civilian governance generally.

Q: Did Cuba play any role, by this point?

ADAMSON: Cuba did not play much of a role. Honduras did not have formal diplomatic relations with Cuba. We wanted to keep it that way. Occasionally, that issue would pop up. There would be rumors about full diplomatic relations with Cuba. We would jump in and discourage the Hondurans from doing this. There was talk of strengthening relations between Cuba and Honduras, but it never really took much shape during the period I was there.

Q: What was Honduras' role in the OAS?

ADAMSON: Honduras is a small player in multilateral institutions. They didn't play much of a role in the OAS, except on issues that were a direct concern to them, such as the delimitation of the border between Honduras and El Salvador, or the de-mining effort that the OAS was facilitating in Central America. Other than on issues of very direct interest to them, they didn't seem to play much of a role.

Q: At this point, was Nicaragua much of a menace? They were basically a wealthier country.

ADAMSON: Nicaragua and Honduras were the two poorest in the region. Honduras was probably doing better than Nicaragua, which was still feeling the effects of the civil war, the contras, and the Sandinista years. Honduras had problems with El Salvador in terms of implementing the decision that had been made by the World Court on the land border and on maritime borders in the Gulf of Fonseca, and there were unresolved maritime border issues in the Gulf and on the Atlantic side between Honduras and Nicaragua. The World Court basically ruled in favor of Honduras on the Gulf of Fonseca. The Salvadorans from the Honduran perspective were dragging their feet, in terms of delimiting the border according to the world court decision. There were also, from time to time, problems with Honduran fishing boats being seized by the Salvadorans and especially the Nicaraguans.

Q: What was your impression of the civilian government in Honduras?

ADAMSON: They had some good people. The president, while I was there, Carlos Roberto Reina, was an impressive man. The man who was elected to succeed him, and who was inaugurated at the close of my tour, Carlos Flores, was also an impressive man. They were capable men, U.S.-educated, and perceived by us to be generally honest, and wanting to take the country in the right direction. But, generally, Honduran political institutions were weak. The adherence to democratic norms was weak. They basically needed a lot of bucking up. They needed a lot of assistance to keep them pointed in the right direction. Our major effort at this stage was to improve their criminal justice system. We were having some success there. We had some instruments we could use to give aid, and to give training. That was bringing some results, in terms of strengthening the judiciary, strengthening the police, strengthening the new investigative police, their FBI, if you will. Still, there was a long way to go.

Q: Was there any residue involved there, from the contra war, particularly with the CIA operation?

ADAMSON: At this juncture, there was not much of a residue. Much of that interaction had gone away. Washington no longer had an interest in Honduras in that context, since the war in Nicaragua had gone away, and the one in El Salvador had gone away. There was even talk of eliminating the CIA presence entirely. The Hondurans, however, had an internal residue in the sense that the alleged human rights violations committed by the Honduran military during the 1980s remained a controversial domestic political issue. The U.S. sometimes was brought into this because of declassified USG documents that were seen to shed light on this.

Q: I'm not familiar with Honduras. Some of these Central American states, you talk about the top 30 families, and the top 20, was there a family oligarchy running around?

ADAMSON: There was something of an oligarchy. There were a small number of families, but there was less of this phenomenon in Honduras, than elsewhere in Central America. Honduras had traditionally not had a large landowning or otherwise wealthy class. This was changing a bit in the years I was there because the president who had preceded Reina, Rafael Leonardo Callejas, had broken all the records, in terms of corruption. He had stolen blindly from the national treasury, and had created new bastions of wealth in society. Honduras was becoming more polarized on this wealth.

Q: How did you find the embassy? Did one get around in social society?

ADAMSON: Yes, one could get around. Honduran society was pretty permeable. The U.S. and the U.S. ambassador cut a pretty wide swath in Honduras, and the ambassador certainly moved in high society.

Q: How did you find the military? If you were attaches, could you keep testing the pulse of the military?

ADAMSON: Yes, through our attaches and so on, we had fairly good contact through the military. The military, during the time I was there, was still led by corrupt generals who weren't that professionally oriented, but rather were more oriented toward personal aggrandizement. The analogy that had been the case during my tour in Panama, and was made in Honduras too, was the military being a kind of mafia. That remained the case in the period I was there.

Q: Was there much of immigration to the U.S.? I know there was almost daily people coming from El Salvador, but how about Honduras?

ADAMSON: It was the same, with respect to Honduras. Perhaps a little less than El Salvador. Getting a visa to go to the U.S. was a priority for a lot of Hondurans. Emigrating legally, or otherwise, often otherwise, to the U.S. was an objective throughout their society. The U.S. was seen as the land of economic opportunity. This was certainly an issue. The U.S. consulate had a lot to deal with.

Q: Did you have a problem with being able to turn off your contact when the subject of visas came up?

ADAMSON: We had a procedure for interacting with the consular section on this. We had a lot of legitimate visa requests coming through in the political section. Some were less legitimate. It could be a nuisance, but it generally wasn't a big problem.

Q: Were there any crises while you were there?

ADAMSON: There really weren't any crises. Perhaps once or twice, there was a concern on our part that the Honduran military might take steps against the political leadership. We had to make some effort to quash that. Generally speaking, our problem was getting the Hondurans to break out of lethargy to do things we thought were useful in terms of improving their own democratic institutions or moving on an international front to sign agreements with us on anti-drug or other functional issues that were a concern to us.

Q: Was drug trafficking going through Honduras?

ADAMSON: There was some going through or around Honduras. Generally, we had good cooperation with the Hondurans, but resources were always an issue, and we had to provide them a lot.

Q: What about the UN? Were you running with the usual laundry list?

ADAMSON: Yes, we were running with the usual laundry list. It was difficult to get much out of the Hondurans, by way of a definitive reaction on issues. They were polite to us, but they were generally going to go the way of Latin America and the Third World. They were on the Security Council during the first year of my tour, and actually they tended to be quite helpful there. Generally, we had good access to the foreign ministry, though their lack of depth could be a problem. The ambassador talked to the foreign minister quite easily. I could talk with the deputy foreign minister, and the senior people at the foreign ministry, of whom there were really very few working the UN issues. They had one brilliant veteran diplomat, Policarpo Callejas, who was charming and professional and very experienced. We could generally get good access, and rely on the Hondurans to not do us any harm, although we couldn't rely on them to necessarily support us.

Q: This was a time of considerable cutting of resources in the Foreign Service? Did this effect you at all?

ADAMSON: Yes. I had found in Portugal, and to a greater extent in Honduras, that there was willy-nilly cutting, particularly of the substantive sections, political and economic. While I was in each of these posts, the political section was undergoing reduction. At the same time, the tasks we were being expected to undertake were growing because in addition to traditional portfolios, we were being given new functional issue portfolios, international crime and international narcotics, and so on. We simply didn't have the support we needed, but in the time-honored Foreign Service way, we were supposed to be able to accomplish whatever we had to with whatever resources we had.

Q: Was there any solution?

ADAMSON: In Tegucigalpa the problem was mitigated in various ways, by delaying cuts and using other agency officers when possible, but these were palliatives. Ultimately performance was affected by the level of resources one could bring to bear. At one point the Department sent us a cable envisaging further, drastic cuts in the residual FSO presence at the Embassy, and the Ambassador sent back a strong message, more or less suggesting we might as well shut the embassy if we were going to cut back that much.

Q: Was there much to gain in getting out and around in Honduras? Going to the towns and villages?

ADAMSON: There is always a certain advantage to be gained from that, in terms of getting a feel of the winds that are blowing in the political and economic arenas, developing and strengthening contacts, seeing people in their home environment, etc. But, in Honduras and elsewhere in my career, I found that that was one of the things that was first to go when you have limited resources. That took you out of the office and you couldn't do what you needed to do had you been in the office. I have to admit, though, that I met my future wife on an official trip to the north coast of Honduras.

Q: Well, you left there in 1998?

ADAMSON: I left there in 1998, and spent the final year of my career at the Inter-American Defense College, or IADC, here in Washington.

Q: What were you doing?

ADAMSON: I was what they called a faculty-advisor. The IADC has a set of faculty-advisors from most of the countries in the hemisphere, who serve essentially as facilitators, advisors, to the students, who are military senior level officers from around the hemisphere. It's a useful institution. It brings colonel, and lieutenant colonel-level officers and also civilians of about the same rank from around the hemisphere, including the U.S. and now Canada, to Washington, for a year of study of regional security and related issues. I think it is a good confidence building measure, in that emerging military leaders from around the hemisphere get to know each other, understand each other better than they did. So, my role was to serve as mentor to some of the students. I also did some lecturing on American foreign policy.

Q: What was your impression of the men, and women, I guess?

ADAMSON: There were mostly men, but some women, particularly civilian women. My impression was that many of them were going places in terms of their national militaries, that many of them would probably make the rank of general officer, and that it was useful to have them in Washington for a year or two or three, since some became faculty-advisers or military attaches or diplomats in Washington. It exposed them to the U.S. and to our military and to each other, to other hemispheric countries, so they could develop bonds and relationships that could prove useful in the future.

Q: In Portugal and then Honduras, were you seeing a change in orientation, or maybe they had already been there, but I mean, more students going from these countries, to the U.S. to study, or were they going elsewhere?

ADAMSON: I couldn't really say what the trend was in that area. I can say that it seemed that our ability to finance that sort of activity was being reduced, which was unfortunate. What the overall trends were, I wouldn't know.

Q: You left in 1999?

ADAMSON: Yes, I retired in September 1999.

Q: Then, what did you do?

ADAMSON: I successfully competed for a professorship at the Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, which is part of National Defense University (NDU). It is one of three regional academic centers, of the university, and one of five regional centers that are operated by the U.S. Department of Defense, including the Marshall Center in Europe and the Asia-Pacific Center in Hawaii, which report to the respective regional U.S. military command rather than to NDU.

Q: What were you doing?

ADAMSON: I was a member of the faculty, a full professor. The primary course that is offered there is on defense strategy and management, primarily management. I was teaching modules on interagency cooperation and on human resources management, teaching in Spanish and sometimes in Portuguese to, primarily, Latin America students. That was my primary role. However, my career there was circumscribed by the dual compensation or pay cap for civilian retirees, which means that I, unlike my retired military colleagues, could not receive most of my civilian pension. As a result, I resigned in July 2002, when I hit my cap that year.

Q: I guess this is a good place to stop.

ADAMSON: Okay.

Q: But, to put at the end here, you are going off to a short time assignment. It sounds quite interesting.

ADAMSON: Yes. I've been contracted to go out to U.S. Transportation Command, at Scott Air Force Base, in southern Illinois, to serve for almost a year, as political advisor to the commander there, who is an Air Force four star general, who is head of the U.S. Transportation Command, known as TRANSCOM. He manages U.S. military transportation, globally. He has something like 90,000 people under his supervision. It is a very large and important command that provides the U.S. its strategic mobility. It is one of the nine unified commands of the U.S. military. Until now, it is the only one that has not had a permanent political advisor position filled by a senior U.S. Foreign Service officer. They are changing that. They hope to have an active duty Foreign Service officer out there by fall 2003. I will be out there on an interim basis until the active duty officer arrives. They found as the war in Afghanistan heated up, they really needed someone who could help on the diplomatic side as they were transporting troops and material around the globe, and in particular to southwest Asia. I will be doing the same re Iraq, assuming we go to war.

Q: For the last decade or more, one of the things that has given the U.S. its edge as a superpower, is it being the only power that can transport troops by air, or supplies by air, or what have you, anywhere. No other country can do this. Other countries, when they get in trouble, they call on us. The Europeans have to be lifted to places by American wings.

ADAMSON: That's right. We should also remember that while air transport is more rapid, most of what we move is by sealift.

Q: I'm surprised that there hasn't been a political advisor. So much of the work they do is fly into places where they haven't seen American Air Force before. What the hell do they do? They get there and say, "This is what we're doing," and telling people how to avoid problems.

ADAMSON: Right.

Q: Okay, I want to thank you very much.

ADAMSON: Thank you.

Q: It's been great.

End of interview