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

MARK S. PRATT

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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[Note: This interview was not edited by Mr. Pratt]

Q: Today is the 1st of October, 1999. This is an interview with Mark S. Pratt. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Well, let's start at the beginning. Can you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family?

PRATT: Yes, I was born January 29th, 1928 in Lynn, Massachusetts, but my family was resident in Salem, Massachusetts, and my father's family had been there for about 300 years.

Q: So you were born in the Year of the Dragon. I was born on the 14th of February 1928.

PRATT: Well, we're dragons then. We should be compatible.

Q: Could you tell me something about your mother and father?

PRATT: Yes, my father was from a rather old New England family, both his father and mother. My mother's family was originally from the Middle West, but both her father, whose family name was Schrumm, is from that little area in Virginia where this German deserter from George III's troops settled in the area of Scotch-Irish. And then my mother's mother came from farther south, the Carolinas, and they were both from the Middle West. And of course when they were born the Civil War was barely over, so it added to my father's side, which had one person who fought for the entire Civil War and another grandfather who had paid somebody else to go in his place while he made a great deal of money producing munitions and other things for the Union side. On my mother's side, one ran horses to the Confederacy, and the other side of the family had already left Virginia because of the opposition to slavery. So there was very much an awareness in our family, of course, of the importance of the Civil War.

Q: Where did your parents meet?

PRATT: They met in Salem. Lynn and Salem are, of course, contiguous. And my mother's father practiced medicine in Lynn, and my father's family was in various types of business in Salem.

Q: What sort of education did your parents have?

PRATT: My father graduated from Massachusetts Agricultural College-"Mass Aggie," it was called-University of Massachusetts now. And he was sent there because his grandfather offered to pay for the education of all of his grandchildren, and some of them selected to go to Harvard and Harvard Medical School and he paid for that. But my father was very sensitive to the fact that he was getting it from his grandfather, so he went to the cheapest place there was, which was Mass Aggie. And that was what he had as his background, which then gave him . . . they made him a second lieutenant in the First World War and then subsequently got him to be the director of the Park Department in Salem. We can go on from there later, because later on, when he became director of the Salem Hospital, he got a master's degree in public health from Harvard.

Q: Your mother?

PRATT: My mother went to the University of Indiana because that's where her father had been. Her father had gotten his doctor's degree from the University of Indiana, and so she went back there, I guess out of filial feeling, but then got her final degree from Cornell, and she got it in modern languages, French and Spanish. She subsequently studied at Simmons, and she had herself worked for a time and then they got married.

Q: So by the time you came along in 1928, what was your father doing?

PRATT: My father was still the director of the Park Department. It was in 1931, I believe, that he moved to be director of the Salem Hospital.

Q: Did you have other brothers or sisters?

PRATT: Yes, I have two brothers and a sister, one older brother, one younger brother, and the youngest child is a sister.

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

PRATT: Early schooling was at the Bowditch School, named after Nathaniel Bowditch, the great navigator, and he was, of course, a Salem boy. And this is the same school that my father had gone to. In fact, some of the same teachers were still teaching there, so one had quite a sense of roots there in Salem.

Q: Did the sea play a part? One always thinks of Salem and whaling and all that.

PRATT: Very much so, because although none of my immediate family had been seafarers, nonetheless it was one of the strains there. One of my great-grandfathers, his wife's family were the Wards, and they of course had been sea captains, and one of them was Frederick Townsend Ward, who was in China as the precursor of the British "Chinese" Gordon as the head of the Ever Victorious Army during the Taip'ing Rebellion. But it meant Salem was very much there on the seacoast. We would go to Dirty Wharf. We would go aboard the ships, and we had our own little sailboat and so on, so that when I was growing up the sea, of course, was very, very much in our lives.

After I was about eleven, I guess, when they moved from Salem to Marblehead, which, of course, is basically a very different type of society perhaps, but now of course very much just a suburb of Boston.

Q: Then it was more sort of a yachting place, wasn't it?

PRATT: It was a yachting place and very important for the summer people out on the Marblehead Neck and a very important yacht club, where many persons from Boston and elsewhere would have their yachts. So indeed it was very much a place for yachting and sailing, but then we had the old town, which were fisher people and drawn from the Channel Islands, where they had a very different accent and sort of a different speech from those of us from Salem, shall we say, just a mile or so away.

Q: At the Bowditch school, did you find that there was any part of the sort of the educational curriculum that was beginning to particularly gain your interest-reading?

PRATT: Well, the Orient, of course, was some place of considerable interest because of Salem's connection with China, and so China, indeed, was one part of this and also the fact that some of the members of my family had been there. In fact, we still had some there until 1923. Then also, of course, we had, as you can see, some of these things around here were from my grandmother, so on that side they had their gifts from people who came back from China, and so on. So I'd say that at that time, probably the China side of things was one of the extensions of general education that interested me the most. I think you know that the old East India Marine Hall, now called the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem was a place that my father used to take us to in order to have us get some sense of that sailing background and the Oriental connection of Salem.

Q: At an early age were you starting to read about Asia? Did you find yourself sort of following news from China more than most other people? This was the time of, of course, the Japanese incursion into China and all that.

PRATT: Yes, but I got a little more about Europe, when, say, in 1938 the storm clouds were more obviously striking there, because my grandfather, whose family had been here since the 18th century nonetheless was considered to be of Prussian-German background, somebody who could possibly have close connections with Europe, and at one point he'd been invited to go to the University of Berlin-I believe that was the university-to work on a special branch of medicine. This was before the First World War, but his wife said she didn't want to leave this country, so they didn't. But it meant that he retained a very, very great interest in world affairs and in Europe in particular.

Q: How about sort of around the dining table in the evening. Were foreign affairs talked about much?

PRATT: Not too much. Basically it would be on a Sunday when my grandfather was there, and my grandfather, as many doctors do, had a very pedagogical aptitude and interest, and so he would try to broaden our horizons-Asia as well, because he knew of the Asian side of my father's family-but the European side was one that he thought he could make a great contribution to, and did.

Q: Where did you go to junior high, high school?

PRATT: Well, in 1939, we moved to Marblehead. And we did not live in the old town; we lived in the newer development, which is part of the burgeoning bedroom side for Boston. And I went to the high school there until I went off to Exeter Academy in 1943.

Q: What was Marblehead-was it high school or junior high?

PRATT: Well, this was high school at that time because I think they broke it in a different fashion, different year. I think it was the seventh grade . . . eighth grade, I guess it was, and so I was there for three years . . . two and a half years, about three years. So this was very much a much more suburban, drawn from all over the United States, really. This was where the bedroom towns and the people who were moving around brought in the different . . . I think, maybe, generalized American suburban culture. So this was very much of a "jock" type school, mostly middle to upper middle class and very much-not anti-intellectual, but certainly not very pro-intellectual. Standards, I think, were not what they could have been, although you had the teachers who still were in a slightly older environment mentally, and so we had our Latin and we had our French, and we had other subjects which required some effort, but you had a general atmosphere in high school which is more real sort of "American high school" than it was a learning environment.

Q: Before we move to Exeter, was there anything that you were particularly interested in or good at while you were at this high school?

PRATT: Well, I spoke languages, for one thing. I got an early start on French there because one of my friends had a family that was sort of traced back to Charles Sumner, and they had his portrait in the library and so forth, and they wanted their son to go on back to Exeter the way several of his forebears had done, and so he's the one who interested me in going there. And so for a year or more prior to that, his mother, who had been raised in Berlin but had a French governess and was an American family, so she spoke English, French, and German-her English had more accent than either her French or German-she wanted to give her son a step up in French because she felt that at Exeter he would be one year behind because they started French much earlier at Exeter. It was in the middle of their four-year high school. So she taught us French, and she had me involved with her son because she felt that he would pay more attention to it and be more willing to learn if there were someone else there learning it. Well, he didn't do quite so well as I did, and then he did not go on to Exeter, but in the meantime, I had had my path set toward that as a result of this desire on the part of my friend's mother to get him to go to Exeter but to be ready for it in foreign languages. So that was my first taste of foreign language as something which was not really foreign because, after all, it was spoken by the mother of a friend.

Q: Well, you were at Philips Exeter from when to when?

PRATT: From 1943 to 1945.

Q: What was Exeter like in those days?

PRATT: Well, it had quite a fair jock aspect to it, as I'm sure you will have heard from Jim Lilley, although he wouldn't have described it quite that way, although months later he did say one of the reasons our paths did not cross that much at Exeter (because we were there at the same time) was that "You were in the 'brain' part, and I was in the 'jock' part." Of course he wouldn't admit today that he wasn't as brainy as the rest of us-and he was-he was very good in school as well. But in any case, there was this other aspect, which I found most interesting, and that is the number of persons who were there as sort of refugees from the European war.

Q: How did Exeter respond? You were there during the war, and was it a subject of conversation, a subject of study? How did it play while you were there?

PRATT: The war was rather important, because of course we had, as I said, a number of students who had been given special scholarships to get them out of Europe, some from England, some from the Continent. I did not know too many of them very well, but the point is that they were there and they gave a kind of leavening in which they would want to very closely what was going on in their homeland of Hungary or Germany and so forth, and so of course it meant for the rest of us that if it's that important to them then maybe we ought to know a little bit about it. So I think there was much more of a sense of both national affairs and international affairs at Exeter than I certainly experienced in Marblehead. Of course, my father's job-he was then also a member of the Office of Defense Mobilization, which meant that he was supposed to be on an advisory board to assist in preparations for the war. This was even prior to 1941 -the preparations to get the American hospitals and other aspects of the medical care cranked up to meet a war situation. So already at home, my grandfather, my father, and so forth-the international side of things, the war, was really something which was very, very important.

Q: What about reading and all during the time you were at Exeter?

PRATT: Well, we had to read mostly the things which were covered by our course levels, but we did occasionally have teachers who would extrapolate from what we got in our textbooks to what was going on at that time. We did not, of course, in the very highly academic schools, have courses in current affairs and so forth, as we had actually had at Marblehead, where we would be the news story of the week and discuss it and so forth. But nonetheless, the teachers being themselves well educated were interested in what was happening right at that moment, and therefore some aspect of current events would intrude on many of our classes, including our French class-because after all our French teacher was a refugee from France.

Q: Many of our generation who went into the Foreign Service received got an exquisite sense of world geography by hearing names like Tobruk, Rostov, Chungking or Iwo Jima, Guadalcanal-you know, we followed the war on the map. Was this true-

PRATT: Oh, yes. Some people would have their own big maps on which they would trace this, because it was, indeed, the environment in which we were growing up, and of course we know that if the war went on longer, we'd be off in some of these places with a gun in our hands, and therefore this was not something which was just an abstraction. But as I said, we had teachers and fellow students who came from these places, so it was a very internationalized environment there.

Q: How about your feelings about China? Did that continue or was that sort of pushed to one side?

PRATT: Yes. We continued to be very interested in China.

Q: Were you doing more reading about China at that time?

PRATT: Somewhat. Of course, that's the time when one does a great deal of reading and so one reads across the board, and one would just go into a library and come across a book of which one liked the title, and take it home and read it. And so, of course, I was reading about aspects of China as well as many other things.

Q: While you were there, was there any thought about where you might go to college at all?

PRATT: Yes, it was mostly that I would go to Harvard. Many from Exeter went to Harvard, and of course quite a few went to Yale, too-Jim Lilley, for example. But I'd been to the Harvard Campus. My father had studied there in the School of Public Health. My mother had studied at Simmons in Boston, and therefore Boston seemed to be a good direction to go. And obviously it had a great deal to offer, a wide range of subjects, and it seemed to be a natural place to belong to. I think it's about the only college to which I applied.

Q: You graduated, what, in-

PRATT: -1945.

Q: 1945 - then you must have been a little ahead of your class, weren't you?

PRATT: Not really, no. I mean I was young for my class, but that's only because I was born in January, and the way in which they calculated how many months old you had to be before you could go to school to begin with - so I was younger than many.

Q: So when you went to Harvard you were in what class? You were at Harvard from 1945 to -

PRATT: 1945 to 1946, I think.

Q: What were you taking when you started?

PRATT: I was taking mostly the standard courses one has to take when one starts. I mean you could take examinations to get out of two or three things, but other than that, English literature and things of that sort. However, I also sat in on the Chinese art course, which started out with the bronzes, the early archeological side of Chinese art, and that was an easy one to just sort of audit.

Q: Well, then in 1946 it sounds like Uncle Sam was breathing down your neck?

PRATT: Well, two things happened. One, despite the record I had at Harvard, where they selected me as the top student at Harvard from Exeter, I got rather . . . I still don't quite understand what happened, but the thing is I got to be very negative about many aspects of Harvard, and particularly their studies there, and did not do well. And they requested me to leave. They said I could come back, but they thought it would be best if I not remain on at that time.

Q: This was the same time I got out, in 1946, out of Kent, and I went to Williams with some of the same experience, except a significant number of the people who went from Kent to Williams - Kent was a very enclosed atmosphere - and some just plain went wild when they got to Williams and didn't study.

PRATT: I went a little wild, but I got some good friends there - and one of them, I still see him - who found it much more interesting to go to the theater and to go to supper clubs afterwards, and so on, and so -

Q: I hope you went down to Scollay Square, too, to see -

PRATT: Well, of course, we wished to see the, uh, as we called it, "the last remnant of the Elizabethan theater" in this country, the old Howard, but regular plays and the supper clubs and so forth, late night drinking and so on. It indeed was a period when I also found that I was learning so much more from my fellow students, who came from even broader backgrounds. And all the other things that one can learn there at Harvard without getting too sunk in some of the not very stimulating freshman courses. I think one of the big problems of a university like Harvard is that there's so much there to be learned, but it's not all just in the most pedestrian of classes.

Q: I know. Well, then what happened. I mean, you were sort of given your marching orders, and what did you do?

PRATT: Well, I went back home, and this was when I got my draft notice, or at least my notice that I would be one of the ones eligible for the draft. And so given my sailing background, I decided to volunteer for the Navy instead. This is when I enlisted.

Q: So you were in the Navy from when to when?

PRATT: I was there from April of 1946 to January 19, 1948.

Q: Let's talk a bit about your Navy experience. Where did you go for boot camp?

PRATT: Well, boot camp was just up the way here at Perryville.

Q: Perryville - that's in Maryland.

PRATT: Maryland, yes. I've forgotten what it was called now. There is a stop there on the train that used to let us travel down from New England or up from Washington. So this was the initial boot camp. Then off to Treasure Island, in San Francisco Bay, to study electronics, and we had I think a 10- or 11-month course or whatever it was there at Treasure Island, and then down to San Diego for the outgoing unit, and then from the outgoing unit off to a hospital ship, which took us out to Qingdao. And then from the hospital ship I was transferred to a destroyer operating in the East China Sea.

Q: Well, that sort of puts you right back in the briar patch, doesn't it.

PRATT: It did. I felt as though this is what I'd studied Chinese bronzes for. In any case, even in San Francisco, of course, I was just going by a feeling of connection with Asia, and although I probably did much more listening to music there, because one of the good things of being at that school was that I could get out every night and go whenever there was a concert, and so I heard a lot of music there. And of course we'd go to Chinatown, and at that point one didn't have any distinct ideas that one would necessarily go to Asia after completing the electronics training. That could be useful anywhere. But it did mean that it would be somewhere in the Pacific.

Q: Well, when you took electronics training, what does that prepare you for? What type of work were you doing?

PRATT: Well, the work I was doing was repair of radar and also radios, although generally there were radio technicians who were themselves often operators of the radio stuff as well, could do it just as well as we could, but the point is we were the ones who got, shall we say, the most up-to-date training in the repair of radar because it was much more recent, of course, than radio was. A lot of the radio people were already in their 40s, and therefore they would have to go back to school to get radar, which didn't exist when they had their early training. So this is what I was doing in China aboard the destroyer.

Q: What was the name of the destroyer you were on?

PRATT: The USS Rupertus. [Ed: DD 851 was a Gering class destroyer built in Bethleham, Qyincy in 1945]

Q: Did you talk about the China Station at that time?

PRATT: Not really because this was basically the Pacific Fleet, which had gone up above the China Station. The headquarters for the Pacific Fleet was in Qingdao before it was moved to Yokosuka.

Q: Did you get shore leave in China?

PRATT: In the first place, I was still aboard the hospital ship for several weeks when it first arrived in Qingdao because the destroyer was still out on maneuvers down in the Bucyrus [Ed: Ryukyus?]. And of course I went into China quite frequently, and then of course this was our home port, so that when we came back into port I was usually out on the town. The Rupertus was one of the destroyers which apparently had gone through the typhoon down in Okinawa when a couple of its sister ships were capsized.

Q: The book The Caine Mutiny has this storm as a major part of the plot.

PRATT: I think so. As I say, I was not on board the [inaudible] but even stories about how their fuel tanks were low and instead of pumping sea water into the fuel tanks to begin to have them float lower in the water, they left them empty, and that was, I gather, why they capsized, with of course considerable loss of life. But this was something which I didn't know too much about but it was one of the things that was background. Also, of course, I don't know whether you've been aboard a destroyer or not, but they are not, shall we say, friendly to landlubbers, and it turns out that I had much more propensity to seasickness. I had never had it before on the hospital ship going out. The motion is different. But the motion was something that didn't agree with me too much, so I spent a lot of my time flat on my bunk when we were out at sea because I was not a good sailor.

Q: Did you all get involved in the civil war in China?

PRATT: Well, I could say we were on the periphery of it. We knew about it. There were some Chinese who wanted to have acquaintances with Americans, who spoke a little English, and obviously, in many cases, for their own financial benefit because life was very, very difficult there. Qingdao, of course, was cut off from the rest of China by land because the Communists had the city surrounded.

Q: Qingdao is where?

PRATT: It's in Shantung Peninsula, where we had our ship visits when I was posted in China. And I was thinking of trying to go back there and to be there for the new ship visit. Jim Lilley, I think, got there because, of course, he himself was, I guess, born in Qingdao.

Q: On the shore visits, was this leaving you with any impressions of the KMT (Kuomintang-Guomindang)?

PRATT: Oh, yes. It was a very sad time both for American policy and for our view of the Kuomintang because we were there at one of the ports when they were bringing in the military equipment for the KMT army. And then one would see the trucks moving out to ship the stuff out for sale to the Communists. They would turn it over. The KMT would turn around and sell it. And we also had problems - I don't know whether they were just going out on a lark - I guess they were - but a Marine group in a jeep went out too far from the city, and they were shot by the Communists. And so one was very much aware of this environment. The Chinese whom we knew, of course, were very contemptuous about these KMT and their military. They referred to their headquarters as the "palace of the 10,000 sleeping colonels." And so it was very clear that this was a totally artificial situation, and I think that our people in the Navy realized it was just a very short period of time before we really should be getting out, and we did, of course. Within four or five months of my departure, the Navy moved the headquarters to Yokosuka. The Communists left Qingdao alone because it was useful to them; because they got all kinds of equipment which we were shipping to the KMT, which then the KMT was turning around and selling. So it was a very clear illustration of a sad and declining environment there. This was already 1947, but it was near the end of 1947, and you know that by 1948 it was pretty clear that things in the north were such that they would collapse in a very, very short period of time at any time the Communists blew the whistle.

Q: During the time you were in the Navy was there any apparent enemy, or was it just doing one's thing, sailing back and forth?

PRATT: There was no focused enemy because this was the time, still, before the Fulton, Missouri, speech of Churchill had taken place, and the problems were there in Europe, but there was none of this that looked that focused against Americans in Asia. At that time, the Chinese Communists were not really treating the U.S. as an enemy; it was only the Kuomintang, and the only thing we could feel was that the Kuomintang was obviously not behaving very intelligently. I mean the strategy of having themselves hold on to all these little enclaves in the north, where they dissipated all of their strength and where they, of course, lost or funneled through military equipment to the Communists, rather than trying to create a strong movement where they could - as at that time many of the military strategists, both American and Chinese, were advising Chiang Kai-shek to try to hold the line at the Yangtze and to abandon the dissipation of his forces and strength throughout the north. But of course the Chinese culture is one of face, and you just don't lose face by pulling out of Qingdao. You wait until you're kicked out. But as I say, Qingdao was so artificially there - we knew it was not there because it was a strong military bastion.

Q: Did you have any thoughts of what you wanted to do after the Navy?

PRATT: No, not yet. I just knew that I enjoyed traveling, I enjoyed being in foreign environments despite the fact that it was often both uncomfortable - there were many places where one didn't find the same facilities one would find elsewhere - but in addition to that it was distressing. The Kuomintang kept the people out of Qingdao at sort of bayonet point because they didn't want any more people in the city that they would have to try to feed than they had to. And in addition to that they had marauding parties that went out into the hinterland to seize the crops the minute they were in to be able to feed the city, thereby, of course, alienating a further batch of peasants beyond the city. But it still meant that things were very tight-rationed, and therefore there were beggars and there were people in obvious suffering - lack of fuel in the winter, so it was very cold, and it is, of course, right on the sea coast, with very cold winds coming in. Electric power was sporadic. Water was a problem. There were a great many hardships one had to look at, and they weren't easy things to live with.

But the complexity of it and the interesting way in which these people were trying to deal with this problem was to my mind fascinating. Then, of course, also the history was there very much in bricks and mortar. You could see the old German concession, and you'd see the German-constructed church, the German-constructed railway station and so forth. Then the Japanese took it over in 1919, and you saw the Japanese buildings. The [inaudible] police and all the rest had been built by the Japanese in the Japanese modern style, which is very interesting - of course, mostly drawing from the German and other Continental sources. And then of course some Chinese things, and of course absolutely beautiful landscape because of the sea and this beautiful peninsula there, marvelous to look at from the sea and also from the hills to look at the seashore. It was a beautiful landscape, and of course you'd get reminiscences of Chinese paintings, with the cloud effects and the mountains and so forth. So it was over all a very interesting and compelling experience.

Q: Well, you were still pretty young then, but were you thinking at all about How am I going to get back into this?

PRATT: No, I wasn't really at that point. I was just figuring that I would find some way in which I could be involved in things foreign. I was also, of course, studying Chinese. I had tried to study the Yale books on the way out there, and their very complicated Romanization was not the standard of the later Yale or the Wade-Giles, and also, of course, when you get to Qingdao you find that the dialect there is one of the stranger dialects of Mandarin, and therefore it is not easy to keep track of what the sound differences were between what I had learned in my books and what it is I was hearing there. But I would take my little notebook in with my Chinese friends and would have him say something, and I would then try to write down what it sounded like to me.

Q: Well, when you left the Chinese tour of duty, what happened?

PRATT: Well, then we left in December of 1947 and went back through Japan, went to Yokosuka. I took the train from Yokosuka to Yokohama and Tokyo, and of course saw there the results of a very different war. In other words, Qingdao had not been badly hit because when we defeated the Japanese they turned Qingdao over, and apparently there is a book out on this, which sometime when I get time I'll read, about how a Japanese colonel worked together with the Americans for the turning over of all of Qingdao relatively unscathed. In any case, that was not true in Tokyo, where the whole city was flat, with the exception of a very small number of buildings which had been built to European fire standards and so forth, because obviously the fire bombs were devastating.

But it was very interesting to see that really flattened city and realize that that city has not been untouched by war, even though Qingdao could have its history from the German time on - in fact, pre-German - all the way through, and you could get remnants of each part of it, boy, there was a lot that was no longer there in Tokyo. The Imperial Palace was there, surrounded by a moat, after all, and the Daiichi building and so on, but the rest was really -

Q: The Imperial Hotel.

PRATT: The Imperial Hotel was there, and so forth. But these modern fireproof buildings were there, but the rest of the place was gone.

Q: How long were you in Japan?

PRATT: Oh, this was just two or three days, enough to see it, enough to buy a pair of binoculars and look around at all the things.

Q: And then what did you do?

PRATT: And then the ship went back to San Diego, and I was mustered out in San Diego by my 20th birthday.

Q: What were you thinking about doing then?

PRATT: Well, going back to the university.

Q: I mean, had your attitude changed toward university?

PRATT: Oh, yes. I had decided I really needed to get it, and I had a renewed interest in some of the things which I really wanted to learn and would figure out ways of avoiding having to take all those courses which universities want you to take but you don't feel you're going to . . .

Q: You were saying you went to Brown - from when to when?

PRATT: My father had moved in 1946 from being director of the Salem Hospital to Providence, Rhode Island, where he was director of the Rhode Island Hospital. And having been away from home for five years, from the age of 15, I decided it would be nice to be at home again, and therefore decided I would go to Brown.

Q: Just so I get the period, you were at Brown from when to when?

PRATT: I was at Brown from September, 1948, until June, 1951.

Q: Can you describe Brown at that time. You, of course, were different, having had the military experience, but Brown as opposed to Harvard and all that - did you find it a different -

PRATT: Yes, I found it a very different environment. I continued to go up to Harvard to see friends of mine who had been a little bit more diligent and had been able to avoid "being separated," and so I retained a certain entrï¿½e to the more sophisticated and cosmopolitan atmosphere of Harvard, but at Brown it was very much, again, more "Joe College," smaller, and very - I shan't say anti-intellectual, but certainly not very much interested in the things of the mind. However, there were some people there who were, and I knew them, including my wife, who arrived the year after I did at the university. People who were interested in literature and history and so forth. And this small group was considered to be rather, shall we say, Bohemian and un-Brunonian. And although my father sort of tried to persuade me to go and present myself for the various - well, particularly his old fraternity, and also they had a fraternity of an uncle by marriage at Brown - I, of course, was not at all interested in the fraternity life.

Q: What area were you specializing in?

PRATT: Well, this is when I went back to Greek and Latin, which I felt I had been sort of diverted from when I went to Exeter and they told me, well, don't try to get into Greek and Latin here because you'll find that this is one of the strengths of Exeter and the boys who are there started out in preschool at Emerson and then a full four years of Exeter. They're the ones who are going to be working in Greek and Latin. Really, it's a little late for you. So I did not take Greek and Latin at Exeter, but I decided that I really should fill it in, so I majored in Greek and Latin. I finished in three years because I was able to get extra credits. In the first place, I took the maximum allowed - five credits instead of four - per semester, but in addition to that spent a summer in Florence working on the Italian language and Italian culture of the Quattrocento and so that gave me enough credits to be able to graduate in three years.

Q: Were you able to do anything to stimulate your interest in Asia at that time?

PRATT: Not much. There was no Chinese available at Brown at that time. There is now, of course. The only oriental language I took was Middle Egyptian, which got me into trouble later on when I was going through the oral exam for the Foreign Service.

Q: As you were doing this, did the Foreign Service raise a blip on your radar at all at this time?

PRATT: Not really, no. I was still filling in civilization, Western civilization - Greek, Latin, French, and Italian. I was doing some work on Chinese history. I read Fitzgerald's Cultural History of China and things of that sort. But I was trying basically at that point to fill in the basic Western civilization background so that I would have a better basis when I went to look at Chinese and Japanese.

Q: Were your parents sort of looking at you and kind of wondering, "Well, this is all very nice, but what are you going to do? How are you going to earn your living?"

PRATT: Well, not really. They were both very indulgent because they felt that so long as I was working hard and taking obviously very difficult courses and I my sort of minor at Brown was mathematics because I was aiming at taking Otto Neugebauer's history of mathematics course, he being one of the great, great scholars at Brown - there weren't too many, but he was one of them. [Ed: Otto E. Neugebauer (May 26, 189February 19, 1990) was an Austrian-American mathematician and historian of science who became known for his research on the history of astronomy and the other mathematical sciences in antiquity and into the Middle Ages.] And so they realized that I was taking very difficult courses and I was doing well. I missed a summa, but I got a magna from there. There was just one course where I was badly treated by a professor of Greek history. I disagreed with his book, and I should have known. That taught me something about politics.

Q: Oh, yes.

PRATT: He had written a book about Alexander the Great and considered him basically as a precursor of the Christ, and I supported Plutarch's analysis of Alexander the Great instead of Robinson's, and it resulted in getting a B, which ruined my summa.

Well, in any case, as I say, my parents were very indulgent, so when I said afterwards I wanted to continue on this European kick and would go to study in Paris, they were very supportive.

Q: So you graduated in 1951 and off to Paris?

PRATT: Yes. In 1950, as I say, I went to Italy to study there and had gone to Paris and then down to Italy, where I stayed at a pensione which was in the family of somebody who was a friend of mine, a professor. My professor had stayed in that pensione when an earlier generation of the family had run it, and so it was easy enough for me just to follow along there. And there again I had one of the interesting aspects of foreign, shall we say, diplomacy, in that one of the persons living at that pensione was the Marchese di Montagliari, who had been one of the great old Italian diplomats, who had been chargï¿½ d'affaires in Washington, I guess at the time of President Taft, when Italians had been killed in New Orleans.

Q: New Orleans - oh, yes, that was something like 10 Italians were essentially lynched.

PRATT: Yes, lynched there.

Q: And the police didn't do much. Oh, that was a big -

PRATT: Yes, and in any case, he had been chargï¿½ d'affaires at that time and had made very virulent protests too, which they didn't like. Then in addition to that he pulled off a very interesting stunt. The nephew of the secretary of the treasury had been in Italy in the Lake Country with his wife, and they went out in the middle of the lake, and the boat overturned. The nephew got to shore, but the wife drowned. And he had picketed men at the Hoboken piers when the chap, apparently very clandestinely, got aboard, but they were able to find out what ship he was on, and they were able to pick him up and carry him across, I guess, around to piers in Brooklyn or something of the sort to have him shipped back to Italy for trial. And the secretary of the treasury was so incensed - because this, of course, was not totally legal - and had him declared persona non grata. Well, this was a very, very interesting chap, a great old diplomat of the old school and one of the noble families there - but at that point, I guess, nearly penniless. And his mistress was a very handsome blonde Australian woman who had lived for many years in Peking, where her first husband lived off betting at the horse races, which is another aspect, of course, of the good old China that I kept running into.

So the Marchese di Montagliari was a very interesting insight into the life of what an Italian had been a number of years before. His first assignment was to Madrid, where he fought in one of the bullfights. I've forgotten whether he was a picador or what he was, but Queen Isabella awarded him an ear. And then he was at the court of Montenegro, where the old king used to hold court under the tree and so forth. So when one gets stories like that, one begins to build up a concept of the Foreign Service, so that was part of the interesting experience there.

But to get back to going off to Paris -

Q: You were in Paris from when to when?

PRATT: From 1951 to 1953. And I was nominally studying at the Sorbonne in a program for political philosophy - general philosophy and political philosophy - which included, of course, some Greek and some Latin, not much Greek, really, but a fair amount of Latin and then also the great 17th-century philosophers - Descartes and Malebranche and so forth - and then on, of course, to more modern things. However, I was getting back into my Harvard mode, finding I was learning a lot more in Paris than I was learning in the Sorbonne, so I was doing a lot of things - going to galleries and knowing painters and having dinners and going to cafï¿½s and so forth and meeting the fascinating people who were to be found there in Paris.

Q: Well, it was a great time of people from after the war. I mean, Paris was really cranking up again, wasn't it?

PRATT: Yes, it was. Well, like for example, I ran into people like Richard Wright, who lived down the street from me, and Baldwin. And I did not know the great Montparnasse people who were coming back there at that time, but I knew a number of . . . not well, but I knew Argentine painters and Egyptian painters and so on. It was a very cosmopolitan, very educational population.

Q: Again, having my practical American point of view, what were you aiming at?

PRATT: Well, I was aiming to do that particular phase, which is to get what I considered a solid education, which I should have got originally and much earlier, but as we all know these days, most education now occurs when people are a bit too old for it. It's very rare to have somebody like Oppenheimer's parents, who get him into the mathematics and physics at an age where he can really get this kind of education. But of course I was trying to get a much more cultural education, which was not quite so narrow as music or science.

Q: You had mentioned your wife was at Brown. Were you in touch with her, or was this something that developed later on?

PRATT: Well, both. In other words, we met in 1949. We got married in 1985. So there were a few years...But the point was that she was studying Greek and Latin, as I was. She started a year after I did, and therefore was going to go on after I left. Then she got married instead and took leave, had a couple of children, and then went back later on. But I always remained in touch with her, while I was in Paris for example, and when I came back I would go to see her, and then she and her husband moved, bought a house just three doors down from my parents' house in Providence, which is very close to the Pembroke campus of Brown University. So obviously she would see my parents, go over and have tea with my mother, and occasionally she would bring a letter, or my mother would have a letter from me and would read it to her, and sometimes she would ask my mother to help puzzle out what it is I had written because my penmanship was not of the clearest. But in any case, we maintained contact . But this was, again, part of the small number of good contacts, the good friends I made at Brown University.

Q: Well, then, while you were in France, had you any contact with people from the embassy or other embassies about?

PRATT: Not really. This was a time when I was, obviously, beginning to think when my two years or so were up I really ought to think about what it was I would do next, since I had gotten this opportunity I thought it built kind of a base for looking at Western civilization, which is, of course, my civilization, that I was closest to. And obviously, this is the time when the Foreign Service began to be one place to which I could go. I also was working a bit on the Asian side again. I went to the Sciences Po, for example, to attend the lectures by Jean Escara on Chinese law, and the family that had the pensione in Florence, the woman was an American citizen then living with a French professor of Greek and Latin, and one of his best friends, one he had been in the resistance with, was a priest who had been of an order which was seconded to various places abroad, and China was one of the big places in which they operated, to serve as intermediaries between native clergy and Rome. Often, of course, the Latin was inferior with some of these foreign prelates, and yet Rome wished to encourage the raising of them to archbishop and cardinal and so forth. So he had been one of these priests there in China, to study Chinese in the old school in Lyons back in the 20's. So knowing L'abbï¿½ Du Perret, he introduced me to a Chinese who was studying the foreign affairs side of France, and the world really, with Renouvin. And so I would meet with him, and he would prepare Chinese food and he would talk to me about China, and we would compare notes. He subsequently moved to Singapore and was one of the advisors to Lee Kwan Yu, and at one point I think he thought he was going to be named ambassador to Cambodia. Something happened, but as you know, Lee Kwan Yu had a very high opinion of Sihanouk and therefore thought it would be useful to get somebody there who would have a similar French-type background and could deal with Sihanouk in French. And so my friend nearly got named back there.

So I was having, still, certain contacts with things Chinese in Paris. And also a couple of people whom I knew there were studying in order to go back and take the examination for the Foreign Service. So that again was on my screen. So when I left Paris in 1953, I came back and decided that I should fill in those things which I would need to pass the Foreign Service Examination, so I embarked on a semester's course at Brown - postgraduate, non-degree or possibly a degree later, in such things as economics, in which I had no background whatsoever, and aspects of modern history.

Q: American history? Had you been picking up American history as things went on?

PRATT: Well, American history, of course, we got a fairly good background in it at Exeter.

Q: When did you apply for the Foreign Service Exam?

PRATT: As soon as I could, which meant that I would be taking the Foreign Service Exam in 1955, I think it was. I'm trying to think. No, it was in 1954 I took it first, because I came in in September of 1956. I think the cycle was such that it would have been 1954.

Q: When you were back in Providence and all, were you getting able to talk to anybody about the War College - about the Foreign Service, I was thinking about the Naval War College?

PRATT: Not really. I mean the international affairs sections were not that intertwined with the Foreign Service as they became later. There was very little in the way of recruitment. It wasn't generally considered necessary. But at least I got the advice that I could take the cram course at Georgetown University offered during the summer, and so that was in 1954 - June, July, and the first part of August - and then I would take the exam, I guess, in September, or whenever it was.

Q: I don't know.

PRATT: Well, in any case, I took the cram course given at the Georgetown Institute of Languages and Linguistics. I think it was located at that campus. In other words, I think it was down here on Mass Avenue, where Brookings is now.

Q: What did the cram course cram you in?

PRATT: Well, in the first place, it told you what was going to be on the examination, and therefore what multiple choice type things you might expect. Then what the essay exams would be and what the range of questions would be - how much of Western, how much of worldwide, how much American history, what the economics questions might be. And so it was very, very good. The thing is they didn't give you any crib sheet, but the point it did sort of tell you what sort of exam you were facing, and for persons who had not gone . . . If you had gone to Fletcher, you would have gotten three or four years of being told all that, but this gave you, if you had your own good general education, a good idea of what you were up against, what other people would know in advance was going to be on the examination, and you really ought to, too, so you could know how best to budget your time.

Q: When you took it, it was still a three-and-a-half-day exam, wasn't it?

PRATT: Yes, three and a half days. Two languages.

Q: How did you find the exam, the written exam?

PRATT: Well, I sort of prepared for it as much by having taken exams at university as anything the cram course gave me with the possible exception of the economic side of things, because I had studied international economics at Brown, that one semester course, and yet the cram course gave me a much better concept of how I ought to handle economic questions. There as at least one economic essay that you had to write.

Q: Well, then, how did you do on the exam?

PRATT: Well, they told me afterwards that I had the highest score that year.

Q: So you were ready.

PRATT: Well, they were ready, because this is when the oral team tried to do a business on me. One of the things I mentioned earlier was "Why did you study Middle Egyptian?" And I said that I was trying to study a non-Indo-European language in order for me to get a feel for the other languages that I would probably be exposed to later on. They said, "Why didn't you take modern Arabic?" I said, "They didn't offer modern Arabic." So this was something, I think, that annoyed one retired FSO who was on the team there, and they turned me down.

Q: Do you recall any other questions on that first oral thing?

PRATT: Well, one thing I studied a little bit of and said I was interested in Chinese, and so he said, "What does taku bring to mind?" I don't know. And of course, it turned out it was ta ku [da gu], which of course is written t-a-k-u, but it's not pronounced that way, and those of us who had studied Chinese - and by that time at Georgetown I'd already had one year of Chinese - in fact, more than a year of Chinese language. We didn't do any Chinese history, but of course I was reading Chinese history for some time. But this was one question which he thought showed that I hadn't really learned my Chinese history, whereas of course the fact that I had performed pretty well on the written examination would indicate that if I hadn't been led astray I might have had an idea what was going on.

Q: These were the forts located at the Pei River estuary, some 60 kilometer southeast of the Tianjian area?

PRATT: No, theoretically they are the bar for Tianjin. There was and incident there.

Q: Well, then, did this sour you on the Foreign Service at all, or how did you feel about this?

PRATT: Well, one of the other things he said afterwards was that they didn't think I had a sufficient background in economics to show that I would really be able to handle working in the Foreign Service. And I said, "Come on, I got a 93 out of a possible 99 on the economics exam. I'm sure that's higher than a lot of other people you have passed." I thought it was to a certain extent a bit of an anti-intellectual approach, which of course as you know was pretty much what was the ethos at that time. I went back, and you know "Wristonization" had just started and so forth. And I knew Wriston, and my father knew Wriston, so I went to see him.

Q: He had been the president of Brown, hadn't he?

PRATT: Yes, so my father knew him and I knew him. I went to visit him in Fosterville, his place on Cape Cod, which was not too far from where our place on Cape Cod was, and told him about this experience, and he said, "Well, I did try to tell them that we ought to get more people in who knew that Milwaukee was a great town, but maybe some of them are over-interpreting that." Because here was this kid coming in who had studied Greek and Latin and Middle Egyptian, of all outrageous things, studying in Paris, living it up in Paris and Florence, Italy, and he thinks he's going to go out and represent the United States? What does he know about the United States. He's never been out working in the coal mines, he's never done this, and so forth. So the Wristonization mentality, I think, was creeping in, and they decided, you know, we don't want any more from the effete Eastern establishment.

Q: Yes, well, I came in 1955, and I remember the thrust was they wanted a massive infusion of mainstream into the Foreign Service.

PRATT: Yes, outside the Eastern . . .

Q: I'm going to have to stop here pretty soon. I thought we'd get you up to getting into the Foreign Service.

PRATT: Okay, well, we're getting close.

Q: So what happened?

PRATT: So I went back . . . As I say, I went and talked to Wriston, and he said go back and try again. And he said he'd write a letter of recommendation, which he did. And so I tried again the next year, but the next year, of course, the next time I came in, it was no longer the long examination. And I didn't have any of the same static in the oral boards that year that I had previously. I don't know whether that was something they'd gotten over - because obviously they were very duplicitous in what they told me about the reason for rejecting me. That's one of the things which really soured me on this process - because, you know, when they say, "You don't seem to know about economics, you don't have enough of an interest in economics". . .

Q: I think that was probably a standard response, and they just pushed that button to all the candidates. It's usually an easy one to give, but not to somebody who did as well as you did on the exam.

PRATT: Well, this was the point. I felt that if they were going to give me . . . the fact that they just didn't like my gueule, then fine, but this is . . . or "this year we're trying to make sure we don't take in too many people who are intellectually suspect" - then fine. But you know, the thing is they just, as usual, find it much easier to make the politically correct lie or something which is false but which can seem more defensible. And that I didn't like.

Q: Well, then, you took the exam again in, what, 1956?

PRATT: 1955. I took two in 1955, and then in September of 1956.

Q: Alright. Well, I thought this would be a good place to stop. We'll pick it up - I'll put at the end of the tape so we'll know how to pick it up - we'll pick it up in 1956, when you came into the Foreign Service.

PRATT: Very good.

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Q: Today is the 27th of October 1999. Mark, we're getting you into the Foreign Service in 1956. I assume you took the basic officers' course, the A-100 course and all that.

PRATT: Yes, I did.

Q: Could you talk a bit about your impression of it and also of the people who came in with you?

PRATT: Well, it was a very good class, I thought, and many of them went on to have good careers, some in the Foreign Service. Some left the Foreign Service. But we were, I think, quite collegial, in that we felt many ties with each other and maintained some of these to this day. So it was a much better group than I thought the course was. I've often found that to be the case, that the students are often better than their teachers.

Q: You're basically only learning some of the bureaucratic principles that you're going to have to deal with, paperwork and all that. It's not really designed for -

PRATT: For political counselors.

Q: Yes, or to inspire you. It's just to say this is what a visa looks like; here's how you an aide mï¿½moire. Can you remember any of the members of your class?

PRATT: Harry Thayer, for example.

Q: We've interviewed Harry.

PRATT: Yes, and one who is a good friend of his, who left earlier on and then became the head of the International Rescue Committee, Bob De Vecchi. And let's see - Goodwin Cook.

Q: Goodie and I worked together in Belgrade. He's at Syracuse now.

PRATT: Syracuse. I saw him once when he was here from Syracuse. Let's see -

Q: When you came in, were you able to express any preference for the type of work you were going to do or where you would go or not?

PRATT: We were allowed to express it, but we were told that we couldn't expect too much to be listened to.

Q: So where did you go?

PRATT: Well, I was originally assigned to go to Hong Kong, which is the place that I wished to go because I wished to get as close to China as I could; and instead, I was at the last minute shifted to Tokyo. At that time, of course, the needs of the Service were very much the most important thing, and although we were allowed to express one or two preferences, it was not the way it is being done today. Tokyo, of course, was perfectly acceptable.

Q: You got into the right area, too.

PRATT: Yes, in the right area. Of course, obviously, most of us did not wish to go into visa work. We had not joined the Foreign Service to do that kind of work. After all, majoring in history and political science and so forth are not the things which have inspired one to get into visa work. But of course it was considered the "entry assignment" for almost everyone.

Q: So what was your first assignment?

PRATT: In late December 1956 I went into the Consular Section at the Embassy in Tokyo, which was visas and passports, citizenship work.

Q: Let's talk a little about visa work there. This was early on as far as Japan was concerned. What type of people were you talking to, working with?

PRATT: Well, this, of course, was mostly business visas at that time. The money was just not there for the personal tourism. We had a certain number of student visas, of course, but not too many of those, nothing compared to what happened later.

Q: I would rather imagine that there was no particular problem, as there was in posts like Naples or Mexico City, where you were concerned about people going to the United States as tourists and staying on.

PRATT: No, this was not a real problem. There were Japanese who did. Of course, we had the usual "Wristonees" heading the section, who had brought their paranoia with them from the United States, where everybody was just scheming to get into the United States, therefore you couldn't take anything which was said at face value; but of course, those of us who knew a bit more about Japanese society realized that was not at that time and at that place a major problem. It was not like China or Hong Kong or even, at one point, Korea.

Q: Yes. How about the American community. When you're talking about passports and other American services, was the American community a pretty stable one? Were there any problems with them?

PRATT: Not really, although passport and citizenship was more interesting even than visa work because we were still living with the fallout of the Second World War, which meant that there had been a couple of Supreme Court cases which had ruled that Japanese who had been impressed into the military had not necessarily lost American citizenship. Though much of this had been cleaned up before I got there, nonetheless, there were residual aspects of that. There were also, of course, a lot of Japanese Americans who had gone over to be in the occupation, and then, of course, the racial laws of marriage had changed, so we were still dealing with open marriages and children, some from some rather complicated backgrounds with very interesting legal ramifications. One of the key things, I think, which we all learned from this is to have a great deal of respect for our Japanese colleagues, in other words, for those working for the embassy, many of whom had started out working for SCAP [Ed: Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers] back in the MacArthur days and then came on the rolls of the embassy. And these persons, of course, were very, very competent and capable and gave us, I think, a very different view of our overall operation there from what one might have gotten in other places. In general, I found that American local employees had been head and shoulders above many of the Americans we sent out.

Q: Oh, yes. I think we've all learned to rely on them. Who was the ambassador when you were there?

PRATT: Ambassador Douglas MacArthur II.

Q: Well, now, did you get much involved, were you in the Visa Section the entire time?

PRATT: Well, visa and passport - we had a rotation. I did not get to Special Consular Services because that was a much smaller office, and therefore you couldn't rotate everyone through it.

Q: You were there during the demonstrations against the 1960 Eisenhower visit, I guess - or were you?

PRATT: No, I had just left, in 1959, I think. Yes, I was in Tokyo from1957 to 1959.

Q: Did you get any more of a feel for the Orient being in Japan?

PRATT: Oh, very much so, and of course it was the other side of the Orient. In other words, when I was in Qingdao, I had seen that the Japanese had been there, and then of course got to Japan and saw the Japanese on their home ground, and it was obviously a very, very different environment, even at that period when the recovery was just sort of starting. Nonetheless, it was a very different society from the Chinese society I had seen.

Q: How would you contrast them?

PRATT: Well, when I was first starting out on working on Asian matters, one person who had basically spent 30 years, I guess, in China said that most foreigners find that after they go to the Orient they discover whether they are really themselves, in addition to being an agent of their own country, whether they're Chinese or Japanese. In other words, you either like one or the other. You find it difficult to like them both. And I did not find this to be true because I found the Japanese to be very different in general from the Chinese but really quite impressive.

Q: Were there a lot of GI marriages and all?

PRATT: Quite a few, yes.

Q: Did this cause any problems?

PRATT: Well, obviously, I ran into some cases where the family of the girl was very unhappy because it was a fairly good family and they couldn't understand why their daughter couldn't hold out until they could arrange a marriage for her. But in general that was not the case because so often the girls were ones who came from not very good families or impoverished, parents dead and so forth. And they seemed to work out pretty well.

Q: Was social life pretty well confined to within the American community at that time?

PRATT: Not really for us. I mean there was quite an active American social life, and then also there was quite a diplomatic social life. But also we had a certain amount of contact with the Japanese. One aspect was, for example, the Japanese language school, which for younger officers studying Japanese, there were all their teachers, who were about the same age and we had each had university education and so on, and so you had a certain amount of social life within that area of the Japanese language group. And then also my local employee, the one I worked most closely with, was very closely tied in with the Ministry of Justice and the police agency and so forth, because her previous work was with the occupation forces, and also it was part of what she did in the Passports and Citizenship Section. And so through her I met many of the other people. Then in addition to that I wanted to keep up with my Chinese, so I cultivated a woman who was working for FBIS in Tokyo, who was married to the man who had been the last minister of the interior in the [end of tape]. . .

The Chinese [inaudible] who was studying at Tokyo University in a postgraduate course in neural anatomy, and he became my Chinese tutor. So through him I met some of his Japanese colleagues and also other Chinese living in Tokyo. A very unusual group there, but these were persons, of course, who were forced out by the fall of the Mainland to the Communists, and so they were living in rather precarious circumstances in Tokyo. So I knew Chinese, I knew the diplomatic community, and we were very much involved in that - the British, the Italians, and so forth, and the French. And one of the French there was the basically air and parachute army attachï¿½ in the French Embassy, who was a close friend of these friends of mine in Paris I had mentioned earlier, and obviously when in 1958 de Gaulle took over, the man who had been the head of the military attachï¿½ section, and admiral, was somewhat eclipsed by somebody who was much more tied in with de Gaulle and not with Admiral Darlan. So one got a certain amount of French involvement there.

Q: Did you have any connection in the big embassy with Ambassador MacArthur at all or any reverberations of his rule?

PRATT: Not too much. Obviously, we occasionally were called on to do certain things, when we were either duty officers or something of that sort, and so one did get to know him, and in particular we got to know well his secretary, Betty Foster, who was one of those marvelous great old Foreign Service secretaries who realize that one of their principal tasks is training a new generation of young diplomats. So I got to know even better, for example, the DCM, Elizabeth Swarcie.

Q: It was a very professional embassy at that point.

PRATT: It was very professional, and we had some very competent and capable people working on... Dick Snyder was there in the Political Section.

Q: He was my ambassador in Korea.

PRATT: I thought he might have been. And Martin Hertz was... and I had a certain amount of dealing with him because one of the more unusual visa things I had to work on was the contingent from Sumatra that was trying to get to the United States when they had their uprising against Sukarno. And it was Martin Hertz who was handling that on the political side.

Q: Did you ever run across Mrs. MacArthur?

PRATT: Oh, yes, many times because, you see, as young bachelor officers we were often called upon to fill in for certain things such as one dinner when the secretary of agriculture, Ezra Taft Benson, came through with two daughters. And so my colleague Frank MacNeill, who was also a classmate, and I were summoned up to be the ones to sit next to the two young daughters of Ezra Taft Benson. Also, for example, I escorted a person who was put in charge of the newly established and expanded refugee section. I accompanied him up for one... I think Madeleine MacArthur invited him for drinks and so on. So one did see Wawee.

Q: The stories about Wahwee [Ed: Mrs. MacArthurs given name was Laura, but he never referred to her by any other name than Wahwee, her nickname from childhood.] are legend in the Foreign Service.

PRATT: And they should be. She was a legend.

Q: Did you -

PRATT: Oh, I had some wonderful ones, yes.

Q: Could you tell one.

PRATT: Well, one, for example, was as you know she did generally start her first martini a little bit earlier than most, so that when we get up close to the man who was the refugee, she had already had had her martini and they had nice big glasses, so we had ours. But she generally apparently continued a bit through the day, not always but sometimes, so we worked up for the Ezra Taft Benson dinner.

Q: Who was a Mormon, by the way.

PRATT: He was a Mormon, yes, and of course she had great instructions to give again and again to the servants, don't you dare offer him any alcohol, no Coca-Cola, no coffee, no tea. But he arrived, and it was a winter evening, and we arrived early, as we were generally called upon to do, and then she came down to give us our instructions, our marching orders, and so she walked into the room rubbing her hands, and Meany, I guess, came a little bit behind her, and said, "It's very chilly tonight." And I said, "Oh, would you like me to lay a fire?" And she said, "Well, if after looking around the room the best thing you can think of laying is a fire, go right ahead." And I said, I think, "In any case, I brought my matches."

But nobody had a really negative view of her. I mean she was a legend, and you had to make sure you didn't rub her the wrong way, but they were most reactions were really quite generous to her, because we did think that she was an outside figure and had many, many qualities. Another woman, of course, whom we knew was Liz Bonnard Green, and the stories about her were a little sharper.

Q: How about with her? Did she not suffer gladly, or what?

PRATT: Oh, she was not nearly so . . . She just was merely so much stuffier and took the Foreign Service so much more seriously, and she was much more difficult to the women. The women, of course, would be told what color they could wear, what color they couldn't wear, and gloves or no gloves, and so forth.

Q: Mrs. Green's parents had been in really the old Foreign Service, when it was more a society thing.

PRATT: That's right. And this was not, of course, anything that Madeleine MacArthur would take very seriously. On occasion, for example, she would say, "Don't get too worried if I use some rather colorful language, but any words I did not learn from my father I learned from the stable boys."

Q: Of course, her father had been Vice-President

PRATT: That's right. He won't tell the President.

Q: They were from Kentucky, the Barkleys. Well, when it was time to go, were you trying to point yourself towards something?

PRATT: Yes, I applied for Chinese language training.

Q: Did you get it?

PRATT: Yes, I got it, and went back to the United States. I left, and they again said they wanted me at the FSI language school in Taichung in August 1959, and of course didn't have much flexibility at that time, so I waited to take my full leave, and then they encouraged me to take a ship back out to go to Taiwan, so I took a ship as far as -

Q: You didn't take preliminary Chinese in Washington, then?

PRATT: I had already studied, of course, at Georgetown, Chinese language and Japanese language, and so I had completed the coursework for my MA at Georgetown, so I had enough Chinese so that when they gave me the examination they put me right into sort of the middle of the program out in Taichung without having any training whatsoever in Washington.

Q: How did you find the course there? Were you at a remove? You were where, in Taichung?

PRATT: Taichung, yes.

Q: Which was at some remove from Taipei, wasn't it?

PRATT: Yes, it was down the in the middle of the Island, as the name implies, and therefore it was an hour and a half or two hours or more driving, about an hour and a half plus by train. So it was a good remove. However, I often went to Taipei for weekends because I had friends in Taipei and did not have any friends, of course, except those built in at the school, in Taichung. So I spent quite a bit of weekend time in Taipei. The language school I thought was pretty well run, although we had not one of the most successful language heads of the school.

Q: Who was that?

PRATT: This was Howard Levy. I missed Bosman and didn't get into Topp. I understand Topp in some ways was better. They were still using rather, I think, outdated materials, in that they were ones devised at Yale for training teenagers, and they were not really so well suited to persons who were older and had much better backgrounds in other languages and so on. They had a great deal of emphasis on rote memorization, which is easy with children, but not so easy particularly if you're learning a horrendous Chinese different language as an adult. But it was a pretty good school, and they, I think, got us up fairly far. But it's such a difficult language, particularly the written language, that they really could have done better to have had us there a little bit longer and tried to get more of the language nailed down to make things easier for us to maintain it when we got away.

Q: Were you picking up... Obviously you were tied up with language training, but what was your impression of the political situation on the island in this 1959-60 period?

PRATT: Well, as I've mentioned earlier, I had been there in 1947 when I was in the Navy, so I had had at least a glimpse of the old Taipei, which was, of course, pretty much untouched by the Second World War. But it was beginning - but only just beginning - to develop economically. I was also trying to maintain my Japanese, and I was trying to complete a thesis for Georgetown, which was on Japanese materials concerning Islam in China, a very abstruse thing, but it was something dear to the heart of one of my professors at Georgetown who became my thesis director. So through the Japanese contact, that is the person whom I had engaged as a Japanese tutor, I got involved with aspects of the Taiwanese society, as opposed to the Mainland society, which I knew, Chou, my contacts in Tokyo, for example, the gentleman in Tokyo who had been minister of the interior in Nanjing recommended me to... He had a son studying there. He had his former colleagues, a general and others, and his wife had a brother who was in the Ministry of Finance. So these were the persons whom I would see up in Taipei, the old Mainlander KMT types, and then down in Taichung with my friend who was teaching me Japanese I would be able to see the Taiwanese, who of course were very much unhappy under the yoke of the Mainland Kuomintang. And so very early on that bifurcated society was something which we got very much into.

Q: Were there signs at the time that the Kuomintang group was going to be sort of aged out or moved out, or how were we seeing this? Were the Embassy and all pretty well read into the KMT at that time?

PRATT: The Embassy was not. The Foreign Service people were not. It of course was the political leadership which, of course, found it convenient for the United States to let the so-called China lobby and it's views of the situation be spread around. I think it was also another good indicator of just how difficult it is when you have a democracy and the persons who are your leaders come in knowing very little if anything about foreign affairs and knowing, however, that they do have another election coming up and therefore it's far more important to pay attention to what domestic concerns are than what the foreign realities are. It didn't bother me particularly because we took that for granted. We realized that we were expected by the Foreign Service to keep track of what was going on in elections, even though, of course, the persons who did so would be called in by the ambassador and the ministers would have fingers wagged at them telling them how we should not be permitted to talk to any of these Taiwanese, we shouldn't go anywhere near polling booths, we shouldn't try to compile biographic information about the Taiwanese and so on. So we knew that we were in an adversarial situation to a certain extent.

Q: Was Walter Robertson's hand apparent?

PRATT: Oh, yes.

Q: He was the head of the Asian Bureau at the time and very much the creature - a strong term to use - but very much part of what you called the China lobby in Congress.

PRATT: Well, I had had for a short time Pat Paul Weinbarger, who, of course, had been earlier tied in with Sun Yat-sen and very early tied in with also Chiang Kai-shek. So I was not unaware of these people. I heard, for example, when I was a student here, a debate between Fulbright and Walter Robertson. So of course the China question was one which was a big problem in the United States and something we were well aware of. But we did see that one of the realities was that the Taiwanese were not that happy to be under the Kuomintang, and I had to remark also that most of my KMT friends in Taipei had nothing but the greatest of contempt for Chiang Kai-shek, and what the military leadership was going. They blamed them for the loss of the Mainland. They said, "I wouldn't be here if they hadn't been such a miserable bunch of corrupt officials back in Nanjing." So I found that the Mainlanders at that time - and that was 1959-60 - were far more willing to criticize the leadership of the Kuomintang than they were when I went back in 1979.

Q: Well, now, later in the years, around October of 1960, the Islands of Quemoy and Matsu all of a sudden became the center of the American political discourse, when Nixon and Kennedy debated on these two islands, which I don't think either of them ever paid the slightest bit of attention to afterwards. But were Quemoy and Matsu the subject of discussion while you were on Taiwan?

PRATT: Somewhat, although I think they're really, to a certain extent, a matter now of discussion than they were then because, although the 1958 crisis had come, it had also gone, and therefore the only reaction of the Taiwanese, I found, was that they were very annoyed with the Kuomintang because they, of course, considered neither Quemoy nor Matsu to be Taiwanese at all. And they said what the KMT is doing is taking all of our young men over there and putting them on those islands as hostages because they are trying to involve us in a war with Peking over their own interests, which have nothing whatsoever to do with Taiwan. Now, of course, because KMT has had Quemoy and Matsu sufficiently tied in for all this time, they are really saying that Quemoy and Matsu have to be considered part of Taiwan. Now this is not what was the case when I was there early in 1959-60, when these were extraneous islands which should be turned over to the Mainland, and all the Taiwanese troops should not be sent over there to die for the pretensions of Chiang Kai-shek, when they could be kept back for the defense of Taiwan if it were ever needed. This is a very different attitude. Now they have been tied in long enough so that between 1960 and 1990, those 30 years mean that these people consider that that's just a place to go for viewing the Mainland and tourism and so forth, but now it's part of the Taiwanese concept of Taiwan.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you were on Taiwan?

PRATT: Let me see. Our DCM was Ralph Clough and then Art Hummel.

Q: I think both have been interviewed by our program.

PRATT: Everett F. Drumright. He was an interesting character. Of course, as you know, one of the incidents which had occurred a little bit earlier - and I'm sure you've talked to other people about that - was when they had the sacking of the embassy and -

Q: Talk a little about what you were hearing about it.

PRATT: Well, what I was hearing about when I got there is that how badly this was really handled by the American side. Now, as I say, I've never gone back to reread the history on the subject, but I was told that Drumright had gone down to Hong Kong for a little R & R and Joey Yaeger was then the - have you interviewed him?

Q: No. Where is he now?

PRATT: I think he's here in Washington. He was DCM, and therefore chargï¿½ d'affaires. And Chou Chi was foreign minister. I run into Chou Chi the rest of my career, too. And when this occurred, Joe Yaeger went to see Chou Chi, and they could not locate either the chairman, who was down-island, or Chiang Ching-kuo.

Q: The son.

PRATT: The son, who of course was a key figure in most security matters and certainly in any security matters which touched the United States connection. So my friends whom I talked to there said one of the real problems was that the Americans didn't seem to understand this: this was all set up by Chiang Ching-kuo [CCK] with the permission of his father to take the place really of elections. In other words, they believed in the good-old Communist type of . . . both of them strongly influenced by Moscow and the Moscow representatives, and therefore you had to have "participatory democracy" without any power coming from democracy.

Q: The 99.9 percent vote.

PRATT: But allowed them to let-off steam; let them think that they are participating. And therefore, these demonstrations and the sacking of the embassy were set up primarily to show that, unlike the May 4th movement, they were not going to be soft on the foreigners, even though they depended on the foreigners. And therefore, they were going to let out a burst of righteous outrage, and of course, at the same time, however, going along with the looters of the embassy, were a few of Chiang Ching-kuo's agents. And along with the top-secret communications from CINCPAC [Commander in Chief, Pacific] all over the front lawn and so forth, the files which were most thoroughly viewed and then taken were all the biographic files that we had on the Taiwanese population. And so this is what I was told was how the Americans just didn't understand that this was done on purpose at a relatively high level and it was only when the people who attacked the embassy then got close to and appeared to be headed for a police station that, of course, the waiting troops came rushing in and cleaned up the area - that they just did not realize that this was being done by the top leadership for their own purposes. So this is part of the environment, this attitude towards the Kuomintang, which was prevalent not only in the Taiwanese, where you would expect it, but also in the more educated and more enlightened Mainlanders. Of course, the Mainlanders also say, you know, "Taiwan, this is the place for my father's generation. We are merely here because we had to go somewhere, but we're all headed out." And at that time, of course, almost all of the scholarships and even permission to leave Taiwan to study went to Mainlander children, not to the Taiwanese. The Taiwanese exodus took place in the 1970s, not at that time, in the late '50s and early '60s.

Q: Well, given the sacking of the Embassy and all, would you say that the attitude of the Embassy - and we're talking about the officers, particularly who we're dealing with - our "gallant allies" - was there certain amount of almost either dislike or contempt towards the KMT?

PRATT: Yes. Well, although it was a bit bifurcated in that the top political leadership, which was also highly military. If you look at the central standing committee of the KMT during the period of the '50s and '60s, it was heavily laced with military and security people. And of course they considered themselves to be occupying an unfriendly territory. When they first arrived in 1945, they treated it more harshly than we treated Japan because from their point of view, these people had been on the other side in that war and therefore they were traitors to China. So of course they were not really very nice colonists for Taiwan. But we also found that there was a whole new breed of intelligent civilians who had either been in the United States when the collapse of the Mainland occurred and then when they left the United States they didn't go back to the Mainland but they went to Taiwan instead. And they were emerging in most economic areas, and they included people who worked in the JCRR [Joint Commission of Rural Reconstruction], which was one of the most interesting organizations which the U.S. set up, the organization which served to really be a way of getting to the top levels of the Chinese Government the intelligent opinions on what ought to be done about agriculture and land reform. All of the Chinese technocrats who had come back from study at Cornell, like current president Lee Teng-hui, and these persons found great difficulties in getting their ideas up to the upper level of their own society because that's not the way Chinese bureaucracy works. And so JCRR was a way of getting around the usual blockage which exists within a Chinese bureaucratic system, which of course we're seeing on the Mainland now, less so in Taiwan.

We found also, paralleling this, the U.S. MAAG organization, the Military Assistance Advisory Group. They served a similar role within the military because down there in Taichung, one of the groups that we knew, of course, the military was headed by Chiang Wei-kuo, the ostensible brother of the vice-president at that time, son of Chiang Kai-shek - ostensibly. And we would hear from them that the MAAG was their only way of getting what really was sensible military advice from the lower level to the top level because, again, you had this blockage in the Chinese bureaucratic system, where you'd never dare tell your boss anything except that which he's already told you before. So this was part of the very creative role which, I think unbeknownst to many of the people doing it, was set up by the very intelligent Chinese who were trying to find ways of handling the difficulties within their own political structure. And so this is one of the things which one could observe there. But I think even more important, though, was the fact that this, in the eyes of most of the Mainlanders, was a hopeless stopgap situation for them, where they would fill out their time till retirement or till their death doing as best they could there, but the thing to do was to try to get it so that their children could leave and get out to the rest of the world and not be in this terrible backwater of Taiwan, because from their point of view they had come from Shanghai, they had seen the glories of Shanghai in the 1930s, they really even considered Peking a little as a backwater. Intellectually speaking it was still a very important part of China in the 1930s and '40s, and Taiwan just didn't rank.

Q: It's like going to Alabama or something like that.

PRATT: More like the hills of Arkansas. This was something - because of course, you know, the Chinese I think are very, very sensitive about quality, a kind of snobbish, perhaps, aspect, because it's not always real quality - because that they don't know - but they really do have a sense of hierarchy in quality. And of course now it has become almost something which has to have a numerical price tag on it. But nonetheless they are looking for what is of value, and having known Shanghai, which is, after all, the greatest city in the Orient in the '30s - it was called, you know, the New York and Paris and the London of -

Q: Much more than Tokyo.

PRATT: Much more than Tokyo. So in any case they had to look at this as exile, and I think you may have heard of the great laments written by the poets (who were also officials) who were sent out to Xinjiang under the Ch'ing Dynasty and their laments for the beauties of either Peking or Yangzhou or other places in civilized coastal areas. So this is something which has a whole tradition in China of exile. But the thing is, they considered New York to be far more pertinent to them than Taipei.

Q: Well, then, were you able to tap much into this sort of intellectual program that was going on?

PRATT: A bit, because as I said I knew the son of this minister of the interior, and he was a student at the Normal University in Taipei, and he had students. So I would hear a great deal about the views of the younger Mainlander kids who were students of the elite. I met some of the elite. I was taken off to see a General Chiang, who was a cousin of Chiang Ching-kuo, and I would see, say, the brother of Madame P'eng, who was in the Ministry of Finance, and would occasionally have dinner with people of that sort. They were very outspoken because what happened between then and the time when I went back, in 1978, was the great expansion in the capacity of listening devices and enough money used to purchase them, so that the whole society became far more aware of the special secret services and how they could be listened in on and how what they said could be used against them. That's something which did not exist there in 1959, and the Mainlanders could feel free to grouse, the way Chinese love to do anyway. I mean, it's a marvelously complaining society, unlike the Japanese.

Q: What impressions were you getting of the role of Madame Chiang Kai-shek?

PRATT: Well, we would see her, say, out at the airport and so on. Sometimes we were sort of air marshals there to see when people were arriving and departing and so on. She, of course, was not greatly liked by either mainlanders or Taiwanese, and they told nasty stories about her silk sheets and how she plundered any place she happened to be in. I mean she was sort of a Hermann Gï¿½ring of the KMT.

Q: You hear stories about her during the war in the White House, demanding her silk sheets.

PRATT: Yes. Well, afterwards she learned to travel with them always. The point was that she expected that there be silk sheets. But she did - she does - because she's still alive, one should keep in mind - so she was not at all a Grand Old Lady. She was obviously considered a very handsome woman by the Mainlanders, and they somewhat admired her ability to become so popular in the United States, to speak English well enough, and to head such a role in the American political system; but she was not their kind, any more than Jiang Qing was the kind of person whom the old Communists liked. I mean Jiang Qing was a cheap actress; well, Madame Chiang was, after all, one of the worst of the Shanghai types.

Q: Well, in 1960, you finished there, and where were you off to?

PRATT: Originally I was supposed to be assigned to Cambodia because I knew French as well as, by that time, a bit of Chinese. But then something happened there, and so I was sent instead to Hong Kong.

Q: And so you went to Hong Kong more or less directly?: And you were there from 1960 to when?

PRATT: Yes, I went to Hong Kong on direct transfer in July 1960 and served until July 1963, when my tour there was curtailed and I was sent to Laos.

Q: Well, let's talk about Hong Kong 1960. What was your impression of the city and the operation of the consulate general at that time?

PRATT: Well, obviously I had seen Honk Kong first as a sailor in 1947, and so I found it then a fascinating city. But of course in 1947 it was just beginning to recover, or shall we say, not recover, but transform itself because, of course, so much of the industry which moved down in 1948 from Shanghai, the big textile people who transported equipment and themselves and their know-how - that hadn't happened yet. So in 1947 it was very British, whereas when I went back, traveled there from . . . in fact, I had gone through Hong Kong on my way back from Tokyo, I believe . . . But in any case, I had seen it only briefly, and in 1960, when I moved there, it was very clearly in the process of enormous expansion.

Of course, the consulate general was an enormous organization by the standards, well, not of Tokyo, because Tokyo was an even larger embassy at that time, but Hong Kong, I think, was something like third or fourth largest post that we had in the world, and of course no other consulate general was anything resembling this because, of course, it did have to handle all reporting on China. And it was indeed a very, I think, interesting and heady assemblage of very competent people in a number of areas where you would not expect to have a consulate general holding these resources.

The political side, I thought, was rather ably handled to begin with by Harold Jacobson, followed by John Holdridge, who was of quite a different dispensation. We had not terribly good head of the Economic Section to begin with, but we had stars like Paul Popple and David Dean also in that Economic Section, which made it really quite a serious group. And we had a very, very good agricultural attachï¿½, and this, of course, was a key time to have a good agricultural attachï¿½ because, of course, this was the collapse of the "Great Leap Forward." So very important things were taking place on the Mainland, things which were very, very difficult to sniff out, because of course the Mainland does not advertise what's really going on. So Bryce Meeker, who then later on was agricultural attachï¿½ in Moscow, was remarkably good in trying to figure out what was really happening in the agriculture, which resulted in this terrible, terrible starvation on the Mainland.

Q: When did the Great Leap Forward start?

PRATT: I believe it was started in 1958, but it didn't really get going until 1959. By the time we were there in 1960, they were trying to recover from it, and they were able to recover somewhat.

Q: Were you getting any views of the Great Leap Forward while you were on Taiwan?

PRATT: No, very little, because, of course, the Kuomintang did not want to have much information about the Mainland because they were busy spreading their "theological" positions. It was much more like a fundamentalist religious group, where you "don't bother me with the facts." And of course, the poor Taiwanese considered that they were having enough trouble trying to keep track of what the Mainlanders were doing without having to be concerned about what the Mainlanders on the Mainland were doing!

Q: Well, when you got to Hong Kong, what was your job?

PRATT: I was in the Mainland Economic Section. They have changed their setup several times, but this was the Mainland reporting unit.

Q: Who was consul general when you were there?

PRATT: Let's see. Julius Holmes started out. Then Marshall Green. We had Sam Gilstrap there acting, I believe, for a time. He was deputy Consul General when I first arrived, and he was back on leave in the States, so I lived in his house down on Deepwater Bay, and he, I think, was acting then as Consul General for a time until Marshall Green arrived from Korea.

Q: In many ways the politics were much less the story on the Mainland than the economics were, while you were there, because of the collapse of the Great Leap Forward.

PRATT: Well, of course, as in most Communist societies, it's very difficult to separate the two things because the principal thing which most political leaders are concerned about is economics. But how you solve economic questions is, of course, a political question. So of course, one of the key things we had problems with is that it was very, very difficult to get any information about the internal political workings. We did have, of course, a very active intelligence operation going on, mostly done by the British, screening refugees out from the Mainland. One of the great figures of modern study of China, Father Madani, ran his China news analysis, which was an enormous influence on how everybody was looking at the Mainland, because he, of course, tried to look behind - took what they said and then tried to figure out what was in the minds of the people who were writing it.

In any case, we did get a certain amount of information, for example, about the Lushan meeting, where Mao was criticized for the Great Leap Forward. Peng Dehuai was subsequently . . . [end of tape]

So we realized that there were political things going on. We had a very, very gifted Chinese, who had studied at Harvard and had gone back and was working as a local employee in our political section and was one of the most gifted persons in reading the tea leaves. We would look at the photographs and do whatever people used to do in Moscow with Kremlinology and try to figure out just what the role of Chung Min [Ed:?] was at this particular point because of where he stood in relationship to Mao, and who was being eclipsed by whom, and whom did Mao walk by without shaking the hand of the person, and so forth.

And so we were, indeed, trying to work on the political side of this, and like, say, the British did get a read-out of the Lushan meeting, apparently, indirectly from somebody who actually attended it. So you could get little hints about the politics.

Q: Could you talk about what you later learned about the Lushan meeting that made it so important?

PRATT: Well, this was the major big fight that Mao had. Mao, of course, had generally been able to get everybody to go along with him, even, for example, in the earlier attacks on Rao Shushi and Gao Gang. Nonetheless, he had been able to get almost everybody to go along with this. But the Great Leap Forward was something which he had launched on his own, and it was very, very difficult to get him to pull back from this. And they had a meeting, ostensibly to try to figure out how to handle this, and it was turned by Mao into something where he was able to get out of positions of real authority those who had opposed his view, at the same time that he was able to pull back from the Great Leap Forward. But he was able, as I say, to use it to take care of, eliminate the critics. In other words, there is nothing worse than being right when you are dealing with someone like Mao because you had better not be right until he's right.

Q: Was there any feeling within the American watching establishment of China early on - I'm talking really about before your time, but you were getting reflections of this - that, gee, maybe the Chinese have got something? I remember, you know, there was a little talk about these hearthside furnaces and barefoot doctors and all this, really by people who didn't know what the hell they were talking about - we're talking about Americans - but was there any that, people thought maybe because the Chinese are so big, maybe they're on to something?

PRATT: Not in our consulate, because I think we had practically nobody who had come to that view. Even our Chinese local employees were constantly being told to approach these claims with a critical eye, not to just try to do puffery about China. But we know that not only in the United States, but for example, the Japanese . . . The Japanese had long held a very pro-China section. This, of course, was generally people reacting to the old military people and what they considered to be the anti-Chinese attitude of the military. But we had one Japanese we heard, because we had very close relations with the Japanese consulate general in Hong Kong because we were both looking at the same problems there in China, and we basically shared similar views. But one very prominent Japanese, when the initial claims of the Great Leap Forward came out, showing enormous advances and great achievements and so on, hailed it as being proof that the Chinese system was the best in the world and that Japan could learn a great deal from the Chinese. And then Zhou Enlai came out and retracted the claims, and this Japanese said, "Zhou Enlai is a liar. They really did make these great accomplishments, and now he is lying. We don't know why he's doing it, but Zhou Enlai is being the liar."

Q: Was this a sort of Asian nationalism, too, do you think? I mean, the Asians can do it better than the Americans, the West, or something, do you think, from the Japanese point of view?

PRATT: Well, the Japanese point of view, I think it was just part of internal Japanese politics. In other words, they felt that in Japan, society has several threads through it, and one of the military ones, and the old Samurai traditions, and so on; and then you've got some of the other people, who really are opposed to this particular group, and their way of showing it is to say China is another alternative. Japan has always borrowed from China and Korea as well as producing a lot of things on its own. And we then, afterwards, I think, went through a very strong "Japanese system is better than any other system," which you can see in Ezra Vogel's Japan Number One. This is, I think, something where Japan can say no, and things of that sort. And now, of course, China can say no. So I think that, yes, there is a partly anti-Western bit to it, but also there's an aspect of the internal politics of your own country. We could see it with, say, Pat Buchanan, what silly ideas he can come up with, which pretend to be drawn from foreign reality. In other words, Hitler was really right and should have just been able to have taken over Eastern Europe, and he had no intention of doing anything against France.

Q: Oh, no.

PRATT: Oh, no. Well, in any case, this is using foreign matters to decide internal matters. The other aspect, I think, is still this nostalgia for Marxism and a nostalgia for how you can get a socialism where you're not quite sure what the socialism is - whether it's Hitler's socialism or Stalin's socialism or Fabian socialism -

Q: It's government control, basically.

PRATT: It's the most intelligent way. Of course, the thing to do is to get the most intelligent people into the government and then let them run things, and don't let things get tied up with dirty money, which is what capitalists always do.

Q: I must say that as I've interviewed people who have dealt with things around the world, one does come away with the impression that Communist was a disaster, but particularly intellectual socialism as applied to a government has probably done far more harm than the Communist system did.

PRATT: Well, the Communist system is merely another aspect of it, and of course I think one sees the desire to have the government alter thing through its subsidies but without really seeing that some subsidies are either not needed or the unintended consequences are worse than the intended benefits. And so I think it's not just, shall we say, full-fledged socialism (as if one really can figure out what that would be).

Q: Well, tell me, you're sitting there in Hong Kong, looking at the economy of China - what was the typical day like? What would you do?

PRATT: Well, obviously, we would get certain telegrams in from around the world about various things which other people were learning. We would get the newspapers in. We had our local employees who were supposed to scan all the newspapers every morning and bring us in a report on what they considered to be the significant bits of information they got out from the regular newspapers. Then later on they would get the ones which . . . We had a big operation to buy local newspapers from various parts of China, which were, of course, not permitted, legally, to be exported from China, but we were able, of course (the Chinese being interested in money as they are), to pay smugglers to get newspapers and periodicals out, and we would be checking those and so forth, seeing if anything of great significance. We would be comparing notes with our fellows. We had, for example, a regular weekly luncheon meeting of the persons working on China where we would move around from restaurant to restaurant, each person supposedly trying to find a new and as yet undiscovered restaurant with some great new specialties and so on.

Q: The members of this group would be from other consulates?

PRATT: Sure. And also on some occasions some from the British Government as well. It had a regular membership, and we traded lots of notes because, of course, at that time we had nobody going into China. But the Germans had plenty of people going in. The Canadians had people going in, and the French, and so on. So we would often get very interesting information from them as well, particularly bearing on trade. But trade also, of course, was a key aspect of what was going on with the Great Leap Forward.

One of the political-economic questions was the departure of the Soviet experts from China, and I was asked to do a piece on that shortly after I arrived, and of course I had very little to go on at that point. I had just arrived from Taiwan. But it just did not seem sensible for us to have the Soviet experts thrown out by China despite the attack on the Soviet Union which Mao had launched with his "Long Live Leninism." In any case, this was obviously something where you had to listen to the facts, and the facts were that they were going. And of course, it did turn out, we did learn later, that it wasn't Mao who threw them out; it was Khrushchev who had withdrawn them because he wasn't going to have Mao dragging him through the mud and attacking him and yet expecting to get full benefit from assistance from the Soviet Union.

So that was one of the political economic things which one had to work on, and a more important one even was the sale of grain and fertilizer to China as the result of the Great Leap Forward. We heard stories finally, after this had started, that it was Zhou Enlai who had been able to persuade Mao to alter the basic trade policy which Mao had enunciated, which was that China would not import anything which it produced itself and would export, to gain money, what it needed in order to buy what it could not produce itself. Mao was therefore wedded to a very sort of narrow, not very economically sound policy, and Zhou Enlai was able to persuade him to trade Chinese rice, to sell it on the open market, in order to purchase foreign wheat, because of course there was a great shortfall of foodstuffs, and he was about to demonstrate that they could buy two tons of wheat for every ton of rice they exported, and Mao, of course, found this challenged his whole concept of foreign trade, but he went along with it, but only after the military substantiated Zhou Enlai's claim that the danger of unrest in the cities was considerable. They had already squeezed as much out of the countryside as they could, and while the military could control the countryside and if 30 million died, 30 million died, but if they had unrest in the cities because of starvation, the military could not answer for it. And so this is what persuaded Mao, finally, to permit the exports in order to purchase grain. Of course, grain they purchased from France, from Australia, from Canada. At this time, we in the consulate tried very hard to get the new Kennedy Administration to be willing to adopt a policy of providing American grain. This grain was at that time being sold, but to sell it you had to make sure that you did it in a way which . . . Peking, for example, swore the French to secrecy. I found out about it anyway, and the French commissioner, or assistant commissioner, I guess it was, who was handling it at that time, was absolutely furious. He said, "How could you find this out. We made sure that nobody knew about it." Well, we did. I've forgotten just what the source was, but this was something which the Chinese were very much trying to keep secret. But then, of course, it was definitely too big to be kept secret very long. So we said there should be some U.S. indication that we could also be of assistance because, indeed, it is a famine situation in China. But of course, the people working around Kennedy, while clearly he would like to do something of this sort and clearly wanted to get closer to a policy - I won't say of "engagement" because the term did not exist in that sense at that time - but nonetheless wished to have an opening to China. As you may remember, when he first came and referred to the "government of the people on Taiwan," very clearly not using the "Republic of China." But he was persuaded that Congress, including the Democrats in Congress, would go through the roof if he did not cast this in such a fashion that it would be refused. So they had him make the offer of grain for China in such a way that the Chinese could only refuse. And this was, therefore, a connection of both politics within China and politics within the United States which, unfortunately, the Chinese rose to meet the challenge, and of course Washington did not.

Q: Well, now, particularly at this stage, 1960-63, how were the consulate general people dealing with this, including yourself, reading the relations between the Soviet Union and China?

PRATT: Well, very early on, of course, we had known that there was this "Long Live Leninism," and therefore a big Sino-Soviet split. We could not, however, get this popularized in Washington. I think, if anything, probably the most important factor was Dean Rusk. We knew the Yugoslav representative - called the trade representative - and an Austrian married to a Yugoslav, I think it was, and it was very clear that the fight was very important. We did not know all the details. We did not know, for example, the degree to which Mao was resentful of how he personally had been treated by Khrushchev. A lot of these stories were spreading around as gossip, but we didn't know how much weight to give to any of them, but it was very clear, certainly from the time in 1960, when these Soviet technicians were withdrawn, that it had gone just beyond an ideological sort of conflict.

So we believed that, and of course, we also believed that China was not part of this great web going from Moscow to Peking down to Hanoi - because of course by 1963 (in fact, from 1962) the focus had very much shifted to Indochina from China.

Q: Well, now, you mentioned Yugoslav. I served in Yugoslavia from 1962 to 1967. At that time there was a feeling that the Yugoslavs were probably the most astute reporters on the scene in Beijing, reflecting what was happening. In other words, Yugoslavs were important players from our point of view. Was this just when we were in Yugoslavia, "Yugo-centric," or was this a

PRATT: No, it's because they, of course, as nominally Communist, and particularly in Peking they would view them as "national" Communists, which of course the Chinese considered themselves to be, they were no longer ready to take instruction from Comintern, and therefore, from their point of view, the Yugoslavs were sort of some of the "good" Communists. So indeed, they were the ones who, of course, broke the story about the departure of the Soviet experts. They saw them off at the station. Of course, they also, most of them, spoke good Russian, and they also spoke good English, French, or what-have-you.

Q: So they had an entrï¿½e in both camps.

PRATT: That's right, and as you may be aware, that was the time in the 1960's when Peking sent a certain number of students to study economic matters in Yugoslavia. And later on, they had them study in Poland, but the earliest group of the ones who were not sent to Moscow were sent to Belgrade.

Q: What was the impression while you were there of Zhou Enlai, of his role?

PRATT: It was a very high estimate - one, of course, of intelligence and, two, of suppleness. And I don't think he had a PR man because he didn't need one. Almost all the Chinese had a very high opinion of him, and I think, of course, Mao was obviously for many people a problem figure. They would view him as a god or as a devil. But a sort of educated, sophisticated, intelligent, supple Mandarin was the reputation of Zhou Enlai. I gather that a lot of newer material shows him to be far more of a kind of toady to Mao and not really having the guts to defend a lot of people whom he perhaps might have been able to defend, including Liu Shaoji. But the point was he apparently considered that he was one of the few people who could keep things from getting too far out. Even, for example, during the Cultural Revolution, he was able to defend the various museums in China and to put them off limits to the Red Guards, who wanted to destroy the museums as another representation of what was old. And he was able just to pick up the telephone and ask a military man to try to keep the Red Guards out of the museums. So fine, you know, his reputation in the earlier period was of shifting to be able to get along with Mao, but nonetheless finding the best way to avoid real disasters. There is, I think, a story about he was able to even get Mao to realize that there was a great famine in the countryside, and using his own guard - I think that story is in the book by Mao's doctor -

Q: The Private Life of Chairman Mao - fascinating book.

PRATT: That's right. I think that book is very interesting. Obviously, the man could not understand all the politics going on, but nonetheless, he was like many Chinese, very astute in many ways. In any case, this is the sort of image which Chou had. We didn't know that story at that time, but we did hear the story that he was the one who was able to persuade Mao to change his attitude towards imports in order to permit them to import wheat to feed the cities through that horrible 1960's winter.

Q: One of the things that I find interesting is that the 20th Century has been visited by three people responsible for the death of millions - Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Mao Zedong. And yet, I think almost everyone who looks at it, at least from the American point of view, will agree that Hitler and Stalin were monsters of the first water; Mao was not regarded that way, and yet was probably responsible for more deaths than those other two combined. How was he looked on? Were people saying, "This guy's a monster"?

PRATT: Of course not. Look at what Henry Kissinger had to say about him. Look what the French - for example when I was in Paris later on, from 1973 to 1978, I think it was Bï¿½tancourt made a trip to Peking and came back with the most ludicrous kinds of praise for Mao, how he was a "great civilizer" and a great "world cultural figure." I think that the fact that Mao actually wrote poetry and did calligraphy and that he has four volumes of his works which pretend to be contributions to the canon of Marxism-Leninism is something which means that intellectuals feel that they have to take him seriously because, from their point of view, he also is an "intellectual," and you can't attack him for that. And I think, sometimes it's the way some of the media people are so resentful for any attack on any journalist. Good journalist, bad journalist, betrays his sources, has people killed because of what he does - ah, but he's our fellow journalist. And I think a lot of the intellectuals would not attack him. But Hitler, he just wrote a one-time book, Mein Kampf. Now, I have 20-some volumes . . . I ordered Lenin's works and instead got Stalin's works, but I never could read more than three or four pages before I would go to sleep. But nonetheless all of their efforts to present Hitler and Stalin as cultivated thinking people I think were not very successful. But up until the end, you know, Jean-Paul Sartre still though Stalin was Jim Dandy compared to the capitalists of the West.

Q: But I must say that we had Americans, from President Nixon and Kissinger and even a man I've interviewed at great length, Winston Lord, who admit now that it was overdone, that they were practically wetting their pants when they were allowed to have an audience with Mao. This man . . . I don't know, I keep coming back to he was a monster. He killed people more indirectly than Hitler and Stalin did, but he killed more.

PRATT: Well, the thing is, I think, probably one could say, many of his apologists do say that he did it inadvertently. He was really trying to do the right things, and yet I go back basically to the school of Talleyrand. Do you remember the story about the murder of the Duc d'Aiglon and someone said to Talleyrand, "C'ï¿½tait un crime." And he said, "It's worse than a crime; it's a mistake." I think in politics, you really have to give very close attention to what is a mistake because that is what can often cause greater harm than any kind of personal crime. We, of course, look at Nixon and find a personal crime, the worst action, when of course really one should look at what are the big mistakes which result in far more devastation. And they can be economic mistakes. In Mao's case, just being so stupid and letting nobody get intelligent things done. Because it's not just even the Great Leap Forward. When he made the decision after the Korean War of the movement of industry to the Third Line, a program from which . . . You know, Deng Xiaoping was usually the great implementer of all of Mao's great ideas, and he was put in charge of moving all of this industry away from the border areas to the interior so it could be defended from possible attack from the coast. I visited some of these spots, even in Guangdong Province, which is close to the coast, but nonetheless they moved factories and so forth up to where there was no energy, no transportation, no raw materials, no work force, no market. And that, indeed, you could do with the slip of a pen. But it set back the economic development of China enormously. And that, of course, was again Mao's mistake made out of his way, I think, of having abstractions and ideology take the place of any kind of appreciation of the facts - which is why Deng Xiaoping was so very successful and so very innovative to say, 'Come on, let's learn from the facts.'

Q: But at the time you were looking at this, in the 1960-63 period, was there the impression that China was a basket case? Were we concerned about the potential, or were we looking just really at the situation on the ground at the time?

PRATT: Well, I think we were looking at it on the ground as a place which was badly run, and we did not challenge the political stability. Therefore, since we viewed that it had gone through so much suffering and it looked as though it would go through a lot more, we did not have to be concerned about its breaking up into various parts and having a real disaster, because the Great Leap Forward was a major disaster, and then, of course, we could not see down the line that there would also be the Cultural Revolution. But that seemed to be the way in which China would go: in other words, creating its own disasters, which would make it very difficult to cause disasters for others.

The one exception was the role it would play in supporting Hanoi versus the south. And that is, of course, in 1962, basically after the Geneva agreements in 1962, when the focus shifted from Laos to Vietnam. This appeared then to be the other role that China could play as part of a backup, the way it had been a backup in the Korean War. So we were still somewhat recovering from the Korean War, but we were looking at the internal turmoil and problems, and then the one exception to China totally harming itself was the role that they could again play in supporting some other conflict in Asia, namely the Indochina one.

Q: How about this very important but often overlooked Indonesia? Sukarno was by many people there was a concern that Sukarno was moving Indonesia, trying to put it into the Communist camp. Was that something that crossed our radar in Hong Kong at that time?

PRATT: It had crossed our radar a little bit earlier with the 1958 incident.

Q: Sumatra - and the little CIA involvement.

PRATT: Sumatra and the CIA involvement, and of course as you know, Ambassador Allison was ambassador to Indonesia at the time when John Foster Dulles refused to let him know what was going on because he said, "I'm handling this through my Brother," Allen Dulles. And that's the sort of thing which we saw, one, as being part of the "bad American system" and the bad American approach to all of this and, two, the oversimplification, because none of us really considered that any Indonesian would do anything more than try to flirt with China because of the problems politically inside Indonesia because of the Chinese. The Chinese you had to manage; you had to deal with them because they had all the money and they had all the contacts and so forth.

One of our very interesting friends in Hong Kong was a chap who had been in Shanghai and in the government, I guess, of Wang Ching-wei. Kung Yung-Li, I guess his name was. He was then located in Jakarta and running a lot of very important business things out of that area. But he was convinced, and told us, that this is merely superficial flirtation, and of course the Bandung Conference - Zhou Enlai had turned out to be such a star at that, and Mao appeared to be talking about the Second World and opposition to the U.S. particularly. Then, of course, he began to be against the Soviet Union, which meant that he could be considered not to be in favor of international Communism. And of course so much of the Communist movement in Indonesia had come via Holland, and therefore was Russian-oriented, connected with the Comintern and so forth. And therefore the Chinese in Peking were involved with the overall Chinese population in Indonesia, but not necessarily with the Communist aspect of it. So this was part of, shall we say, a very astute local politician trying to play with big figures on the scene, just the way Sihanouk tried to do it - not that he was playing into the hands of China. He was playing with the Chinese and exploiting Mao's grandiose idea of being the center of the Third World against the Chinese [sic].

Q: Before we leave Hong Kong, sort of an overall thing: we're looking at China as the economy is going to hell and obviously very badly mismanaged - was there any sort of Schadenfreude or something about saying, You know, China is a big country, it's a Communist country, it doesn't like us, and the more self-created disasters the better, and let's hope they keep it up? Or did you come to identify with the Chinese enough so that you were almost rooting for forces of common sense to prevail?

PRATT: Well, I think certainly the latter. The thing is, you don't have to really, shall we say, because you are very concerned about a people, you don't have to consider that their government is something you have to be supportive of. As you can see around here, I'm very much a lover of things Chinese - all kinds - and one of the key things I've always felt is that the Chinese have been enormously gifted in literature, in painting, in ceramics, in many aspects of art, in philosophy, thought. They have done some marvelous things in science - Needham's exaggerations notwithstanding, nonetheless they did make enormous contributions - and that goes without mentioning their cuisine. You really have to consider that the Chinese people are one of the great, great peoples who have created a great culture. And unfortunately they have not been nearly so gifted in the past 150 or 200 years in politics. And therefore, you really have to be sorry that they have had artists which are up to their standards but unfortunately they have had very few political leaders who are up to the quality of their overall people, which is why, as I said, the Mainlanders in Taipei were so contemptuous of Chiang Kai-shek and his crew: they themselves know that their political leaders are not up to the level of what they should be. I think the United States is getting close to that these days, too, but the point is that we are obviously better and more gifted in business and science and technology than we are in politics.

But we, I think, very much were not negative about the people. In the first place, we had so many wonderful friends there. Occasionally we would have our little spats with them, when they would try to blame everything that had gone wrong in China on the United States, how if only Wedemeyer had been better or the Marshall mission had done something different they would be back in Shanghai living high at the racetrack and so on. But nonetheless, the point was that the poor, long-suffering Chinese people were the ones we were somewhat rooting for, and of course we wished that we had had a more forward-looking policy in Washington, DC, because a lot of this that was done finally by Nixon could have been started under Kennedy. Unfortunately, he had the wrong secretary of state for this, because Dean Rusk was convinced that Peking was part of just a transmission belt for world Communism from Moscow through Peking to Hanoi. And that, of course, was one of the focal points of our work in Hong Kong in the 1962-63 period, obviously when Indochina became the key preoccupation of the American Department of State rather than anything with China.

Q: I thought we'd stop at this point, and we'll pick it up the next time when we move to Indochina, and you went to, where, Laos?

PRATT: I went to Laos in July 1963.

Q: Okay, we'll pick it up at that point, then, next time. Great.

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Today is the 5th of November, 1999. You wanted to add a few things about Hong Kong.

PRATT: This is in the connection Hong Kong and Indochina at that time. As you can well imagine, the focus already in 1963 was very much on Indochina. In fact, it started a bit in 1961-62 with the Laos question and the Laos agreement in Geneva, which, of course, had a China connection in your famous refusal to shake hands with Zhou Enlai and so forth. So we were there very much involved in the Indochina situation, and there were sort of three things which particularly distressed us. One was the constant assumption that China was one of the direct supporters of Hanoi. We did look at China as supporting the reunification of Vietnam as a question different from the aspiration of Hanoi to oust the French, and then the Americans, from all of former French Indochina, based on the Ho Chi Minh view that there was only one Indochinese Communist party, formed, of course, in China in 1931.

So we were not at all immune from seeing that China was indeed a factor in this, but we believed it was about as badly understood as a factor as, shall we say, the connection between Moscow and Peking. So we China hands had quite a few problems with the way in which particularly the Secretary of State and the people who were writing the stuff for the press seemed to view China and its role in Asia.

Q: Was this division sort of apparent? I mean, were things sent in and rejected or rewritten? How did this manifest itself?

PRATT: Not too much because we were never asked. That, of course, is one of the great things about our great political leaders: they never seem to want to hear very much, particularly if it does not agree with what it is that they are trying to present to the Congress or the press or the people. We did, however, have much greater optimism about President Kennedy because we did think that he was of a younger generation and that he would have a far more open mind, and we found, as I mentioned last time, that what he said about the "government of the people" on Taiwan was a very good signal that we would give up our nonsense of Chiang Kai-shek ruling all of the Mainland.

Well, also Hong Kong was one of the bases for a lot of the journalists who went into Vietnam and elsewhere in Indochina and then returned to their home base, where they had their wives and children and so forth, in Hong Kong. And so, of course, the same journalists, like Stanley Karnow, who wrote a book about Mao but also, of course, was very much involved in the Vietnam situation - these journalists, whom we saw on a regular basis to discuss Chinese matters, were, of course, themselves getting increasingly concerned about Vietnam, so this was very much something which was very hard to avoid there in Hong Kong.

Then we had Roger Hillsman, who had been in INR and, as I'm sure you are aware, gave away part of the store, the biographic side, to the CIA, who have never been able to do decent biographic work since. Roger Hillsman was taking over as the new assistant secretary for East Asia, and on this occasion he was sent on a familiarization trip particularly to Vietnam, but on his way out of Vietnam he stopped off in Hong Kong, and we had a session with him. And he was telling us the marvelous things being done in Vietnam, how they were going to move all the villages and fortify them and get them under the control of the government, and they were going to train all of the village leaders to see that they had responsibility upward to their government, just as they were going to train all of the people who were sent down from Saigon to feel that they were the father and mother of the people in the villages and, therefore, they would be concerned about the villagers and the villagers would be concerned about Saigon, and therefore this would, at the end of six months, resolve the great security problem they had in Vietnam. And several of us, of course, took great issue with this, and we in particular hit him on saying, well, do you think within six months you can remake a traditional Asian society, have people change their whole attitude, have all the officials who have had this bureaucratic training for some 300 years under Chinese influence, and have village leaders who for as many decades have realized that the only way they can try to be a proper village chief is to protect their villages from the depredations of the officials coming out from the central government - do you think you can change all of that within six months, whereas you say we can't really do anything about our China policy? The China policy is something which really hits deep into neither the pockets nor the minds, the hearts of the majority of the American people, and yet you cannot even make a small change in that. Hillsman said, well, he thought maybe it would take 10 years to change the China policy, and we said, you know, it's really just typical that you think that you can change a foreign society in a matter of months, whereas something which is totally peripheral to American society is going to take 10 years to accomplish. Of course, it did take almost 10 years to the year. Indeed, this was something which clearly was quite an education to most of us, who, of course, thought we knew a bit about our own United States, but we were being lectured how we were expecting too much of a president, expecting too much of American government.

Q: Hillsman had been with the OSS (Office of Strategic Services) in Burma and seemed to be infused with the OSS spirit, you could do anything with a few good men plunked down in the middle of the jungle. This may be unfair to the gentleman, but I seem to catch that. I worked under him for a little while in dealing with Africa. But were you at least allowed to present your views, or was the consul general trying to shush you up because he didn't want to upset the new head of the East Asian Bureau?

PRATT: Oh, no. This was pretty free-wheeling, and of course since by that time China was considered so peripheral, because the focus had gone entirely toward Vietnam, and China, which was therefore then considered part of the Vietnam question - and indeed that is after all how Nixon and Kissinger were able to get it through 10 years later, was still to have it part of a resolution of the Vietnam question rather than a matter in its own right.

Q: I was just curious about the mindset. Was it almost a given with Hillsman and the rest of them, saying, Okay, we're stuck with this for domestic political reasons. We're not going to try to open up to China at this point, but it wasn't a matter of saying we shouldn't open up to China, or was it just a matter of practicality when you could?

PRATT: Well, it was a question of this is not something which is in front of us. We have other questions we have to handle. And of course, they also were saying that because we are fighting this war with Vietnam, we have to demonize anyone who is considered to be connected with it. Later on, of course, we're already beginning to dï¿½tente, to try to get a more balanced view of Moscow. But of course Moscow was far more of a direct supporter of Hanoi than was Peking. As I say, in the end, you'll find when I get to 1970, Peking was very clearly not supporting Hanoi in all of Hanoi's pretensions, and after all, they eventually had a war with Hanoi. This was the sort of things which we were trying to sensitize the people in Washington to, in which we found almost no success. Now this was not because they were trying to squelch things, but they did consider that we were, of course, narrow-minded, we had "gone native" and were considering things from the Chinese point of view, that we weren't looking at the way in which things really were in the United States. Of course, we still disagreed with that because, of course, we felt that we did have a certain idea of what the United States could and could not put up with.

Q: At this time, while we're still in Hong Kong, I'm trying to get the mindset. One of the things I believe was bandied about at that time - I think it was even under Eisenhower - it became one of the watchwords of the Vietnam situation - was the "dominoes." And granted you were looking at China, but there was a concern that if Hanoi were to take over the south, it would just be the beginning of Cambodia, Laos, maybe Thailand, Burma, Indonesia, et cetera et cetera. In other words, start something going. Was the domino theory prevalent, discounted, or what, exactly?

PRATT: Well, it was discussed, and it was considered to have a certain validity. However, we figured that each case had to be looked at separately. The reason why we were looking at Laos, because of course we had the Geneva agreement on Laos in 1962, which was something we resolved before we began to have our big involvement in Vietnam. So Laos was supposed to be the first of the dominoes rather than South Vietnam. Then, of course, Cambodia, we thought, was a very different kettle of fish, and then Thailand something yet again different. The one thing which we did see, and we think we saw as being something which was not seen the same way in Peking as in Hanoi, was which dominoes are going to be pushed by whom? And very clearly, as I later on will say, it looked as though the Laos and Cambodian dominoes were Hanoi's, and Peking was not so happy with that. That therefore gave a rather different game than the simplistic one of Moscow-Peking-Hanoi and then the rest. And of course, as you know, the thing which gave the impetus to ASEAN was, indeed, the end of the SEATO treaty and the pullback of the U.S. so that they decided they had to do something themselves to be a little bit more cohesive. But as I was seeing when I was in Laos, Indonesia did this because it was afraid of the Chinese. Thailand did it because it was afraid of the Vietnamese. They didn't fear the Chinese; they feared the Vietnamese. And of course the Malays in Malaysia were also concerned about the Chinese. They didn't even like Lee Kwan Yu, who was a Chinese. So this was a very complicated situation, which we felt was not really very well served by having a simplistic concept of dominoes, as though all of these had the same regular shape, size, and weight. They didn't . We considered that you've really go to learn more about the details of what's going on there rather than just having a simplistic image which you can use with the press and with the great unwashed.

Q: Well, now, Hong Kong was this center where journalists would come in and out. At this time, I'm making the assumption that most of the journalists who came were relatively serious ones, as opposed to later on, the glamour-seeking ones or with a cause or this sort of thing.

PRATT: Sure.

Q: Were you having these dialogues that we're having right now basically with the journalists at this time?

PRATT: Yes. And we had, of course, a well-known journalist corps there, and people, of course, who subsequently had quite distinguished careers. And we indeed would get together primarily to discuss the most recent events in China. And we were, of course, at that time interested very much in what the conflicts were in the leadership, which we could figure out only slightly. The American journalists, of course, could also not go into China, so they were there in Hong Kong as much interested in talking to Germans and French, who could go into China, as we were. So indeed, yes, we had talks. As I mentioned earlier, we had one luncheon club, which was the reporters on the Mainland getting together once a week for this lunch. And then we also had the evening meetings, which would bring in the journalists and scholars. There were some good scholars either permanently in Hong Kong, at the University of Hong Kong, or temporarily in Hong Kong, farmed out from the United States. One of my friends there at that time was Conrad Brandt, who together with Schwartz and Fairbank had brought out the very important documentary history of Chinese Communism. This was a textbook which we had all gotten through, all the journalists and scholars and people at the consulate. [Ed: see Brandt, Conrad, Schwartz, Benjamin, Fairbank, John K., A Documentary History of Chinese Communism (New York: Atheneum, 1966)]

Q: We're looking first, your impression and then your colleagues who were in the China-watching game, particularly at the consulate general. China was obviously undergoing great turmoil internally at this time, but was China seen as an expansionist . . . I mean now they had Tibet and Outer Mongolia was sort of in the Soviet slate. Was it seen as an expansionist or potentially expansionist rï¿½gime or was it seen that it had enough to digest and this was going to keep it pretty occupied?

PRATT: Well, I'd say both of those concepts. China, when possible for it to do so and when it was convenient and helpful to do so, then indeed China can be aggressive. For example, when the Chinese came into Korea, that was perhaps considered a special case, but nonetheless it certainly was an indication that the Chinese were not going to live up to their view that they would have no troops ever outside their own borders et cetera. And then, of course, already there had been problems, the inner Central Asian difficulties. Xinjiang was a very difficult area and had a very peculiar history. The head there during the '40s had been a member of the Soviet Communist Party, not the Chinese Communist Party. So yes, we considered that they could indeed keep pushing, and therefore it was not surprising that they would push, shall we say, on the Vietnamese border area and also that they were involved in Burma, and the were also involved in the highlands of Thailand, although, of course, there they would say they were merely trying to root out the KMT irregulars who were still there. So indeed, China had to be considered because it was the biggest boy on the block, and therefore we really had to keep looking very carefully at where they might flex their muscles. The Korean War had not been over that long. What they tried to do earlier over Quemoy and Matsu (and therefore obviously aiming towards Taiwan) was very clear. And so we knew that Mao in the 1930s had said that after Japan was defeated Korea and Taiwan should be given their freedom, freed from the Japanese. He didn't say that that was an inalienable part of China that had to be returned to China at that time. So we knew that things had changed and had developed. So you really had to look and see each situation, what it might mean, and I think that most of the journalists also looked at it that way, although there were some who, of course, always, whatever Peking said they agreed with. We had a lot of those coming. They were like Edgar Snow, you know, the only ones who really could get into China were the ones who would parrot whatever Peking had said.

Q: There is an Australian journalist.

PRATT: Wilfred Burchett.

Q: Who was sort of considered to be a tame pussycat of the Communists.

PRATT: Oh, indeed he was, and of course we had Han Su-yen. We would occasionally have dinner with Han Su-yen, and of course whatever the latest line in Peking was she would come out with.

Q: It was handy for you.

PRATT: It was handy for us to know what the line was; however, we did not consider that the line was the only thing that you needed to study in order to know what they really had in mind.

Q: I'm not sure if we covered it the last time, but about the time you were in Hong Kong there was the Indian-Chinese border war. How did we see that at the time? What did we think this was about?

PRATT: Well, there again, it was mostly political. I went through New Delhi and saw Harold Jacobson, who had been our political officer in Hong Kong. I guess the war was still somewhat on, and he, of course, was trying very hard to give an analysis of how the Chinese viewed the situation and therefore what did the Chinese think the Indians had done. But that, of course, was not where the political line was. The political line was supportive of India, of all the Indian claims and pretensions and an attack on Peking.

Q: Were the China watchers in Hong Kong seeing this as an effort to try to destabilize the Indian rï¿½gime, or something, or were the people looking at China there seeing this as a matter of straightening out the borders?

PRATT: Well, there is no question, as we saw it, but that the Chinese had a good case, that it was the Indians who had first moved into what had been generally considered to be Chinese territory, believing that there was a weakness in China because of internal problems there. And therefore, as Harold Jacobson was doing in New Delhi, we were trying to explain that the Chinese had a case and even if you wanted to support the Indian case, at least give the Chinese credit for having a case of their own. This was something which, of course, a lot of people took immediate positions on, one way or the other, because we had, for example, one of our colleagues there, V. D. Paranjavay, who was with the Indian Commission, and he had been a student in Peking and then interpreted for Nehru in Nehru's conversations with Zhou Enlai and so on. And he, of course, was well aware of the geography and knew what the Chinese claims were, and he saw that they had some validity, but as an Indian, of course, he felt it important, almost essential, to defend the Indian case against the Chinese case, whereas when it came to some other little dispute - with Vietnam or someplace else - he would then, of course, be supporting the Chinese because he had spent many years in Peking and spoke the language beautifully. And so he liked things Chinese, except when they liked things Indian. But our official position at that time - after all, we had a much more prestigious figure in New Delhi than we had in Hong Kong, and that was a person whose views got through to the White House and so on.

Q: That was, was it -

PRATT: Bowles.

Q: Bowles, Chester Bowles. Well, now, should we go on to Laos?

PRATT: Well, I want to add one more thing. As I mentioned, the Geneva agreement on Laos had been signed in 1962, and following their signature there was an effort to determine how much we could expect from Hanoi, whether they would really live up to the letter of the agreement or how they would really get around it, in what areas, and all the rest of it. So Harriman had been responsible for this, and you may be aware, one of Harriman's protï¿½gï¿½s was Michael Forrestal. Well, Mike Forrestal had been in my mathematics class at Philips Exeter Academy, and I knew him. He was one of the more prestigious figures in our class, and his father, as the first secretary of defense, came up for our commencement address in 1945. So I somewhat followed the career of Mike Forrestal, and he was sent out on a trip by Harriman to look at Laos and to see what was happening because already things were breaking down. I don't think Quinim Pholsema had been killed yet, but obviously the Hanoi side was trying to turn the screws and to push Souvanna Phouma to granting them the predominant role in much of the eastern part of Laos. And that, of course, would have been something which later became the famous Trail, but at that time it was basically access to the Plain of Jars and control, really, in Laos itself.

But Mike was sent out to inspect all this and determine to what extent we would try to persuade Souvanna Phouma to accept greater deliveries of American military equipment in order to build up the defensive capabilities of the neutralists, to begin with, but then also perhaps to get him to agree also to getting stuff to the former [inaudible]'s troops. And so he was coming back through Hong Kong, and I sent a cable to him in Laos suggesting that he stay with me and we could chat about the situation. So I picked him up at the Star Ferry, and we went back and had dinner, and he said, "Oh, this is all very well and good, and it's nice to talk to you about China, and China is very interesting, and so on, but really, where you ought to be is Laos." And we were seated up behind my house, which is the highest private house in Hong Kong, looking down over the harbor and the and the hills beyond. And I said, after having a marvelous dinner from my wonderful cook and seeing this beautiful view and drinking brandy where you were overlooking these magnificent sights, "You think I ought to go to Laos? You know, I think I had better send you off on the next plane."

Well, he went back, and what role he played he never would confess to, but within a few months of that, I got orders transferring me to Laos. Of course, I was a bachelor, therefore no family encumbrance. Two, I spoke French. Three, I was already in the area. I was being transferred from a post where there were quite a few officers who could presumably pick up the slack until they could get somebody else out there. In any case, I was sent off to Laos to be the Pol-Mil officer there, to be working on the political aspects of the efforts to crank up the air force and get further arms in and so forth. This was not the CIA side, the other irregular forces, but really the regular forces particularly efforts to try to crank up the poor neutralists.

Q: You were there from when to when?

PRATT: I was there from April of 1963 - that's when I got the assignment change, anyway - to January of 1968.

Q: All right, what was the situation? You arrived in the spring of 1963 in Vientiane. Could you describe both the embassy and job, the situation on the ground?

PRATT: Well, the Embassy was still a rather crumbling old building with rather cramped quarters. I had to share an office with someone, with a nice young chap in the CIA, and it was very clearly a . . . We worked very closely with the station in Hong Kong as well, because we knew so many of the same people. We knew the people in British intelligence, and we had a great deal of back and forth. But this was clearly a big CIA function as well. And we also, of course, had an even more testy relationship in a way with the American military, which of course was no longer permitted to be in as military, and so they had to have a very discreet-type operation, and they had really first rate officers in all of these areas because Harriman had sort of hand picked these. And the ambassador was Unger. I guess you've interviewed him, too, haven't you?

Q: Leonard Unger, yes. Well, what was the situation in Laos?

PRATT: Well, the situation in Laos was that you had a very testy relationship because you had a time rift in effect, has is not always, in effect, a very stable form of government. Souvanna Phouma had to fight people on his right and on his left. He had also to try to hold together his own neutralists, because this was not a - shall we say - political movement which was very understandable to most of the Lao.

Q: What was the sort of situation on the ground, military, going on at that time?

PRATT: Well, there had been nibbling away in the Plain of Jars, as they started at that time to try to clean out people, including pushing back some of the neutralists. The neutralists, for example, were in posts farther in towards the center of the country and even towards the east of the country than the Vietnamese wished them to be. And so what they were trying to do, however, was to do it politically, in other words, to take over the neutralists. You see, the neutralists were themselves divided into several factions, and even at the top political level, the foreign minister, Quinim, had really been under Vietnamese discipline, whereas Souvanna Phouma, of course, obviously was not. And Kong Le was, of course, basically his own man; whereas some of the lower neutralist military leaders were basically sympathetic to and basically had been coming under the discipline of the North Vietnamese and the Lao who were controlled by the North Vietnamese. In other words, the Neo Lao Hak Sat was an organization which was basically controlled by what we called the Pathet Lao, the Lao Communist Party. But it in turn was influenced by the Vietnamese because most of these persons were also members of the politburo or at least of the Hanoi Communist Party. So it was very complicated politically speaking, and before I got there they had already had the assassination of the foreign minister, Quinim , apparently by somebody whom Kong Le sent in to do it.

Q: Kong Le being?

PRATT: A neutralist. He was the captain who had sparked off the 1960 uprising.

Q: On the ground, in the first place you were politico-military. What was the military situation, one, with the Lao military - I suppose the royal army or something - then the sort of neutralists Kong Le, and then what was the CIA cadre doing? And then what were the North Vietnamese doing?

PRATT: Well, the North Vietnamese, as I say, were trying first politically to grab a hold of all of the neutralist forces and the neutralist areas, thereby trying to twist the screws on Souvanna Phouma to get him to basically give in and come over to their side. Souvanna Phouma was trying to hold on to a kind of what his concept of neutrality was, and his concept of neutrality, of course, had brought in the Chinese Communists with their embassy and the North Vietnamese with their embassy. And he was trying very hard to do this above this kind of fray, whereas the Vietnamese, of course, were trying to do it all through their direct cadre approach. And one of the key things they thought that would be the vulnerability of true neutralists, and therefore they could get these neutralists to split off from Souvanna Phouma and to go over to their side, and then that would undermine the whole role that Souvanna Phouma was playing. Now very early on, Souvanna Phouma had been convinced that the Vietnamese were trying this, and he did not like to be treated that way. After all, he was from his point of view the descendant of the "Kings of the Front." He was a Mahuparak of old Lao society, as his older brother had been, and therefore they should let him do this, and he would restrain the Thai, he would restrain the Americans, he would let the French do military training and so forth, but he would keep it, from his point of view, neutral in favor of everyone. Well, the Retsi [Ed: ?] insisted on having Hanoi's ambassador in Vientiane and Peking's ambassador in Vientiane and keeping this as a somewhere where everybody was supposed to be welcome and just leave Laos alone, whereas, of course, Hanoi was not prepared to leave Laos alone.

Q: Were there North Vietnamese troops in Laos itself at this point, when you arrived in 1963?

PRATT: Oh, yes, oh, yes, oh, the whole eastern area was occupied by the Vietnamese. In addition to that, there were cadres in all of the areas in which the normal Lao Communists were functioning. There was a Lao Communist contingent right around the corner from our embassy when I got there.

Q: As a politico-military officer, what were you u to? What were you doing?

PRATT: Well, one of the things we were trying to do was to strengthen the Lao Air Force. They had old P-6s.

Q: It's a trainer, actually.

PRATT: Which were old training planes which had been fitted to carry machine guns and things of that sort. We had to work this out. It was good training for what I had to do later with Taiwan, but we had to try to say, "Listen, we can't repair these P-6s; therefore, we can introduce P-28s, which is the next step up because that's the only thing we've got parts for. So therefore this will not be a violation of the introduction of new and sophisticated military equipment." These aircraft could therefore be of assistance to both neutralists and what they called the Royal Lao Army, which was in trouble particularly in Suvannakhet Province, and so forth. And then, of course, later on they could be used to assist the neutralists in the Plain of Jars and the other areas in the north. So this was one of the key things we had been trying to work out, to get some framework within which we could introduce improved aircraft.

Now Souvanna had to be brought along at every step of the way because we had strict instructions from Governor Harriman and therefore from President Kennedy that we were to respect the framework that Souvanna had established and try to make it work because they thought that it would be helpful in making any future framework work for Vietnam itself. So this was very much the desire to maintain a kind of framework. I think, as you know, later on one of the key finds was always the overt but the secret war and all the rest of that. Well, this was, I think, one of the key things which bothered us with, shall we say, naï¿½ve journalists - not with the more sophisticated ones. They realized in the first place that this wasn't secret and there was no real attempt to keep it secret; the only thing we were trying to do was to match Hanoi in having it "not avowed," because that's what Souvanna asked: "I don't mind your providing this assistance, but I want to be able not to have it something we put out in the press as something which says, 'Yes, we are indeed violating the Geneva agreements of 1962,' because that's not what Hanoi says in all of its attacks." And therefore this was one of the key things that we had to try to do in our pol-mil approach, to make sure that we at every point tried to respect Souvanna's desire to keep the framework of the Geneva agreement as best one could, and that meant making sure that we did not criticize his having the Soviet ambassador or the Chinese ambassador or even the Vietnamese ambassador around and so on, and at the same time that we were not trying to upset the Geneva agreement's military matters. I don't remember them in detail now, but the French were the only ones permitted to do formal training. That was under the Geneva agreement, and they did have a French military mission there, which was training and primarily trying to train the neutralists, because, of course, the French, with their usual ideological and geometric approach, were very much tied to supporting neutralism in the middle against the two extremes, as they might as the Chamber of Deputies was the range from left to right. So they considered themselves the vague supporters of Souvanna Phouma and the middle. But of course they weren't prepared to do very much, and they weren't really capable of doing very much, but they were there, and Souvanna always gave them due recognition (as we did as well) as people who were providing a very important service, namely, a French military mission which tried to crank up the military capabilities of this ragtag neutralist force.

Q: You mentioned the royalists, the regular army. Did that amount to anything?

PRATT: Oh, yes, that was the biggest army in Laos.

Q: How could you work with that, then?

PRATT: Well, we didn't have any problems in dealing with them except on the political level, but there again, at the political level the deputy prime minister was Phoumi Nosavan. And of course Souphanouvong was the deputy prime minister, but he hadn't been around town for quite a while because the government itself was composed of all three factions. Boun Oum was not in a formal position, but he was the nominal leader of this group, and he was also in town, and he, of course, had basic authority in the southern part of Laos because that's where his Champassak kingdom had been, because he was basically one of the three kings of Laos in the good old days, before the French just picked on the king of Luang Prabang and made him the king of all Laos.

So we had direct connection with Phoumi Nosavan. One of my tasks was to deal directly with Phoumi's staff, particularly his chef de cabinet, who was Bounleut Saykosi, who had a very distinguished career. I think he's now living in California. But we dealt with all these military commanders. Some of them we liked better than others. One we always had a bit of trouble with was Kupersit Abai [Ed: ?], who commanded the legion there in Vientiane itself. His father was from the Island of Kong. His mother was a Senanikom. The Senanikoms were the big family of Vientiane, one of the Sino-Lao families. So we had no problem in meeting with all factions because they all had things to gain from us. We were supporting their currency, and that of course was a very key thing. At some point you might want to talk to somebody who worked on the economic side, because that was a very interesting one. We were trying to use economics to bolster the society, and of course with the usual lack of great results.

Q: Supposedly, the French were in charge of training the army, but they were concentrating on the neutral side. Were we furnishing equipment to the regular Lao army?

PRATT: Oh, we were providing most of the equipment, yes.

Q: Well, who trained them in how to use a howitzer and that sort of thing?

PRATT: Well, we had a bit of a military group there. Some of them were very capable indeed. Colonel Law was a chap who had been in the American Army in World War II and had been sent out as an advisor to the Lao Issara movement, which was trying to fight first the Japanese and then decided it could also fight against the French coming back in. It was the movement in which Souvanna Phouma had been involved and many of the other members of the Lao elite. But he was a very sensitive chap who knew the geography, knew the history, knew the psychology of the area. And he got together some very, very good people, including a young colonel who was unfortunately forced out too soon. But they had big parties. One of the things the Lao liked are what they called Boums, or parties, and they would bring together the neutralists and the rightists and the American and the French. And we occasionally were able to get the Russians and the Poles involved. The Poles were members of the International Control Commission. That was, again, a very important part of the overall faï¿½ade. And we therefore, in addition to myself as a Pol-Mil officer, we always had an ICC officer, and officer who was charged with trying to make sure that the International Control Commission, which reported to the co-chairman of the Geneva conference, could function in such a way as to deter violations by any side.

Q: Was the ICC the usual Poland, India, and Canada?

PRATT: That's right.

Q: What I gather, the Canadians were the only ones who wanted to do something. The Indians were trying to duck everything.

PRATT: Well, the Indians, of course, were under pressure from Moscow, and of course, that's one of those things which, while I don't think that they ever did too much what Moscow wanted inside India, nonetheless they were prepared to pay by doing abroad whatever Moscow wanted. And of course the Poles were just total emissary of Moscow, and Moscow, indeed, was very supportive of Hanoi. That did make for problems until the Chinese attacked again, and this is something which some of the Indians got sufficiently annoyed at all Communists so that they did get a few investigations going, too. But we were trying, in any case, to keep this functioning as best as possible as part of this faï¿½ade.

Q: Was this sort of basically a faï¿½ade? I mean, as we see this as being anything other than giving lip-service and let's get on with what we have to do using the CIA and whatever we had to do?

PRATT: No, it was a much more two-track approach. Let's keep this going as best we can. Souvanna wants to keep this framework, and remember, we were able to keep that framework through all the open war until we, of course, bugged out of Vietnam. And then, of course, Souvanna was able to use the remaining shreds of this faï¿½ade to be able to arrange a rather peaceful turnover to his brother. So it was a good deal more than just a faï¿½ade which we treated with contempt. It was a faï¿½ade which we considered to be very much part of the way of managing things in Asia.

Q: What about the CIA? What were they doing? It almost seems like they were running their own war while the diplomats were going around trying to do something but rather ineffectively.

PRATT: No, I think that we were all being pretty effective. The fact that we were able to maintain that faï¿½ade and to keep certain military - and this particularly became difficult later on when the MAC-V [Military Assistance Command-Vietnam], of course, began to be viewing itself as the command structure for the entire area and then required a great deal of effort on the part of Bill Sullivan . [Ed: Ambassador William H. Sullivan (non-career appointment) presented his credentials on Dec 23, 1964 and left post, Mar 18, 1969] to restrain MAC-V, and he had to use his contacts both in the Pentagon and in CINCPAC to try to rein in those who were trying to destroy that framework. So no, I would say that we were doing several tasks at once, one of the political tasks for the international community, which of course, these are what the people wanted, and I think it's something that really should be better studied by people who think we can do these things in Kosovo and all the rest of it purely by this international faï¿½ade. The faï¿½ade could be of some help, but you have to look at the other aspects of it. So the CIA, indeed... In the first place, its role changed considerably through the year.

Q: We're talking about 1963-68 here.

PRATT: Yes, in 1963 to 1968, even during that period there were enormous changes. When I came back in 1968, I handled Laos again and then added Cambodia until 1973, so I have perspective there of basically 15 years, because that's what I was also doing in Paris, of handling this. Now, of course, that means I sometimes get the date when something happened a little bit off, but what I wanted to say is that from 1962-63, the CIA had a double role. One was to have liaison with Souvanna Phouma and Souvanna Phouma's people, to be supportive to the neutralists, and that meant supportive in various ways. For example, they provided money to run a neutralist newspaper. They supported a neutralist youth movement. They tried to assist in getting some of the neutralists trained in Thailand or something of the sort. But at the same time, they were handed the task of trying to assist the Hmong/Miao, as we then called them, Meo, to withstand attacks by the North Vietnamese and by the Neo Lao Hak Sat and what were called then by the Communist side, the "patriotic neutralists." So this was, of course, General Vang Pao'who led the Region II (MR2) defenses from his headquarters in Long Cheng, operation in the Plain of Jars area, where the Miao were. And then also, the CIA assisted down in the Bolavens area, where the Communists tried to get in. There were two provinces to the west, Champasak and Saravane, and they tried to defend the two capital cities. They couldn't do much in the countryside, and then they tried to get some patrol-type operation in the Bolovens area to try to keep protection in depth for the river valley, and also the same way in Suvannakhet, and then they made an operation up in the north, which was designed to try to keep the area of Kweisai [Ed: ?]somewhat safe. And this meant being involved with the Ha or other Chinese type forces up there. So, Vang Pao, of course, was the most important figure, and he could be used even in dealing with some of the top people there on the Vietnam border area.

But this meant money, of course, medicine. It meant food. We set up the operation of air drops of food in these mountain areas, where it was very difficult to have a good landing strip, but we also built two landing strips not too far from the Plain of Jars to support the Vang Pao operation. So this was obviously starting out small. It was starting out in its support for guerilla-type operations - it was not so much the whole territory, but it was to have forces which could try to make sure that the others could not hold territory - but later on became more positional, and by the time I left, they were beginning to chew up Vang Pao as they tried to hold on to areas where they could not really withstand a full onslaught by the Vietnamese, even with the assistance of not only the Lao Air Force but then the American Air Force by that time.

But it was slow. It was progressive, and it was designed in its defensive way to spare also as much of our population as possible, because everybody knew that the Vietnamese population was so much larger. They could afford to lose a lot of people. The Lao couldn't, and least of all the Meo and the other highlands people because their slash-and-burn agriculture and the other problems of living at high altitudes mean that you had rather low birth rate and you had a fairly high death rate. People died fairly young, and therefore, you just did not have a big population base you could work with. Vang Pao finally got to the point of having 13 or 14 year olds being some of his most important troops. That's something which, of course, when we go back and revisit it, we will not be quite so proud of. But we certainly can be proud of what a lot of the Meo and the Khman did do, and they were doing, of course, a lot of this, in the end, for us as well because they were there to rescue American pilots shot down in the bombing raids over North Vietnam. They would help establish and protect navigating device in the northern part of Laos to try to assist in the actual bombing of Hanoi, things of that sort.

Q: Talking about triangulation.

PRATT: That's right. It's just one of those Air Force operations which they would basically be supportive of. We knew a key aspect of what they were doing, and they had really very, I think, high quality people. I think whether you did work with this, then of course you've got the book that was written by Doug Brauthar, who was one of the station chiefs.

Q: No, I'm not familiar with the book.

PRATT: Okay, well, he was one of the station chiefs, and he wrote a book about the guerilla warfare. And it was after his time that they went more into positional warfare, which of course chewed up the Meo and did not really . . . well, it was designed basically to be supportive of the mentality of MAC-V, which never really, I think, understood the war which was going on, and I don't think that, for example, Kissinger did, either. And I think that, of course, the big problem was the way in which we handled Cambodia. That was something I worked on when I was back here in Washington that happened later. But again, the unwillingness to listen to most of the people whom they sent out and paid fairly good salaries to learn about what about what was going on was a key aspect of the this fortune, as I say. Bill Sullivan, I think, emerges as a considerable hero, as somebody who was able to parlay his previous experience working with Harriman, at the Geneva Conference, and through the contacts that he had made with the military, to be able to keep at least the Lao situation from getting too much out of whack. I think that this is something which John Gunther Dean understood from his time in Laos and his time also in Paris and would have liked to be able to do better in Cambodia, but already MAC-V [Military Assistance Command-Vietnam] and General Vessey had already taken over and militarized the thinking there, which I think was part of the standing problem, why we were still having some of these difficulties in Cambodia. Laos was coming along not terribly smoothly and not terribly well, but since it is more of a backwater than any other place, it probably means that the passion in Bangkok and the passion in Hanoi don't get quite so riled up, and certainly not in Peking so that people are much more prepared to let it go its own way than if it's not what they would like. It's less offensive to others. And this is basically what we were trying to do at that time as well, to commit Souvanna Phouma to make Laos as inoffensive as possible, to be used as little as possible by anybody else so that the opponents of these other people would have less of a pretext.

Now we did eventually get the Thai involved, and we got them in with their own troops and their artillery in certain areas. They were very much in support of Vang Pao and so on. This, of course, provoked in turn even greater efforts on the part of Hanoi. We got the Chinese involved in what I later on - when I was back in Washington - tried to downplay so that we would avoid reaching in such a way as to anger the Chinese and to get them to be more involved than they otherwise would be. But we had people at that time who were saying, Ah, the Chinese are trying to build a road straight down to the Mekong and then cross into north Thailand. They intend to move in and take over Thailand. When you get these wars and you see people looking only at their maps and not looking at who else is looking at what map and what their map tells them, then you really can get involved in trying to prevent something which you don't need to prevent.

Q: Did you find during this 1963-68 period that the people from MAC-V or from our embassy up in Saigon or CINCPAC or what-have-you would come in and start looking at maps with flags and say, well, we've got to move in here and mover this - you know, this type of thing. Was this the mentality?

PRATT: This was what constantly . . . It was not so much of a problem in, of course, 1963-64. It was not until things began to go rather badly in Vietnam itself that the military began to say, "The reason things are not going well in Vietnam is not because we aren't doing things in Vietnam well; it's because of what's going on in Laos or [later on] in Cambodia, and therefore we only widen the war, we can reduce the war." And this, of course, is not the mentality of Bill Sullivan, who felt that if you are going to really get something accomplished in Vietnam, you've got to do it in Vietnam. And it was later on when we had our incursion into Cambodia-

Q: In the spring of 1970.

PRATT: -in the spring of 1970, then we on the Desk at that point said, "Well, you know the Vietnamese are fighting so well in Cambodia, and the CIA has gotten the Cambodians to go up and fight in southern Laos. Now the thing to do is to have the Lao attack Hanoi, because it looks as if they can't fight very well in their own countries but they can fight pretty well when they go abroad." So, you know, it was just crazy. Well, we felt that having a balanced view was very, very hard. Now we had great advantage in having Governor Harriman still around, even though Lyndon Johnson didn't much like him. And after all, Kennedy did not live that long. And so it was important that some of the framework which he had been astute enough to let Harriman try to handle rather than letting Dean Rusk do it, this was something which Harriman, being on the scene, could continue to sort of play a key role in. Now I'm sorry that Harriman did not really get into the Vietnam equation earlier. I think we might have avoided some of what we did in Vietnam if he had been able to do this because he was able to, for all of the contempt that some people have for Averell Harriman . . . One of my friends said, "Well, you expect a person who has $21 million on his 18th birthday to be able to do something with his life."

Q: I think his life stands as quite a monument to public service.

PRATT: I think it does. And strange public service, too, and not always what he would have thought, but nonetheless, a person always interested in public service and having certain talents for it. I think that one of the key things was his ability to appraise people. He wasn't always right, but he was far more right than most of the others, and he was able to see that they could build on Souvanna Phouma as they could not build on Phoumi Nosavan. Now if he'd been able to get to Saigon, he might have been able to find somebody there whom one could build on rather than a parade after . . .

Q: The 1963 assassination of Diem.

PRATT: Yes, after the assassination of Diem, the parade of sorry figures that followed. That's something I think that he would have been able to try to arrest.

Q: Well, now, Unger was ambassador about to when?

PRATT: He arrived I think in 1962, so I think he was there until 1964 or '65. [Ed: Ambassador Leonard Unger (career foreign service) presented his Credentials on Jul 25, 1962 and left post, Dec 1, 1964]

Q: And then Sullivan.

PRATT: Then Sullivan, yes.

Q: Can you describe from your perspective at the time the differences - operating style, effectiveness, point of view and all - between Unger and Sullivan?

PRATT: Well, I'd say one of the key things is that under Bill Sullivan one immediately had a vast increase in the excitement level. He was very much sort of in the Kennedy mode, somebody who was very quick, not ponderous, very open. He convened a kind of dinner meeting at his house very shortly after his arrival at which one of the questions raised was a discussion of China. I didn't think he did a terribly good job on that, and I told him so. It didn't bother him one bit, whereas I found that Leonard Unger was rather secretive. He did not really convey easily to the members of the staff what it is that he thought we should be doing. He did not always clue people in who were in the embassy. He's a shy man, and Bill Sullivan is not very shy. And so one had a greater sense of involvement when Bill Sullivan was there because everybody was brought into what it was that he was trying to do, and he had no problem in trying to explain to others what it is we should be doing, and I think this made for - shall we say - a much happier team. If you look at the people who have been in Laos, you'll find that it's one of the few places where almost everybody considers it either his most important, most interesting tour or one of them. And I think in part this was even more true under Bill Sullivan than under Leonard Unger, although under Leonard Unger as well one had to admit that the Lao, in the first place, were very open to foreigners. In the first place, most of them had been trained in a foreign language; therefore, they did not expect people who came to their country to know their language - because they all themselves had had to learn French, and they also, when they were speaking, even to each other, when they got into an economic or military discussion, they would switch or at least introduce a lot of French because they didn't have the word in their own language. They discussed Buddhism, of course - they had all the words they needed. But when it came to other subjects - medicine or something of that sort - they had learned it in a foreign language, which meant they were very open, and this was very, very pleasing because they are also very ingratiating people. They can be awfully tough to each other, but the point is that even, for example, persons whom they did not particularly like, or should I say, whose country they did not like or the policy of their country they didn't like, they would nonetheless be very, very pleasant with the individuals themselves. And it made for very sharp contrasts to some countries where you're really feeling left out and you're working on the periphery and you are nothing to do with what really is going on in that country.

Q: Was there that visceral reaction to the Vietnamese? You know, in Cambodia the Vietnamese are seen as very aggressive people, sort of like the Japanese certainly before World War II. What were you getting in Laos?

PRATT: Well, in Laos, remember that almost all the elite had been trained in Hanoi or somewhere in Vietnam.

Q: We're talking about French Hanoi at that time.

PRATT: Yes, what I'm saying, though, is that they had all very good Vietnamese friends, and many of them spoke some Vietnamese. The Vietnamese had been used quite considerably in Laos as well as Cambodia by the French as intermediaries, so from their point of view, there were good Vietnamese and there were bad Vietnamese. They did not like, of course, what Hanoi was doing because, in addition to that, Hanoi was suborning their fellow Lao. Now admittedly the top man, Kaysone, was half Vietnamese and half Lao, and there were stories that his Lao mother still lived in the Suvannakhet area and she cursed her son as a turncoat from his Lao roots. So indeed they did consider this to be a Vietnamese movement. They considered it to be having all the ferocity and the un-Lao aspects of ideology and class hatred and xenophobia, which they knew to be bad qualities of the Vietnamese and which they themselves, as good Lao, did not think would be good for them to copy.

So yes, they disliked the Vietnamese and what the Vietnamese temperament was, but so many of them went to marry the Vietnamese; therefore, there were good Vietnamese too. And that's one of the great things about the Lao - they were so, shall we say, not unconscious of these various differences, but very conscious of them but assimilated them easily, so that the Chinese they saw not just as the money-grubbing people who benefit from the opium trade or something of that sort, but there are also some Chinese whom they dealt with, who were their bankers and whom they liked and could talk about things with. So that's why Souvanna Phouma was so able to have his own type of neutrality, which was neutrality open to everybody. And I think this was something, a spirit that made us feel that the Lao would be one people who probably could try to make that kind of framework work at the same time that they were able, around the edges, to try to defend their own territory and within their own interests and so on. So it was a strange little operation, and in the end not so much of a success as we would like, but certainly, when you look at what happened to South Vietnam and what happened to Cambodia, Laos came through it a good deal better than any of the other places; therefore, I think it's a vindication of the efforts that people put in to try to manage this framework, because it meant when that whole thing collapsed you had the framework for a transition, to recognize the changed realities.

Q: When Sullivan came in, as you were saying, he's very much the activist and all. Was that a certain amount of concern? In other words, it sounds like situation where more activism might cause more activism on the other side and stir up the pot rather than keep it calm.

PRATT: No, because his activism was to keep the pot calm, because that was his framework. And therefore he was not one of the persons driven by a military mentality at all. And so, yes, he was activist, but activist in trying to manage all of these various problems without any of the military desire to solve something.

Q: Were you, as the politico-military officer feeling very much under the pressure of the American military: get out and do more and all that, I mean from MAC-V {Ed: Military Advisory Command-Vietnam] and other places?

PRATT: No, because we were able the whole time I was there to keep that restrained. In other words, we had our good military and not the bad military. Well, I can take that back - we did have one "bad" military, General Vernon Baldwin, a very nice man, but one who was also duplicitous, the way the military can be. I think some of the greatest liars within our foreign affairs area are the American military, who believe that civilians shouldn't be told some of these things because they will come to the wrong opinions and stop giving them money. So this is something which we were able, for the most part, to restrain because the CIA was, of course, even substantially more secretive, and as you are, I'm sure, well aware, Ted Shackley came in after we'd had out succession of Charlie Whitehouse. [Ed: Ambassador Whitehouse was appointed Jul 24, 1973; presented his credentials oSep 20, 1973; and left post on Apr 12, 1975]

Q: Whitehouse?

PRATT: Yes, Charlie Whitehouse. He's the FSO who now lives in Virginia in the horse country. No, he was also involved in all of these things a little later, but this was a CIA figure who was a very smooth operator, very good. And a very good deputy, George Kolaris. And then we had Jim Lilley and then we had Shackley coming in with Lilley also still there.

Q: How was Jim Lilley? I've interviewed him, and what was your impression of how Jim Lilley operated?

PRATT: Well, of course, as I told you, I knew him back in Philips Exeter, so...

Then he had been involved in the China side of things, too. Very intelligent. I know he would make jokes about his being a jock, but he was very intelligent, and very smooth. Well, we had one delightful little contretemps which I'll cover now. One of the jobs I said was to have liaison with the neutrals to funnel money and other support, and on one occasion my house was cattycornered from that of Sukhan Bilaison, who was a secretary of state of sports and youth and was a neutralist official whom Souvanna had designated to be the intermediary for much of this. And so I went home for lunch one day and was called over by Sukhan, who said that he had learned from the front, the neutralists up in the Plain of Jars, that there was going to be a real problem and therefore I should let Bill Sullivan know about this because there was going to be funds or else Colonel Sing would have some difficulties with the patriotic neutralists, mainly the ones who had been taken over by the Communists.

So I went in and told Bill Sullivan about it, and he said, "Go down and tell Jim about this." So I went down and told Jim, and Jim blew up. He said, "I see Sukhan once a week. Why did he raise this with you?" I said, "I don't know. You'd better ask him." Jim did ask him, and he called me in afterwards and said, "I asked Sukhan why he called you in, and so Sukhan said, 'Ah, but I thought you were supposed to be handling support for newspapers and things of that sort and when it comes to intelligence matters I should raise it with Mr. Pratt.'" You have to find that funny. Here we are in this country like Laos, you know, where they are so subtle about so many human relations, but they really can get something so wrong.

But at one point, well, I'll just say why it is that this sort of thing went on. I was considered to be, if not the station chief, a top intelligence operative there, and this came from the fact that one of the persons who had previously, in the 1959-62 period, who had been there with Campbell James, who is a legend in the CIA (and not one that they're always terribly happy about, although I think they should be). He was a very colorful chap, and he was the one who had all these contacts with Souvanna Phouma during the time when he was in the outs and so on. But they finally, when he went away, they then tried to figure out who would be coming to take his place. And then they got an announcement that Campbell James had married Ruth Pratt, and so immediately the penny dropped, and they said, "Ah, then it's Pratt who'll be sent here to take his place." So they considered me to be a top intelligence official.

Q: Offhand, was Ruth Pratt any relation?

PRATT: Only very, very distant, because her family was the family that left New England after the Civil War and became Standard Oil Pratts, and say that my family remained back with whale oil. So in any case, it was still quite enough for them. But again, on one occasion, at a wedding, one of the Sumanikong's Oulm called me over to introduce me to a brother whom they had recently elected to the National Assembly from Attopeu, I think it was, because Jim Thompson had died and he was no longer working with Jim Thompson in his silk business.

Q: Jim Thompson had disappeared.

PRATT: Disappeared, yes. But we considered that he died. In any case, he introduced me and said, "Oh, this is Pratt. He's the head of American intelligence in Laos." So the secretary general of the prime minister's office, Peng Nourin, a very pedantic chap who had been a schoolteacher, of course, very bright chap, too, said, "Oh, but I thought that Schackley was the station chief of the CIA." And Boone turned on him in his rather imperious way, because he, Peng, had married a Souvanikong who was his niece and therefore was one of these young whippersnappers who hadn't really learned the real things in life, and said, "Oh, but Pratt is from the intelligence organization of which the CIA is the front."

Q: How wonderful!

PRATT: Well, it did mean, of course, that I had a role there which sometimes annoyed the CIA. In fact, at one point Shackley tried to get me sent out of Laos, but Sullivan said no. They also sometimes found it useful because it did deflect some what from them, although Shackley, I think, tried with his colorful car and the fact that he made no secret - in fact he made it clear that everybody knew that he had one of the few acoustical rooms - the only one, I guess - in Laos, and one that the ambassador didn't have either.

Q: An acoustical room being...

PRATT: A safe place for conversations.

Q: You couldn't bug it.

PRATT: Yes. And so I think that he was always very fond of his appearing so very overt. It still made things a little bit confusing to some people because they couldn't be quite sure . . . they knew I was very close to Sullivan and therefore questioned the roles. They could get to Sullivan directly and easily through me, but they weren't quite sure just how this worked.

Q: What was Shackley? I mean he was colorful and all that, and later he went down to Saigon.

PRATT: That's right.

Q: But what does it mean to be "colorful," as far as operations go? Was there a feeling, at least on your part, maybe some of your colleagues, that Shackley and his operations were getting off base or sort of going too far, or not?

PRATT: Yes, very much so, because, you see, we'd had the contrast with Blaufarb, his predecessor, and we began to feel that both under Shackley and then later under Devlin the pressure to make a contribution to the Vietnam War effort there in Laos was such that we were destroying people and we were not making a framework where we could keep Laos, as much extracted from it. Of course, we would be considered to be narrowly interested in Laos, and I suppose, to a certain extent, in part, that was true; however, I do think that Sullivan's view, that Laos could not make a great positive contribution and therefore the thing to do was to maintain things in such a way that it was the least negative contribution . . . and we were very much considering the problem of Thailand on the other side of Laos and Laos as a buffer and not bringing the Thai and the Vietnamese nose to nose. So our view was that in Vietnam, try to solve Vietnam's problems in Vietnam.

Q: Yes.

PRATT: Now we had a number of trips back and forth, because of course we knew that they were not totally separate and they couldn't be. But the point is just in order to be able better to argue how to manage some of the Lao stuff, we would have periodic meetings in Saigon discussing problems of the whole area. And, of course, Bill Sullivan would go down a lot more frequently than anybody else, and he also, of course, had his own back channel to the State Department and so forth. So indeed, this was indeed, again, a problem which we thought should be looked at in its own right, and all the details of it understood rather than just seeing and being seen as an unpleasant little difficulty impinging upon the one thing that they were really interested in, which was Vietnam. And there again, you know that we felt that we had to consider China, we had to consider Thailand, and all the rest of it. And therefore it was a whole Gestalt which you had to look at from the Lao point of view as well as from the Vietnam point of view.

Q: Well, certainly when you get into a military operation, thoughts get to be . . . Here people are taking military equipment down through Laos, and we've got to stop that, and that's it, as far as they're concerned.

PRATT: But they should have considered, do we stop it at Hanoi? Do we stop it at Haiphong, etc.? Because, you know, finally when Nixon did do that, blockaded Haiphong and also had the Christmas bombing and also Peking had been sufficiently massaged so that it was holding up shipments across China, you know it was much more effective than what they were doing on the Trail. So you know, the point was that they just were not looking at it either from a broad enough perspective or a narrow enough one.

Q: When did the bombing of the U.S. Air Force start coming in?

PRATT: That must have been in 1965 or 1966.

Q: What was the feeling about the effectiveness of that?

PRATT: Well, we felt that it was something where we had to have a good handle on it, which is why Bill Sullivan grabbed a hold of it and said, "We will validate all targets."

Q: He became known as the "bombing officer."

PRATT: Yes. That was right. Mort Dworkin you probably have heard of, anyway.

Q: Yes.

PRATT: He was one of them. And I've forgotten. There were two other people who had been there. I think Mary Rosenberg for a time, and he died. Anyway, Mort's a good man. In any case, and he always took it in stride, and of course as you know an FSO does not really like the thought that he's the one who's deciding who's going to get hit and who isn't going to get hit by bombs and so forth. But since the principal job was to try to make sure that one avoided hits on inhabited villages and things of that sort - that's why we insisted on having control over it - and therefore we would look at absolutely everything to make sure that if there were any chance of there being a bad hit on civilians that we would say no. And so that's what Sullivan considered his job to be, and of course he was considered to be part - particularly Lavelle was the one who, of course as you know, was most annoyed by any of these civilian controls, including by the President of the United States.

Q: Yes.

PRATT: And I had a problem with that when I was back in Washington later, when we found that Lavelle had been able to find a little area on the map where he could hit the Chinese.

Q: Who's Lavelle?

PRATT: General John D. Lavelle was the commander of the 7th Air Force in Thailand from July 29, 1971 to April 7, 1972. He was the one who was eventually reprimanded and removed for directly disobeying orders.

Q: During this bombing, what was the reaction when it started with Souvanna Phouma and company?

PRATT: Well, the first . . . I remember once, and I've forgotten which operation it was. I think it was something with Long Vong Ping and so forth. I was sent by an aircraft up to Luang Prabang, where Souvanna was at that time, to let him know that we were doing something of this sort, and Sullivan considered that when he had discussed it with him earlier and raised this, that and the other, that he had said yes, provided you don't hit at such and such. And Souvanna still felt that he wanted . . . more than he wanted to . . . So he was a bit unhappy because, of course, this was one of the . . . a point of exclamation which he had to consider might produce a Hanoi or Soviet or Chinese or even a French escalation against him politically, or attacking him in the press in Paris or something of the sort for going over to the Americans et cetera. Because he wanted to make sure, certainly to begin with, that all these U.S. air operations were designed in support of the Lao question, not designed to support what Saigon wanted done against Hanoi. And therefore, not (Ed: Ho Chi-minh) Trail oriented and not purely Vietnam, but something where he could justify it. Listen, the Vietnam were attacking my Lao positions such and such, and this is trying to defend my Lao positions. And so this was something he had to be very careful about, and he did, as I say, get very unhappy when it first occurred because it was at that point of escalation. But when we explained and when we put on our various safeguards and we said it would be supervised . . . he talked to Sullivan, you see, but he had learned to trust Harriman, Unger, Sullivan, but he never really had much trust in most of the American military.

Q: Did the bombing while you were there - and again, we're trying to stick to the 1963-68 period - get to be one of these things where first we made due representation and then begin to get out of hand and become pro forma, and were our people beginning to go after things without due consultation?

PRATT: Not at that time, not until after 1968.

Q: Okay. What was the feeling about Kong Le?

PRATT: Well, Kong Le, of course, was a rather romantic figure. He was a person who was half-Lao - really Lao Tung - and therefore not very much held in respect by the Lao elite, which is all Lao Leung and not Lao Tung. And he had gotten up with a bit of support at the French to be a captain of the paratroopers, and he's the one who staged the coup in 1960. So he was somebody who we knew, to a certain extent, had been responsible for some of the problems. But then, of course, we felt that he was initially not really very supportive of any political figure. It was only later that he became tied in with Souvanna Phouma. And so we realized that he was a not-very-well-educated military chap. We didn't know to what extent what he did was prompted by some of the French, who were anti- Phoumi [Nosavan]. So we had to be supportive of him and what he was doing because he was Souvanna's man and he was therefore someone whom Souvanna had asked us to assist. And since we were pinning our policies on Souvanna [end of tape].

Q: You were saying it was Souvanna Phouma who asked you to support him. He wouldn't have been your candidate.

PRATT: That's right. We knew he also was very, very close to the French, and particularly to those French who were rather anti-American. However, of course, he had to be more open to us because he was being attacked by the Communist side. The Communists had already taken one of his principal deputies; Colonel Duen had gone over to the Communist side. They had killed one of his chief friends and lieutenants in the Plain of Jars, and in retaliation for this - that was Colonel Ketsen, I guess - Kong Le was supposed to arrange the assassination of Quinim, the Chinese (or half-Chinese, half-Lao) foreign minister. And so all of this happened before I got there, but it was very much a fight within the neutralist movement. I knew particularly well some of the ones from Luang Prabang who were better educated than Kong Le, and they all were trying very hard to have Kong Le become more prestigious military leader. He had been, of course, promoted to general by a captain. He of course was totally despised by the regular Lao military because they considered him badly educated, not of the right social class, and all the rest of it. But Kong Le had quite a bit of charm. I don't know whether you ever heard of Pamela Sanders, but she was a journalist out there who was one who wrote a lot of stories which made him very appealing to the American public at the time. And she subsequently married Marshall Brement, who was somebody who at some point you ought to talk to.

Q: We've interviewed Marshall Brement.

PRATT: I see. Well, okay. Pamela, of course, is now Mrs. Brement, and so Marshall's career went from China to Moscow and other -

Q: He ended up in Iceland, I think.

PRATT: That's right, Iceland, although he's continued to be very much involved in Russian affairs, the gulag issue and so forth. In any case, Kong Le was a colorful and charming chap, but not somebody on whom one felt one could build a great deal.

Q: Well, you have this peculiar thing - at least this is just my observer's thing - of this war over the Plain of Jars in the rainy season, one side would take it over, the rainy season would go, and I guess the Vietnamese would take it. Was this considered a real war, or how did we feel about this Plain of Jars dos-ï¿½-dos-ing?

PRATT: Well, I think we felt at least one should hold the western rim of the Plain of Jars because that's what then could protect against incursions against the Lao to the Mekong River Valley at Luang Prabang, to a hit into the Meo country, and so forth. So indeed, we did support a Neutralist position there on the western rim. They had already lost the central part and the eastern part by the time I got to Laos, and there was very little thought of retaking it. There had just been stories of how . . . One could never get out of the DIA the reports that Bill Wall would have sent in at one point. He was explaining why the Neutralists were not taking the hills from which the artillery of the North Vietnamese in support of the so-called Patriotic Neutralist forces were bombarding the Neutralist positions in the Plain of Jars. And that's because the spirit's there, and Kong Le, before the attack, went into a monastery and abstained from sleeping around, as he usually did most of his days, in order to build up merit, to be able to get strong enough numenistic [Ed: animistic?] powers to be able to oppose the superior spirits of the Vietnamese. When it failed he went right to his womanizing because he realized that it still wasn't enough to take care of the stronger phi. Phi is the term used for spirits in Laos, very, very important. But the phi of those mountains favored the Vietnamese and not them. So he wrote a communication back explaining why this attack had not succeeded, and of course immediately it was ridiculed by people who just didn't understand the kabang. That's what really happened - in the minds of the Lao, anyway.

Q: Before we finish this up, were there any major crises when you were there? I'm thinking of personally affecting you.

PRATT: There was a kind of coup d'ï¿½tat almost every month almost every year, and in a couple of these I was very, very much up to my eyebrows, including being nearly . . . Well, mortar shells were landing all around us, but fortunately they hit a tree instead of getting to the ground where they would have spread out and taken care of us. Several of these, I say, I was very, very much involved in, trying to show support for Souvanna Phouma and to . . . Well, for example, in one of them I spent several days with Colonel Bounleut Saykosi, who was involved on the wrong side in one of these coups, and finally got him to surrender and to sort of withdraw his support from the coup, and that permitted Souvanna to get back into power openly. And at that time, for example, I had forty-some people who were camped out in my house because I was considered to have, the Lao said, a big spirit, and therefore, my spirit would be there in the house and help protect them. In addition to that, this Buddha in the next room - it's a Thai Buddha, but I had that in the house - and that was considered also to be a great protective element. So people involved with the coup - on both sides, really - who felt they might be endangered all came and were camped out in my house, people including all the children.

Q: What were the coup people trying to do? Were these just discontented military, or were they coming from the right, the left, or what?

PRATT: They were coming from the right. They were coming from people who were either supportive of Phoumi Nosavan - and occasionally Phoumi Nosavan was himself personally involved in some of these, and eventually of course Phoumi had to hide out to Thailand, and when he went down to Songkla and continued to make problems from down there. But these were persons who objected to Souvanna Phouma. They felt that these policies were not really resulting in the defeat of the Vietnamese. And he, of course, kept trying to explain to them, "Listen, nobody thinks you can defeat the Vietnamese from here. If anyone defeats the Vietnamese anywhere it's going to be in South Vietnam." But these were persons who just had enough military capabilities so that they felt they might at least try to turn their military capabilities in to greater political clout.

Q: I thought this might be a good place to stop. If there's anything more to add, sort of tuck it away and we'll come up with it on our next one. Otherwise, we'll move on in 1968 to your time back in Washington, on what - the Indochinese Desk?

PRATT: That was the Laos-Cambodia Desk.

Q: Laos-Cambodia Desk, great.

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Today is the 2nd of December, 1999. Mark, you came back in January 1968, and you were on the Laos-Cambodia Desk-

PRATT: -until 1973. Again, a five-year assignment.

Q: When you came back in 1968, could you give a feel for where Laos and Cambodia were in the Washington complex? Had the Vietnam War sort of almost overwhelmed this area, or was there a substantial group looking at this and figuring out what to do about it?

PRATT: Well, obviously by 1968 the emphasis had been on Vietnam for some time, but Laos and Cambodia, the office of which was located right across the hall from the Vietnam Desk, was obviously very much involved in what was going on in Vietnam. In many cases, as I discussed earlier, there were efforts certainly to try to keep them somewhat separate and to try not to militarize, shall we say, the situation in Laos and Cambodia the way it was being increasingly done in Vietnam.

Q: Could you describe a little bit of the structure in the Department of State, where you fit in, and then we'll talk about the issues?

PRATT: Well, of course, this changed several times during the time that I was there, but there was, of course, under the assistant secretary, a deputy assistant secretary who handled Indochina, and I think that that was only Indochina, French Indochina, that is. And then the other deputy would handle the Southeast Asia or China or Japan. The biggest office was called the Vietnam Working Group, rather than just the Vietnam Desk, because of course it was also working on North Vietnam as well as South Vietnam, and it was seeing this as also an operation which had to include more about what the Defense Department was doing and then of course later on what the negotiations in Paris were all about, or even pre-Paris, the concept of negotiations which at that time was already being urged by Harriman on Johnson.

Q: What were you doing? Start at the beginning. I'm sure it evolved and changed.

PRATT: Well, in the beginning I was the deputy office director on the Laos side. There was an office director, and he had two sections under him, one Laos, one Cambodia. I was sort of the action officer on Lao matters. The head of the office was Tom Corcoran, who had his own experience in Hanoi before in the 1950s and also in Cambodia and Laos, so he was a well-grounded hand for Indochina.

Q: Oh, yes. One of our earliest oral histories was with Tom.

PRATT: I see. Well, Tom was a very good, savvy officer who knew the substance and was concerned about being as effective as we could be, and he was not carried away by any of the particular enthusiasms of the morning.

Q: Well, this is one of the things. Talking about enthusiasms, did you have the feeling where you were that one of the things we had to do was to almost sit on the CIA because, as we've talked about before, Laos had such a major CIA establishment there by that time?

PRATT: No -

Q: Talk about the relationship.

PRATT: Well, the relationship was basically that we felt that there was no chance or very little chance of doing what was best for Laos and Cambodia; we merely had to avoid the worst. And this, I think, is something which many officers in the Foreign Service gradually come around to realizing is the primary function of experts in the foreign affairs side when they look at what the elected representatives of the United States will be doing, and therefore how do you minimize the damage? How do you keep things from getting worse? So that was our approach. And the biggest threat did not come from the CIA. The CIA was already being slapped around by the military in Vietnam. It was already waning. All the operations which they had previously done - and done fairly well - in the Highlands, and I knew some of the people in Saigon who had been involved in those efforts, just as I knew some of the people in Laos, many of whom on the CIA side I thought were very savvy and very effective . . . So no, we did not really consider the CIA to be the major part of the problem. We sometimes considered some of the leaders - I mean, Shackley would have done things, and Devlin also.

Q: Robert Shackley.

PRATT: Shackley and then also Devlin, who went out there at that time. Some of these persons were being too responsive to the pressures put on the CIA by the military, by the Pentagon, to accomplish what we considered to be excessively "adventurist," activities, wasting and damaging the assets which we felt we had in Vang Pao and elsewhere in Laos. So it was really the militarization of the conflict in Vietnam and the lack of understanding of what the military problem in Vietnam really was. I'm sure when you've interviewed a lot of people who had been in Vietnam, many of them will be blaming the political leaders for not permitting this, for not permitting that, handling the military incorrectly, and the whole concept of the Vietnam "complex" within the military is something which I think certainly deserves much more attention and a much better book than it's ever gotten and probably ever will get, because the military is, I think, not very good in examining itself and in understanding its own shortcomings. Obviously, a lot of our political leaders deserve their criticism as well. I do think that Lyndon Johnson was very ineffective in having a good foreign policy, and I think he kept on Dean Rusk, primarily because he liked his Southern accent, far longer than Dean Rusk should have been there. I think in addition to that his handling of the military - because most Southerners, you know, generally have nothing but the greatest of confidence in military people, despite the Robert E. Lee's idea of what they are trying to get in their generals. And so I think that our biggest problem was really trying to have knowledge about the area and knowledge about the people involved, knowledge about how things were set up, and a feel for the people there that was almost totally lacking in the American military. I don't think that's necessarily true for some of the top civilians in the Department of Defense. We had some very, very good people, particularly later on, when President Nixon was in. I think Secretary of Defense Mel Laird was really a very, very good Secretary of Defense and had in his ISA office a group of very, very competent people. And of course nobody can fault Elliott Richardson as a Secretary of Defense, either.

Q: You came there just as the Tet Offensive was hitting?

PRATT: Yes, I was in Washington when the Tet Offensive hit.

Q: You were in the bureau. How was this perceived when it started and as it developed.

PRATT: Well, of course, it was perceived primarily as an aspect of the political situation within the United States and the relationship between the government and journalists, which were both, of course, we thought, being rather badly handled. And one of the reasons for their being relatively badly handled is that they were being handled as part of an attempt to manipulate rather than as, let's say, getting a good policy which is going to be effective and then letting the chips fall were they may. It was already the beginning of, shall we say, "spin" running programs. And I think this is in part what some of the military complain about, but the point is they played their own role in this, to my mind. And what some of the most dishonest people giving the worst reports back as to what was going on were in the military. That goes from Westmoreland in particular. We all hoped that Abrams would turn this around, but he didn't.

Q: Well, this, of course, is one of the basic problems with the military, in that it's in the culture that they have to give a positive view of what they're doing, rather than say, "We're losing."

PRATT: That's right.

Q: I think I've mentioned before during part of this period, 18 months from 1969 to 1970, I was consul general in Saigon. I would get these military briefings as I would travel around, and these were sort of well-rehearsed, canned briefings which were all supposed to show that I, the officer, and the command that's doing whatever it is, is doing a good job, even if it's not their fault that the job isn't being done well.

PRATT: That's right. I quite agree. Now I, of course, was under the influence, when I was Laos, of the John Paul Vann school as well as the CIA school, because these persons, whom I would see most when I would go to Saigon as well as, of course, seeing my fellows in the embassy, and I visited a former colleague of mine who was with me together in Laos, Tom Barnes, who was in Ben Lam. And I visited him up there and ran into John Paul Vann [Ed: see Neil Sheehan, A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and American in Vieetnam], who came in, and so forth. And there was no question but that the persons who knew Vietnam best were persons who could have found much better solutions than those which the military adopted when they came steaming in. For example, their concern about a field of fire going up a road there meant that they would chop down rubber plantations. Okay, well this alienated not only the French planters but it alienated all their workers because it destroyed their livelihood. And there they were trying to fight a war in which they required the support of the people they were dealing with, and they did the very things which destroyed the support of the very people they needed. So we felt that this was one of the biggest problems, and I know that the military thinks that they are merely in an engineering-type approach, dealing with matter and not dealing with human beings, and they don't think that that's part of their job, just as they don't think that, say, pacification or anything of that sort is part of their job.

Well, you can imagine what would have happened if you had tried to tell Eisenhower that when he had to deal with the French and they were invading France and had to say "To hell with all the French." Come on, you can't do that. Or for example, you've got McCloy and you say, "You don't have anything to do in Germany. The army has defeated Germany; now we turn it over to the Department of the Interior." You know, come on, the American military has been able for centuries to do the task which it's called upon to do. It's only now that they're saying, "Listen, you elected people have no right to tell us to do anything we don't want to do." And I think this was the major mentality, and one sees it still. I mean, everybody is saying how marvelous General Colin Powell was and how he restored everything form the disastrous . . . how marvelously he helped us recover from the Vietnam syndrome. Well, I think not. I think what we're seeing now in Kosovo and elsewhere is the continuation of the military's concept that it is what decides is supposed to be done and it's going to take any war that they're given and try to turn it into the war that they like. And that's why, of course, we continue to have the American military able to fight a big Soviet invasion from Eastern Europe into Western Europe. Richard Pearle yesterday was saying that he thought that it was appalling the way we're now developing all of our equipment basically designed to fight a Soviet invasion. And the procurement timing is many years, and therefore, by the time any of this stuff is produced, even if it might have made sense at the time it was started, does not make any sense. And there's no effort on the part of either the President or the Secretary of Defense to try to shorten procurement time to keep up with the very rapid change of technology. Well, the military, I think, is very much that way. It's very set in its way and believes that it should tell the civilians what war is, who the enemy ought to be, what they are supposed to do about them.

Well this was our major problem about Laos and Cambodia, particularly Laos. Later on, of course, in 1970, the big problem was the invasion of Cambodia. That was, of course, one of the crucial things which called me off from doing time in my Laos work to doing also Cambodian work. And this is a time when-

Q: About the spring of 1970.

PRATT: -the spring of 1970 - and this is when Rogers also asked for the formation of a special working group on Cambodia, to look at various aspects of this. This is just when, of course, Kissinger was grabbing a hold of things from his point of view and changing the whole structure of how the Asian approach was done.

Q: Well, I'd like to go back again. Let's talk about 1968, maybe to the spring of 1970. We're talking about your perspective at that time, and we're talking about the military. Now, by this time, the American military had had thousands of officers of various ranks serving as advisors. Serving in Vietnam you almost had to, even though it was a relatively short tour, get your ticket punched to move on. So I would have thought that you would have had the feeling that there was a pretty solid cadre of people who knew Vietnam in the military - or were they so isolated that it didn't seem to give you that type of expertise?

PRATT: Well, I think that they were also shifted. And of course the ethos was such that those who did know anything about it were generally sidelined. As you know, the whole concept of command was such that people had to go in there with a particular type of command, and then once they punched that ticket, then they were rotated out.

Q: It was six months. There were usually two assignments in a year, which was a disaster.

PRATT: Well the point is that also they were not highly valued for acquiring the knowledge and abilities which were required by the situation. They were highly valued for the way in which they could deal with Tan Son Nhut Air Base. I think if anybody in the future looks to see what the ratio was between - what do they call it? - nose - and tail? - that the tail, of course, was wagging this dog very early on, and the enormous layers, and the enormous bureaucracy of Tan Son Nhut Air Base -

Q: You're talking about the Pentagon -

PRATT: Pentagon-MAC-V headquarters there at the airport.

Q: It was huge.

PRATT: Which was huge, and which, of course, the military ran this for the benefit of themselves. And all the people who were also working on this, in large, large numbers in Washington, viewed this as their way - though some of them would say, in a cynical way, "Good Lord, if we keep this up, maybe we can turn this from a two-promotion war into a three-promotion war." Then again, they would say, "Let's go off and make our inspection tour leaving the 28th of this month and we'll come back on the 3rd and we'll be able to get two months' combat pay." So they were viewing this war as part of their fiefdom, part of their way of getting something for themselves. This was no longer a concept of trying to win the war we had, even trying to understand the war and the enemy that we had. Now, admittedly, I think that certainly President Johnson was no great help. I mean there are some things that . . . Pulling a cheap trick like the Tonkin Gulf incident, if that is indeed what it was, was something which does nobody any good. Saying that he's going to fight this war without raising taxes, without putting any kind of strain on anybody - this also is no way to fight a war.

Q: Including not drafting people in colleges and all of that in order to keep the pressure off the middle class.

PRATT: No, you have to enlist the people rather than viewing them as the enemy. And we created not just the enemy in Hanoi; we created an enemy in the United States - by the way, in which we did not handle what this war really was. Now I think that in many ways it was a much more laudable war in that it was very much concerned to avoid too many casualties, one of the first times we ever considered that as part of what we were doing, but we were avoiding casualties of the enemy as well as for the U.S. for the benefit of the U.S. electorate, not for the benefit of the war that we were involved in. And in addition to that, we were trying to help escape what this war really was by coming up with mythology like that of Dean Rusk saying, "This is part of the world Communist movement, and it's all run out of Moscow, and everything we do in Vietnam is hurting the leaders in Moscow and the leaders in Peking who are in the chain of command from Moscow down to Hanoi, and from Hanoi down, of course, to Saigon." So I think that the concern to fight this as a creation for public relations and media purposes, rather than seeing it as something that was a factual question and a problem which we had to first understand better ourselves and then to try to explain it better - this is, I think, also the fault of the top leadership. And obviously poor President Johnson was very badly trained to see this, and he did not have, I think, advisors of the caliber of, let's say, General Marshall and other people of the Second World War period who could have given him much better advice. Bunker was not bad, but Lodge was a disaster.

Q: Mark, going back to this time when you were there - in the first place, what was the feeling at that time, by you and your influence group, that you were influencing - you know, I mean your working group that you were dealing with this? I mean, what you said now, was that apparent, and how well did you think that the Department of State, through the Foreign Service and maybe other experts brought in, was serving the cause or not serving the cause? We're talking about 1968 to the spring of 1970.

PRATT: Well, the talks in Paris had started, and Laos was one of the subjects which was occasionally included in that. We were not against holding the talks. In fact, we thought they'd probably be useful, and that, of course, was a small part of the problem which we were playing a more direct role in, and therefore we were encouraged to spend more time working on that than on, for example, what the military were actually doing. There was not much advice from the State Department asked for by the Department of Defense. The American military have never been very terribly fond of political advisors. I mean, they say they want them, and they try to get them to sit in a corner of the room and not interfere in what they would call their military matters. They are not quite as bad, perhaps, as doctors or lawyers, but they do feel they have a profession, and while I'm quite prepared to admit that they do, I think they occasionally misunderstand, as some doctors do, that they have to deal with the whole patient, the whole problem, and not just that part of it which they would like to have it limited to. So we did indeed feel that what we were trying to do was constrain them as best we could, and obviously by the time when President Nixon came in in January of 1969, we felt that there was perhaps a better chance of having an influence go from the political level to the military level and have the military understand better what its real problem was. However, we did not see that this took place that rapidly, because everybody else was sort of deferring to the military and its concept of what their war was. And of course they were chafing at the bit because they kept feeling that they were being kept from doing things which, as a military, they ought to be able to do, at the same time that they felt they couldn't criticize these decisions because they came from the lawful commander-in-chief. So everybody was very unhappy with what was going on: we because we thought the military did not understand what it really ought to be doing - and many of us were very much in favor of having direct pressure applied to Hanoi and doing effective measures such as bombing the rail lines into North Vietnam, blockading the ports, as was done to save the Christmas bombing -

Q: Of Haiphong.

PRATT: But the problem we had there was that at every point Dean Rusk would go in and say, "Ah, the Chinese are still just acting as agents of Moscow, and they're all together in this, and if we try anything above such-and-such, then the Chinese will invade, as they did in Korea." And we were saying, "Come on, the Vietnamese would never want the Chinese in," because the old saying of Ho Chi Minh, that it's better to be in French shit for a few years than in Chinese shit for centuries. So we did not see the Russian and Chinese connection the way in which some of the political figures at the top were apparently presenting it.

Q: What was the East Asian Bureau called in those days?

PRATT: East Asia. It was before they added the Pacific.

Q: In the view of the professionals - not of Dean Rusk, but in the view of the professionals - you did not see China as ready to move across the Yalu into North Vietnam and come down and attack.

PRATT: Definitely not. We saw even the strains between the Chinese, who were building the roads in Northern Laos, and the Vietnamese, and how the Vietnamese wanted that road construction from the point of view of having supplies come in, but they did not want a large Chinese presence. At that time already, as you know, or later on perhaps, we were trying - and certainly the minute that Nixon came in we were trying - to get the China connection going in a separate way from the way in which it had been viewed by Dean Rusk, as merely a spin-off from the Vietnam one. Fortunately, President Nixon himself had already seen the importance of China. He had written about it in 1967, I believe it was.

Q: A Foreign Affairs article.

PRATT: The Foreign Affairs article, yes. So we realized, although he put India there instead of Japan or whatever it was, nonetheless he had recognized the importance in Asia of China, and we figured at some point we therefore would be able to have a more sensible China policy and not necessarily trying to split China away from Vietnam, because we were sure that China would continue to support the unification of Vietnam, because that, of course, was ideologically connected with their concern about Taiwan. Therefore, that was not something that we could do; however, we could expect Peking not so support Ho Chi Minh's desire for the creation of the greater Indochinese state, in which Vietnam would rule Laos and Cambodia and Thailand.

Q: Well, now, I take it from what you are saying that your view and the view of others was a feeling that the Johnson-Rusk administration was by this time a spent force and maybe had gone down the wrong track and that you looked forward to the Nixon Administration. Of course, Kissinger was an unknown quantity at that time.

PRATT: That's right, and certainly unknown for Asia, and insofar as known at all for Asian matters, shall we say, it was China that he was considered to be not very well informed about. I had friends from Harvard who ridiculed Kissinger's approach to China. He went to them and asked for briefings, and he said "Maybe I will take all afternoon to talk about China." And at the end one of them turned to the other and said, "Well, he does not know much about China, does he?" And he said, "He did not express the right views about China." And the other one said, "He didn't even ask the right questions about China." So Kissinger has been very good, I think, as his own publicist, but no one had very much knowledge of what he might do, despite the fact that he had made several trips to Vietnam, and some people say that he did ask some of the right questions there.

Q: When it happened, how was the Nixon-Rogers connection, this new administration? Did you have a feeling it was taking hold and beginning to do some of the right things?

PRATT: Well, we learned very early on that it was Kissinger who would be grabbing hold. Of course, we knew that Nixon had his own views and was very much a key element in all of this, and therefore you could not really move without having some idea in your mind as to how his mentality would look at this problem. But nonetheless, it was Kissinger's emergence which startled, I think, Rogers. And very early on, of course, came to the attention of Elliott Richardson. If you can ever interview Elliott, I think you'll find that he'll be a very, very good source on what was going on there. But the minute Nixon came in, the State Department, basing itself on what Nixon had written and a bit of what he'd said about Asia, tried to start work going on China. And there was a speech, I think Rogers gave one in I've forgotten what the sequence was, but there was one by Rogers in Australia and another by Richardson in New York, which we sort of wrote and sort of suggested be given, which sort of tried to point to a maneuver concerning China. And of course, there was an immediate response from Kissinger and a directive from the White House that nobody should talk at all about China and this would be off limits. So then it became very clear that whenever something looked significant and important, that Kissinger would probably want to grab a hold of it. This also turned immediately, of course, to the Indochina situation. Kissinger grabbed a hold of that.

Q: Well, did you all get hit by this flurry that Kissinger did on purpose of wanting position papers on everything of the State Department, which was according to everyone, including I think Kissinger, was basically designed to tie up the State Department while they went ahead with their own policy?

PRATT: Well, yes, and in addition to that, the whole approach to the papers, in that you were expected to give your options, and they were supposed to go from the silly at the top to the silly at the bottom, and everything was always aimed for "option 3b" or something of the sort, which would be neither the high nor the low.

Q: Well, the classic one was "abject surrender, nuclear war, or something in between." The something-in-between was always the one that . . . These could be gussied up, but basically that was how these things were designed.

PRATT: So of course you spend your time spinning this, and these were often long papers, and they had generally very short time fuses. It was a little bit later, this time when I was involved in doing these, because we had to do even more than anybody else because we very quickly became first . . . the Vietnam Working Group was put under Bill Sullivan. Bill was not permitted to tell either the assistant secretary, Marshall Green, or Secretary Rogers what it was he was doing in many areas because he was considered to be working directly for Kissinger. That was when it was a Vietnam Working Group reporting directly to Kissinger. Then it was expanded-

Q: The policy, was this before 1970.

PRATT: Yes, 1969. And then it was expanded to be the Indochina working group, so that Bill Sullivan, instead of being just the deputy assistant secretary-type setup, it was a separate office, and he was then put over the Laos and Cambodia, although Laos and Cambodia continued for a while to be still reporting to Marshall Green on some matters, and Marshall Green was kept in the loop for a while there. Then later on almost everything had to be handled through the Working Group, and as you know, that's a time when Kissinger was also establishing, or refurbishing, the inter-agency committees, and by that time the inter-agency committees were doing most of the work. That was the WSAG - the Washington Special Action Group - the Forty Committee, and the Senior Review Group.

Q: At a certain point during this period we've blocked out, when you were in Laos and Cambodia, was it sort of understood that essentially you were working for Kissinger, and not for the State Department, and was there a Laos-Cambodia man or woman over in the NSC?

PRATT: Yes. In fact, there was one for each. The Laos lost out; that is, the man of Cambodia was General Haig. General Haig sent his man, General Vessey, to Cambodia, and he tried to hold on to that. Of course, Kissinger was himself handling much of the Vietnam thing at that time, and the NSC tried to get into its hands Colonel Kennedy.

Q: Richard Kennedy.

PRATT: Richard Kennedy, yes, who was, of course, a deputy to Haig, and he wanted to be able to get a similar control over the Laos side of things and wished to have the Lao communications and all the rest of that be funneled through him, but the Defense Department said, "We are not involved in war in Laos. We won't touch it." CIA said, "Listen, we are doing the bidding of the U.S. Government, including the Department of State, in Laos, but we are not doing this as a regular CIA operation; therefore, we do not wish to be point man."

Q: This was sort of disingenuous, wasn't it?

PRATT: No, it wasn't. It was part of the internal U.S. Government bureaucratic fight. I remember when Laird went up to testify on Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, he took Bill Sullivan and myself up there and said, "Well, of course, the Defense Department has nothing to do with Laos. If you want to ask questions about Laos, you ask the State Department." Because the fiction and, to a certain extent, the reality was that the American ambassador in Laos was running the operation, and whatever the CIA did, they did it at the behest of the American ambassador. If there was bombing in Laos, they had to go through the ambassador's office. You had your Mort Dworkin and so forth working as bombing officers. So Laird was very meticulous about this and said he would not be held responsible for this, that they did not have the command structure, they had no generals in Laos, and so on. This was part of the basic U.S. policy, which was to support Laos as an entity which should be considered as neutral as it could possibly be and could be returned to the neutral provisions of the Geneva Agreement. And therefore, this was something which got very down to the nitty-gritty of what policy should be. But the NSC didn't much like that, because it liked the Ollie North type approach.

Q: Being in control of everything right at the center.

PRATT: Well, primadonnaism - in other words, it's my country. In other words, it's not that there is a U.S. Government. These are all fiefdoms spinning off from Henry Kissinger, who distributed them as grand duchies to his various minions, and then they would try to use the other structure and play them off one against the other. It was very Byzantine, but as you'd guess from the way in which he had this Washington Special Action Group, Forty Committee, and Senior Review Group, with basically the same participants, and then different people would talk differently. If you got to the Forty Committee, then you'd have Richard Helms and probably Mitchell attending.

Q: Helms was the head of CIA. Mitchell was -

PRATT: Attorney general. So I would attend meetings on Laos, and because of the CIA role there, you'd have Helms. And because Helms was there, you had Mitchell. And then it would turn into the Senior Review Group, and it would be a different representative from the Department of State and so forth, but Hemming would always be in the chair, and he would generally walk in and say, "I've just talked to the President, and he believes we . . . " From there on. So this was a very different type organization. It was not from the President, who as you know was most reluctant to talk to many people, a very shy person, and therefore was delighted to deal with just one person and then feel that he had the real control going out in various areas. And Kissinger, of course, was very good in signaling both that he would do exactly what Nixon wanted and secondly in implying - even when it was not true - that he had just raised his own ideas with the President and the President supported them totally.

Q: You are a Foreign Service officer, and in a way almost by instinct and by training, Foreign Service officers are supposed to figure out where power is in various countries where they serve and what buttons to push. I mean, was it pretty quickly apparent how this was working, and how were you, as a Laos officer, getting your . . . I mean, what were you doing in order to get what you wanted or what to get? Or was it all orders coming down to you?

PRATT: Oh, no, no. So much of the orders, we tried to make sure that we drafted the orders we wanted to get. And it was networking that we did, and we developed, as backup to the inter-agency approach, a network of people - and obviously when Person A was posted elsewhere, then we'd have to make sure that he introduced us well to the next person coming in - and we also had to work out something at our inter-agency level which we would then have to sell to other bosses.

But we had some very bright people. We had, for example, Jerry Britten over in ISA, who could sell things to Laird. I mean he had access to Laird and would tell his immediate superior, and they had some pretty good ones. And we would generally try to I shan't say cook things, but we would try, since we were the ones who had the best knowledge, most detailed knowledge of what was going on, to try to make sure that we came up with, shall we say, the most sensible policies we could. For example, when we discovered thaGeneral Lavelle was bombing parts of the Chinese road - I was the one who detected that from some of the military traffic - we would then get to ISA. ISA got to Laird; Laird got to them, and they had the man fired, because to begin with he was manipulating an oversight in how some of the various lines on the map were drawn, and he was anxious, of course, to avoid any kind of restriction on what he was doing, and from his point of view, if people that said that China was really running this whole thing or Moscow was running it using China, then obviously hit the Chinese. Well, that, of course, was just the time when we were trying to push to get our own dialogue going with the Chinese and say, "Listen, we can eventually agree at least on some things concerning Southeast Asia." So we, indeed, had our own little team, and we'd often get together just before some of the bigger meetings because the bigger meetings would generally include other people on Cambodia, other people on Vietnam, and so on, and therefore the Laos side would be I shan't say a sideshow, the way Willy Shawcross put it [Ed: Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia] ... and yet it was something where we knew that we had to be aware of what the big Vietnam questions were, because they'd be the things finely discussed. Then at the very end there might be a little fillip concerning what was going on in Laos.

Q: Could you explain who Lavelle was?

PRATT: Well, General John D. Lavelle was the general in charge of the Air Force engaging in operations in the Indochina sphere, and he was eventually removed and disciplined for violating his instructions.

Q: He was up in Thailand.

PRATT: He was in Thailand, yes. His was in Udorn, Thailand, which was the 7/13 Air Force headquarters for the Indochina area.

Q: Well, in 1968 and 1970, what were your prime concerns, and how were things going as you saw them in Laos?

PRATT: Our prime concerns were to try to keep the American military from doing things which would complicate unduly Souvanna Phouma's efforts to have Hanoi restrained by his actions with Moscow and Peking. In other words, his effort to convince both Moscow and Peking that he was not being un-neutral for, shall we say, bad reasons, from their point of view - that he would like to be as neutral as he could be and he wanted to Chinese to be involved, he wanted to have good relations between Laos and China. He believed that was important, and he could not do this if he appeared to be an American pawn. And therefore we had to have Laos look like something other than an area in which the American Government was just acting as though it was the colonial power and Souvanna Phouma was our puppet. This permitted him to remain on until he, of course, turned things over to his brother.

But there was no need, we felt, for many of the incursions they wanted to do using American troops into Lao territory. We did not mind what the CIA was doing, which was trying to block certain guerilla operations - in other words, provided it was aimed at the Vietnamese. And similarly in the north, Vang Pao, and also in the far north, the other Thais up there. So that we considered to be far preferable to the way in which the American military operated. We therefore had to keep the Defense Department happy. As I say, the Defense Department at the upper level, particularly Mel Laird, was very sensitive to all this and for the most part not very well prepared to accept the more outrageous demands from MAC-V, you know, of widening the war just to be able to widen it. So that was the major framework - trying to maintain Souvanna as best we could because we felt that it was valuable in itself, of all else, and we were very concerned, particularly when we had people like Bill Sullivan around, very concerned about the people of the country concerned, in trying to minimize the sufferings. We also, of course, had to do work a great deal on such things as the AID program for Laos. We supported the currency, so we'd go to the World Bank and IMF to work out supports for their exchange program. The second largest AID mission after Vietnam was in Laos. So we had across the board a whole range of things which we were trying to do, but the principal thing was to maintain the viability of Laos and to try to minimize the suffering of the people there, who were not actively involved against the U.S. - quite the contrary. And then to have against the Vietnamese use of Laos the kind of operations which would cause the minimum concern for Souvanna. Souvanna said that if you're hitting against the Vietnamese and it's clearly against the Vietnamese, they say they're not in Laos, well, they can't say they've been hit and they can't blame me for that because they say they're not even there.

So this is of course . . . we then permitted use of American Air Force in Vietnam and then operations in northern Laos in support of that. This is when we put in directional radar in the mountains of northern Laos, and of course we had Vang Pao and his people as our marvelous troops were extracting the airmen. They were operating throughout the western part of North Vietnam as well as in Laos to pick up pilots, and so we had a number of operations which we were trying to control to make sure they served the purposes which had been decided upon. And I must say that the American Air Force and military did a very great job in all of that.

Q: Was there any concern in putting these directional radars - because later one of these ones was old and rotten -

PRATT: That's right.

Q: Was there any concern about the isolation and the protection?

PRATT: Yes, a great deal, which is why, of course, this was something which we had to work out with Vang Pao and I think it was the father-in-law - because he had several wives, and it was the father of one of them who was the chief in the area in which we put in the first one. And so, yes, one had to make sure that we knew the terrain, that we knew what the assets were and making sure also that this would be something for which the Meo would also feel that they wanted to fight.

Q: During this time, 1968-70, who was our ambassador in Laos?

PRATT: Mac Godley up until 1973. [Ed: G. McMurtrie Godley, career Foreign Service officer presented his credentials on Jul 24, 1969 and left post on Apr 23, 1973.] So let's see. I'm trying to think. Bill Sullivan, of course, was for a while, and then he came back.

Q: Did you have the feeling that the so-called "bombing officer," the operation there, was well under control, that they knew what they were about and this was not something where it might get out of hand, although you talked about the Air Force?

PRATT: We knew that there were efforts on the part of the Air Force to push the envelope, and they would be prepared to be far more understanding if bombs got close to an inhabited village than the bombing officer and the ambassador were. But any failure on that score would be something which could be laid at the ambassador's door, and if reports came in about that, then there was a remedy - not that we reprimanded him, but he knew that there were people back in Washington watching over this. And so even Mac Godley, who liked to be very much a generalissimo, was aware that he was sent out there with an organization back here which gave him his orders and that he was expected, if he didn't like them, to come in and request that they be changed. But not to violate them. And as you know, I think most Foreign Service officers are far more respectful of orders and will indeed go in and try to get them changed if they think there's something wrong with them, and will not just disobey them because they think they're crap.

I think that's also for example when, say, they questioned even the loyalty, Foreign Service officers had generally been quite trustworthy from the point of view of loyalty, something that you cannot say for some of the military.

Q: Well, now, in the body politic, this was the period of demonstrations and all. Did you feel any repercussions of the antiwar movement on the Laos operation at this particular time, or were you off to one side?

PRATT: No, we were right in the middle of it. I went up and talked to people. For example, I went up and talked to Reischauer and others at Harvard. When I came to Providence, my current wife was married to somebody else, and she gave a party in which they included the usual academic types, most of them not knowing very much about Asia, not really caring very much about Asia, but they were very passionate about all of Indochina. And of course I would get it in the neck. But yes, the whole question of the reputation of the Vietnam War was very problematic, particularly in intellectual and political circles in the United States. Certainly not very much was being done successfully to handle that, and this was true particularly , in think, under the Johnson Administration, but even under the Nixon Administration, when the effort was indeed made and both Kissinger and Nixon, I think, made some very cogent arguments, nonetheless, the ferment was very much there.

Q: Something we may have touched on before, but let's go to the 1968-70 period again. What was your feeling about the whole of our effort in Vietnam? Was this a worthy cause, or was this in American interests, and all that/

PRATT: Well, I think we basically considered that this was one of the more, shall we say, principled wars that we were involved in. We were not fighting it from any narrow aspect of U.S. interest. We did not have a defense agreement with the Vietnamese people or anything of that sort. It was not part of a treaty organization like NATO. It was not right on our doorstep, and so forth. We were therefore doing it for relatively high-minded reasons, trying to prevent - just as we would have done, obviously, if East Germany had attacked West Germany. We would have had far more cogent reasons for intervening, but the point is we had the same reasons that we should have had for preventing Stalin from moving as far to the west as he did. And this, I think was something which was in the minds of people, that we had let this take place in Eastern Europe and we shouldn't permit something similar to be done in Asia. I don't know whether that was what the French really felt they were doing; I'm sure some of the French did. Others, of course, really thought that the French had been merely involved in holding on to a colony for commercial and other reasons. But I don't think that that was what was in the minds of many of the French. La mission civilatrice is something which very much influenced the French as well. So the fact that the French couldn't do it - well, if the French had not been able to prevent Stalin from moving in to take West Germany, then perhaps the U.S. ought to be involved. Well, I think that this was part of the mentality. Now it's one thing to say you have a laudable goal, but the next question is what are your chances of doing it and what is the means you may have to use to accomplish this. We thought those second two questions were not well addressed. We obviously had felt that the earlier period, immediately following the departure of the French, had been badly managed.

Q: That was 1954-55.

PRATT: 1954-55-56, when for example the earlier Geneva agreements, which we'd been somewhat involved in, they called for elections et cetera and polling for reunification. Now should those have been provisions in that agreement? Well, we weren't determining what was in that agreement. And should we have tried to find some better way of handling this afterwards in order to blunt the obvious intent of the Indochinese Communist Party in Hanoi to replace the French to begin with and maybe even to move on Thailand next, because there was a Thai aspect to the Indochinese Communist Party as it was formed in 1931, and Ho Chi Minh had his first assignment in Thailand, where he was an organizer. So how are we going to see the problem for what it is and then try to determine how we best can handle this? And this is something in which I don't think we did a very good job.

Q: Well, now, let's turn to spring of 1970. In the first place, I can't remember the exact timing because there was this rather infamous attempt by the South Vietnamese to invade Laos - Operation Lam Son 719executed in February and March of 1971 or something.

PRATT: Something of the sort, yes, and it was up in what was often called the Triangle area.

Q: Did you get involved in that? The idea was that the South Vietnamese were going to go into Laos to block the Ho Chi Minh Trail, wasn't that it?

PRATT: That's right.

Q: And Lam Son 719 or something like that was operating. I mean, you must have been involved.

PRATT: We were, and we, of course, recommended against it, only the decision was made based upon MAC-V, that, one, it would be a great success and it would be something which nobody would really notice. Of course it was noticed, and it was not a great success. So this is precisely what, say, Bill Sullivan, of course, was, he thought, one of the best persons to give advice on this sort of thing. I believe he was still in Laos at that time, and he argued against it and really challenged MAC-V et cetera - that they had been engaged in this, that, and the other thing along that area and had never been able to do very much, and the losses, not only Vietnamese but in American operations (because Americans were going in with the Vietnamese) - and the American losses would be totally out of whack with what they could expect to accomplish. And indeed, that's the way it turned out. So often when we make our recommendations we knew full well that they might not be accepted. We were, after all, only one factor in this.

Q: This essentially was an invasion of a foreign country, and so sitting on the Laos Desk, as this happened, did this have any repercussions? I mean, was there much consideration or some office talk about this?

PRATT: There wasn't. The fact that it wasn't a success was what the most important repercussion. You notice they didn't try it again in that area of Laos. But there was, you see, a lot of this went down to disputes about borders, and there was a little area where the DMZ came in, which was disputed, and some of the people were saying that this is what is being used by Hanoi to be able to say that it's not using Lao territory because it claims this little area, which goes around the DMZ, and therefore, we have just as much right to move in there as the Vietnamese have to say they're not in Laos because it's an area which had a peculiar background in the French time. I think there are some maps in INR where they worked on this. We tried to say that this is not what the Vietnamese had in mind. This is not something which is part of their mentality. They're going to deny it no matter whose territory they may eventually recognize it to be. But then again, they also considered all of Indochina to be their territory, from the point of view of what the Comintern gave them as their marching orders in the 1930s. So this was something which obviously caused Souvanna some pain, and of course it was in an area which they had absolutely no pretense to control and also an area which the Lao Communist movement could not really claim to control, because it was indeed in the non-Lao-inhabited areas. It was the Lao Tung, the tribal people, who existed on both sides of the border and so on. So this was something which was a problem, but it was primarily a problem because, of course, it was not very successful.

Q: Well, let's turn to the events of the spring of 1970, when there was a joint South Vietnamese-American incursion into what was called the Parrot's Beak. What was the initial reaction you heard about it, and then what were you doing?

PRATT: Well, we were involved very much. As I say, Rogers had established a little group to work on Cambodia, and this was before everything was being handled by Kissinger. And so one of the things that we were working on, and I was, of course, next door to the person who was the principal action officer on Cambodia, but was whipped into it because we had to write so many papers about Cambodia. And one of the key things was that we were trying very hard to convince the White House that Sihanouk, despite his failings, was more of a positive element than a negative element. We didn't think he was quite like Souvanna Phouma - he was not as much of a gentleman. Souvanna Phouma called Sihanouk "ce prince mal ï¿½levï¿½" 'this badly raised prince.' We knew that there were problems with him, but still we considered that he had no personal interests and no national interests in permitting his country to be taken over by the Communists of Hanoi any more than Souvanna did. Therefore, the thing was how to make sure we kept him as much of an ally as possible, because he had prestige, he had international connections, he had support of many of his people. These were assets which nobody else in Cambodia could readily lay claim to. So we were checking on him as he saw the increased operations of the Vietnamese in his own country. On one occasion, when he flew to a province bordering on South Vietnam to the north (I don't remember what it was), and he was asked to leave, and he felt that this was something which was going too far. The Vietnamese were already using Cambodia, from the northern route, as a supply route for parts to the Third Corps.

Q: This was around the Mekong.

PRATT: Well, west of Saigon. It was not up in the upper highlands, Danang and so forth. And so we also knew that he had been permitting the use of the port of Sihanoukville, also using then army trucks to convey some military equipment, again to the more southern parts of Vietnam, which the Communist was using. And we knew that he was not totally aware of this or was not totally aware of the volume. There was a big dispute between CIA and MAC-V over the importance of this, and it was the CIA which was charged with looking at port capabilities, checking on the ships going there, how many of them, checking on what the capacity of the cranes were to offload and so on, and therefore estimating the tonnage. Well, they got the tonnage wrong because they got the Belgian company's specifications for different cranes from those actually being used. However, they were fighting against MAC-V's claims that the tonnage was everything that was being used by the Vietnamese Communists in the southern part of Vietnam. In other words, nothing was trickling down from the North, and therefore, all of this tonnage was what their figures were. So as usual, you had two intelligence organizations arguing about the facts, neither of them right and both of them having their own reasons. Well, I don't know whether the CIA had any ulterior motive, but I think they really wanted to show that they felt that they were capable of making this kind of analysis, with photography and querying Belgian firms and all the rest of it, and come up with a correct figure. But in any case, MAC-V won the game, because by that time, of course, we had Al Haig beginning to grab a hold of the Cambodian side of things. And so of course they then decided on moving in to disrupt. We, of course, were opposed to this with then advising our political bosses to keep in good contact with Sihanouk while this was going on. But at the same time that we were advising that, MAC-V back in here in Washington was dickering with Lon Nol to depose Sihanouk.

Q: Were you aware of this?

PRATT: We were not fully aware of their intrigues in Phnom Penh, by no means, but we knew that there was something going on, and we knew that Lon Nol was making a play. And of course you had a much more distinguished and important figure, in a way: Sirik Matak, who was, I think, a fairly honorable gentleman. And so indeed you had people who were viewing Sihanouk as complaisant and supporting the Communists, whereas the State Department considered that he was doing as best he could to try to hold onto things. And there were certain things he felt he couldn't do and there were things he felt that he could try to do by other means. And his whole departure from the country, his talking in France - which we could not get a kind of good readout which we could then play to our top leaders - and then, of course, his conversations in Moscow - and we lost contact with him there; we didn't even try to see him in Moscow. And of course his plane was going from Moscow to Peking when MAC-V moved and Lon Nol took over.

Q: Well, now, we talked about mindsets, but it strikes me that the military is always looking for that particular point that if you push a button you either knock out this road or you do this and that will change things dramatically. Do you have the feeling that the military got fixed on the supply side of Sihanoukville and all that?

PRATT: Yes, that was almost their total motivation.

Q: There seems to be a sort of an undercurrent - it's a very American thing, in a way - that there has got to be a gimmick, something that will unravel the puzzle, and if you just push somewhere . . . I mean, this is not just military, but our military respond to this idea that "this is going to be the key." Were we in CIA and State both sort of saying "no."

PRATT: Well, I think CIA was at that point pulling out of this because they had originally been very, very important in the whole operation in Vietnam and the upper highlands and the organizing of troops there. They had, I think, been relatively supportive of the Green Beret approach, but they had seen the American military move in and destroy the whole concept of irregular-type things in favor of spit and polish and parades and so on. And so I think by that time they had seen that if it worked at all they wouldn't be involved in it and they'd get none of the credit for it, and therefore they were sort of washing their hands. And this is when they began also to do the same, certainly, for much of Laos, although they were still hoping, I guess, in Laos that they could still retain some of this. And in Cambodia, of course, they had not been involved in much other than up near the Lao area, where they had gotten some Cambodian troops, which they had organized through Lon Non, Lon Nol's brother, and they were involved in certain operations in the Bolo Lands and other parts of southern Laos against the Vietnamese, using these Cambodians tied in with Lon Non, who was probably even more unsavory than his older brother.

But the other key thing was, I think the American military has always wanted to have "their" man. In other words, they've not been very relaxed with political figures who themselves are aware of various complexities. They want to have their man whose mind is as simple and direct, military as their own. As you know, the American military picked Phoumi Nosavan in Laos. In the first place, they love military men, and I think that's going to be part of what we're going to have difficulty with in Bosnia and Kosovo. They're probably going to be in favor of the military leaders in Kosovo, just as they apparently almost all the military went out to Bosnia and was impressed by the Serbs there because they felt that the Serb military people were disciplined and behaved like true military men were, whereas the Bosnians were-

Q: Were always committing war crimes.

PRATT: That's alright - they don't mind war crimes. As we can see, there was not much impetus on their part to do anything about Calley and the other people doing war crimes on our side, so they were always very indulgent about that. But they do like the military mind, and this, of course, is exactly what Haig thought that he had found in Lon Nol.

Q: Did you find that there was any sort of residual resentment against Sihanouk on the part of the CIA because he had made a big point, back in the early 1960s, I guess, of kicking all the CIA out and made this not a place that the CIA could maneuver in. Was that around or not, I mean the feeling about Sihanouk?

PRATT: A little bit, a little bit, but I think, because I have known some of the people who had been there in the station in Phnom Penh, and many of them ended up with a considerable amount of respect for Sihanouk, so yes, he was difficult, but you know, the CIA, these are people from Yale and probably even from Harvard, and therefore they understand that people can disagree with them. They hadn't gone to West Point, where everybody agrees with you, and if they don't they're the enemy. So I don't think that they were nearly so . . . As I say, they were already cooperating with Lon Non and using the Cambodians for matters in Laos. And admittedly this was the southern part of Laos, which had originally been part of the same old kingdom of Champassak that, after all, you know the old Lao kingdom of Champassak claims the northern part of Cambodia as having been part of the kingdom of Champassak in the 16th and 17th centuries. So indeed, the CIA has been involved there, and they found- [end of tape]

Q: So you don't think the CIA was a problem.

PRATT: No, I think the CIA people working at Tan Son Nhut Air Base and Saigon might have submitted an analysis of Sihanouk and what was going on which would not be supportive, but we did not feel in Washington that the top figures... because we had some very astute and I think broad-gauge people at CIA who participated in the Indochina working group. And they were always very sensitive to the more sophisticated aspects of international politics and so on. So they were probably pretty divided, just as there were certain persons in the Department of State who were divided as well, and they probably were supportive of this because they resented the fact that, while Sihanouk now had been very unhappy with Ambassador McClintock, who arrived with a dog under his arm and so forth-[Ed: Ambassador Robert Mclintock, career Foreign Service officer, presented his credentials on October 2, 1954 and departed post on October 15, 1956.]

Q: That's McClintock. He did that in Beirut, too.

PRATT: Well, anyway, the fact that he had difficulties with Sihanouk . . . Well, almost everybody had difficulties with Sihanouk. Sihanouk was a difficult person. But persons who really looked at what a leader of a country, with all of his failings, if he's able to accomplish something, then use his abilities, because you've got nobody else who's going to have comparable ones. Some people felt that Sirik Matak might be able to do that because, after all, he was related to the royal family. He never was able to take off. He never was able to compare with Lon Nol. Lon Nol, of course, was basically also able to say that he was the man of the Americans. But in any case, to get back to the whole question of Sihanouk, we had, I think, certainly in the East Asian Bureau, a general agreement that he was better than alternatives, and the State Department being what it is, you know, if you can get something which is better than something else, you generally go for it. You don't say, "Let's see if we can get the perfect solution, and if he isn't perfect, we'll make him perfect" - which is what I think the military believed. We also had seen the problems of trying to shape Phoumi Nosavan and having him with his military backers turn into the perfect leader. It gave us a disaster in Laos. And Souvanna Phouma, who was a prince in the sense of noblesse oblige, was able to accomplish things which Phoumi Nosavan never could have. This is something which we felt, you know, there again, the American military went along - in fact were perhaps the principal impetus behind removing Diem - and then of course they were the ones who were always looking for the person to replace him, and one after the other they found disasters. And so we at the Department of State were looking out there and seeing what these appalling figures were that had gone one after the other. Then we saw the other side, the French, saying, "Ah, Big Minh is the one who really can handle this." And then finally at the end, Polgar running in to the ambassador and saying, "Maybe we can get Big Minh to solve the problem for us now."

We did not find that the American military were very good in running foreign countries, particularly when they select a fellow general to do it.

Q: Well, now, let's talk about the incursion, as it was called. How was this seen when you got brought into it - I mean, the accomplishments, and then what were we about?

PRATT: Well, of course, we considered that the major accomplishment was the fact that Sihanouk was brought down and it polarized things. Two, we were just beginning to see what the Cambodian Communist movement - the new one, the one that started in 1966 - what that was beginning to do. We were monitoring, for example, the fact that they had moved west of the Mekong and were having their communications run by the Chinese and most of the communications going outside to Peking and equipment coming in from China. So one was seeing that you were dealing with a change. Now that, of course, was stimulated by the incursion. Secondly, we were looking at the general situation in the United States, and you know, it's very difficult to predict what foreign country the Americans can get an enthusiasm for. Who would have though that Tibet would be such a great spot for Americans to be picking for a place to fight a kind of battle. Well, Cambodia? Cambodia was far less important than what was going on in Vietnam, but we had enormous demonstrations here, and I went with my colleague, who was the principal action officer on Cambodia, down on the Mall, and we talked with the people there, and of course they were enjoying this as a bit of an outing as well, so my Cambodian colleague turned to me and said, "Well, you know, if they knew as much about what's going on as we do, they'd really be worried!" So our basic concern was that this was not going to be very effective and, secondly, that it would have repercussions which would be ones we could never really handle.

I made a trip out to Cambodia as well as Laos in 1970.

Q: Was this after this?

PRATT: This was after this, yes. Of course, things were by then polarized and things were then also getting into the usual Asian corruption mode. How could they best utilize the American support? Was there any way of trying to restrain, let's say, the exploitation of this war for their own benefit, trying to keep the war from being done for the purposes of war. And so this was what we were concerned about because we didn't think they'd leave the troops there. We thought that it would end up, the bombing and all there rest of it, causing more havoc and sort of putting Cambodia into the pot, rather than being more like Laos, which was tied in with but could still be handled separately and you could come up with a final solution which probably then would have Sihanouk around and you'd have some areas where the Vietnamese would still be operating but you'd at least not have sacrificed Cambodia in the process. We could not have envisaged what the Khmer Rouge would eventually do. We didn't think that Cambodians would be quite that bloody-minded. We knew they'd be much worse than the Lao because the Lao are basically a rather benevolent Buddhist people. The Cambodians are a more bloody-minded Buddhist people. But the thing is that we did see that this was "Vietnamizing" the Cambodian situation even more than . . . But they even held on to Laos and keep Laos from being so completely Vietnamized, but Cambodia was basically destroyed as a separate Gestalt. It was put within the framework of a kind of satellite of the U.S.. Lon Nol could never have the prestige that Souvanna Phouma had, including in, shall we say, Hanoi because Souvanna Phouma still had sufficient prestige in Hanoi. His younger brother would be the person who was still there, and he would go through the procedures of having the younger brother take over from the older brother and, you know, having things move a little bit more humanely. And of course also foreign support.

Q: Did you sense, after the initial incursion, a sense that it didn't quite work on the part of the American military, or was there sort of a positive attitude maintained?

PRATT: Well, we knew that one thing had been accomplished, but we felt that in the first place, Sihanouk was going to Paris, Moscow, and Peking to accomplish the very things that we sent the troops in to do - in other words, to cut down Vietnamese utilization of Cambodia for the southern part of Vietnam. And so we felt that this incursion and of course the seizure and the breaking of the route from Sihanoukville so that indeed that part was no longer used, nonetheless, that did not block the utilization of the northern route, and therefore we felt that Sihanouk could have accomplished everything that was being done by Lon Nol without the disadvantages of having Lon Nol around our necks.

Q: What was the reaction from our embassy in Phnom Penh at this point?

PRATT: Well, it was told to shut up.

Q: What?

PRATT: It was told to shut up.

Q: Yes, but I mean, when you went out there, what were you getting?

PRATT: Oh, I was getting the fact that they were finding it very difficult to find somebody to deal with because, of course, you had Lon Nol there. He was really the top figure. You had Sirik Matak. I believe at that point one still had Sami San. You had some fairly prestigious people there, but the political structure had been so much a personal garment tailor-made to fit Sihanouk that you didn't find it easy to change that and have another political structure put into place. Lon Nol thought he could do it somewhat through military means, but he didn't have the prestige among the royal family and with top, very intelligent people like Song San to be able to tell them what to do and to run his own type of government. So you had considerable disorder.

Q: Were we seeing the Khmer Rouge in this first period as being basically a Chinese tool rather than a North Vietnamese operation?

PRATT: Well, first we were seeing it as Sihanouk saw it as a rather disruptive student group. These persons were all students - the top leaders, anyway - who had been paid for by the Cambodian Government and the French Government, who had gone off to Paris and studied there. Some of theme even became members of the French Communist Party and came back, of course, and had their own little movement inside Phnom Penh and working in various ministries of Sihanouk's. And so they were indeed considered the left fringe of the returned students, but of course they then left Phnom Penh, went into the woods, and of course they had to fight against the Vietnamese Communist Party, which had organized the Cambodians and which was, indeed, the old Communist Party movement which traced its history back to 1931, to the formation of the Indochinese Communist Party. This is not what Salatsar, Khieu Samphan, Ieng Sary had as their background. They, of course, had not been involved in the early anti-French Indochinese War. They did not have direct connections with Hanoi. They were rather anti-Vietnamese, which is why, of course, they initially went together with the Vietnamese part but then split off and had their communications handled by Chinese and so on. So the Chinese were merely a matter of convenience. None of them were of Chinese origin that we know of. Some of them, I think, were Vietnamese. I think Ieng Sary may have had some Vietnamese blood. But we didn't know too much about that Communist Party, just as we had difficulty in trying to tell people about the Lao Communist Party. Fortunately we'd had a RAND study and another book by Joseph J. Zasloff [Ed: perhaps the 1969 RAND research memorandum "Revolution in Laos: The North Vietnamese and the Pathet Lao"] on the Lao Communist Party, which pinpointed the real party as opposed to the Neo Lao Hak Sat, which was the front organization. But we were having our problems because, of course, MAC-V considered them all to be run out of Hanoi, and we found it very difficult to try to convince them that, you know, Sihanouk says these people are different, they aren't tied in with the Vietnamese. They were not giving any significance whatsoever to the movement of their headquarters and the communications center from east of the Mekong to west of the Mekong. They saw no significance to any of Chinese connections; from their point of view it merely showed that China was supporting Hanoi and what Hanoi was doing. Of course, the suborning of Thai and all the rest of that along that border area was not something which they were able to see as it really was. And of course they were totally taken by surprise later on, when the Vietnamese attacked Cambodia. Why would they do that? Of course the Cambodians were trying to get the Vietnamese out of the Parrot's Bea.

Well, in any case, at that time, we did not consider that either the Vietnamese or the Cambodian Communists were a major threat. After all, if the Cambodian Communists required support from Peking, then Sihanouk was perhaps best able to figure out how to get them to give the minimum support, and maybe Sihanouk would not even have permitted support if he had been still sitting in Phnom Penh - but of course he wasn't. So that's another aspect, we felt, of the dangers of getting rid of Sihanouk, because Sihanouk would be able to make sure that this was seen as a Cambodia versus Hanoi type problem rather than a Communist movement inside Cambodia which other Communists, particularly in Peking, might feel they not only could but should support.

Q: You talk about MAC-V. Did you feel that MAC-V was sort of its own entity, or was this a reflection of the Department of Defense? You're talking of you as a trained political officer trying to operate with power centers. Where did you feel things were coming from?

PRATT: Well, there was a big movement within particularly the Army staff, and of course that influenced the Joint Chiefs. So indeed, there were people in the military who would be prepared to go that route, and they were constantly supporting MAC-V. But it was the usual thing of a war being considered with rather narrow blinkers.

Q: You're putting blinkers on it.

PRATT: So you'll find people with those blinkers, including in the Department of State, because you get people who, shall we say, have never been to Asia, and of course they're inclined to say, "Well, there's only one way to fight a war; there's only one kind of war, that was what there is, and that is, you kill as many of the enemy as you can and lose as few of your own as you can."

Q: Did you find within the Asian Bureau in the Department of State, was there a division between the real Warists and the other ones who said this is more complicated?

PRATT: Somewhat. And even for example in the Vietnam Working Group there were some, particularly those who were closely tied in with the American military, who were inclined to take the position of the military, and of course were incensed with the way in which Sihanouk was permitting his territory to be used by the Vietnamese. And the fact that he didn't want to have it used by the Vietnamese and was trying the best he could to have it not used by the Vietnamese was something which they probably did not give much credence to. I mean, after all, who are these people who are doing something that we don't like. I mean, do we have to give them an order every time or shoot them if they don't? Well, maybe we do.

So Sihanouk did not have as good a reputation here as he did in Paris, and after all, he'd been somebody who had fought the French and won against the French, basically. The French did not want him to become king, or when they made him king they did it because they thought he was young enough so he would do everything they told him to do, and they found out that he didn't. Well, nonetheless, they eventually came around to seeing that he wasn't as bad as all that, and they found him flamboyant and interesting, and besides, he spoke French - whereas, of course, Sihanouk didn't speak a word of English, or wouldn't speak a word of English. He did speak English. He understood English pretty well. So Americans, and particularly the American military, did not respond easily to a prince like Sihanouk. He was quixotic, he was artistic, he had a lot of the character which we don't consider a part of a serious political figure's character.

Q: You know, I'm not an Asian hand, and as I say, my time in Vietnam I was really basically a Balkan hand, but I remember sort of in the corridors and in the Foreign Service - this is before he was deposed - Sihanouk was considered a pain in the ass by an awful lot of people in the service, and you'd here stories about, you know, you had to be careful about him because when he was on a diet he was particularly difficult to deal with and he ought to go back to France and sort of slim down for a while and then come back. I mean, he was a little bit of a figure of fun. Did you find this? You were dealing with a serious person, basically, as far as you were concerned.

PRATT: As I say, we considered him both. In other words, he was a great figure of fun, and of course, as you know, he used to himself engage in operas and plays and required members of the diplomatic corps to attend these dreary evenings occasionally. So indeed, he was a figure of fun, and he was quixotic and he was mercurial. And when I quoted Souvanna Phouma, even his fellow Asians felt that he was often rather hard to take. However, we had noticed, we had had his career from the 1950s on to look at, and when it came to really matters of great importance for Cambodia, he was a serious political figure, and even Souvanna Phouma recognized that, although he found he had bad manners, the way he treated Souvanna, and there was a famous story of Boun Oum, of course, who would have been Sihanouk's elder, visiting Stonshang [Ed. ?], and he was greeted by Lon Nol, who welcomed him to Cambodia, and he said, "Oh, on the contrary, I feel as though I am welcoming you to Champassak." And when that got word back to Sihanouk, he forbade any further contact with Boun Oum. Well, you know, the little petty things he was quite capable of, and yet the basic fact that he was indeed aware and associated himself with Cambodia meant that he was a serious political figure, much more so than Lon Nol and of course Sirik Matak and Song San were both potentially serious figures. And of course Matak stayed to be executed, and Song San went off to Paris and was involved with the new emergence of Cambodia following the fall of the Khmer Rouge.

But this indeed we kept arguing because we said, "Yes, we recognize his defects, we recognize how difficult he is to deal with," but you know, what else had you got? You have a system, a royal government, which is basically based on Sihanouk. All the people serving at his pleasure. You have no representational organization that means anything. These people are all emanations of Sihanouk, and nobody would dare go against him. And at least he's somebody who's considered to have some legitimacy, which is not what you'll get with a number of other political figures who are going to be equally authoritarian. So we argued that he has sufficient entrï¿½e in Paris - he can get the French to support him. The Russians probably like him even less than we do, but they nonetheless are going to see that maybe there's nobody else who favors their interests that much unless something comes from Hanoi to Moscow, say, "Block this man because we intend to do the following." So Moscow apparently gave him a fairly cool hearing when he went through, and then, of course, he hit Peking, and the Chinese eventually, of course, supported him through all this period despite the fact that they didn't like him one bit. If there was anybody who would consider him to be frivolous and all the rest of it, it's going to be a good old Chinese Communist system. And his womanizing - well, Mao hid his womanizing, too, but it was rather different. And on the rest of it, of course, they would consider him undisciplined and lacking in any kind of solid ideological base.

Now, how they could be supportive of the Khmer Rouge is a different matter. That's one of the things I asked him when I was in Paris, of course much later. This is a time when Zhou Enlai's widow went down there and sort of conveyed prestige to them by her visit. And the person who was my interlocutor in Paris was sent there as ambassador. So how the Chinese could consider this Khmer Rouge group to be anything other than a group of ideologically deviant thugs, I don't know. And obviously in the end they finally did feel that they had to drop their support. But when it came to Sihanouk, we realized that the Chinese would be ambivalent also, but the point is, would they not prefer this? The fact that they were opposing the Vietnamese in Cambodia indicates that if they could have had Sihanouk, they would have stuck with him. They would not have supported Pol Pot's rï¿½gime against Sihanouk if Sihanouk had been there, and that's in the end what really toppled Lon Nol. It wasn't the Vietnamese because the Vietnamese did not have any means at that time to go beyond the utilization of the border area. So this was our view, and I think it would have been borne out if you could have replayed history and changed that one decision of deposing Lon Nol and invading Cambodia.

Q: During the period after and up through 1973, when did you leave this job in 1973?

PRATT: In 1973 I went first on a quick trip to attend the international conference on Vietnam and the last of the negotiations for that, and then was posted there in April.

Q: Posted where?

PRATT: In Paris. There was one important even of 1970 which I think I ought to fill in, and that was after Sihanouk was in Peking. The Indochinese people's summit conference was convened. Sihanouk attended for Cambodia, of course -

Q: He was out of power by this time.

PRATT: Yes. This was held in what they called the Vietnamese-Lao-Chinese border area. Some say it took place in Canton. Others say it took place in Nan Mei - Guangzhou, of course, now. And I don't know whether it's ever been fully established from the Chinese side just where it did take place. But this was, I think, a significant development which I was never able to convince the Department of State was that significant. In fact, INR wrote it in as "old wine in new bottles." I said, "No, this is China giving its blueprint for what is going to happen if and when Hanoi takes over South Vietnam. This is time when Zhou Enlai" - because Zhou Enlai attended, and I said, "You don't have Zhou Enlai attending this kind of thing unless there's something in it for China and unless it's important." And this is when I believe the Chinese said they were going to be supporting the non-Vietnamese-controlled Communist movement, the Pol Pot movement, and they were going to say that it was nominally under Sihanouk. This is when they insisted on having direct access to the Lao Communist movement, and not just the French organization of the Neo Lao Hak Sat headed by Souphanouvong. And they were therefore laying down their markers. While Hanoi could expect to reunite Vietnam and control all of Vietnam, it was going to have to leave Laos and Cambodia sufficiently independent so that China could maintain its paternal relations with two Communist movements. In other words, the expanding of the real Indochinese Communist Party. Now several years before that they had nominally disbanded the Indochinese Communist Party and referred to it just as the Lao Dong and said it was limited to Vietnam. And in fact they said there were two movements, one in the north and one in the south. Obviously that was not correct, but in addition to that, operationally speaking, they had retained strong movements in both Laos and Cambodia, and therefore they were reporting in to the Central Committee in Hanoi, and some of these persons were members of the Central Committee in Hanoi, and they were therefore under the direct discipline of the Vietnamese Communist Party, or Indochinese Communist Party as it was rechristened.As I say, I tried to alert people to the fact that China had taken an important step and therefore we should expect to see some rather different developments in both Laos and Cambodia, and that China had already set out its markers for what it expected to happen in the future and may have remembered the fact that when they were moving into Cambodia, and this of course annoyed China considerably, and installed their own government there, the Chinese remonstrated and said that after all at this Indochinese summit congress, Pham Van Dong had come to an agreement with Zhou Enlai concerning the fact that Hanoi would treat Cambodia as a separate country.

Q: He was the foreign minister?

PRATT: Pham Van Dong was the prime minister of North Vietnam. And Zhou Enlai, of course, was prime minister of China. So this was, of course, at a very high level that this agreement had been reached. And the Vietnamese replied to the Chinese, "Ah, we always considered that to be an unequal treaty, and sure that you have had plenty of experience in deciding how to disregard unequal treaties." So they considered that they had to come to disagreement in 1970 because they were dependent upon transportation of war equipment from the Soviet Union through China on the land route, and also there was certain support coming from China as well. And therefore, because of this, they felt they had to agree to these provisions, which were arrived at during the Indochinese summit conference. Now as I say, I think that this is one of the aspects which, again, was very difficult to explain to people because, of course, they just said, "Well, that is just new wine in old bottles," when of course it was a fundamental change, with China appearing very much on the scene and playing a much more understandable role. Now whether Kissinger ever understood this or not or focused on it, I don't know, but in any case, he certainly was able to see that one of the keys to working to try to handle the Indochina situation as well as the Soviet side warranted an approach to Peking. And I think that Nixon was already phasing in an approach to Peking for a whole slew of other reasons. But this was one of the things which, I think, could have reinforced and perhaps even expedited the movement toward China if it had been more widely studied and discussed.

Q: Well, in 1970 you were dealing with this matter to 1973, how did you see the opening to China and the peace negotiations, from your perspective at this point?

PRATT: Well, from our perspective, we had been supporting the opening to China. As I mentioned, those of us in the Asian corps had for the most part been hoping to push this when Kennedy came in. We didn't want to wait until Nixon came in, but the thing is we also were supporting . . . and as I say, we considered it a useful way of trying to work out an eventual arrangement in Indochina as well. You remember, we were not just looking at Saigon at that time. Our "domino" concept meant that you had to be concerned about Thailand and Malaysia and Singapore and Indonesia and the Philippines, so that you were dealing not just with that one little Vietnam thing, which is all that the American military perhaps was looking at. So we considered that China was very, very much an important part of this and would be becoming an even more important one. We had not realized, and considered that we should plan on, the disruptions of the Great Leap Forward and the Great People's Cultural Revolution as focusing China so much on internal struggles, and that's not just internal struggles of dealing with these problems but among the leaders, who of course were fighting each other all the time, a fight which, of course, so many of the great academics said would never exist because they had been, after all, been working together so closely since 1930, they obviously totally agree on everything.

Well, obviously we could not have planned on China being so terribly torn apart that it was not able to play a greater role. But there we were in 1970, which was after all when the Cultural Revolution was beginning to hit real speed, and there was Zhou Enlai still trying to set down markers for what would be the situation, what China's role would be from then on, and particularly following the unification of Vietnam. So we looked at China as being an important factor in all this, and one which had to be handled. As you know, we are not people who believe, as the military are, that everything has to be a problem which you solve, but there have to be situations which you try to manage as best you can. You don't sort of win your war and move on to the next one. That's not our mentality, because you never move away from any of the problems that you're managing because they're going to be in different form perhaps but you're going to have to continue to take care of them. Well, this is the way we looked at the China situation and thought it should be an important part of it.

As for the negotiations, we were rather pessimistic.

Q: Well, I'm wondering, this might be a good place to stop. I'll put at the end here, you've commented on the view of . . . what was this meeting in wherever it was, in Guangzhou, on Indochina and the aftermath? We've talked just the beginning about the opening to China and the fact that China was getting very much involved in its internal Cultural Revolution, so essentially we're taking late 1970 to 1973 and the peace negotiations and what you all were doing at that time, and then we'll move on to your going to Paris. How's that?

PRATT: Very good.

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Q: This is the 15th of December, the Ides of December, 1999. Mark, let's continue on. I think I'll turn it over to you for a minute, and let's see where we are.

PRATT: One of the problems that we in the East Asian Bureau had was that we had long considered that China was a very important part of how we would act in many other places in Asia, and that included, of course, Japan, which was very much recognized as the most important relationship we had in Asia because, of course, of its economic strength and its growth and its dynamism and its very great potential. But China was the other key point, and we of course were very frustrated when everybody kept saying, "Oh, no, we can't do anything about that. The American population won't stand for it." And none of us really believed that that was true. And I think we certainly felt very much vindicated when there was such a positive response to Nixon making the trip there. And we sort of said, good Lord, maybe we had such pusillanimous presidents before that that they couldn't realize that this was indeed something that could turn out to be viewed favorably. Now since that time, of course, the ups and downs of U.S. relations with China are probably caused by some of the same ignorance and some of the same pusillanimity on the part of the American side as was, I think, responsible for our doing nothing between 1960 and 1972.

Q: I have to say, though, that there was the other side of this.

PRATT: Oh, we knew there were people like Goldwater and all the others; however, if this had been packaged, as indeed finally it was packaged by Kissinger and Nixon, in such a way as could point this out as something we were using as a tool against the Soviets and also a bit on the side that we were using it to help resolve aspects of the Vietnam War. Some of this, of course, was true. Those of us in the China field considered that this was all very, very much overblown, that China was a tool that we could use for our purposes against the Soviet Union. And of course those of us who had been arguing about the Sino-Soviet split at the time when our political "betters" were saying, "No, no, this is really all a shadow game, it's a subterfuge. They are trying to manipulate us by presenting a false situation." We found it very difficult to deal with these political figures who were more concerned, indeed, about the American public opinion, and therefore to show themselves as being anti-Communists they had to say that there could be no differences between Communists, despite even the fact that we had had Tito splitting off from Stalin.

Q: And that was back in 1948.

PRATT: That's right. So these persons who were not really looking at the Soviet Union as something to be taken seriously in itself or the China and the Soviet connection as something to be looked at for itself, but instead were looking at almost everything through the prism of American domestic politics were getting things very wrong.

Q: During this time - this is before the Nixon opening to China - where were you getting the feeling that maybe there is something, maybe American opinion is not so terribly anti-Chinese? I mean, were there any voices? I'm talking about significant voices saying, "Hey, let's take a look at this," either within the Department or out in the academic or media world?

PRATT: Well, certainly in the academic and to a certain extent the media worlds, although the media world was very interested, as is always the case, in selling its product, and therefore it would do what it thought was going to be popular because that's what the editors - and Luce was not alone in being a violently anti-Peking figure

Q: The position is understandable, but at the same time, the other position is also quite understandable. I mean you can't ignore this huge weight, as you were saying, that's so influential, and I've always felt that it's better to talk to somebody than to both ignore them and to isolate them because it means that you have left control over the situation. This is the essence of diplomacy.

PRATT: Well, it's the essence, I think, of good sound politics to do whatever you can, and therefore that includes such contacts as you may have in order to influence them and also includes possibly trade and other things which can also influence them. After all, we had had contacts with the Chinese in Geneva first and then in Poland. Of course, we all were really appalled at the bad manners that Dulles showed in refusing to shake Zhou Enlai's hand because, remember, Winston Churchill was criticized for referring to Mr. Hitler. He said, "If you're going to destroy someone, you can at least be polite in the process." Well, we felt that certainly we did not see eye to eye with China, much of Asia. We were not terribly happy with even what Nehru was doing with the Soviets and the whole Bandung Conference and the Nonaligned and all the rest did not seem to be serving American interest very well; but it does not mean that one should cut off all contact with India, with Indonesia, with all these other countries just because they do something you don't like. I mean that, I think, is part of the mentality of the people who are rioting in Seattle. If you don't like something, you know, throw a tantrum. Well, of course, the whole essence of diplomacy is don't throw your tantrum. Maybe you'll throw bombs, but don't throw a tantrum. So we were very much in favor, as I say, from the 1960s on, and we felt that these were politicians dragging their feet on a supposed reaction to what the American public response would be. But there was practically never any effort to make a poll, and of course you can't do a poll in a vacuum. We found certainly very favorable responses both to Secretary Rogers' and to Elliott Richardson's speeches, which were very clearly favoring an opening to China, because we knew all of that had to be prepared for with our allies, with the press, with the public, and so forth. Of course, this was something which was against what Kissinger thought, which was that a coup de thï¿½ï¿½tre would be the best way of doing these things. Well, of course he was capable of a coup de thï¿½ï¿½tre, which of course Rogers never could have done. He had a very different approach to resolving this problem.

Q: Before we turn to the Vietnam peace process, was there sort of an internal plan of what would happen if opening to China came around - I mean what would we want and what wouldn't we want and all that?

PRATT: We were told we couldn't do anything about that. Obviously, I was on the Indochina side, so I wouldn't have been directly involved in it, but I would have been involved in sort of saying what the China-Laos connection was, what the China-Cambodian connection was, what would be part of what we would want to accomplish in that fashion, so indeed, the peripheral aspects we would presumably have been involved in. However, Kissinger said not one thing on that subject could be worked on. In other words, he took it over, took it into the White House. I think you are aware of what Nixon has said about the problem with the State Department: they never have any daring new ideas. Well, of course, he never really was much interested in finding out. And when Kissinger found out that there were new ideas and that we were getting them up and were finding a good audience in both Rogers and Richardson, they decided they had to block any of these good ideas because they risked preempting them.

Q: Well, you also had the feeling that this whole opening to China business, the way it was gone about - I'm not discounting it as working relatively well - fit the personality, one, for Henry Kissinger to be able to control events and also play center stage-

PRATT: That's right.

Q: -rather than be part of a team effort, and Nixon's idea of secrecy anyway. And so we're talking about almost the paranoia of one and the egotism of the other.

PRATT: I think that's very true. And as I say, this of course created frustration, and the people believed that they could be of great assistance in arranging this and also not believing that we were necessarily going to be the major source of leaks. I think any really good study of leakage, in particularly the Department of State but even in the executive branch overall, would come to the conclusion that the political appointees were most frequently the ones who did the improper leaking. There is considerable discipline within the State Department.

Q: Well, now, turning to the peace process, during the 1970-73 period, what were you doing?

PRATT: Well, we were backup for such aspects of the negotiations in Paris as involved as involved Laos and Cambodia. Originally, of course, it was just Vietnam, and that's all that Henry was running to his special Vietnam Working Group. But then as early as Harriman even, Harriman said that we had to whip up positions on particularly Laos, because of course it was where the road went and there would be aspects of the Vietnam agreement which would include discussions of such things as the utilization of Lao territory by Hanoi and so on. And I think what he said afterwards, one of the major reasons for this is that we are very much at a handicap in negotiating with the Communists because they don't mind coming in every single week and repeating exactly what they said the previous week, but we get bored with that. We constantly want to say something different. We want to say something new, we want to try to get things moving, et cetera, whether they want these things to move or not. And therefore we find that we through boredom, without listening to ourselves speak, undercut the only real method of dealing with the Communists. Now of course, while Averell Harriman was not the most brilliant diplomatist in the world, nonetheless, he certainly was one of those who had the longest experience, particularly of dealing with Communism from, I guess, even from Stalin on. So part of what we had to do was whip up a few little things, of which I think some of them were supposed to be zingers, in that they should annoy the Vietnamese, who were saying we're not going to discuss this, it has nothing to do with it, we have no Vietnamese in Laos, et cetera et cetera - their usual line on this question. But at least it would mean something different. Each week we had entabled something new. So this, I think, is one of the key things that we kept on doing to have fodder for the people in Paris.

Q: Well this must have been sort of like writing jokes for a weekly TV program or something, in a way.

PRATT: A bit.

Q: Did you really get rather cynical about this after a while?

PRATT: Well, we did get a bit cynical, but nonetheless we realized that it was one of the few things that we were called upon to do, one of the few things. I mean, after all, the really important things were eventually those which were done by Kissinger, who took them out of the hands of the people who were negotiating in Paris and made his own direct contacts with Le Duc Tho. But at the time when Kissinger was working on other things, and of course this was maybe a side show, but it was the only show that the State Department was given much of a role in, so we tried to do as best we could. And also, of course, we always had a great deal of esteem for Harriman and for his successors in Paris, so that if they wanted something we, of course, worked till late hours of the night to get it to them.

Q: Did you have the feeling that there was any progress in cleaning out some of the underbrush or something so that when the time came for the real breakthrough, the trees would be standing out there in full view?

PRATT: No, I don't think so. I think that we felt that there were great flaws in how we were handling things. As I mentioned, this desire constantly to come up with something new when there wasn't really very much new that you could come up with. That, I think, bedeviled us because we were just playing this finally to keep our own negotiators happy - which is, of course, not a bad thing to do - but the point is we were not making much headway because, of course, the real negotiations, the real working out of what was going to happen was taking place on the ground, and that, of course, was the military situation and what we were planning to do with our withdrawal of American forces, the political disorder and military disorder in South Vietnam. I know that Henry, of course, continues to say if we had been able to fly just a little bit more war materiel to the South Vietnamese Army, they would have held their own. So of course, that was part of the - I shan't say cynicism because we believed that we were trying to do something and wanted to do it as best we could.

Q: Before the plan of peace accord, all this was going on. Actually the military situation wasn't that awful, was it, in South Vietnam?

PRATT: We considered that basically the political situation was very bad. We considered that they had a rather feckless rï¿½gime and corrupt and not coming to grips with what the real problems were, and the American military had never wanted to fight that war and certainly didn't want to fight it the way in which the political leaders thought it ought to be fought. And so it was a bad situation. It wasn't even the Tet Offensive in 1968 that let one see just how problematic this was, but even earlier than that. So lo, these many years later, we did not believe that the U.S. had come any closer to having a real idea of what the problem was and how it could be handled. That is, we though maybe when the Christmas bombing took place that this would be an indication - and all it was just an indication - that they were finally convinced by China and others to take what they had and the good prospects that that gave them for getting more.

Q: Well, as you were sitting on this Indochina task force, was there the feeling that if we wanted to do something we had better start mining the harbors, going after the guts of the thing rather than just nibbling at the edges?

PRATT: Yes, and we, of course, as I said earlier talking about Dean Rusk, we never thought that China would follow through on a major program, say, sending troops in the way they did in Korea. This was not so important to China. Now obviously we wouldn't want to get off on Yunan and Guangxi borders, so it's not a question of our occupying North Vietnam. But there was a lot more that we could do that would not bring necessarily any Chinese movement. But the point was if you're not prepared to do that, we said, you know, what you're trying to do is not the way it can be accomplished - just as, for example, in the case of Laos we felt that trying to fight a frontal war with the North Vietnamese troops in Laos was a no win situation. Laos just did not have the manpower to take this kind of killing battle. You had to do non-positional warfare. You had to be guerillas and just do what you can do with a very much smaller force and don't delude yourself into thinking there's any way of turning it into the major positional warfare along the lines of World War II.

Q: How were we viewing events in Cambodia during this time?

PRATT: With a great deal of sadness, because of course we figured that the momentary respite that maybe had been occasioned by shutting down the port of Sihanoukville was not worth the collapse of any strong hope for having a stable government in Phnom Penh, that Lon Nol couldn't do it, and even with the aid of S_____ and if you had gotten rid of Lon Nol and put S_____ in or had gotten Son San, it still wouldn't have worked. It was the problem you get when we did as we did in Vietnam, got rid of their own leader there and saddled ourselves with a succession of sergeants in the French Army.

Q: What were you getting from the embassy about the Thieu government in Saigon during the 1970-73 period?

PRATT: Well, ineffective, internal fighting. I mean you had Ky, who was a flamboyant figure, but not very -

Q: He was vice-president.

PRATT: And you had Kanh, who was not much better. I knew these persons somewhat in Paris afterwards, because of course a lot of them popped off to Paris. Thieu, of course, went to Hawaii, but I think I met with him once in Paris. But these were not impressive figures.

Q: Was there almost a two-track reporting system? At the top the ambassador was Bunker for part of the time, and what was coming there, and then sort of the more junior officers who were out in the field - were they sort of reporting, not the official back channel, but you know, you were hearing . . . I mean, were you getting sort of a dual picture?

PRATT: Oh, very much so, and of course we would get the standard view in Saigon, which we then called "Saigonitis," where they were under the discipline and they all had to hew to the same line, or else. I don't think this was Bunker's imperial way of doing it.

Q: You didn't have that feeling.

PRATT: You didn't need that. But the people out in the field were the ones who felt that they were having difficulty in getting their voices through, and they said, "Maybe you think everything's going Jim Dandy in Saigon, but if so it's not being translated into progress in the boonies." And this was where, I think, all the corps coordinators and the people out in the various provinces and so on were very helpful to people like us because we would hear their side of the story even though that side could be filtered so badly coming into Washington from the places like Ben Long.

Q: How would you hear their side of the story?

PRATT: Well, they'd come through Washington.

Q: So this was, in the Department of State parlance, "in the corridors" rather than through the official telegrams and all.

PRATT: That's right. There were occasional reports that they let through - trip reports that people did - and they were so informal that they didn't really try to argue anything in the way of policy but all had to be implicit in the trip report.

Q: I wasn't a reporting officer when I was in Saigon as consul general from 1969-70, but I didn't get the idea that Bunker was particularly sitting on things, but there was a huge almost machine that would grind up and pasteurize anything that came through the official reporting process. And these were people sitting in Saigon. It's like reporting on the what's happening in the United States by reporting from Washington. But still, I'm sure the process was one that ended up reflecting the Saigon view of things.

PRATT: Well, I think it reflected - because I talked to the people coming in from Saigon, who mentioned all of the things that they might like to have been able to report, particularly of course, for example, reporting on both the way the U.S. military was acting and also what the Saigon military was doing, and that, of course, was something basically off limits; in fact, that was the reason why I told Phil Habib that I was not really terribly anxious to go to Saigon unless I would be able to be reporting - since I would have been in charge of internal politics - unless I could report on the political activities of the Saigon military, I would figure that I had such a partial approach to it, even with the dissidents and the Buddhists and so forth, that it would quite unimportant compared to what the various Saigon generals were doing to each other. And he said, "Oh, well, forget about that. When you come down after you get here we'll decide what it is you can work on." And this is when I told Bill Sullivan that, well, "I think I'd prefer to go back to Vientiane," because there I knew that there was no ban on my dealing with the military, not from the point of view of what they were doing militarily but what they were doing politically - in other words, not pol-mil but mil-pol. And I was basically as much as told by Phil Habib, "Listen, I can't even get my hands on this, so how do you expect to be able to do it?" That, I think, was part of the big problem. The embassy was kept away by the enormous military establishment from the most important political actors on the scene, the military.

Q: I have the greatest respect for the fighting prowess and the sacrifices made by the U.S. military, but over the years, in one place and another, including being an enlisted man in the military, I have been . . . the system is not very good for political sensitivity and reporting what's happening. Did you find that the reports that would come out of our own military tended to be - after you sort of looked at it - to be almost discounted because you didn't think they were very good?

PRATT: Yes, and as I say, I agree with you about certainly the heroism of many of the people - not of all, by the way, of course, because as I mentioned as early as last night, there were a lot of people who merely considered this as a pathway to promotion and maybe they could even turn it into a three-promotion war rather than coming to grips with what their war was. Now admittedly they had big problems back in Washington, but if they had only explained to Washington what their problems were, then they would have to decide whether they were going to fish or cut bait back in Washington. But they kept saying, "Oh, no, can do, we will do it. Just give us the order and we will carry through," et cetera. And it obfuscated the difficulty of the real challenge facing us. But there again, as I said, I think individual reports, sometimes a trip report and so on, would show quite a bit, and individual reports from some of the military, when they came back here and they would be telling us what their experience had been, were very cogent. It's just that the general military ethos was, I think, bad. They really were not able to tell who their real friends were. They considered American civilians to be the enemy and the press to be perhaps first in this group of enemies, and they considered all of the toadying Vietnamese military men, provided they had their shoes shined and gave a sharp salute, to be their kind of boy. But of course they were the ones who were the most responsible for the terrible situation we had and the fact that we weren't able to come to grips with it.

Q: And also the real fighting Vietnamese generals tended to be pushed aside by the Tu cliques, weren't they?

PRATT: That's right. And of course they were anxious, and that's understandable in a way, to try to get the U.S. to fight the largest part of the battle and to have the largest part of the casualty and to be able to save their own military equipment, et cetera et cetera. It was not ever the kind of partnership which earlier on I believe the CIA had with some of the people in the Highlands, but of course they were dealing with non-Saigonese Vietnamese as well as montagnards, and therefore the very people that the French had found to be useful (because after all so much of the French Army was made up of Tai Dan and other Montagnards), was the group that the CIA found that they could deal with. And of course that's precisely what the American military wished to get rid of. In other words, they were much less concerned about proper prosecution of the war than about having what they considered to be a good U.S.-type military. It reminds me a bit of the complaints we are getting out of Kosovo and Bosnia, and we don't know how to handle this sort of thing. We aren't trained for that. Well, you had not such complaints coming out of the military who went into Germany or Japan after World War II. They would still do what they were told to do, and they wouldn't be crybabies and say, listen, we've never been trained to do police work or try to get bridges back up again and the economy going and so forth. None of that was particularly obvious after World War II. In Germany, some of our best administrators there were military. Often, they were indeed not career military; they were colonels brought in from running a brokerage house or something of the sort or businessmen, but many of them were career military, and they did a damn good job.

Q: One thinks of Lucius Clay and all this. These were not fighting generals.

PRATT: Well, even if they are fighting generals, they're also generals, and they have enough sense to know how to manage something and to follow the orders they were given.

No, we really were wondering just how long this was going to play out. We had very little optimism about its coming out the right way or our way because we didn't think that we were prepared to do what would be required. Now of course you had the other dogmatists on the other side who every time there was a new directive coming out saluted and said, Oh, this is going to solve the problem for us. But Asian hands who had been working on this sort of thing for a long while felt that, yes, something can be done, but it can't be done using the methods which we are being given.

Q: Did you think that we suffered a bit from gimmickry? There was always a rather easy solution to solving the problem. I think when I went out to Saigon, I remember the military saying," boy things are really going to turn around because we're going to give the villagers the M-16 standard military rifle." It was this type of thing, and there was always one solution to things.

PRATT: Yes, and of course, as you may be aware, one of the key things about the whole route area was the attempt to devise brand-new gimmicks - gadgets, I mean, physical objects - which would report on the use of the trail and call in the aircraft and all the rest of it, all these sensors and the rest of it that they set their little boys in the laboratories to whip up. And none of theme did work terribly well, certainly not nearly so well as the Vietnamese coolie carriers. And I think also the other was the other gimmicks that could have a slogan tied to them. It became part of sloganeering and to guess all we've got to do is to motivate the villagers, and so I mentioned what Roger Hillsman said way back then, 1963, that it's going to be so easy because all you do is just have the village chiefs understand that they're working also for Saigon and have all of the mandarins at the county level realize that they also must be defending the people, the individuals in their area. You know, you don't remake and Asian society that way, but that's precisely what the military thought they could do. They, I think, sincerely believed that they do their reengineering of human beings, and it's called Parris Island for the Marines, and once you get them through there you come out with a totally different human being, and that's what you have to do to these Vietnamese. And I think they just did not understand the nature of the problems that they faced.

Q: Well, now, you left this Indochina Working Group in 1973, and you went where?

PRATT: Well, I was still part of that group when I went to Paris for the International Conference on Vietnam. And this was where we brought in all the people who had been previously at the Geneva conferences, one and two, and had a conference there where everybody signed it and the Chinese came and the Soviets came and so on. And that was supposed to be reaffirming what it was. Then it finally was signed between the U.S. and the Vietnamese. Prior to that time we had several last-minute meetings that instead of Kissinger you had Le Duc Tho. It was Bill Sullivan and Minh Co Tac, who was then the foreign minister.

Q: Of North Vietnam.

PRATT: Of North Vietnam. And we had those little talks to iron out the various aspects of holding the conference. So I went over for three or four meetings of that sort and then finally went over for the conference itself, came back to close up house and finish up my job and was over in Paris in April of 1973.

Q: First, before we move to that, what did you think, what was the mood at this international conference? What did you think? This was the one that essentially set up the so-called peace, wasn't it?

PRATT: That's right.

Q: In the first place, was there within your group a feeling of annoyance that in this whole damn thing you were working on a sideshow while Kissinger and Le Duc Tho were putting it together?

PRATT: Well, at that point we were merely implementing, under Kissinger and Le Duc Tho, what it was that Kissinger and Le Duc Tho had come to. And then the Vietnamese sort of stuck at a couple of issues, and we had the Christmas bombing, and then that was broken away and we went back to the board there. We felt that this was a kind of Soviet-Chinese persuasive action which had taken place. The bombs helped, but the real influence on Hanoi was what the Soviets and the Chinese said, which was, "Listen, you've got all you need. The Americans want out. You're going to give them a chance to get out, and so stop trying to hold out for the last little bit of America's humiliation and holding up for the last little bit of what you hope is going to be a lot of money." Now, as you know, the agreements did include a provision for the U.S. providing assistance for reconstruction to North Vietnam after the war. That was one organization which was set up there in Paris. Of course, they went on negotiating for months and came up with something which, of course, the American Congress said forget about it. But the major reaction was come on, let's get it over with. This is not where the real battle is going to be. None of us think the Vietnamese are going to be able to do anything very effective, so our view was that we've lost this, and therefore just let's go through with it and get rid of the last bits of this because we are admitting that we are going to let them take over South Vietnam. We're basically going to stand by and let Cambodia crumble and Laos go to the Communists. And therefore, let's do it in as gentlemanly a fashion as we can. So our view certainly was that this was countdown to the end. We did not believe, as Kissinger professed to believe, that this was a peace with honor in the sense that the South Vietnamese would be able to hold their own more than, shall we say, a decent interval.

Q: Was there concern on the Asian hands, which you were, about the aftermath of this thing, of an aggressive Vietnam, say toward Thailand? Was this a concern?

PRATT: Yes, very much so. And of course that, as you know, was why we had SEATO to begin with, originally China, but of course also covering Vietnam. And this is of course why ASEAN finally sort of kicked off after the end of the Vietnam War. It's because they themselves could not agree as to whom the greater enemy was. For some, Thailand, it was Vietnam. For Indonesia it was China. For Malaysia probably it was China. And so our view was that we didn't believe necessarily in the "domino" system because we believed that Indochinese nationalism would go just so far, and it was basically French Indochinese nationalism and it would not necessarily extend to Thailand and Burma, which is what originally, let's say, Ho Chi Minh had perhaps been dreaming of. So we did think that this was going to be a problem and, in other words, that struggles were not over, but they would take a different form. And this, from our point of view, one of the few good things about it was that we had worked out a relationship with China where we could perhaps expect to be on the same side as China in many of the ensuing struggles, and therefore, of course, none of us were terribly surprised when eventually Deng Xiaoping attacked Vietnam. It was the sort of thing which we would have felt was quite possible because, as I said, even the 1970 Indochinese People's Summit Conference seemed to be a way for China to lay down the rules to Hanoi, giving the limits of what they expected Hanoi to be able to do. So already we had a better situation because of a China which was being concerned about its own national interests, and one of those was not to support Hanoi in its ambitions.

Q: So with this in mind, when you went to Paris in 1973 to settle, this was what, April of 1973? You were there, by the way, from when to when, approximately?

PRATT: April 1973 to I guess it was basically April of 1978, so five years.

Q: What was your initial job?

PRATT: My job was the one that remained the same throughout my entire career there. It was to be a first secretary in the embassy handling liaison with whatever kind of negotiation group we had there, which was the post-peace-settlement negotiation about aid for Hanoi and also to handle turnover with Peking, because although we had established our working groups in Peking and the Chinese one in Washington, nonetheless communications were such that a certain amount of our communications back and forth were still done through our embassy in Paris. And also I was supposed to deal with both the North Vietnamese, because we had no other place where we could have contacts with the exception of occasionally in Saigon. But the major turnover point was in Paris, and I was charged with that. And then also, of course, working on liaison with the Lao and the Cambodians for the fallout of the peace agreement, and then dealing with the French Government.

Q: Well, it would seem that in a way your connection to our embassy outside of for administrative support was rather thin.

PRATT: Well, it was, and basically I was expected to be working primarily for Washington. For example, we worked out later on when we started new talks with the Vietnamese, it was the DCM in Paris who had these talks with Hanoi's DCM, and he, of course, provided a certain amount of supervision, as did the American ambassador because they were both interested in this.

Q: Who were they?

PRATT: Well, there were three ambassadors there. Watson was just departing, so he was out. He, I think, formally left a little later. Then they had Kenneth Rush, and then we had Art Hartman [Ed: see Hartman's ADST interview]. Oh, I'm sorry, we had Jack Irwin first. Jack Irwin, Kenneth Rush, and Art Hartman. So there are four ambassadors inside my period there, but three that I dealt with.

Q: Well, let's talk about the money first. This was essentially a non-starter.

PRATT: Well, we thought it would be a non-starter - that is, the unofficial sort of people who discuss things in the Department of State - because we felt that the major interest of the Vietnamese was not in getting money. They had never been good capitalists. Their interest was in getting, for their own people primarily, admission of guilt for the U.S. in fighting an aggressive war, and we sort of figured that would not be easy to get out, certainly, of Nixon, and maybe Congress wouldn't like it. So that was one of the things which you may remember, because I was there when Nixon and Ford and Carter were President. There were three Presidents. And so at no point was the Congress ever prepared to do what would have to be labeled "reparations" or pass for reparations, and even when Carter wanted to give them and Holbrooke had sort of worked them out, the Congress blocked it. And of course it was quite a bit later. But from the early period, and I've forgotten who it as who was the head of this, it was a political appointee who was sent out there to renegotiate it, and he tried to keep me out of things as much as possible, but of course I would generally find out what they were doing anyway. There was, of course, need to know, and I had to know the general atmosphere because I had to discuss this with others. But again, it was going to be sent directly back to Henry Kissinger, and there's no question but that the terms that Hanoi wanted were not terms that Henry would be prepared to give, so those talks resulted in a kind of document which was the best they could do, and then we never went anywhere with it.

Q: Were you talking to your North Vietnamese counterparts at this point?

PRATT: Yes.

Q: Did they seem to be other than messengers, or how did you see them?

PRATT: Well, they sent special people out from Hanoi to negotiate with . . . Williams I guess his name was. And so this was a separate kind of channel. I would deal with the embassy personnel on arranging for messages to be sent back and forth. For example, if we had Sunny Montgomery coming out to talk about trying to get more information about POWs and MIAs and so on, then I would be the one to arrange this and accompany them to see the North Vietnamese and so on. So I would handle all of the stuff except for the actual negotiation on the so-called "reparations agreement." And my contacts would tell me, because they would be told more by their negotiating team what was going on than I would be able to get easily out of Williams and his crew - although I say Williams and his crew were very competent and they were good people.

But it was, I think, fairly clear that the Vietnamese, as we would have predicted, were continuing to be not so much interested in the money, which they felt they were going to be able to get out of the Soviets in ways which they thought would be less destructive to their society than getting reparations from the U.S., so that they were primarily interested in something which would look like an admission of war guilt.

Q: That wasn't in the cards at all, was it, from our side?

PRATT: We thought it wouldn't be in the card. We thought that regardless . . . But we weren't so sure when Carter came in because when Carter came in, of course, he sent his emissary, Don White, who basically beat his breast and said that, basically, Carter wanted to let bygones be bygones and have mutual forgiveness and let's go to church together and sing the same hymn.

Q: So there was concern about the Carter crew, that they seemed to be full of Christian forgiveness and all, that they might come up and say something that might, in a way, let our side down. Was that a concern?

PRATT: Well, we felt he had the full authority as President to make such a policy shift; however, we did not think it would get by the Congress, and in the end it didn't. And I'm sure that under our current President, after all, we did reestablish relations with Hanoi. It was a few years after Carter, perhaps.

Q: We're talking about the Clinton Administration.

PRATT: The Clinton Administration, of course. And so we get another sort of anti-war crew in, coming with hat in hand. And of course times have changed in Hanoi as well. The same old people, some of them are still there, but some of them have gone, and they're not holding out for the same reparations. However, they will get recognition, and they will get trade, and of course we would all say that, well, times have changed, water has gone under the bridge, and so on. But we did not feel that in the immediate aftermath of a very bitter war - because it had been not perhaps quite so bitter on the ground there as it was inside the United States, but it was not one which left a political climate which would be congenial for somebody like Carter himself and his views. But even before that, the reaction of the Congress had been very clear, and I think both Nixon and Ford read the Congress well enough to know. And that, of course, was another aspect of my little struggle in Paris, and that was the POW-MIA question.

Q: Yes, I wanted to ask about that. Before we move to that, though, just to finish up on the money side, there has been sort of rather grandiose talk about a big Mekong Delta plan and all this. Was there sort of a plan in your hip pocket or the negotiators hip pocket that if this thing did open up this is what we'd do?

PRATT: Well, there has long been a Mekong project under the United Nations, and one of the key things which we had been working on even while the war was going on was the Nam Ngum Dam in Laos. And therefore, even farther down from the Mekong it was considered that there was work to be done. I'm sure, given the importance of the Mekong to Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, that it would have been one of the things which would have been what we would have prepared to provide greater support for. So indeed, there was supposed to be quite a bit in the way of rebuilding, and of course rebuilding also in North Vietnam - port facilities and things of that sort. So yes, there were some very good projects which had been identified even before the war reached its peak as good projects and which would have obviously been ones which resurfaced if you could ever pacify the area. So, sensible projects were in abundance, and we were prepared to give quite a bit, and even Henry Kissinger talked about 13 billion. They were figures which were bandied about and all denied, but nonetheless some of them seemed to make some sense. It was indeed what appeared to be a fair amount of money that we were prepared to provide. However, no under the terms that it would be considered reparations, and never tied directly to the sort of thing which would permit it to be called reparation. So the Vietnamese deprived themselves of this. I think it would have perhaps collapsed anyway when they moved into the Parrot's Beak and certainly when they occupied all of South Vietnam as well.

Q: Just to continue on this particular side before we move to the other, was the situation on the ground, were we coming back and saying, "No, we're not going to talk about money" - you've done this or that, which is a violation of the truce agreement and all that?

PRATT: No, it didn't look as though we were going to get out from under. I think they took the proposals back and said we would study it, there are things we still don't like in there. And this, of course, by that time, we were getting very close to the North Vietnamese decision to move full-force against the South. Remember that was, after all, 1975 by that time. So we went through a year or more of these negotiations, and that, I think, got them fairly close to their preparations for moving against the South because after all we'd made it very clear that we were going to continue to remove our forces. And of course the Congress refusing to permit money to be voted for military equipment for the South was giving a very clear indication that the North Vietnamese had won their war in the United States.

Q: But it also meant that if it wasn't going to give it to the South, it sure as hell wasn't going to give it to the North.

PRATT: That's right. And that was, I think, why they decided. They may have held back in their invasion of the South to see if they could get some of this money first, but then I think that they saw that the chances of their getting the money were not very good, and if they did start getting it, it would be cut off the minute they invaded the South. So I think they decided this was good as to see what the U.S. might be prepared to do, and when it wasn't going to do what they needed, then to hell with it.

Q: Well, when they invaded in full force in the first part of 1975, did that stop all the talks?

PRATT: They had stopped before then.

Q: Why?

PRATT: On the economic side? Well, our turnover had never stopped, and we had a hiatus at that point, in fact, slightly before that. But the money talks had just been dropped, I think, sometime in 1974.

Q: Well, then, let's talk about a problem that still remains with us, sort of an artificial problem, the missing in action, the prisoners of war thing. What were we doing when you got to Paris? What were your marching orders on this issue?

PRATT: Well, the only marching orders we in Paris had were to research the French experience, which had already to a great extent been done by a special contract to the Rand Corporation, so that one would be able to have an accounting and be able to address, for example, to find out where persons were buried, if they had died in captivity, and registration of this sort of thing. And then, of course, we were going to work on the recovery of remains. And so we would be doing all of our discussions there. We, for example, whenever we were going to have . . . this would be later, of course, after 1975, that we would actually be sending planes in, but we would arrange that sort of thing through Paris. It was, as I say, our turnover point. So we were basically waiting to find out how many came out, whether they all came out, dealing with the French Government to find out if the French, who had, after all, an ambassador in Hanoi, could provide us any indication as to whether the "Hanoi Hilton" is now emptied or do they still have some people there. And of course, we always are dealing with the French, trying to find out if they had gotten through any of their contacts any information about places where they might be held or whether they indeed had all come out.

Now in Paris, we were basically sharing the views of the people we were depending on later on as well that they were not holding any people. Now, we had to take what they said and parse it, because they said that "we are not continuing to hold any prisoners." Now we tried to tell Washington what that means, that is the terminology they used also with the French, but it did not apply to Senegalese troops who had deserted from the French Army and had asked to remain in Vietnam, married Vietnamese wives and so forth. So we were not surprised when - I've forgotten the name of the chap now who finally was released years afterwards - and we wouldn't be have been surprised particularly if some African-American had done what the Senegalese had done - perhaps they had met some of the Senegalese and the Senegalese persuaded them to stay on, life isn't half bad here - because they were very good at driving wedges between various aspects of the American military. So some people may have rallied to, to put it militarily, rallied to the North Vietnamese side and they therefore were not considered still to be POWs.

Q: Now it's still an issue today - I think it's basically a fake issue - that somehow or other the Vietnamese are holding prisoners of war somewhere. Did the French - I mean obviously we were looking at the mass capture of troops at Dien Bien Phu and other places - did the French have the feeling that there were any prisoners of war - not deserters, but prisoners of war - who remained in North Vietnam afterwards?

PRATT: Well, there they believed, as we did, that maybe it's going to take a month or so to make sure that they have gotten the word around everywhere that if you've got anybody, for God's sake send them in, because anyone who disappeared in the last weeks of the conflict might possibly be in a remote area and they hadn't gotten the word yet. I mean they don't know the war's over. So we thought that perhaps there could be some short delay, but we did not think that they were lying about this question - not that they didn't lie about almost everything else, but the point is that one question where it was put in such a way that the only way that others said they were lying was that they would not answer the question which we put: Do you hold any Americans. They would not answer that question, so we knew that, yes, they did have some who were there, but they were not considered by them to be prisoners. So we did not consider that then, of course, this whole question about all these prisoners supposed to be held in Laos - we felt that was a red herring, that for the most part it was people who had gone down in areas where the control was in the hands of the Vietnamese, not even, shall we say, indirectly through the Lao Communists, but directly to their own Communists, and that they were being sent back to Vietnam. They may have died en route, and of course a number of people may have been killed when they first came down because sometimes the troops weren't that disciplined. But the thing is, we did not feel that this was . . . I mean, I had to deal with the league of families quite frequently, and I think that they were - even though we thought they were somewhat misguided - nonetheless, we thought that they were honest in their concerns to make sure that everybody got out and we didn't believe that they were correct in saying that they thought all these people were still there.

Q: During the Vietnam conflict, several of our people, like Philip Manhart and others, had been picked up and basically held out in the hills somewhere by the Viet Cong and all that. Did we feel that this was just a matter of some months, of making sure that the word had gotten through?

PRATT: Yes, we did. As you know, Phil Manhart finally got the word. Is he still alive, do you know?

Q: No, he died, just about two years ago.

PRATT: That's too bad. He was a nice man. I liked him.

Q: Had the cottage industry which is still going on today, particularly in Thailand and all, of entrepreneurs who were picking up pictures of so-called prisoners of war being held - had this started yet?

PRATT: It started.

Q: I mean the creating of artifacts to show that there was a cadre out there.

PRATT: Yes, this, of course, was after 1975.

Q: Yes.

PRATT: And even, for example, Phoumi Nosavan got his son cranked up to get involved in this in the hopes of getting U.S. support moved back into Laos. At that time Laos had a Communist government, and what did a good anti-Communist do except to offer his services and find out some things that the Americans might possibly want, such as dog tags and reports of American prisoners in the mainline area. We found that most of this was fabrication of various sorts. Even as late as when I was in Guangdong we had people coming up in to China purporting to have reports of some people still being held somewhere in Vietnam. So indeed yes, when people can't make money without working too hard, they generally find a way of doing it. We were concerned about the way in which the U.S. military handled it, but we knew how difficult it was for them. They had established a big office in Washington and, of course, had undertaken a number of studies, and they sent a lot of people out, so they did not want to call the National League of POW/MIA Families [Ed: Ann Mills Griffiths, Executive Director] or groups of the press. They knew that they were mostly well meaning and so on, while many of these persons, of course, in the military realized they were trying to get maximum pay benefits, which if they had a husband who was missing in action pay, including combat pay et cetera and automatic promotions, would continue until they could establish probably death. Therefore, the family had no incentive to try to have that straightened out until the wife decided she wanted to be married. And so there were all kinds of stories about just what this really meant for a lot of people. But nonetheless, for the most part, I think the Defense Department leaned over backwards to try to follow up on any story. They didn't believe there was any prison camp or even two straggling prisoners around there by that time, but the thing is they weren't going to turn it off. So I think all the attacks saying that we abandoned our POWs in that whole area of Laos and Cambodia I think is misguided, and all the films that they turn out - you know "Rambo" this and that - are certainly keeping alive something which deserved a much speedier death.

Q: Well, had it turned into a real political issue? Today it represents - God, we're talking about 25 years later - had it turned into a right-wing conservative political issue at that time, or was it mainly groups, during this time you were dealing with it, around the families and all, as opposed to sort of a political movement in the United States?

PRATT: Well, I think that it has a little bit of each. The families were there to be exploited by other people. They had their other political agenda, and that often included people who were anti-war people, who wanted to consider that we shouldn't have done the war at all and when the war was over we should have fought a war to get our MIA back.

Q: How did you find the North Vietnamese in dealing with this issue? Were they understanding and businesslike, or what was their attitude?

PRATT: Well, I was dealing for the most part with a very, I thought, professional man who was fairly young. He had been involved in the war against the French, I believe, but had then gone into the Foreign Ministry. His French was pretty good, and this was always in a very professional manner because, of course, he would basically report back what I said to him and then give me the report in from Hanoi. He was not embroidering too much, and very clearly they had been somewhat prepared for this by the way in which the French had handled their prisoner and death issue following the war. And the French have perhaps an even stronger motivation than our government had in that there was a provision in French law which requires anyone who is mort pour la patrie to either have his remains brought back and put into a military cemetery or elsewhere, if the family itself is not in France, with perpetual care for the grave, or being in a foreign graveyard which is basically supervised, at least, if not run by the French. And so whenever . . . for example, on one occasion Hanoi wanted to take over one of the cemeteries inside Hanoi for some building project and wanted to move these bodies from that to another, they had to go through a whole rigmarole of trying to find out from each family whether they wanted the body to be reburied in this other cemetery or whether on this occasion they wanted the remains sent back to France. So they had been accustomed to dealing with the French on these matters, which from their point of view were a bit extraneous because, they, after all, never really made much of an effort to recover their own dead.

Q: Of course, the project was a mess, but what was the Vietnamese culture regarding the remains of dead?

PRATT: Well, of course, in their circumstances of peace, they have to a certain extent a cult of the dead. They have their cemeteries. They don't exactly worship their ancestors, but nonetheless, the tombs of their ancestors are very important. So that part they understand. But during wartime, when it's difficult to do this, then of course you have to abandon some of your usual rules. So they were not making a great to-do about getting back from South Vietnam the bodies of the North Vietnamese who were killed there. In the first place, most of them, they said, were not there. Anyway, it was nothing but the South Vietnamese doing all this. But what I think amazed them more than anything else - and this, of course, was later on when we began to send out our forensic boys - the fact that they were able, from a bone here and there, to sort out the remains, because sometimes bones were put together, and sometimes they would include bones of a Vietnamese in with the bones of an American. And the fact that they were able to determine all this and that we would go to the point of doing it sending in all these big forensic teams and all this aircraft and all this equipment and so on and then shipping them off to Honolulu and sending a report back saying, Well, you gave us four bodies, you thought, but it's really three plus parts of two others. So this, I think, the technical aspect, was something which they were amazed that we could do as much as we could do.

Q: Well, let's talk about the French side of this whole equation, not just about the bodies missing in action but on your work with the French on this whole liaison and being point man dealing with the Vietnamese and reports from the embassy. What was your impression of how the French supported or worked with us?

PRATT: Well, obviously two very diverging trends in France - it's no more united, I guess, than the U.S. is. But as you were aware, I'm sure, at the time, there was a whole group within the French Government, and that included the Foreign Ministry, included political figures, included the military, who were still smarting from their defeat in Indochina and were quite determined to enjoy the U.S. defeat and to gloat over every aspect of it. One of Dolores's friends back in this country was married to somebody, a French woman, who used to rub her hands with glee every time casualty figures came in on the American side. So indeed, there was that whole trend within France. But you know, the French have always had a love-hate relationship with the U.S. anyway, and on the other side there were persons who, of course, wished us well and hoped that we would not have such a feckless government as they had had fighting against Hanoi and therefore would be able to succeed where they had not. And we found those persons as much in Saigon and in Vientiane as in Paris. And in addition to that, you had, of course, the real professionals, and these professionals, like Challier, who had been ambassador in Hanoi and then ambassador in Peking and when I was there was working within the French Foreign Ministry on the problems of resettlement of the Vietnamese, because when Saigon fell there were just as many boat people who wanted to go join their family members in France as wanted to come to the United States, maybe more. France took certainly, on a per capita basis, far more refugees than we did, and of course we had people coming over and lecturing them about how they ought to do their share. And Challier was very gentle in explaining how they were doing already a good deal more of their share than we were doing of ours. And I think that we really had a lot of good friends who went out of their way, for example, over the whole grave question and repatriation of remains and so on. They had an organization there which spent hours with... Some people came out and wrote a full report, and then other people came out and didn't even know that the Defense Department already had in its library a report which they had already laboriously provided for them. Whenever I wanted to see them, I could get to see them. They were really leaning over backwards. So yes, we had that side, the very admirable side of the French.

At the same time, we had the bloody-minded people who just wanted to stick their finger in the U.S. eye, and they had a good chance to gloat and to cause us problems. This was something which had existed from the time of the Paris Talks on. Even at the end of the French involvement in 1954 they were pretty nasty, and then they were nasty again in the Geneva agreements of 1962. And you have this whole trend. And I'm sure they didn't think they were being nasty to the Americans. It's just that they obviously so much understood Hanoi and the whole Asia so much better than the Americans did, and therefore they wouldn't have made any of the mistakes that the U.S. had made. The fact that they already had made them, and made them under circumstances where they had less of an excuse - because loads of people knew that area very well . . . So this included people like, shall we say, the chap who was then there during the '70s and handled the Asian bureau and then was ambassador to Peking - Manach, a very strange French name [inaudible] , I think. And these were the old socialists, and that strain of anti-Americanism was very much alive in much of the Foreign Ministry.

Q: Well, were we using our connections there? I mean were you involved in trying to figure out what was happening in Hanoi, because this goes with the time, how the truce implementation went and then the takeover? The French were sitting there. Did we use that, and were you involved in that aspect?

PRATT: Well, of course, I would have regular meetings with the people in the French Foreign Ministry and others who would talk about what their perception was of what was going on in both North and South Vietnam. And yes, I would send in their estimates. Of course, it's a fairly closed society, and therefore it's not easy to get too much hard information, but the impressions and what information they did have, they were often prepared to provide to us. Not all of them - as I say, there was that very nationalistic, anti-American side of some French which meant that they wanted to make sure that we were led astray so we would do ourselves the maximum harm. But that was not what I found among many of the more professional people who realized that they had had their chance in Indochina, and De Gaulle himself said let's forget about it, it's past, and so let's not try to just wish ill on the Americans just because we failed ourselves. And as I say, the people who were most important to us, namely those who could be of assistance in trying to get out persons for whom we felt a responsibility - they were very helpful, and they understood this and they themselves were trying very hard to deal with Hanoi to get out the persons from South Vietnam who were important to them. As you know, some of the people who had been involved with us, in talks in Paris or something of the sort, were taken prisoner there and sent to education camps. Some of them had French connections, and the French tried very hard to help get them out, and we, of course, would go to the French and say we know that you are aware of such-and-such; what we have heard is the following; I'm sure you have more information; we also have an interest in seeing if this person can be gotten out of the education camps from which he might not emerge alive.

So in general it was the usual mixed bag of dealing with the French, which is that some of them are marvelous, but difficult, and some of them are difficult, but marvelous.

Q: What about after the fall of South Vietnam, were you continuing to talk to the North Vietnamese?

PRATT: Yes, well, we resumed our talks very shortly after that because we had to find out about including some Americans who were still there. There are always a few stragglers, and on the American side, people go out to do some ethnographic music in the Highlands and, you know, what's happened to them? So yes, we started to have our talks again. These were not designed to do anything about the previous negotiations. They were considered by that time a dead letter, although it was occasionally still mentioned by people in Hanoi, the reparation, as one of the unfinished business between us. Nevertheless, they knew that that was just for the benefit of their own people, not out of any hope to get anything going. Of course, as I mentioned, when Carter came in they picked up considerably.

Q: Talking about the cleaning up after the fall of South Vietnam, were we getting people out? For example, Saigon must have had still a considerable number of deserters. There was a whole deserter colony in Saigon of GIs who had gone AWOL. They were deserters by this time and living in the black market. Were we trying to get these people out?

PRATT: Well, we were trying to make sure that . . . When families came to us we would ask what information they could provide on some of these people. However, things were sufficiently chaotic, so we didn't expect really to get much in the way of answers down there. And of course very quickly the boat people started arriving. That, by the way, is another whole and rather shameful chapter. I think the United States behaved rather badly in that.

Q: Before we move to the boat people, were you taking any information the families would have and passing it on to the North Vietnamese and saying where was so and so and do you have any information?

PRATT: Yes.

Q: How would they accept that?

PRATT: Well, they'd accept whatever we gave them. They wouldn't necessarily ever respond. I think for the most part we never got a response.

Q: Where all of a sudden an agricultural researcher in the Highlands who sort of disappeared, would he or she surface?

PRATT: Did surface, did get out.

Q: I mean this is not a matter of putting and holding. In a way it was pretty much they were trying to clean up and not leave these people.

PRATT: That's right. They were trying to get rid of these people. They didn't want them around.

Q: What about people, for example, we would have Vietnamese that we'd say, Look, can you let so-and-so - we're talking about a South Vietnamese national who's got a sick mother in the United States or something - and can you just . . . if you let him go, we'll take care of him or something like that? Were we trying any of that?

PRATT: Not at that point. Later on we were prepared, by transmission or to tell the family in the United States how to address their own communication. And so we'd say we think it would be better if you were to raise this personally, and you send it to the Vietnamese Embassy in Paris, Mr. So-and-so, and say that this is a family unification matter, and you would like to be able to promise that you will support this person and please let him leave and so on. The French were doing the same thing. The French were trying then to get out people, and of course the last thing they wanted to do was to have everybody get off by boat.

Q: Did you get involved in the boat people business.

PRATT: Yes, well, we were handling much of it there and trying very hard to get all the people concerned - that means countries as well as private organizations - to provide what assistance they could and also trying to make sure that ships implemented the law of the sea. Because under maritime law, if a ship comes across a vessel in distress, they are required to stop, pick up the people, and they may offload them at the nearest port. Well, unfortunately, out in that neck of the woods, the nearest port is not very close. Secondly, it may not be the port to which they are heading. In the third place, none of these ports may be willing to offload these Vietnamese. And in the fourth place, no matter what happens, it delays you and costs you money. So they were constantly passing by . . . Some countries did not do that. Some countries gave instructions to all their flag carriers to follow strictly the maritime law, and I believe that American carriers got those instructions, and I think for the most part they lived up to them. But of course you had the Lebanon and Panama and Liberia registries, and of course God knows, it was probably a Greek who owned the ship, and these were not really living up to these requirements. And we had, of course, an office in the Department of State which was trying to handle this refugee migration matter and so forth - Frank Sieverts. And we were trying to see whether we could get maybe even a tougher U.S. law which could penalize foreign carriers if they failed to implement the maritime law, and deny them U.S. ports or something or other. And I guess they looked into it and decided it was much too cumbersome, too difficult, and so we did not follow through. We did not try anything more than just try to make sure that our own flag carriers did not violate the maritime laws. But a lot of people died because these ships passed them by.

Q: How about the French? Do they-

PRATT: They tried. I think the French flag was probably pretty good. Well, of course, you know, they have felt a sense of continuing responsibility for almost all of their colonies anyway, and therefore, they were taking, as I said, far more Vietnamese into France, per capita, than we were. And I think that at all points they were sort of among the most active. And I'm sure some French ships probably didn't stop, but the French Government made every effort to make sure that any ship which was under their discipline would do something even though it would cost them time and money.

Q: Did you, in your capacity as this liaison person, tap the Vietnamese community in Paris at all?

PRATT: Yes, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Lao. And obviously my time was limited in doing this, but I had best contacts with the Lao, but also good contacts that I gradually built up to some of the Cambodians because they were interested in having their views conveyed at a time when we were still important there in Phnom Penh. And then after the Khmer Rouge took over, they of course were interested in seeing what we could manage to do to help, particularly some of their relatives, because there was not much we could do but, of course, we had contacts with more people perhaps in Thailand than they had, and of course they were able to escape out to Thailand.

One of my contacts, for example, at the Cambodian Embassy was called back to Phnom Penh and was there when Phnom Penh fell, and he was, I believe, part Vietnamese origin, and he know that if he tried to go toward Thailand the Khmer Rouge would get him and, of course, kill him because he was educated. And he went back through the highlands in Vietnam and into southern Laos and from there was able to get out through the UNHCR. And of course when he was able to get out and back to his family in Paris, he gave me quite a report on his trek. He eventually went down to Abidjan for a while. So that's the kind of person whom I would talk to to get what information he could provide.

Q: Talking about the time you were in Paris, 1978, were we aware of the enormity of what happened in Cambodia at the time?

PRATT: Yes.

Q: How were the French reacting?

PRATT: Well, the French felt particularly - I can't say "responsible," but particularly concerned - because they blamed us for the polarization by our behavior over Sihanouk. However, they also knew that the Khmer Rouge movement-

Q: It has a French name even.

PRATT: That's right. Pol Pot - or Saloth Sar, as he was originally known - and Ieng Sary and Thio Som Po and so forth - all of these person imbibed their Communist in France. They were not part of the Vietnamese Communist movement as Kun Sen is, but instead were the French intellectual side of Communist, and so of course they saw this as a direct implementation of the most anarchistic and chaotic and extremist type of political movement and having very good roots in France. Not in Marxism - well, in Marxism, perhaps, but not Leninism. In any case, the French were very concerned about what was happening in Cambodia, and they, of course, were in the forefront of trying to protect some of the people and trying to get them out, particularly as Phnom Penh was falling. The French ambassador had in his compound a large number of persons who would have been, in fact, Sirik Matak was there first and then decided he should not take refuge in a foreign embassy and went out to his death. So the French were very, very concerned about this, and of course they continued to have information on what was going on and to of course see that we got it. So we were not unaware of the killing fields.

Q: Speaking of the French intellectuals, they always occupy an important place within the French social and political life. Were they of interest to you in your job, or socially? I was wondering how they were reacting? Here they had been sort of anti-American and things were falling apart in Indochina and it wasn't a nice scene. It wasn't the nice clean, tidy parlor Communism that many of them had ascribed to.

PRATT: Well, of course, there again, the French intellectuals are even more divided, I think, than they would ever be in the United States. I of course had a great deal of respect for and enjoyed talking with people like Raymond Aron, who of course I think, as a good Jewish intellectual, was pretty solid, and a number of other journalists and writers. But one of the problems I had with many of them, of course, was that they would have their opinions first and then seeing what facts would fit. That, of course, is not something which is unique to the French by any means.

Q: No.

PRATT: But it did mean that even some of the persons whom I would deal with fairly frequently because they were scholars on China and so forth were ones whom I would deal with as best I could, but still often I would find that their positions were, you know . . . it was very difficult to argue with them because they had already had their conclusions, and any facts I gave them would be of interest only if they happened to fit in. But that was not true of many of the others. For example, on the China side there was General [Jacques] Guillermaz, who had been one of the famous line of French military officers who did some of the best reporting out of China in the late 1940's and early '50s. And he was sent by De Gaulle to Taiwan, for example, to break the news to Chiang Kai-shek that De Gaulle would be recognizing Peking. And he was head of a Chinese institute there. They did very, very good work. They were very conscientious. Others, however, were just, well, particularly of course the Communists - they had real problems after the Sino-Soviet split because, of course, the French Communist Party was basically dominated by the Stalinist Russian side, and so of course it was bound to be somewhat against Mao, but then of course you had another crew that just loved Mao because he was more of a French-type intellectual. And of course even the intellectuals who were not Communists Peyrefitte [Ed: ?], for example, who recently died, and others of that sort - were often very pro-Mao and pro-China. Of course, they saw a very different China from just a purely political one; they saw it as a great empire on the cultural side and philosophical side and all the rest. There was Mao, the great philosopher king. Well, I saw quite a few of them, but I didn't have time to cover the full range, and it was not my principal focal point because I needed to be kept up on what the facts were and what the French Government's position was and how they intended to implement it. These influences on the French Government, which you get from the writers, both scholars and journalists, were, of course, something I would follow in order to be able better to predict what might be a governmental decision.

Q: Did the intellectuals have an influence on the Foreign Ministry and the people you were dealing with, on the government?

PRATT: Yes, somewhat. But what they wrote would have an impact based upon the political level, not the working level. The working level had to be concerned about it, to know what it is that their minister might have read in the morning Express, and therefore what he might be telling them they ought to do and what they ought to look into. The French politician, of course, found that China was always something from which you could get benefit. In other words, China was good news, good copy, and anybody . . . It was Giscard who went there representing the National Association of Manufacturers, of the patronat, and other people going there representing aspects of the government and the establishment - they all would have very nice things to say about China because China was well regarded in France. And it doesn't make any difference whether it's under the Cultural Revolution or the anti-cultural revolution and so on. They probably preferred the news they could get out of Mao and the Cultural Revolution to what they could get out of Deng Xiaoping, who is much more pragmatic and therefore not so French. But as I say, the other side of the intellectuals, of course . . . I don't know whether you are aware of Pierre Ryckmans (writer, sinologist) (born 28 September 1935, in Brussels, Belgium), who also uses the pen-name Simon Leys,, a Belgian really, but someone whose works, in French, had been most highly critical of the Chinese Government. He's somebody who has a great admiration for the Chinese and their culture but does not consider that their politics is something for which they are most gifted, unlike art and poetry and literature and philosophy and so forth. Politics is not their forte. In any case, you would find that as well in France, but regardless of that, China always is something that the French are interested in.

Q: Well, maybe this would be a good place to stop, I think. Was there any other aspect of your time there we should talk about up to 1978?

PRATT: Well, let's see. I think that the interesting thing, of course, was the fading of Kissinger from the scene. We found, of course, that Brzezinski came in and apparently -

Q: As national security adviser to Carter.

PRATT: He seemed to be picking up - we might have said - the bad habits, but he I'm sure would say the intelligent approach to his role that Kissinger had adopted. And of course it was later on that we saw the sharpest dispute between Brzezinski and Vance, but already this was part of the framework that we noted for matters which were of import to me, anyway. The Indochinese and Chinese areas were ones which were also of importance to Brzezinski, and therefore one found the same problem of secrecy, of obfuscation, and of conflict. And of course this put many of these problems which I faced into the basket of the difficult things. Do I aim this for one or for the other? What can I expect to have happen when I do some of these things? And this, of course, when we began our new discussions with the Vietnamese after Carter eventually came in on the problem with the trip to Hanoi and also Woodcock, and then the efforts in Paris to get things going, which I think I should discuss the next time because the framework of that was also difficult in dealing with our own government because our own government does not want to deal with its own people.

Q: Alright. Well, the next time, we'll still stay with the time you were in Paris, but we'll talk about the Carter Administration coming in and the whole relationship with Brzezinski and dealing with Hanoi and also with China from your perspective, okay?

PRATT: Very good.

Q: Great.

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Today is the 12th of January, 2000. Mark, when you heard what we said the last time, do you want to pick it up from there for a while?

PRATT: Well, I think that the key aspect of the entry of Carter was of course the personality of Carter himself. I'm sure many others have commented on much of his approach to foreign policy and the importance to him of his religion. And of course it made it very uncomfortable for people who have their own religions views but do not necessarily believe that religion is the best direct guide for handling politics and particularly foreign affairs.

Q: Could you explain as you say it what was his religion and what thrust did this give to his approach to foreign policy?

PRATT: Well, I think the key thing mentioned impacted on me, but I think we can see it in, say, his approach to Africa and other countries - the desire for peace and his trip to Korea and so forth - but as it affected Vietnam, it was the Christian view, which I can respect but don't agree with, that we had fought a bad war, morally, in Vietnam and therefore he should be having the U.S. atone for this. And he, of course, wished to be able to establish relations with Hanoi. He wished to, in effect, apologize for the war and try to if not get political reparations, nonetheless from his point of view moral reparations for what he considered to have been an unjust or immoral war in Vietnam.

Q: Was this palpable when he came in? You were still in Paris dealing with Vietnam.

PRATT: I was the only turnover point at that time. After the fall of Saigon, we basically had all of our contacts, such as there were, in Paris. Of course, we did have things we had to talk about. Not all of them were ones that you were willing to raise in any meaningful way, but nonetheless, whatever you were prepared to do, and often we were acting on behalf of the Congress because, as you well know, the Foreign Service is the Foreign Service of the United States, it's not the Foreign Service of the President. So when Congress wished to be very active about missing-in-action or something of that sort, then we were expected to be of assistance. And indeed, we were. So it forced us occasionally to get involved with the North Vietnamese when, probably, the President and Secretary of State would not have been so happy to have done so. But when Carter came in, he of course was most anxious to do so. Of course, one of the early acts was to send Leonard Woodcock to Hanoi [Ed: March 1977], in effect to try to move things toward recognition. Obviously it was very early in that process, but that was the flavor of that trip. In addition, in order to emphasize this approach, Woodcock got all of the State Department people whom he was forced to take along because they were the experts and knew the languages and all that stuff, forced them out of any meeting which he considered important. This, of course, was again an aspect of the Carter view that the Realpolitik of the State Department was something he had to get around, and to do that he had to get his own people and to be as much against the State Department as any Republican had been who was suspicious of these liberals in the State Department.

Q: Well, this is interesting. We'll talk about the Woodcock thing, but when Carter came in, since you were the point man for the Vietnamese-American contacts, did you sense a change in attitude, the fact that they'd read Carter and figured that they could, in a way, get more out of us than previously? Were you aware of anything like that at your level?

PRATT: Well, somewhat, because, of course, the signals were coming, indeed, from the White House about the desire on the part of the President to overturn what he considered then to be a Republican policy, you know, a Nixon policy, which was, from his point of view, I guess, immoral. But more important, one could see that the forces in Hanoi were what drove them more than anything else. In other words, we may think that only the United States had domestic politics, but Hanoi had a lot of them, and of course the top leadership, their whole framework had changed with the collapse of Saigon, and the relative strengths of various groups and what they ought to be doing with each other, who was up and who was down, which one was pro-Chinese and which one was not, which one was really totally concerned with the concerns of Moscow and nationalism and so forth. There were various trends there, which meant that they had to treat the United States in a particular way for their own internal needs.

Q: Were we getting any feedback - I mean particularly you - about what was going on in Hanoi and any feel for the various currents that were going on there?

PRATT: We were not getting too much. Of course, we had nobody of our own in Hanoi. I was also not getting much of the intelligence information coming out from Hong Kong and persons whom we were using as agents there, but I would get a bit from the French themselves, but the French had their own national interest and their own way of chivvying things to serve their interest. And as I mentioned the last time, we had a series of heads of the Asian department in the Quai d'Orsay who were basically very, well, they're not anti-American in the sense that they were opposed to what the U.S. was doing in the U.S., but the point is they were very much suspicious of and against what they considered U.S. policy in Asia to be. So we were not getting at the political level the kind of insights which would have been much more helpful, but we were getting a great deal of direct information from the lower level of the Quai, which was concerned about facts, as we tried to be in the State Department, and less concerned about the great political games.

So, yes, we were getting certain information about what was going on in Hanoi, and yet we had to extrapolate because, of course, that society was perhaps even more closed than was Peking society. And Ho Chi Minh, particularly during his lifetime and for a short time thereafter, was a unifying force which one did not have in China because after all in China from the early 1950s on there had been fights within the top leadership and purges and all the rest of it. One did not see much of that, and to this day, you know, we still have not seen much in the way of open fights going on in Hanoi, with one exception. But we nonetheless knew that there were various strains because the war had been such a unifying force. Once it was over, then, of course you would quarrel about how you managed the next stage, what you'd do vis-ï¿½-vis Cambodia, your next-door neighbor, what you'd do about the agreement you'd previously arrived at in 1970 with the Chinese about giving greater independence to the Lao and Cambodian Communist movements, and then of course how you would handle the border area with China. So there were a number of issues which would be viewed differently and of which strains would have to be handled without the moderating and overall influence of a Ho Chi Minh because they, of course, lost their great leader.

Q: He died in, what, September 1969?

PRATT: I'm sorry, you're right - 1969. so this had occurred before. But as I said, they were able to carry on as though he were still sitting there.

Q: And the war was still keeping them together.

PRATT: That's what I mean, and it was basically his framework that was behind it.

Q: Well, it's January 21, 1977. The Carter Administration comes in. What were you doing and how did you proceed at this point? Was there the usual hiatus while they were sort of putting their administration in place?

PRATT: Somewhat, although of course very quickly on, as you know, he did get some staffers in to the White House and into the State Department for handling foreign affairs. And of course Dick Holbrooke came in as assistant secretary for East Asia, and he apparently had established a kind of relationship - less so than perhaps some others, because he wasn't, after all, from Georgia - so he was in and, of course, had his own history with Vietnam, and also, working in the White House, he had his own personal desire, I think, to move things along in East Asia, in particular with Vietnam.

Q: What were you doing? The Carter Administration is in. You're kind of a point person in Paris. What were you doing?

PRATT: Well, whenever there was a message to passed, that was where it was passed, and this would be, for example, if we were going to have Sonny Montgomery [Ed: Mississippi Democratic congressman] come to talk about MIA issues, we would have to make all of the arrangements for the aircraft and so on. So we also had information which we would sometimes want to get about certain Vietnamese in the South, some of whom had worked very closely with us. And we were often asking whether they could find us any information about this. A lot of them were the same persons the French were asking about, and occasionally we'd get the information via the French, generally a more thorough report. But whatever it was, and of course, any meetings, anything we wanted - for example, the Woodcock visit - we had to set all that up in Paris. He was taking his own aircraft in, and one had to say what aircraft it would be, where it would take from, where it would be landing, and so forth. We had to get the information and say what facilities they had, what airfield to land at, what were the means of getting the airplane started through ground equipment or whether they had to bring in their own ground equipment.

Q: Did you have a feeling that, yes, there was activity there but at the same time that sort of this whole apparatus of the Department of State and the military, the Pentagon, and everyone else, had been so focused on Vietnam that all of a sudden it was sort of, "Well, we lost that one," and getting on with it and in away, except for these efforts, which are based a lot on missing-in-action but also the Woodcock visit, that it almost passed off the radar of the foreign policy apparatus?

PRATT: Well, we thought it had basically gone off the screen when Ford and Kissinger were calling the tune, because then, of course, Vietnam was something where we couldn't go ahead with any of the economic stuff because of the demands of Hanoi that it be cast as reparations and the unwillingness of the Congress to budge on that. And therefore, of course, China had to shift to be the more important relationship. And of course, as I said, we had a kind of role in that as well, in addition to being one of the turnover places when the communications were swamped for our newly established liaison offices in China. We would take the slack there, but in addition to that, of course, we had our own head of the liaison office, David Bruce, coming to Paris quite frequently, and we were interested in getting the French view on what was going on in China because this was, after all, a very significant time in China, with the demise of first Zhou Enlai and then Mao Zedong and the ups and downs of Deng Xiaoping. This meant that we, of course, had China far more on our screen and Paris was one of the places where we thought we could get information which would supplement and deepen some of our understanding of what was happening in China. So indeed, for that particular moment, China was far more important. When we had Nixon visit Paris for the Pompidou ceremonies, one of the key things he wanted to do while there was to see Deng Xiaoping when he was on his way through Paris to New York for the United Nations, and that didn't happen because he decided, I think very intelligently, that he did not want to give the French the impression that any stopover in Paris was to be able to see the American President. So he didn't show up, although I was taken to the ceremony for Pompidou.

Q: Are we talking about the funeral?

PRATT: Well, it was after the funeral. The funeral had taken place, and then they had a big reception, a memorial service sort of thing. And I was taken along with the Nixon crew to be the interpreter for Deng Xiaoping, should he arrive. In the end, since he didn't arrive, we did talk to the person from the Chinese Embassy because this was being organized by Nixon to give himself maximum international coverage as a way of defusing, or at least trying to make himself a little bit more popular in the United States, and to show also to anyone else that he at least was very popular abroad - as indeed he was. And he managed a very spectacular session at the Pompidou ceremonies, four or five people sort of moving him around and turning from one group to the next, and everybody was anxious to come up and talk to him. Of course, we had the general, Vernon Walters, as his major interpreter, because of course he could talk with the Russians and the French and the Italians and the Germans and so forth, but he didn't know Chinese, so I was there to take care of that.

So that sort of set the framework from, shall we say, the end of the Nixon Administration, and then through the Ford Administration China was increasingly important to them and also much more activity. But when Carter came in, then the activity shifted to Vietnam.

Q: What was Carter after, did you feel, at the beginning?

PRATT: Well, I think that he wished very much to erase this long war, probably as much for the United States domestic political scene as for anything to do with foreign affairs. But nonetheless they had the attitude of that more than apologies, one needed to try to reestablish friendliness and show Christian forgiveness et cetera, and this would mean that there would be a resumption, perhaps, of trying to give aid to Vietnam for reconstruction and then moving toward what he would call "normal political relations." And that's I think what the Leonard Woodcock mission was all about. It was very hard for us to know because, I guess on the President's instructions, persons who were not in the political appointee - and therefore politically reliable - group were not privy to what his real thoughts and real intentions were. I have seen very little that has come out from Freedom of Information Act queries which would clarify much of this, and we knew that there were a number of things which we were very much excluded from.

Q: Well, from your perspective, you were told Leonard Woodcock would be coming out. What were you doing? I mean was it airplane arrangements and that sort of thing?

PRATT: Yes. We were not told very much because, I think, they had only the most general descriptions which they were prepared to make available to lower-level people. They wanted to get directly through to persons whom they considered would be politically reliable in Hanoi and avoid very much of, shall we say, persons who would not be considered to be loyal by the top government figures in Hanoi. So we weren't told very much about the substance, as I say. Woodcock excluded the State Department people from most of his important conversations while he was in Hanoi. We would see what it was the State Department people drafted coming out of Hanoi, and it was fairly revealing, but nonetheless we knew that in many of the key meetings had people excluded, and Woodcock would not himself tell them what it was he had discussed, and he would say he would report back directly to the President upon his return. So this was very much something which had the flavor of a presidential operation.

Q: Well, in a way, was there sort of the feeling that Henry Kissinger and Nixon or Nixon and Henry Kissinger had sort of set the pattern for this type of thing, and so this was Brzezinski and Carter picking up, and this was considered this is really the way to get things done?

PRATT: Yes, I think that's quite true, and of course I think also the usual view, which of course being Republicans, would say the reason they couldn't trust the State Department is that it was composed of a lot of persons who had voted Democratic and were really not even closeted liberals. And the Democrats coming in would say these are persons who, if they could work for Nixon, you can't trust them. And therefore, also, of course, there they were coming up from Georgia, and here were persons who had worked in the Washington, DC, area for so long, and of course that meant that they were automatically not so trustworthy. Brzezinski, I think, also . . . of course, he had known Henry Kissinger. They were to a certain extent colleagues and ran across each other for quite a number of times over a number of years. And so I think he felt that this is a model to follow.

Now the fact that also you had a President whose initial interests were not that much in foreign affairs, was again also of significance. I think, Vance, who was an honorable man, was considered, however, not be within, shall we say, the closed sphere of Carter's friends. He was, after all, drawn from the New York lawyer establishment and he was not a Georgia, shall we say, political figure around Carter. And so the paranoia... and of course it's interesting that you see the paranoia at the same time you see considerable, shall we say, emphasis from a form of rather fundamentalist Christianity.

Q: As this went on - I'm trying to capture the spirit of the times - was there concern on your part personally that this Woodcock mission might try to give away the store, in other words, to make an abject apology, to promise reparations, and all that?

PRATT: Well, on the one hand, I personally did not feel - although I thought that this was the kind of action which would undermine much of what we might try to do elsewhere in Asia, because it would show us, I think, not really understanding what had really happened, because after all we had engaged in that kind of war for a relatively high-minded reason. There was nothing in it for us. We were not trying to establish or maintain an empire, like the French. We were just trying to basically get out gracefully at the end, and in the beginning we were trying to defend a kind of people. Maybe you'd call them Chechens against the Russians, but nonetheless they were a people in the southern part of Vietnam. Vietnam had never been one, even during the times of the empire it was handled in rather separate ways. But high-minded intentions were those, certainly, of both Kennedy and Johnson, but nonetheless, as I say, I don't think it would have hurt us terribly if that had been successful. On the other hand, we didn't really believe he could pull it off, because the Congress was very much of a different mind, and that included members of Carter's own party. In addition to that, Congress had the wherewithal to block it because a major thing which the Vietnamese wanted was the kind of money which would indicate that we were really saying that we caused the war and therefore we have a responsibility to reconstruct all of Vietnam, and the billions of dollars are given for that purpose. Well, the Congress was jolly well not either going to give or to be committed to be given that kind of etiquette. So we could feel that it was a rather misguided intention that the President had, but in any case that he couldn't follow through it. And of course, this is in the end what actually happened because they started conversations in Paris, and we had to arrange them, and Holbrooke came over and Phan Hien came from Hanoi, deputy foreign minister, and we talked and talked. And we don't know all that was discussed. We were there for the more formal set pieces, you know, 12 people around a table. But every time Holbrooke would go off in a corner with Phan Hien, and we would not know what had been discussed. They did not really get too far because Congress actually passed a resolution which was designed to make sure that whatever Holbrooke thought he was doing in Paris, whatever Carter wanted to do in Paris, the Congress would be on record as making sure that it was not including any money.

Q: Was money, from your perspective, foremost on the part of the Vietnamese?

PRATT: That was their foremost interest, and a symbolic gesture more important than the money itself. In other words, they were getting still a certain amount of subsidies from the Soviet Union, and they knew how they could use these subsidies and how they could run this, but if American aid were to be provided, then of course they had seen how American aid was provided elsewhere, and they knew that they wouldn't stand for that. And therefore, I think that the actual getting the money and the practical things it would do was something which was not high on the list of priorities of the Ho Chi Minh-oriented leadership. But getting it as a symbolic admission of the justness of the North's war and the aggressive nature of the U.S. intervention was key. It was the last thing which would show how they had been Marxist-Leninist correct all along. And this, of course, would be one which would be the best memorial to Ho Chi Minh and the best brownie points and gold stars for their performance as loyal inheritors of the Ho Chi Minh mission.

Q: How long were you there? When did you leave?

PRATT: I left in April of 1978. I was there about five years.

Q: Did you see any change in attitude in the various meetings and all that you were having with the Vietnamese? I'm talking particularly towards the -

PRATT: Not really, because, as I say, my contacts had been with mostly the working level, the person at a level comparable to mine, who was the intermediary, and he was always very businesslike. We did not engage in any kind of recrimination one way or the other. We always tried to be of assistance. We tried to make sure that both sides understood that we were available at any time night or day that a message came in because it was a horrendous problem at that particular point because you can imagine that in Washington you couldn't get anything cleared through probably until five o'clock or six o'clock on a Friday evening, which meant that your Saturday and Sunday were days when you had to be delivering messages to the Vietnamese, and they, on the other hand, were of course 12 hours out, and they'd come in with a message in the early afternoon, which would make the handing it over, and I had to get it in, of course, by noon Washington time. And then, of course, Washington would sometimes want to go back almost immediately with something or other. So it was late at night that we were often working and then also on weekends. So at that point it was not a very relaxing situation, and basically I was sort of told, at least from Washington, that they were going to be having some message coming through and therefore I shouldn't plan to go off for the weekend, but I couldn't call my friend O Tan and say, "You're going to have something coming in and therefore I've got to stay in town, or can I go off now to visit friends in the country?" So it was very difficult because we did have one occasion, I guess, when we did not mesh, and by telephone I couldn't be there in time for the transfer, and so we had to deputize somebody else to go and take the message. But that was only once.

But from their point of view, the top leadership, indeed, seemed more ingratiating, but they had been very ingratiating when we were having the talks in 1973 after the Christmas bombing. They knew full well that when they were getting what they wanted the best thing to do is smile and be jovial about it. Even the foreign minister, Nguyen Co Thach - subsequently he was purged apparently - was very gracious, sort of taking Churchill's view, when you're getting what you want you shouldn't bother about being impolite.

Q: Were you involved in the China connection, or was that pretty much . . . We had our office in China, so that was not . . .

PRATT: Well, when I first arrived in Paris in 1973, we didn't have the liaison office. It was being set up. And therefore I went along with Don Anderson, whom if you haven't interviewed you should -

Q: Oh, I've interviewed Don.

PRATT: Don was the one who was handling the turnover, but he was being taken out because he knew this was being reduced in frequency and importance as the liaison office went into effect, and also he was asked to go to Chukei to work there. And so this was something which went on for a few months, and then I took over that aspect, which within a matter of, oh, I'd say, six months was almost totally gone. However, we still had certain things which we were expected to do back and forth, and the Chinese became much, much more ingratiating once they had a formal permission from Peking to be more forthcoming.

Q: Did the Vietnamese-Chinese border war happen during the time you were in Paris?

PRATT: No, that was when I was in Taiwan. Dick Holbrooke did not particularly like having the conversations take place in Paris because it made it more difficult for him to handle the rest of his job as assistant secretary for East Asia. So he wanted to have them close at home, but they were established in Paris because both we and the Vietnamese had good communications from Paris. One of the key things was that the Vietnamese wanted to be able to have these talks without their being intercepted by Moscow. They could do that because they had their own dedicated communications from Paris to Hanoi. They were not, however, able to do so in many places in the world, and one of them, of course, was New York at that time. They had, of course, gotten their mission to the United Nations, and yet that, I believe, was piggy-backing on the Soviets. This was a subject which they themselves did not wish to, shall we say, have the Soviets peering over their shoulders. So it was a while, I guess they did establish decent communications form New York which they could consider secure. So this is where Holbrooke wanted to shift the conversation.

However, we were still making these arrangements in Paris, and much of the communication was done there. Whenever we had full-fledged meetings, they went there. However, one of the activities of the Vietnamese representative in New York, apparently, was involvement in a certain amount of espionage in the United States, including somebody who had recruited a member of the USIA, and we knew about this USIA problem in that the USIA chap had been trying to get a Vietnamese woman, with whom he had had an affair, out of Vietnam. And apparently this was considered to be a way of getting the girl out, to serve as an agent for Hanoi. And I don't believe he had - he certainly, I don't think, intended or wished to pass information of great value, but nonetheless, apparently there was enough of it so that they did have a court case over it, and the Vietnamese representative at the United Nations was named an unindicted co-conspirator, and we requested his withdrawal from the United Nations. That took place. This is when we decided, in April of 1978, that there was not much chance of anything important going on for a while with the Vietnamese. This was when I was told, go on to your next assignment, whatever that may be.

Q: You kind of wonder why they were bothering to espionage in the United States. Was it just sort of a reflex action?

PRATT: Oh, I think so. I mean it's like many persons working in that kind of job. If somebody comes in and says don't you think we ought to do such-and-such, and he says, "Well, you go ahead and do it. Don't bother me too much about it." But I think probably his involvement was only one of making sure that if the man came to him and said, "Listen, this what he told me, and here's a cable and here's another document," that he would make sure that they were pouched on to Hanoi, because of course there was no embassy in Washington.

Q: Well, then, in 1978 you moved on.

PRATT: Yes, in 1978 I got a call, and they said that we're going to have to replace our political counselor in Taipei because he's had a heart attack, and therefore we'd like you to go there, and since you're a bachelor and therefore more readily transferable and outside the regular cycle, we'd like you there as soon as possible. Go there. And of course, like most of my previous assignments, as you can see from the fact that there are five years here and five years there and so forth, most of my assignments were not bound to the usual State Department assignment process. So, I went flying out to Taipei. At that moment it was clear that China was again very much on the screen because they had not been able to move ahead and get anything important done with Hanoi, but the normalization of relations with Peking was very high on the agenda of Carter's team as well.

Q: So you were in Taipei from 1978 to when?

PRATT: 1978 until 1981.

Q: Was it an ambassador when you arrived there?

PRATT: Yes, Ambassador Leonard Unger, who had been my ambassador when I had been in Laos, was ambassador to Taiwan [Ed: Ambassador Unger presented his credentials in Taipei on May 25, 1974 and departed post January 19, 1979.]

Q: When you arrived there in 1978, the Carter Administration is getting cranked up, and there were sort of a number of things on the Carter agenda. One was the Panama Canal. Another ended up as Camp David. And then there was the normalization. This was the shoe that was going to drop, wasn't it? Was this, when you went out there, were you and Ambassador Unger and the whole place getting ready for this particular shoe to drop?

PRATT: Yes. Those of us who were adept at reading tea leave - and I had drunk too much tea in my life, that I could work out those tea leaves very easily . . . In fact, when I was given this assignment, while the Japanese ambassador, whom I had had quite a few dealings with because we had to get him following what we were doing with East Asia and with China and all the rest of it, he invited me for luncheon, and so I told him that, yes, I figured that the reason that I was being picked out was that they did hope - whether they could do it or not is a different matter - but the thing is they did hope to be able to make significant progress in a matter of months, within a year's time anyway, to establish relations with Peking. Therefore, that would be perhaps one of the things that I'd be working on. I had forgotten that the Japanese diplomatic correspondence, which was generally readily readable - I don't think that's true any more, but it was at that time generally readable - by the United States. And so, of course, the Japanese ambassador's account of my conversation in Paris was something which ended up on the desk at INR in a couple of day's time, and of course, they were saying, when I came through Washington, How could you tell them that? I said, "Well, I'd been told absolutely nothing. I'm really running on what it is that has been published in the New York Times and the regular American press and so on. So I'm just really . . . I have no inside information. I told him that. Didn't his cable say that?" He said, "Well, yes, he said you said that you had no direct information, that this was not something which had been discussed with you, and this is not therefore something that . . .but this is your personal view." I said, "Yes, I've got to be able to have a personal view when I'm asked a question." But I said, "The only problem is, of course, that the Japanese don't have enough sense to use their one channel, which is not readable by the U.S., and they didn't use it." And I said, "Now if I were to see the ambassador again, I'd wave my finger in his face and say, 'Now you're naughty-naughty, don't do that, protect your sources.'" But as I say, it didn't cause any great turmoil because, in the first place, it was not readable to the Soviets or the Chinese - it was only readable to the U.S., because we, apparently, knew how the Japanese -

Q: Well, this is also, knowing Carter and all, very much on the agenda.

PRATT: That's right.

Q: And particularly with Brzezinski. You got the feeling that Brzezinski was always looking over his shoulder and chalking up what he was doing compared to Henry Kissinger. I mean, you always felt that Brzezinski was trying to be more "Kissingerian" than Kissinger, in a way, to show his academic colleague up or something.

PRATT: Right. And also to show that he, as a former academic - and Kissinger was a former academic - that both of them could also act in the real world. And he did not want at all to have it appear that he was more cut off from handling practical matters than was Henry. But the other aspect was, you had a Secretary of State who was really very impressive in his own rights - Cy Vance - whereas, of course, Kissinger had - I shan't say a nonentity, but in any case - a Secretary of State who was more interested in appearing to be Secretary of State than in being Secretary of State. (I hope he's not going to be reading this.) But in any case, a very nice man-

Q: Very nice man, but you get this feeling-

PRATT: -but he did not want really to go head to head with Henry Kissinger unless Nixon asked him to, which of course was not what was in the cards. But in any case, Vance was a very different matter, and a very serious and well established Secretary of State. And also, as I discussed with the Japanese ambassador, Vance had made his trip to Peking and had come away, of course, with a big, flat no because of two or three matters. And I said, obviously in Washington, they're sitting down and evaluating what it is they can do to get around these three things.

Q: What were they?

PRATT: Mostly Taiwan. One was disestablishment of any relations with Taiwan, and that meant at that point we were just told there would be none. We asked about a liaison office; we asked about a sort of consulate general or something of the sort, and the Chinese said no to both. So we hadn't worked out what that could be. The end of the mutual defense treaty: they wanted it to end on the day of our establishment with Peking, in other words the transfer of relations. And the third was withdrawal of all U.S. forces from the area. Now there were a few other things along the way, too, but these were the big sticking points.

Q: It seems like the Chinese have some stake in establishing formal relations, too? What were we asking?

PRATT: We wanted to have our embassies, our liaison offices, upgraded to embassies, and we wanted to have access - although we had had pretty good access. Nonetheless, we wanted more access, and I think we wanted also even some military connections.

Q: Well, it does seem that the charge has been made again and again unto this very day that the Chinese sort of sit back and expect other powers to meet their demands, as opposed to . . . and they seem to cave in. It strikes me, looking as you explained it now, did that appear to you that here is China asking a sort of a barbarian nation to say if you want to deal with us you've got to do this and that, and we want to say, well, then you have to do this and that, too, or something?

PRATT: No, we had no real demands. We wanted a relation, and of course, what we wanted to do was to maintain as much as we could of the relationship which we had with Taiwan. And as I say, that was therefore the sticking point. We could agree on many other things, including what we would do about discussing policies in Asia and what we would do in the United Nations and so on. So indeed, the only real sticking point was that we wanted to hold on more to Taiwan than Peking wanted to let us do.

Q: Well, now, when you came back through Washington, beyond being reprimanded for using your own personal judgment on whither Chinese relations, you were going to a place where, obviously, you weren't the only one reading the tea leaves. Just about everybody in the foreign affairs establishment was looking at the same tea leaves. But were you given any guidance from the Bureau of East Asian Affairs, from Dick Holbrooke on down dealing with this?

PRATT: Well, I dealt primarily with Harvey Feldman, who was the Desk officer. I don't know whether you've interviewed him or not.

Q: I have to check. I think we may have [Feldman ADST Oral History interview started in March 1999].

PRATT: Well, if not, you had better do so because he's a very bright chap and did a very good job in sort of trying to manage this particular difficulty. As the Taiwan Desk officer he was very much tied in with Holbrooke and then of course also with Roger Sullivan. And I was told that one of the key things was that they were a bit concerned about Ambassador Unger's being excessively defensive of the Kuomintang and Chiang Ching-kuo. Ton the other hand, Roger Sullivan, who was the DCM there, was well thought of. When he rotated back to Washington, he went to the NSC at the White House. If you haven't interviewed him, he's a good person.

Q: Where is he now, do you know?

PRATT: He's up in Cape Cod. Harvey Feldman is in the Washington area. I don't know whether Roger ever comes down here or not. In any case, he wanted to go to a place where he could sail his boat. In any case, he was considered the one who was supposed to keep Washington's interests constantly pressed in Taipei, so that Unger would not be out of line. Obviously, one of the reasons why he might get out of line is that nobody wanted to tell him anything because they felt if they told him what to do and what not to do, he would go and perhaps tell Ching-kuo what he had been told, and they didn't want that to happen. So this was a rather difficult task to do. You are not often sent off to keep your ambassador in line, and particularly a career ambassador, one who has had three or four ambassadorial assignments and is, of course, fairly confident about his own ability.

Q: Who was DCM when you arrived?

PRATT: Well, Roger Sullivan had been DCM, and he was being withdrawn, and therefore I was supposed to handle the interim until they could get a new DCM in. It was going to be Bill Brown. I think you could talk to Bill Brown.

Q: I've had a long set of interviews with Bill Brown. Now when you arrived out there, how did you see the relations with Taiwan at that time?

PRATT: Well, let me just get myself there, because after the conversation in Washington, which included being informed about Brzezinski's trip to Peking, I went through Japan and, as usual, tried to see some of my contacts at the Japanese Foreign Ministry and elsewhere. And I happened to coincided with Brzezinski's travels through there. And it was very clear that Brzezinski at least thought he was going with the answers to the three questions from Peking and thought he could perhaps provide proper, suitable answers to move ahead. So that was the framework when I ran into some of the people in Brzezinski's party in Tokyo.

Q: Who were they?

PRATT: I'm trying to remember now who they were. They were people in the East Asian Bureau whom I had known.

Q: Were the people in Brzezinski's party, the ones you were talking to - we're talking about these would be professional colleagues-

PRATT: Yes.

Q: -as opposed to sort of political types.

PRATT: Yes, they weren't political types. These were the people in the State Department he had brought along, you know, to carry bags -

Q: What was their mood? Concern about whether we were giving away the store, or were they sort of feeling, Well, you know, I think we've made some real progress, or were they completely out of the information loop?

PRATT: No, they were in the information loop, and they thought really this time - although they did not know the details of how much Carter had told Brzezinski he could give - nonetheless they felt that they were taking a package which was designed to be acceptable. And therefore, while they couldn't be sure, because of course they hadn't consulted with Peking yet, nonetheless, they felt that the readings of the Vance trip and the requirements set forth at that time and what new they were taking would perhaps work. So this was a positive feeling on what was going to happen on the Peking side. So I arrived in Taipei, also as I say, with some of the things I had with my friends in Japan were that they thought also that we indeed - and I don't know how much we had briefed them on this - that we indeed were trying to get a package which would be acceptable to Peking. Now of course, the Japanese had already gone through their normalization procedure several years earlier [Ed: 1972] , and so they of course had a certain amount of experience and made a certain amount of judgment about what might sell in Peking.

So I arrived in Taipei really considering that this was going to be one of the key things which took place while I was there. And obviously this was not what I was suddenly thrust into, because of course it was business as usual, and to a certain extent a little bit more than usual because, obviously, there was a tendency to try to build up what the Taiwan military forces had in the way of armaments in advance of anything which might restrict us in the future. There was not requirement that Vance had received about the end of any military equipment transfer, but there was indeed a requirement for withdrawal of all U.S. forces. Now that would, of course, presumably include the MAAG, Military Assistance Advisory Group, which, of course, was involved in so much of what the Taiwan military had as their own capability, from the logistic front and utilization of armaments. And therefore, everybody knew that there was an importance in getting the military side cranked up as much as possible because if there were normalization - and of course in Taipei we had constantly to say if, not when - then, of course, it would be important to have the capabilities of Taiwan as advanced as possible at that time. So this was one of the key things which we were doing.

We had all kinds of military matters which we were involved in, and of course the ambassador, who would normally be the person who would go over and give either the good news or the bad news, depending upon what it was that was being asked by Taiwan and what the answer was that Washington gave, as I would normally accompany, because as political counselor I was also chief PM (politico-military officer), I had one deputy politico-military officer who unfortunately was not highly esteemed by our military colleagues, so I had to do more than what I might have had to do otherwise. So this was a key aspect also, of course.

The politics of Taiwan were very interesting. It was very much an authoritarian system, but an authoritarian system which was heading towards institutionalization, and that's I think one of the key contributions which Chiang Ching-kuo made, and he was one of the few, I think, in Asia riding the tiger who knew how to get off. When he died, of course, that did result in a totally different political structure.

Q: In the first place, just to give perspective, how had the Japanese handled their relations with Taiwan when you got there because this would, I think . . . here is a major country which has interests in both places, and so it would serve as a certain model for you to prognosticate how it might come out. How were they dealing with it?

PRATT: Well, obviously when the turnover actually did take place and we did recognize Peking, one of the few things which we had as a model was what we called the Japanese model or Nihon-moderu, anyway the Japanese unofficial presence was called the Interchange Association, Japan.. So I, of course, immediately got very close to the deputy head of their office. The head of their office was always an Italian ambassador who still had good contacts with Tokyo, but they had a presence seconded from the Foreign Ministry to be his deputy.

The Japanese Interchange Association was proposed as the model which we eventually had. So I indeed did have very frequent contacts with him, and we discussed how they handled all sorts of things. The Japanese system was different from ours. They are much better able to keep things out of their press and not to, shall we say, annoy Peking by having stories about what they are really doing. So they had a very big establishment there. It didn't look that big. Ours always looked much bigger, but they always were able to manage theirs so that the number of people who are obvious are fewer. They had, of course, a big economic connection, and that again was also something which was not nearly so obvious as ours because they often were able to have front men from the Taiwan side, and one of the things they were doing, for example, is using Taiwan as a way of getting preferential tariffs for Japanese manufacturers into the United States. And of course the U.S. has been the great, shall we say, absorber of so much of the economic development outside the United States. But they had this very great network, much of it going way, way back. One of the key persons in the Japanese Diet, whom I saw when I went through Tokyo, was considered the "Mr. Taiwan" for the Japanese Diet. He was in his 80s, and he happened to have been one of the young Japanese who had established the first golf course in Taiwan back in 1914 or something of the sort. So they had all of their old people, and for example retired Prime Minister Kishi would occasionally visit and so on. So they were able to do these things and go back and tell the Chinese that this was all totally unofficial. But of course the Chinese could well understand that in Japan almost all of these people are still official in some way or another and tied in with the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. We wouldn't have that kind of system, so we knew we had to be concerned about how we might do things. But then, of course, the Japanese told me, well, the important thing is just to make a faï¿½ade and then you tell the Chinese that this is then the unofficial faï¿½ade. One of the Japanese told me, he said, "When we went to the Chinese, they said just make sure everything is not official. And so we asked them, 'What is our definition of not official?' and they said, 'Well, you'll have to come up with that, because in China everything is official, and therefore your society is different and therefore if you say it's non-official, then obviously you know what that means because we don't.'"

Q: Well, now, when you got with Leonard Unger, you obviously had worked with him before and all that. Were you saying, "Look, this is going to happen," and as a political officer this is your advice, we had better get ready for this? I'm sure he'd been given this from others, too.

PRATT: Oh, sure, but the thing is, he had already been well aware of this, and the only thing he was doing, he was constantly trying to convince Washington that we should get a minimum of two weeks' advanced notice so Chiang Ching-kuo could make his preparations and let his key people know what was going on and so on. And I, of course, was telling him, I don't think that's what's going to happen because the problem was domestic American politics.

Q: In other words, you have to present Congress almost with a fait accompli.

PRATT: Well, enough to ensure that Ching-kuo has a sufficient fait accompli so that he can't go and try to go to Congress and to get them to pull his test and sound the fire.

Q: Which could happen

PRATT: Which could happen. I mean, it would at least complicate things. And so I said we won't get very much warning, but we're dealing with them all the time. We have bright people like Frederick Chen, the deputy foreign minister, who knows the United States very well. We have the President's illegitimate son [Ed: John Chang] as basically the key American watcher and one that I had constant back and forth with, and therefore we can say that we have no instructions and we have no information other than what we see in the press, but, you know, you can see what's going on. You have your very bright people in Washington, very much plugged in, able to get information which would astound most embassies. So you know, they're not going to be caught unawares.

Q: Well, how about when you got there, was sort of everybody ready for this particular shoe - I keep using the expression - to drop? This was there. It was almost so obvious.

PRATT: And it was, of course, a key preoccupation, and so many things which took place would be viewed from that angle: what does this mean? I mean the thing is they had, of course, the Vance trip and the Brzezinski trip. And then there were people waiting to see if there was going to be another trip and who was traveling from Peking to Washington and so forth. It was, indeed, a constant concern. I shan't say obsession, because they had these two other things on their minds, but when it came to the United States, that was the key one. Even when we were dealing with military equipment which we were providing, the question was what should we weed out of this equipment agreement? Is this designed to take care of this problem or that problem? We did not do much in the way of draw-down of our forces in Taiwan, and we did not cut into the role and importance of the Taiwan Defense Command, and we didn't cut back on, for example, on one occasion I accompanied the chief of the general staff on a visit to an aircraft carrier. We didn't cut back on things of that nature because, of course, we weren't anxious to indicate either to Peking or to Taipei that we were caving before we were caving. But nonetheless, as I say, this was the way in which everybody was looking at almost everything that took place between the United States and Taiwan: what does this mean about normalization? So on one occasion, for example, I was asked to give a briefing to what they called the diplomatic correspondents of all the newspapers. This was periodically arranged by our very active PAO (Public Affairs Officer). And so I went through all the press accounts of what had taken place. I said, "I'm giving you absolutely nothing which is drawn from any telegrams from Washington. We are basically not very much consulted about things of this sort because we're the ones who are going to have to be passing the message, and they don't want to give us any more of a heads-up than they have to, but as I read the same kind of tea leaves that you ought to be reading, mainly what's in the New York Times, what has been said by various people after various trips and so on, then it looks, indeed, as though the effort is indeed being made to normalize relations with Peking, and for what they consider to be very good reasons. And of course there will be an impact on Taiwan, and you all know what Peking has required of the French, of the Japanese, and therefore, you know, look around you and see that that indeed will have an impact."

Well, there again, that was misplaced, because one person who had not attended the dinner and heard my briefing and heard all the strictures that it was not based on anything from Washington, DC, and so forth, played it in an AP [Associated Press] report back to the United States saying that the American Embassy had just informed the Foreign Ministry that it was moving ahead on normalization. And you can imagine the blistering call that came in. And so, as I say, this was a person, the AP stringer, or rather the AP person there, was a person of Chinese origin - I don't know whether he had American citizenship or not, but in any case, he was very much under the discipline of the Government Information Office, and he would never have sent that story without the approval of Fred Chen, who had previously been head of GIO [Government Information Office], and obviously this was designed to see whether they could get some information out of the State Department to confirm or deny, et cetera. It really was a pretty nasty, low move, and I let all the reporters know it, that this was not what we . . . Everything was supposed to be off the record, and I had told them I was giving nothing which was in the way of classified information, there was nothing which was official. It was just my view of how things were moving in my own country and in Peking. Well, that was in, I guess, September or October.

Q: Of 1978.

PRATT: Of 1978, yes. And so of course, things quieted down a bit, and we though, well, maybe it won't happen until maybe the Congress reconvenes in February or March. Surely the President would never want to be showing that he is showing due deference to Congress by having it take place, actually, when Congress was back in session. Even though he won't tell them in advance, nonetheless, he wants them to be able to respond.

And we said, "And besides, of course, Taiwan is holding its first probably really significant election under Chiang Ching-kuo's efforts to normalize the political structure and get it closer to, say, what their actual constitution is, which means recognizing the fact that they're only the government of the people who are living on Taiwan, and therefore they have to show decent respect for the opinions of the people on Taiwan and to hold elections which are going to be real elections. Well, they were scheduled for the 20th or so of December, and so much of our activity at that time was trying to figure out just how they were going to run these elections, and much of our contact with what had become the DPP [Democratic Progressive Party] which was at that time was called the Tangwai - 'outside the party' or 'non-party' group. So that was our focus at that time, which then shifted to the major internal political development, which were elections. And we sent in quite frequent reports about how the elections were shaping up and how important they were, and how they would not change the KMT's real hold on power, but nonetheless they would show a progression toward something other than a single-party system.

Q: How were you reading this? Were you seeing that there really were developments within the Taiwan political structure that really were encouraging?

PRATT: Oh, yes, very much so. See, I had been there in the language school as a student in 1959, and there I was back basically 20 years later, and there had been, of course, considerable changes. And we saw that more were being planned by Chiang Ching-kuo. And one of the key things was the effort to find a way of getting a role for the Taiwanese as Taiwanese, instead of their being just an adjunct of the Mainland-dominated Kuomintang. They had, in 1977, local elections, which had resulted a bad riot in Chung-li, where they had been faced with the dilemma of being unable to control the demonstration without sending in regular troops, and the alternative, as I say . . . well, the demonstration ran wild and burned down a police station, which from their point of view was very bad symbolically. And yet the other alternative of sending in untrained Taiwanese troops was even more horrendous, because would they actually fire upon their own people? So they refrained from doing that, and the police station was burned, and police cars and other cars were burned, and so on. And that left a very bad feeling, and, you know, is this going to be possible to liberalize without having things come apart. And that of course was one of the big debates within the Kuomintang party structure and the security services and the military. So this was obviously a key period, and this, as I say, I got there in 1978, and the thing that still dominated the internal political scene was that riot there in Chung-li during the previous elections.

Q: Had our embassy prepared for the shock of recognition or something, because the embassy had been the target of a riot years earlier? Was there a good plan of what to do and all? Particularly the thought would be that, yes, there probably would be demonstrations, and considerable ones, once we did this. Were we getting ready for this?

PRATT: Yes, we were, and we were making sure that we did not . . . the same way with the military establishment, but we always figured the military establishment they would not go after because that would be something where our military friends would say, "We don't want to alienate the admiral. We can alienate the ambassador, but let's not alienate the admiral because we may depend upon him in the future." But we made sure that we did not keep materials that we didn't have to. We had a pretty thoroughgoing review of what we had in the way of holdings and what we could have in the way of protection. We had, of course, a wall around the embassy. We had Marine guards, and they were told what they could use. We eventually had to do some of these things. But, no, that's fine, we knew we had to be ready for it. What we would do about housing, we thought they wouldn't go after any of these people in their housing, and of course a lot of them lived up in Yangminshan, which is very close to the area in which a lot of the bigwigs of the Kuomintang lived, and therefore we felt that they would be very unlikely to do anything in that area. But we did consider that this would be one of the things which might occur. As you are aware, it was the Christopher mission when it did really happen. But in addition to that, we were finding it difficult to use our embassy after the 15th, and we did basically for a time meet in a room in the Tienmu area, piggy-backing on the military. Then when the military were out, we then had no premises, of course, because we had had to turn over our embassy to the Taiwanese Government, and we were meeting in our homes. So we were indeed preparing, but knowing full well that it was hard to be [end of tape].

Q: We have your elections coming up December 20th, and you're getting ready for this, and Congress has been adjourned by this time, I guess.

PRATT: Yes, and so we were sort of saying, Well, we will have finally the elections for it, and then after that we will probably wait and see what happens back in Washington. And of course one should remember this was also the Christmas season, and so there were a number of Christmas parties being held and some of those big public ones, where the Ambassador would represent the U.S. - the Chamber of Commerce and things of that sort - and others would be private ones where you would be at a friend's home. And so come the night of the 15th, I was off at a private dinner at the CIA station chief's house, and the Ambassador was off at a big dinner at the Chamber of Commerce, and a telephone call came through. And finally they tracked me down, and Roger Sullivan said, "Where are you all? We've been trying to get in touch with somebody there." And I said, "Well, the Ambassador is off at an official dinner. If you want me to get a message to him, I can do so." And he said, "Yes, get him over to a secure phone in the Taiwan Defense Command. We want to tell him what he's supposed to be doing."

Q: By the way, the Taiwan Defense Command was our office.

PRATT: Yes, it was set up under the Mutual Defense Treaty, and it was located in the northern part of town, and it was a fairly large area because, of course, it was a complex, in that they had several different spots. But the major part was just up near the airport - the then airport which was within the Taipei city limits. So I got in touch with Unger, and the two of us went to the Taiwan Defense Command for the secure phone conversation. And in the secure phone conversation, Roger Sullivan told him the message would be coming through, and it would be a White House channel message but coming through the station. So I had alerted my friend who was the station chief before, and so he knew enough to go to where we would be . . . where the station office was, so we would get the message as quickly as possible. Their office was over near the MAAG, so we were there where the station was, which was much bigger, of course, not just a little part of the embassy, but had its own operation there. So the message came in and told us to... in fact, we were told on the telephone, we spoke to them, and originally they said tomorrow morning, and it was just about 20 minutes advanced warning to Ching-kuo what we were doing. And eventually Unger, if you interviewed him you'd find out that he was able to persuade Washington to let us do it almost immediately to get the maximum amount of time, not changing the time we were going to do anything in Washington, but making it a little bit more time for Ching-kuo to get his people somewhat organized. So we got the message, and finally we got through to James Soong, who has currently had problems of a political nature in Taiwan, to get through to the president. And as we learned later, they got through to the head of the National Security Bureau, the NSB, who was among the, I guess, only two or three persons who were permitted to wake the president. In other words, the foreign minister was not on this list. The chief of the General Staff was on the list, and formerly the defense minister - I don't know whether _____ I guess at that time he still could do it. So just a very small number of people could put the establishment running so someone could go in and wake the president, because he had insomnia and therefore nobody really wished to face him unless they had to, and the only one who was willing to do so was the head of the NSB. We didn't know that at the time because he was not in evidence when we went over to the president's office. There was Fred Chen there and James Soong as interpreter.

So we delivered the message, and Ching-kuo asked for a written version rather than one which was just read to him, which he would be able to retain, because in it there were reassurances from Carter that the U.S. would continue to be concerned about the security of the people on Taiwan and be opposed to anything which would be, shall we say, a military operation on the part of the mainland against Taiwan, a peaceful solution. I've forgotten just how it was worded, but that would be the gist. And Ching-kuo, in a very sober and very statesmanlike way, said that he thought that we would regret this, that we had made a decision that would not turn out well and we would be sorry. But obviously he had seen it coming. So we went back and reported to Washington through the same channel and finally a few hours later got back a written version of the message which was delivered orally, and we went over and delivered that to his office at his home, which was on a naval base at Tamsui River.

So that was, shall we say, the break, and the turnover was, of course, to take place on January 1, 1979, and the departure of the military three months later and the termination of the Mutual Defense Treaty, in accordance with the required one year's advance notice. So Brzezinski had been able to establish the fact that, yes, we would have no consulate general, no liaison office, nothing resembling an official establishment, and we would do something, as we were learning later, on the order of what the Japanese had done. And then we would break the treaty, but with one year's delay. The Chinese, of course, were not very happy about it. They had agreed to it. And then we would withdraw all American forces, and of course we interpreted that to mean not only Taiwan Defense Command but also MAAG, which then we would have to have under the unofficial office, retired military, and again to manage what the active-duty military had done. So he had been able to get slight modifications to the Peking demands and ones which we felt we could live with. Our basic principle was the maintenance of practical and real relations, and the symbolic things having to go Peking's way. This is one of the things which, of course, was very difficult for Taipei because they were just as Chinese as the people in Peking, and therefore symbols may have meant as much to them as they did to the people in Peking. I don't think that's so true of the Taiwanese population, which is why things are somewhat changing now, although still symbols remain very important in all of Asia, including there. But nonetheless, at that particular time we had a leadership which was composed of elderly mainlanders, for whom the symbolism was again one more humiliation after the symbol of their leaving their home provinces of Chekiang or Chiangsu. So this was indeed very rough for the top leadership, and Chiang Ching-kuo obviously was going to have his hands full trying to manage this. We knew that, and so we, of course... But Unger was deploring that he couldn't get any more time. But I think, really, he made quite a contribution by apparently being able to convince somebody. They couldn't get in touch with the Congress. They couldn't get any bad things done, and if we gave them a few extra hours, so for God's sake, let's give them their early morning hours to do whatever they wanted to do and to tell whatever they wanted to tell so that they could have a statement ready for their own people at the time when the U.S. statement was being broadcast.

Q: Well, when you were doing this, was it clear that we would have a relationship? I mean, we really weren't pulling out. It was the symbols that were changing, but not the realities.

PRATT: Well, we knew that there was a certain amount of the reality which would go with the symbols, particularly the Taiwan Defense Command and the MAAG. And therefore this would have to be handled differently. But my personal view was that the people in Taiwan have always been very resilient and capable, and therefore would work out a way to handle this. And also even when it came to the problem of, shall we say, losing the symbol of an embassy and not being able to use the Foreign Ministry openly because we couldn't go there, nonetheless, they'd be able to work that out, too. In other words, the U.S. would have its problems, and probably some of these problems would be much worse here than they were there because we would have the difficulty of the American media and their role, of the Congress and its carping, and therefore it's very hard for us to do something, particularly since this is not an American game. From the very beginning, from the time when Nixon worked out his Shanghai Communiquï¿½, we sort of agreed to play a Chinese game about Taiwan - in other words, forget about reality and be concerned about the symbols and try to manage this unreal world of symbol. And so that had started way back in 1972. And so we knew that this would be very uncomfortable for us because the United States does not really . . . I mean, I had to go through the so-called "secret war" in Laos when there was absolutely nothing secret about it, and yet to the American press and to the critics and all the rest of it, they used this symbolic thing "secret" - you won't admit it, and therefore you're making it a secret. And so in the same way, you're going to have an embassy in everything but name there, you're going to try to manage things exactly as they were in the past, and there's no change over the role of the American military in the area, and we're going to continue to do this, that, and the other thing even though you say you aren't. Well, that's very difficult for the United States to manage, because this is not an American-type game. Face is indeed important in the United States, but it is not the same kind of game as the one we embarked on with Peking.

Q: It's hard for the press, in a way, to deal with ambiguity. They want to pin this down - what does this really mean? - and all that.

PRATT: And does that mean, you know, is the treaty in force or not? And so you'll have the Congress coming out and saying, Well, the Taiwan Relations Act is the law of the land. Well, what does that mean, and so forth? So indeed, because when the normalization took place, the intention of Carter was to have a far more modest . . . In fact, he originally had just an executive order which permitted us to operate. We had considerable problems, of course, legally, because where's the money coming from? If we didn't have an embassy in Taipei, what budget was the money coming out of, how much of it was going where, and what kind of things could we do? All of that, you see, had to be -

Q: And who is going to staff it?

PRATT: That's right.

Q: You have a Foreign Service, but they can't be Foreign Service.

PRATT: That's right. So how that was going to be worked out, they couldn't even address that kind of question until after the major decision was made because they couldn't inform the people who handled budget and fiscal and the legal department. The Department's legal bureau was involved in some of the major aspects of, for example, the lapsing of the defense agreement with Taiwan, but there wouldn't be enough people involved to look at all the other aspects. They looked at quite a few, and they had a few people involved in it, but still much of it had to be done after December 15th. And we had a cutoff date, basically, of June 1st, when the ambassador was expected to be out, and we had to pull down the flag in our embassy and no place to run it up.

Q: I thought this might be a good place to stop, Mark. We've come up to December 15, 1978, and we've talked about informing the president of Taiwan what was going to happen and all, and we've talked about the complexities of what we were going to do, but these have not yet been resolved, and so we'll talk about the reaction on Taiwan, how we responded, and how things played out during that time.

PRATT: Very good.

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Q: Today is the 24th of January, 2000. Mark, December 15, 1978: alright, what happened?

PRATT: Well, we pulled the plug, as we had been making it very clear that we were going to, from the point of view of Taiwan. As you know, there is a lot being written now about how this occurred, and of course, accusations going back and forth. I'm sure you've seen the Foreign Affairs and Tyler's article and his book [Ed: Tyler, Patrick, A Great Wall: Six Presidents and China: an Investigative History. (19990], and then the answer from Carter and Brzezinski.

Q: You're referring tan article in Foreign Affairs of September-October 1999 called "Dancing with China," by Patrick Tyler. Yes?

PRATT: And then the answer by Carter and Brzezinski.

Q: Yes, which was in the November-December 1999 Foreign Affairs.

PRATT: And also there's another book by James Mann [Ed: About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China, From Nixon to Clinto(1999) about this sort of thing, and they all, of course, try to go in and analyze just how the American political process worked and what people had in their minds. And I think part of the problem that we had, of course, if we're still arguing about this 20 years later and still having varying accounts of what really happened, and of course Carter being indignant saying, "Listen, I was President, and therefore I know what happened, because I did it all," then, of course, really it's going to be very difficult to see what we were doing out there in Taipei at that time.

Q: Anyway, let's take you, and what happened?

PRATT: Well, as we were handling this at that end, we of course had a perspective which was primarily looking at what the Taiwan aspect would be because that is what we were being paid for. I don't think we were given much credit for that because, as you are well aware, many of the Democrats had a very strong anti-KMT bias because, of course, they looked at the KMT as being the favored child of the Republicans, which indeed was the case with Barry Goldwater and all the others. Therefore, they were very surprised to find that after recognizing Peking and of course treating Taiwan somewhat shabbily, they found that the Democrats in the Congress were the ones who spearheaded many of the things which they were opposed to, and appeared to be supporters of the Kuomintang.

Well, of course, our principal point, when we were there in Taiwan, was you cannot just deal with a bunch of strutting mainlanders, corrupt and ideologically driven and all the rest of it, and particularly centered back on their mistakes on the mainland, because this was a gerontocracy for the most part. Even Chiang Ching-kuo, who was next generation, had to deal with the buddies of his father, some of whom are now still alive and in their 100s. Madame Chiang, for example, is going to be 103 shortly. Well, we did not consider that that was the major part of what we were there for handling the Taiwan side of things, because we considered that the majority of the population there, 85 per cent of it, was not Mainlander and not necessarily KMT. And therefore we had to be as concerned about this group of people and how we did things, and therefore we felt that there was a good way for the United States to behave and a relatively impolite way, a way in which we would not like to be viewed by history as having handled this side of the equation. As you I'm sure are quite aware, there was absolutely no concern whatsoever on the Carter team about human rights in China.

Q: We're talking about Mainland China.

PRATT: Mainland China. They had gone through and, in fact, barely gotten out of the Cultural Revolution, which was one of the most horrendous periods of any country. It makes the anti-White campaign that Lenin fought relatively moderate by comparison.

Q: You're speaking about the anti-White Russian...

PRATT: Yes, so our view was that there was a way of doing things which was commensurate with U.S. sense of values, and we knew that Tricky Dick had felt that he had to do a relatively tricky thing to get by the bumps in the road about what you'd say about Taiwan, in order to be able to get things through Peking. And he could do that with Mao Zedong in 1972, and he did it by playing a Chinese game, namely, conceding questions of face, symbol, while maintaining the reality. He wanted to go beyond that, of course. He wanted to normalize relations with Peking, and yet every point along the way he had other things, which, of course, intervened. And of course, that particularly was the problem with the Congress over Watergate and so on. But we all saw that the 1972 game was indeed a Chinese game. We, of course, knew why the Chinese wanted it and what the limits were and what basically some of the rules were. But it was key to us to keep in mind the fact that this was not an American game and we had to take care of American values and interests our old way at the same time we see this in questions of face and symbol to the Chinese-type game.

Q: I want to move you back to you on Taiwan, December 15, 1978, and on. What were you experiencing and observing?

PRATT: Well, we, of course, had to try to get our own status there and our own arrangements worked out because we were not only going to have the embassy closed within two weeks, or just about two weeks - January 1, but we also had to bring down the flag, we had to leave those premises, we had to find other places which we could operate from. We had to figure out new rules of how we would do this, because of course since the "experts" in the Department of State had been excluded from much of the arrangements with Peking, it was taking a while for them even to find out what it was that Brzezinski and company had actually agreed with Peking, and therefore what it is that we had to do, beyond, of course, the basic parameters, which were very clear, namely the termination of the defense treaty, the withdrawal of all forces within three months and so on, shutting down of our embassy by January 1 - the basic lines were there, but the point is that there are always many practical things that you have to figure out how you do, and you have to be able to work out with the host government side how they're going to permit it to be done, and you also have got to be able to tell them clearly what it is they have to do in the United States.

Q: Were you also, more immediately, having to prepare for mobs and that sort of thing?

PRATT: Well, we expected that to happen, and that was - I shan't say the least of our worries, but it was one where we did have to get our security further cranked up. We had to get rid of a lot of things we wouldn't want to have around. Dumping tapes went too far. But we also had to make sure that we told the government that we wouldn't stand for too much of this, that we didn't think that the people on Taiwan would either, and therefore they'd better handle this carefully.

But of course the first step was we had to prepare for the arrival of Warren Christopher and the American delegation, which was going to set forth the policy, explain everythinSomething which, of course, they weren't really able to do because they hadn't been able to work everything out either. And of course, it was labeled as a kind of negotiation, but Warren Christopher made it very clear that there was no negotiations; he was here to tell them what it was we had decided and what it was we were going to do, and what it was they were going to have to do. This was, of course, a relatively highhanded and not very polite way of handling this. Of course, Warren Christopher himself was very polite and very much the gentleman and very cool and I think did as well as anyone could the difficult job of trying to find a little way of stroking the people in Taiwan.

However, on his arrival, the biggest demonstrations of all were set up, and these were, in a very hectoring fashion, announced as being designed to show how the people of Taiwan resented what had been done and how the "just anger" of the people of Taiwan was being given free rein to show Christopher and the other American side how they really felt, and that this should be something he should take back to President Carter and the American people, that this was something which had indeed angered them greatly.

Fred Chen was the deputy foreign minister, and he finally made a speech at the airport when they arrived, wagging his finger a bit, and saying in sufficiently general terms but terms which afterwards were considered to have included the fact that there was going to be a mob scene and there would be actually an attack on the motorcade. Now we considered that this was orchestrated. This was KMT-run Taiwan. You won't get this number of people together without having it organized and having permission being given. And the fact that they moved in portable johns and had other conveniences made available showed that they were indeed making their own organized demonstration, and not something which was the "righteous anger" et cetera et cetera. Some of the few people who really did feel some of this were the veterans from the Mainland. There were still quite a few of them around, and in fact, we knew that we were going to have real trouble when they told the ambassador that he should not use his car but the Foreign Ministry would provide a car for him and for Christopher, and then the other cars would also be provided and no embassy car should be used and no embassy drivers used. In other words, taking it out of our power, and also that meant that if there were damaged cars, there would be no claims by the American Government for damage to American cars, which they then would have to have the indignity of having to pay claims on. So this was all designed, I think, the way they had in previous demonstrations, to show that unlike the May 4th Movement in 1919, there were not grounds for the people of Taiwan to consider that their own government was acquiescing in something a foreign government did which was against their interests.

Q: Was there any proposal saying, well, you know, this is moving, maybe Christopher shouldn't come in, which is a perfectly legitimate response to this? To say, "Okay, fellows, if this is the way you want to play it, so be it, but we're not going to be the patsy in this."

PRATT: Well, there was sufficient indication that something might occur, but every time Unger talked to them about this, they said, Oh, no, these are our precautions being taken to make sure something doesn't get out of hand. And at the same time they were giving him assurances that they would guarantee the safety, et cetera, et cetera. And so what could Unger, who was anxious to have some kind of American gesture to make up for the rather shabby way in which this had been handled, to show that the U.S. Government at least was going to listen to their problems and this could be registered and taken back to President Carter by a high-level emissary. So he was most anxious to have this tape played, and of course anxious not to be unaccommodating. So we were accepting their reassurances. Now I'm not saying they did not play it relatively well. There were only a small number of incidents where they'd really get out of hand, where they broke a few windows and so on. I must say that the drivers they assigned were very disciplined, despite the fact that they themselves were retired soldiers or still maybe active-duty soldiers - Mainlanders, all of them - and therefore they had their strict orders, and they were going to follow them. But they personally were not very happy with what had occurred, and one could see that when they saw the people coming up waving anti-American banners and all the rest of it, they shared those sentiments perhaps more than the persons who actually were carrying the banners, which had probably been written for them by other people.

We learned afterwards, for example, that they mobilized the students from several universities and got them all out there, and of course the students were resentful of being mobilized and sent out to do this thing because they didn't particularly agree with it. A lot of them, of course, were ethnic Taiwanese. And so they, of course, were not, shall we say, with the mindset of the old KMT people, but they were forced to do this anyway. They were given eggs, and one told me afterwards, "Well, I asked, 'Are these rotten eggs, and they said, 'No, no, we don't want to do that. These are fresh eggs.'" Well, they stuck them in their pockets and took them home and ate them. But for some of them it was just a lark, but there are a number of old-time Mainlanders who could infiltrate this crowd of people fairly well controlled and get out of line. But they had security people there in plain clothes designed to grab them and pull them away before they had a chance to do too much damage. Now they did knock off Leonard Unger's glasses and they scratched his face, and in our car, I was in the second car with Mike Armacost and a few others from Christopher's party, and we were basically lightly targetted. The car was shaken, and I think a windshield was cracked or something of the sort, but it was basically pretty minor.

Q: If I recall, Bill Brown was saying in his ADST interview that Fred Chen, after giving his speech, took off and went in a different direction, and Christopher made due note of this and never forgave him.

PRATT: That's right. Not only that, he figured that what he said . . . Well, obviously, we were going one direction, and Fred wasn't, but it was just even getting out of the airfield area. Fred Chen, when he crossed the tarmac and very clearly with design to avoid the demonstration completely, so it wasn't as though he was going to escort anybody to where they were going.

Q: That's a very . . . you know, I mean, just plain . . . I would say rude is even the wrong term, it's greater than that. I mean to say, "Okay, Fellows, we're going to go after you. We'll try to keep it under control, but I'm sure not going to be around of this."

PRATT: "I'm not going to risk it." Yes. Well, we thought, however, that Fred was as much orchestrated as anybody else. So I never held it against Fred because I think that he was really surprised at what happened, and he would have advised against going, not because he wasn't as angry as many of the other Mainlanders, because Fred's been an angry man every since he was probably in his teens, but nonetheless he was not involved in this part; he was merely told what his role was, to be the person who welcomes them at the airport, and such a welcome! I think he played it badly. I would have found it difficult to go through even the kind of speech which he gave, but he didn't realize that he was making the kind of threat which they intended to follow through on in such a physical fashion.

Q: Well, now, you have been making a difference between the Mainlanders and the Taiwanese. I will say, at the time, both before and after December 15th, was there a relatively clear-cut difference between the Mainlanders and the Taiwanese regarding America policy?

PRATT: Yes, very clearly, because the Mainlanders of course were still fighting the Marshall Mission and what they saw as the cutoff of American aid on the Mainland. They considered that the U.S. was the one responsible for their having lost China and for their having to move out of their palaces in the French Concession in Shanghai and losing all of the prestige of being a minister for all of China. One of my friends from Tokyo put it succinctly "Do I want to go down there and be so-called prime minister of so-called Republic of China, which is merely one province?" So the Mainlanders were all very filled with anger with the United States. They think that we have handled China badly for years. The Taiwanese had none of this. The only thing they blamed us for was supporting the KMT in such a fashion that their ambitions for their own island were being given so little weight in the councils of the top KMT leaders. Remember they only had a few token Taiwanese in the KMT, even as late as when I was there. It was not until basically after 1980 that there began to be a more substantial role for Taiwanese, even within the councils of the top KMT leaders. So they indeed looked at the U.S. very differently. They considered that we should have continued with what it is we intended to do originally, in the early 1940s, which was to free Taiwan from Japan and give Taiwan its independence.

Q: Well, now, again, before we talk about developments, you were talking about how shabbily the United States treated Taiwan. In realistic terms, I think you'd mentioned last time, we both agreed, that announcing the change in relations almost had to be done as a fait accompli because Congress would be fighting it out to this day. "If 'twere done, 'twere best 'twere done quickly," but what could have been done that would not have sparked a firestorm, particularly in the Senate and all that, do you think?

PRATT: Well, in the end, as you know, the Congress got its revenge. It passed the Taiwan Relations Act, and we are still today - after all we are 20 years later - and we are still fighting exactly the same battle which we had in 1972, so we've not ended the battle.

Q: Do you think that we could have come up with a reasonable solution that would have been reasonable both to the Communist rï¿½gime and to the Taiwanese rï¿½gime at that time?

PRATT: Of course, we didn't have a Taiwanese rï¿½gime. We had a Mainlander, Chekiang/Chiangsu, rï¿½gime on Taiwan, and we had a Sichuan rï¿½gime emerging in Peking, but yes, I think we could have done something differently, done better. I think in the first place we would have had to rely a little bit more on people, one, who understood Peking better - and admittedly Peking is not easy to understand (just this last week there were stories of a bomb attack against Zhang Zemin, which turns out to be a kind of hoax, but something happened there in Shaban), so we still don't know what goes on very well in China. However, there are certain things we can know better than others. Secondly, we did not have to have the view which people like, I don't think Mike Oksenburg was this superficial, but many others were, and that is once we withdraw recognition, Taipei will come and accept Peking's terms very soon, a matter of two or three years, maybe even before the end of Carter's first administration and certainly before the end of Carter's "second" administration.

Q: Do you think that was the thinking?

PRATT: That was the thinking of many people. In fact, one scholar, Eric Akenshaw [Ed: ?], says that this is why they felt we could afford to do this, because they felt that the KMT was so cut off from the Taiwanese and Taiwan that they would recognize Peking as a way of making sure that the Taiwanese never got into power on Taiwan. And when they saw the demography working so that gradually the sons of the top Mainlanders went off to the United States and very few remained behind, and as the Taiwanese took over, the Mainlanders would pull a sellout and invite Peking in and have them land at the various airfields, which they would control through the military, and turn the island over to Peking regardless of what the people on Taiwan thought.

Now those of us in the embassy (still an embassy then) considered this was not the way things would work out. We didn't know exactly what the Mainlanders, many of them, might try to do, but we felt that they would not be able to accomplish it. I talked to one of the Taiwanese, really a rather significant leader, and we mentioned the fact, what if, for example, it looked as though Mainlanders were trying to pull a sellout and were trying to get the military set up to be able to invite in Peking's military to turn the island over to Peking? And he said, "Oh, we'd have to kill them all." And of course by that time, the military was sufficiently Taiwanese (although the officer corps and particularly the top officer corps was not) and a lot of Taiwanese had gotten well enough connected with them so that they would be able to make sure that the military could not pull off what some of them might have intended to do. We didn't think that they intended to do it, either. We thought this was a miscalculation on the part of those persons who were so virulently anti-KMT, so virulently against Chiang Kai-shek and all that he stood for-

Q: We're talking about Americans.

PRATT: Americans, yes - that they could not see that Taiwan had already changed enormously and that the Taiwanese were very significant players even though they were not among the top people who would be greeting them at the airport or seeing them at the top ministry.

Q: Well, now, going back to 1978, at the time this theory was sort of floating around, what would have been in it for the Mainlander officer corps or political leaders to invite the Communist rï¿½gime in? What would have been in it for them? What was the thinking?

PRATT: Not enough at that time, by that time. And of course, also one thing they failed to understand was that so many of the top leaders of Taiwan were already persons who had made their major career on Taiwan. Sure they had been born on the Mainland, they had been educated on the Mainland, they might have had minor positions on the Mainland, but the positions they had had where they had made the greatest accomplishments were on Taiwan, and therefore although they were Mainlanders and although they really looked down their noses at the Taiwanese, nonetheless they were persons who considered that their major career had been made on Taiwan and that's what they were proud of, and therefore they had a stake in Taiwan. But you couldn't tell this to the people who were living with the concept of the Kuomintang as it was in the 1950's.

Q: Well, now, another question about this. Just as a practical thing, we're sitting in an embassy. We had to so-called give up the embassy. Why couldn't somebody wave a wand and say, "This is no longer an embassy; this is a private office building"? Why did we have to go find other quarters?

PRATT: Because of the symbol, and as I told you, we were playing China's game when it came to symbols. The embassy was U.S. Government property. There was no way. I mean, we sold it.

Q: What did we do now? I mean, what were you doing during this time after the recognition? Christopher came. What was your reading on Christopher and dealing, once he got through the motorcade and all? What were you doing?

PRATT: Well, I went with the motorcade to where we were supposed to have our people be staying, which was the Grand Hotel, so my car got there because the ambassador decided that there might be something still happening at the hotel because we were scheduled to go there. So he went to his residence he had up in Yangminshan.

Q: With Christopher.

PRATT: With Christopher, yes. We were then in telephonic communication, and we conveyed the message back to the Taiwan side that we would not be attending the foreign ministers' dinner. That was canceled, obviously, in view of the manner in which we had been received.

Now the new foreign minister - because when we recognized on the 15th the foreign minister submitted his resignation because, of course, he had failed to hold on the American connection, and the new foreign minister was, I think, a very fine gentleman and not at all as unpleasant and difficult as his predecessor. So we were anxious not to affront him personally because we believed he had nothing to do with this. He would have advised against it, and yet, of course, he was not in the loop for that sort of thing. They were not concerned with what they could do to with the internal security. However, we felt that it was certainly wrong symbolism to be conveyed if we were to be his guest at a dinner, so we moved directly to having the first substantive meeting the following day, and also we arranged for a call on the president, who was not supposed to be involved in the negotiations, but we said that we would not even begin negotiations until we there had been a meeting with the president to express our displeasure at what had occurred and to get assurances that nothing more of this nature would take place. And this is when Bill Brown went on this trip, and I'm sure he gave you a very thorough and good account of how Wang Ching-shi, the head of the Taiwan Garrison General Headquarters, was put in charge of all the security for our stay there and told directly by the president that he had full power to make sure everything was maintained in a good, calm way. And of course, he was a very honorable gentleman. Unfortunately, he was married to the daughter of Admiral Hu Ling-ching, who had taken the surrender from the Japanese along with MacArthur, and therefore was considered not to be in the Chekiang-Chiangsu clique of President Chiang, and he felt that he had a problem and was forced out of the NSD later on, presumably somewhat connected with the murder of Henry Liu. But at that time he appeared to be one of the persons who was not only a real gentleman and a very honorable man, but somebody who had enough knowledge of who would be doing this sort of thing and could make sure that they couldn't continue to do it. So those were assurances that came from the president and from Wang Ching-shi, which meant that we felt that we had the Security basis and basic political go-ahead to carry on our discussions.

And the person who handled them was the new foreign minister, and he was also named Y.F. Chiang, but he spelled it differently and was not of the same family as President Chiang. But he was from that area of China, well-educated in the United States and a very savvy person who had been involved with the Americans since the 1950s. He had been on the Joint Commission for Rural Reconstruction, where he played a key role, which was so often played by these Mainlanders, as being able to get information from below up to where it had to go by using the Americans as the intermediaries. The poor Americans didn't realize. They thought they were there because they were so technically competent. Well, he was probably more technically competent than they, but politically speaking we could serve as a means of communication. So had he played that role very well and was indeed continuing to play a very, very good role. But Fred Chen was also there, and one or two times he started to do his sputtering, and Y. F. just turned and fixed with an icy stare and told him to shut up.

So the talks went smoothly. There wasn't really much to talk about. The Taipei Mission did not find that we learned that much about what Washington intended to do, and certainly the Taiwan side didn't. But at least we got the basic outlines retraced and the time frame for various things to occur, and of course they wanted to be able to have a longer period of time for them to adjust their representation in the United States. They wanted to make sure they had the same number or a larger number of offices here than they had as consulates at the time of the turnover, and we were limiting them. So everything that they wanted we had to say, sorry, no, we had to do it our way. And so it was not that easy, except for the fact that they knew where the power lay. And we were not being very clear about the continuing of arms sales because there was going to be a hiatus of quite some time with no new approvals. And the question was, when would they resume and what sort of arms sales would be resumed? So the security side of things was important, but we didn't have the details for much of that because, of course, the people who handled this in the White House were not terribly good on military matters and therefore they hadn't bothered - the hadn't been able, really, given the way in which they were handling this - to get the Defense Department as thoroughly involved in studying this because it would have meant more people in the Defense Department knowing what was going on than they wanted to have know.

But it was a useful exercise. It gave them a chance not only to present their views, but to be seen by the people on Taiwan as presenting their views. Now, admittedly, they still looked very much like the KMT old-timers' views being presented, and the Taiwanese were still pretty much out of this, but nonetheless it did look as though a view of, shall we say, security and other aspects of Taiwan was being presented to Washington.

Q: Now Mike Armacost's position was what?

PRATT: He was still under secretary for political affairs.

Q: Were you getting from him or from the group that came out with Christopher sort of a feeling of saying, Look, we don't have much control over this, this is a White House thing, and these guys are all screwed up? I mean, was that what you were getting?

PRATT: No, not that they were all screwed up, but we were finally finding out what it is they have done, and we're trying to work out what it is we can do to implement this. I think nobody questioned the right of the President to make these decisions and basically to arrive at them and to try to implement them any way that he chooses to. This is what I think is the mistake in the way in which Brzezinski and Carter and, of course, Kissinger try to play things always, as the State Department is always trying to thwart them. Well, the State Department basically, at that level, I don't think has ever had a separate agenda where it says, you know, to hell with the President, who does the President think he is, anyway? I think the major thing, and this is one of the things I think which Elliott Richardson understood and used this, and that is that these are people who are assets to be used and not opponents. We had been pushing for recognition of Peking since the 1960s or late '50s, and we had been the ones handling the conversations with China at various times. So we weren't people fighting it; merely we were trying to use what little expertise anyone could have over what was going on in Peking to try to make sure we safeguarded our own interests as best we could. But that, of course, was not the way in which it was viewed.

Now Armacost was a good soldier. I mean, we were all team players, and so was Warren Christopher. Warren came to this rather late, too, because he had not been very much involved, and although Tyler, of course, says that this was basically a big feud between Vance and Brzezinski, I think their biggest feud was not really over the China issue (and Vance went along with having most of the people in the Department of State excluded, including political appointees like Mr. Holbrooke, in favor of the little "kitchen cabinet" which Brzezinski had assembled within the White House).

So no, we didn't get anything which was critical of what had been decided. They were interested in knowing our views as to why, for example, we thought if it had been delayed 10 days the Congress still would not be in session and it would have given them a chance to hold their election. I think they were supposed to be on the 18th. So the 15th took place then. On the 16th the president of Taiwan canceled the election. He said we cannot hold elections with the turmoil surrounding the break-off of relations with the United States. Now we would have advised CCK to go ahead with the elections anyway, and merely take this as a circumstance to be handled in the electoral politics, which they generally are pretty good at. And we were advising Washington, of course, one, that we wanted to get advanced notice so that we could tell them what was going on in Taiwan which might indicate to change it this way or that way if they could. We weren't asking too much - say, a week. A week or 10 days would have made all the difference from the point of view of how things were handled in Taiwan. If the elections had taken place, then the first big step that Chiang Ching-kuo was taking towards having the politics of Taiwan involved, and as it was he had to cancel these, and it was two years later and also one dreadful incident down in Kaohsiung later that he finally was able to move to elections.

Q: So how did you all operate? The delegation left, and did you feel that you had instructions? Did you have enough to figure out what you had to do?

PRATT: No, no. But we knew enough so that we had plenty to do, and we could have known about that, of course, as fast as we did when we started the 15th and knew we had to find new premises. We knew we had to do something.

In the meantime, we were told that we could still be getting some money, but there had to be an executive to permit this to happen post-January 1, because, of course, we were in the State Department budget, and that was finished as of January 1. So we had to get word about just how we were going to get the money to pay our local employees and even, for example, our own Foreign Service personnel a sufficient report about what would happen to them - should they stay, should they not stay, if they did stay, what would happen? Ron Palmer came out to give us a bit of a lecture on that and was not very clear because he wasn't told very much about what the shift from status of Foreign Service personnel to not Foreign Service meant. He just told us to hold hands and try to keep the troops from rebelling. But they were really very annoyed because, you know, what was this going to do to their careers. You can argue about being separated from the Foreign Service and what that would mean for the next assignments and all the rest of it.

Q: You know, I mean, a normal person sitting there and told he had to resign - there was no body of law to really back him up, was there?

PRATT: That's right. And we were assured that they'd work something out so that after we had resigned and sort of put in our tour in Taiwan, we would then be returned to the Foreign Service and be able to resume our careers and that we'd suffer no disadvantages from being in Taiwan, that any efficiency report written on us would be given as much weight as a report written anyplace else. And so this was supposed to be really very straightforward and no difficulties et cetera. But our staff was given, however, the right to decided whether they would be transferred and reassigned immediately, and I think if you talked to Gene Martin, Gene Martin was one of the ones basically who advised persons who were at difficult points in their careers not to trust any assurances they got because Ron Palmer was trying to give assurances which he himself did not really believe.

Q: Well, you know, as a serving Foreign Service officer one of the first things you learn is, don't trust promises given by Personnel. Things change, circumstances change and all, and people look at you and say, "Well, that last group of people may have promised you this, but we can't do it." I mean, there is good, solid reason to mistrust.

PRATT: Sure, and I said there were those who were having, you know, who felt that they could move ahead more rapidly in their careers if they could get a regular Foreign Servicposition . . . and several in my own section did leave, some did not. In any case, these were part of the number of internal administrative issue we were struggling with. How were we going to handle things in the process if we lost too many key persons in a particular area? How could we get accomplished all the things that had to be done, because from that moment on we didn't have to worry about reporting on the elections. We didn't have to worry about the internal politics so much because we had thrown a monkey wrench into that and nobody would know for months what was going to bubble up later on, but it did mean we had to be concerned about where we were going to locate our offices, how we were going to be getting cables in and out, where we were going to have our communications equipment, because of course we were going to have to leave the embassy? What are we going to do about a secure place to have the code equipment and so forth?

So we had a number of problems of a purely housekeeping nature, and we all had to work on that. In other words, this was not something which was left to admin, because many of these things were questions which involved discussions with the Foreign Ministry and with other agencies of the Taiwan Government and were of a political sensitivity as to what Washington was really trying to get at, what it had agreed to with Peking. And every time admin would come out with what was easiest for them, the Department would say, "No, that won't work because Washington has said that they agreed with Peking that we would only do such-and-such and so-and-so."

In addition to our changes, we also had to try to get the Taiwan side to come up with its own organization with which we could deal, because after the first of January we were not supposed to see Foreign Ministry people in the Foreign Ministry. And so we had to work out where it is we would be able to meet unofficially, and they had a guest house, fortunately, right opposite the Foreign Ministry, and we could meet there. We could also - they gradually were setting up their own sort of counterpart organization to our American Institute in Taiwan. We had to work with them on what kind of name they could have for us. They proposed four or five different names, and we kept saying no, no, no, you can't use this, you can't use that, you can't have "China" in it anywhere, and so on. So we had plenty to do. As Bill Brown, I'm sure, told you, we had a sort of morning staff meeting every morning up at his residence, which was halfway up the Yangminshan Mountain, which meant people could come down the mountain who lived there and people from downtown could move up there, as I did. And we had to then return to our downtown office, and convey to our own subordinates what it was that had been discussed at that morning meeting.

And I think Bill Brown told you that the cable address we had was BILL BROWN TAIPEI, sounding a bit like an e-mail address, but in any case, not "CONGEN" (Consulate General), not "AMEMB" (American Embassy) and so forth. And so that sort of thing had to be worked out, and we had to know how to handle it so that we could make sure that our traffic got in and we could make sure that our traffic would go out and we could handle various classifications and so on. We also had to work with the Taiwan Garrison general headquarters on our own security. We had to work with the Taiwan Defense Command about what they were doing about drawing down their own troops and getting ready for their departure within three months and making sure that they handled this in a way which was compatible with what it is we'd agreed with Peking that we would do, which was not always easy. I think there were probably a few little lapses there which if Peking could have known about them would have been very, very annoyed.

Q: What about immunity?

PRATT: Well, we had to work that out, too?

Q: Was there a period when you were just sort of nude there?

PRATT: No, not really, because we had an arrangement. I don't know how formal it was and how it would have stuck with international law, but we had actually in writing the fact that we would retain the same immunity as we had had, and for example, all of our number plates, license plates, had to be changed because, of course, they had the character on them for 'diplomatic.' We had to have that taken off. And we had to have something on them which would indicate that we would be treated in a special, protected way. And we had also, of course, to make sure that their desire for something similar in Washington and elsewhere in the United States would also take place. And that, indeed, there was no real problem about that, because they had received instructions, of course, from the president to make sure that this did take place, and so they had enough connection with representatives, who were trade officers and so forth, and particularly, of course, they had had the Japanese Interchange Association as a model, so they knew how the Japanese had said it had to be handled, and if we ever had any real problems we'd end up saying, "Well, do to us what you did to the Japanese."

Q: Did you find, though, that maybe the Authorities on Taiwan had already had this experience, but our people in Washington . . . You know, there's nothing like a bureaucracy for not moving.

PRATT: I know.

Q: And particularly, this is Taiwan - all of a sudden you're talking about somebody in Protocol, and this is a very small little matter, and it becomes, "We don't do it that way," or something like that. Was there somebody who was cracking the whip in Washington and saying -

PRATT: Yes, Harvey Feldman was one of the control officers by that point. You've talked to Harvey, have you? Harvey is here at the Heritage Foundation, and he has done a number of articles about this sort of thing.

Q: I think he's been interviewed, not by me but by someone else [Ed: ADST Feldman Oral History interview started in March 1999 and is on the Library of Congress website].

PRATT: Well, I think in any case he's the best source. We, of course, got it indirectly because our local interlocutors would complain to us about what it was they were hearing from their various representatives in the States. Because it wasn't quite so bad in Washington as it was in some of the cities where they were trying to protect their consulates . . . because did they have to leave all their premises in, say, Boston and San Francisco and so on? Were they going to have to lose . . . which of the offices were they going to have to close? We didn't tell them what offices they had to open or close; we merely said that they were limited. Instead of 11, they had to go down to eight, or whatever the figures were. I've forgotten now what the numbers were. But they had to reduce the number of offices they have in the United States. And they of course had their offices for several purposes. One, they wanted to be near many of the Chinese communities, because they liked to influence their Chinese compatriots, the Chinese people, but they also were interested in trade, and they were interested in having people who could take care of the students whom they had here. So they had a real problem when they had to reduce the number of offices they had, because each one that opened only after getting a fight with the budget people about money to handle this and had to justify this new office. So when they were told they had to consolidate and move out, it wasn't nearly so easy as it would be for the State Department, which had been fighting for years but losing every battle to the budgeters. The Foreign Ministry was not accustomed to losing battles over money, because they could go to the president and get the money for something they said they needed. Well, the State Department, of course, as you know, is totally different.

Q: Were you aware, getting reports back, I'm sure that the Taiwanese, whatever you want to call, representatives-

PRATT: We called them Taiwans to distinguish them from the ethnic group, the Taiwanese.

Q: Alright, the Taiwan representatives were all over Congress at this point, weren't they?

PRATT: They were, but the thing is, what they had to do was merely try to influence draft legislation, and they could not fight the problem. Some of them wanted to fight the problem and have the Congress just refuse and try to do something totally different, but for the most part the people from Taiwan were pretty practical, and they went not to the people like Goldwater, who would want to turn things over, but went to Kennedy, went to Zablocki, went to a lot of the key Democrats. And they said, you know, let's make sure that we make this thing work well for Taiwan and we protect the interests of Taiwan. So that's why, as I say, I think that a lot of the doctrinaire Democrats who thought that only a retrograde Republican would be supporting anything to do with Taiwan because, really, it was Mainlander KMT we were struggling with, that they were out of date, and people were already talking about the 22 million people on Taiwan, and not the two or three million Mainlander troops.

Q: This happened in 1978, so we're talking about 1978. How long were you in Taiwan?

PRATT: I left in 1981.

Q: So how did things work out? In the first place, just a simple question: did you have trouble getting paid?

PRATT: No, I think we maybe skipped one pay period or it was three days late for the pay period or something of the sort, but our checks continued to be deposited. We'd get the money put into our accounts. So they did work that out, and they did get an executive order which permitted that.

However, they had to go to the Taiwan Relations Act for a number of other things.

Q: The Taiwan Relations Act came about when?

PRATT: That was in May, April or May.

Q: Of 1979.

PRATT: I think it was signed into effect in May, 1979. And so we were doing a number of things for which we had very shaky justification under any executive order, because there we American laws which required certain things, and the executive order, of course, could not supersede a law. And therefore arms sales, certainly . . . We didn't have any; we had a moratorium on that. But nonetheless, our contacts with them about what it is they were trying to buy and so forth and getting their wish list anyway - these were things we basically felt we could not do until after we had some authorization, which was of some legal, legislative nature. We had nuclear programs, and nuclear, of course, required assurance given by a government. So you needed to have something which could act in place of a government, which was not what the case was merely under the executive order. Our lawyers were pretty good, and at some point you might want to talk to some of them. Liz Verville is currently off in Vienna handling organized crime, but if and when she gets back - she hasn't retired yet.

Q: What's her name?

PRATT: Verville. V-e-r-v-i-l-l-e, Elizabeth. She was sort of the point officer in L (Bureau of Legal Affairs) for much of this.

Q: What am I going to call it, a section? What's the term I use?

PRATT: Well, we became the American Institute in Taiwan as of January.

Q: Well, did the Institute have much input into the Taiwan Relations Act, or was this something that was being developed?

PRATT: No, I would say we had some indirect input, because we were talking about what it is we were learning from the Japanese as to how they handled things. We were also learning from the Taiwan side what it is they felt they needed. And we would be sending this information back. But Taiwan's major concerns were being conveyed through their own officers directly to the Congress, because they had, after all, a very high-powered representation here - an ambassador who, of course, had to leave, but he several deputies, including one who reported directly into the president's office, and he had very, very old, long-term contacts with many people in the Congress. So they had their own really good establishment to present their views, but in addition to that you had enough persons who . . . Stephen Solarz [Ed: ADST Oral History interview dated Nov 1996 and located on Library of Congress website] and Lester Wolff. In 1982 Lester Wolff published a really very good book about these issues entitled Legislative History of the Taiwan Relations Act. And people of this sort were really pretty aware of what was going on, and what they did not know they could get out of the Taiwan side without any trouble. In addition to that, of course, the State Department was finally involved, and someone like Harvey Feldman was also very intelligent and very competent, and he knew what the questions were. Maybe he had a limitation because, after all, the draft legislation was set up by Carter and added somewhat by experts at the White House, but it was almost totally turned around and strengthened by the Congress itself.

Q: You went through all these sort of housekeeping chores and all, so this, I imagine, kept you busy, and the political reporting, as you said, was sort of in abeyance anyway. But how about the Taiwan Relations Act? When it finally appeared, you and the rest of your group, what did you feel? I mean, this really moved things up a notch in favor of Taiwan, or sort of made it easier to work, or what?

PRATT: Much easier to work because it was indeed very reassuring to the people in Taiwan because it refers specifically to our concerns about the security of Taiwan. And this, of course, was in clearly vague language - as it always has to be - because every time you want to make something stronger than that you run into the problem that you can't even do this in a treaty, that you still have to say, "subject to the American Constitutional provision." So obviously we had to tell these people that this is as far as it could go under our constitutional legal system. And so it was as good - in fact, some people were trying to say, "Look, it sounds even better than the Mutual Defense Treaty." And we had to say, "Yes, but it's not a treaty, and therefore as legislation and domestic legislation handling the foreign affairs matter, we don't know how it's going to work, because this is very unusual, and we don't know, for example, how the courts may take it." As there was a number of Chinese lawyers who wrote analyses of the Taiwan Relations Act and tried to figure out where the pitfalls would lie, where some person would raise a suit and would get into a court, and some American court might say that this was an unconstitutional way of handling what should be handled by a treaty. And for example, in one of the provision near the end it refers to "in U.S. legislation wherever the term 'nation,' 'state,' 'country' occurs, Taiwan shall be considered to be covered." Well, this was something which, of course, was required to take care of arms sales and nuclear cooperation and a number of other things, but we can't do it with renegade groups, can't do it with the mafia or something of the sort. We have to be dealing with governments, and yet we had to say that this was not a government. So we knew we had something which could be up for grabs at any point and could be challenged in court and so forth. The fact that none of this had ever gotten into a U.S. court that we know of is, of course, marvelous. We also knew that any sensible judge would say, "This is legislation. It's been signed by the President. And we are a third branch of government getting in there trying to second-guess what it is that the legislature and the President decided was the best way to handle something, and we don't like to get into that kind of political environment because that's no what we as judges are there for." But you know, you can get a judge who won't hold that.

Q: I know.

PRATT: So we were saying this could be a big problem. We also, of course, continued to get into difficulties over just plain nomenclature. For example, we wanted to find a way of referring to what had been called the GROC - Government of the Republic of China. We couldn't use Republic of China any more, so we called it for a while "Government on Taiwan - GONT. And this went on for a couple of months, but it think it was by February the Chinese were coming in and complaining and saying, "You can't refer to it as a 'government.'" We tried to explain that "government" was a sort of relatively value-free determination, just a denotation of being a government. And they said, "No, no, no, you must refer to them as 'authority.'" And we said, "Well, you know, authority comes from the Latin auctoritas, which means 'justified authority.' And therefore, that is something which you say they don't have." They'd say, "Forget about your English language. We use authority to refer to a government that we like, and we have a different word in Chinese, which we translate as 'authority' which we use to refer to unlawful exercise of authority." So they came back and protested about that. Then we had to figure out what we could do, and call up Taipei and all the rest of it. We had no real easy term.

But you know, getting things paired between English and Chinese is not always that easy. When, for example, we were first trying to sell our policy of engagement, the Chinese were very, very confused, because they had very different terms for 'engagement.' There are two senses of engagement. One is engagement prior to a marriage, and the other is a military engagement. They have no term to cover our use of the word engagement as something which is what we say is our relationship with China. So you are constantly finding problems of this sort. We were able to get help from the Japanese, but of course, the Japanese find it much easier to go between Chinese and Japanese because they both use characters, and many of these characters, of course, will have roots in some of the same Chinese literature. But we couldn't quite do that, and so we were constantly having these problems as we went down this rocky road of establishing what is a new, non-relationship. And then, of course, we had to find, for example, we couldn't call my section the Political Section because that would imply that we had a political relationship, which would imply we had a diplomatic relationship perhaps. So I took the Japanese term, which was "General Affairs Section." And the General Affairs Section in Japanese means it's a kind of secretariat that really is a key sensitive group making sure everything works. But when you get into Chinese, it means 'administration.' So there we were taking a Japanese term for the name of my section.

Q: I have a feeling that for the next two years you were sitting there trying to figure out what the hell to call things. An awful lot of time is spent setting the mold. But other than all this, what were you doing? Up to 1981, you were watching events on Taiwan -

PRATT: And on the Mainland.

Q: What were you getting from the Mainland?

PRATT: We were on distribution for many things from about the Mainland, not the most sensitive ones, because we were still handling much of this in Paris. We were still handling it when I got there in the earlier period, but in the point is that they were moving very quickly from the liaison office to embassy, but nonetheless this was still really relatively new for them, even in Peking. So they were doing a number of things trying to get spin-offs from the Chinese how this was working, and of course the Taiwan problem was one of the things that constantly arose. So we tried to keep track of when they were getting their nose out of joint and over what.

Now those of us who were somewhat old China hands knew well that one of the biggest problems always is one of symbols, and therefore of names. They have a term which goes way back to Confucian times of "rectification of names," and that is that if you get the proper name for something then that's solving half the problem. The reality should follow the name. And of course this is the exact opposite of the Western tradition, where God first created things, then he gave them names; whereas with the Chinese you pick out the name first, and then you create something to fit the name. So we're starting out from different directions, and that's why I said this was a Chinese game we had to play. And when you get a lot of people who are American politicians, they are not really easy, don't really fit in with this Chinese concept of names. We were constantly having that difficulty with the Congress particularly, because the Congress, of course, felt that this was un-American to do it this way. Well, of course it is un-American, but we agreed back in 1972 we weren't going to do an American thing, we were going to do a Chinese thing. To gete an idea of the difference in approach, just listen to Senator Helms lecturing the Security Council! The United Nations has got to behave as though it were in Carolina. And this is the attitude of so many of the people, and it made it very difficult to keep relations running smoothly. And as I say, there were a number of congressmen who were savvy enough to be able to understand this, and they therefore, I think, did pretty well with the Taiwan Relations Act, which really was an amazing piece of work, and I've really been surprised there hasn't been more doctors' dissertations on this in law schools because - I shan't say it's a model for very much else, because you won't find another Chinese situation until you find another China, but nonetheless - it was a key aspect. And we have the same problem in Taipei, because we were dealing with old-time Chinese people just as they were in Peking. They were just as offended every time we got something that make Peking happy. To the degree it made Peking happy, it made the Taiwan side unhappy.

One of the key tasks was, of course, constantly trying to reassure the people who were - shall we say - key figures in Taiwan but not clued in to what the leadership was doing there, because of course they had nothing but, shall we say, total lack of confidence in what their own government was telling them. They never believed what the KMT had been telling about the Mainland, and they didn't believe what the KMT was telling about the U.S.. It's one of the problems, I think, of a big propaganda operation, one concludes that you're being gamed rather than being told what's really true and letting you make up your mind as to what it really all adds up to. So the propaganda apparatus of Taiwan was thrown into full speed, and yet this was the very thing which made a lot of the Taiwanese, that is the local majority population, feel very uneasy; and they, as I mentioned the story about one of these politicians who said, "We'd have to kill them all," their mistrust of a lot of the old timers was very, very deep.

The Taiwanese, of course, had been badly treated back in 1947, and from their point of view the KMT had never redeemed itself by treating them as adults who could be told the truth and be brought into a kind of cooperative relationship with government. Obviously, the government was at that time really changing under Chiang Ching-kuo, but the fact that the elections were canceled meant that from their point of view they had lost a good chance of trying to convey to the government a greater sense of the role of the Taiwanese majority population. And this is one of the things that we felt was also an unfortunate occurrence. This was when they began to establish their own organizations for human rights and things of that sort, which they were using to present a distinctly Taiwanese view of events on the island. They were not permitted to form a political party. They therefore all had to run ostensibly as independents, even those who got to be relatively organized and, as we use the term, oppositionists, because we couldn't call them an "opposition" because they couldn't be organized to the point where they would be that sort of thing; but they were "in opposition" and they were somewhat connected with each other, but they couldn't be excessively connected or else they would be rounded up for violating the law.

Taiwan had this delightful law that any organization which they wanted to establish legally could be done only if there were no organization which already existed to handle this. They used it, for example, to prevent even an artistic association because they said, "We've already got an association of artists," which was established by the KMT, run by the KMT, and having its cadre drawn from Mainlanders and being very much opposed to any of the currents of art which the Taiwanese and the younger people were interested in. But they couldn't establish their own association for the longest while because already an art association existed. In the same way, they got a human rights organization established first, and then the government had to chase them out and establish their own human rights organization, and they did not apply it to themselves but they applied it to everybody else. The fact that this other human rights organization had already been set up did not mean that they wouldn't establish their own.

But here these people were trying to get their own political movement, in part because they were able to criticize the existing government for handling both the United Nations earlier and the United States connection so badly.

Q: Looking at this period, the post-recognition period, up to 1981, with your General Affairs Section, were you seeing a real difference? Were you anticipating the Taiwanese eventually moving in to take over, I mean moving in peacefully, or did you see the KMT holding on till the last? How were you foreseeing what was happening on Taiwan?

PRATT: Well, we saw a constant evolution, and we saw Chiang Ching-kuo as favoring it. Unlike his father, he had seen the kind of Leninist views that his father and Mao Zedong had, at first had when he'd been in Stalin's Soviet Union. And he therefore felt that this was not the way the future was going to be. He had all of his children come under very strong American influence, made sure they all learned English, not Russian, despite his own knowledge of Russian, much better than his knowledge of English - not nonexistent, but it was not that good. And so just as his father had learned Japanese and he had learned Russian, he felt the future was going to be American English, and therefore this was going to be something on the American pattern, which meant rule of law, which he was pushing gradually for and also the importance of the constitution. We nonetheless saw that he was himself running the place in his own fashion as an autocrat.

During this period I did several pieces of analysis of just how the various parts of Taiwan were run by Ching-kuo, how he did not use organization that much; he used his own people in each of the organizations and he had his own separate little connections to security, to the military, to the party, to the economy. And he dealt with them in that fashion. In other words, he did not use his position as chairman of the party to deal with the economic side of things. They only dealt with the premier and the head of the Bank of China and the economic planning organization. And when he dealt with the military he dealt sometimes with and often around the minister of defense. He himself had been deputy minister of defense before he became vice-president and then, of course, became president. So he was well aware of the fact that he himself went to the various aspects of the power establishment through his own sense of organization and knew which people to deal with on what matters. For example, they had previously had a party organization, which was similar to the one in Peking and, I presume, in Moscow, but while they continued to have a finance and economic section in the KMT organization, nonetheless, that was not the way in which finance and the economy were handled. They were handled by the president acting as president, bypassing, not using the party, but going directly to the people who ran the economy.

So this was part of the evolution that took place under him, and the question was, is he going to try to have a succession system which brings forth somebody who will take over and rule things his way or not? For a while there it looked as though he was trying to do that, because they established a separate organization called Yu Shaokan, which brought together a lot of these strengths and put them in the hands of his sort of close collaborator of the beginning of the year, Wang Shen. And this continued until I left Taiwan. It was when I was back in Washington handling Taiwan affairs here that he canned Wang Shen and made it very clear that that was not the direction in which he was going. However, it was still not clear how he intended to have the real political structure go, but there was no question that he intended to bring the Taiwanese increasingly in and also that he intended to have the constitution determine things, rather than the party. In other words, you are no longer seeing the party, which was like the Communist Party, and the government merely being an instrument of the party. It was preparing to become a party which would be like other political parties, which meant that you could have a second political party.

Q: I think this is a good place to stop. I'll put at the end here that we have talked about events on Taiwan up to 1981, about political developments, how we saw things going. The one aspect that I think we should talk about before we move on to your time in Washington was on the defense side. Were you involved in that?

PRATT: Very much so.

Q: So we'll talk about the defense elements of our new relations with Taiwan next time, and then we'll move on to your time in Washington. And you did what when in Washington?

PRATT: I was in Washington, first just on regional affairs for one year, while I was marking time before taking over the Taiwan Coordination Office.

Q: And then you did the Taiwan Coordination Office until -

PRATT: Until 1986.

Q: And then what, retired at that point?

PRATT: No, then I went to Guangzhou, China.

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

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Today is February 9th, 2000. Mark, let's talk about the defense aspects, our concerns and issues with the Taiwanese.

PRATT: Fine, but as I said, I would like to revisit just one quick instance later, so let me do the defense side, and then I'll go back and pick up the last bit, because what we were really concerned about was where Taiwan might go. Would it's governmental system collapse? What were the tensions that would cause perhaps even more problems for the U.S.?

Q: Good.

PRATT: But in any case, the immediate one we felt we had to address in 1979 was what we could do to give to the people on Taiwan the feeling that they were not being abandoned, that their security would not be totally impaired, and that they would be facing Peking, a very hostile Peking at that time particularly (although Deng Xiaoping had recently moved in, he still had not been able to put in some of the sensible things that he subsequently did); however the major concern was that we had had to do several things as of January 1 and also within a few months. The first, of course, was to remove our ambassador, and the ambassador, of course, was a bit of a joke because ambassadors in Taiwan had been considered one of the major political ties because often they were chosen because of their influence in Washington and a voice they thought they would use to get through to the top levels, particularly the President of the United States. Then, of course, they had the ending of the Mutual Defense Treaty, and that was to be terminated in accordance with its provisions, which meant one year from notification. But of course just the notification of it was enough, a major problem. Then also, of course, the withdrawal of the Taiwan Defense Command and the Military Assistance Advisory Group, the MAAG. All of these, of course, represented, particularly for the military, but for others as well -

Q: Which military are you talking about?

PRATT: The Taiwan military. The last umbilical ties which they felt tied them in with people who really understood them and what their problems were. The military on Taiwan, of course, were very important politically as well as militarily, and in fact, they of course were one of the key political factors. If you looked at the composition of the standing committee of the KMT when I first arrived, you would see that it's still highly composed of security figures and old military, many of whom, of course, were military who had been given other jobs. In the National Assembly, the legislative then ex-military figures were very important, and of course they also were very closely tied in with the security forces, which were run separately by CCK (Chiang Ching-kuo), but nonetheless the Taiwan Garrison general headquarters was interwoven with other aspects, and military officers were . . . For example, the head of the police was a former marine general when I was there. The investigative bureau of the Ministry of Justice was headed by a military man. So you're dealing with a people who had been accustomed to having very close tie-ins with CINCPAC (Commander in Chief, Pacific), and they had an American admiral there they could deal with, and they had as the head of their military forces an admiral at that time because they thought that would deal better with the admiral in CINCPAC and the admiral at the Taiwan Defense Command.

So one had to provide a certain amount of reassurance. As I think we discussed before, there were security aspect which were very reassuring coming out of the Taiwan Relations Act, and in particular people like Senator Kennedy and Senator Pell and so forth were very anxious to make sure that there was a kind of military guarantee which would not totally replace the Mutual Defense Treaty but nonetheless would be as reassuring. That was the whole purpose of the Taiwan Relations Act in the minds of these people, to be reassuring to Taiwan. That, of course, was not in the mind of Carter. Carter was obviously trying to do things which would placate Peking and fulfill the Peking aspect of the negotiation and then also provide a sort of basis in law for having some kind of moderate office functioning in Taipei. But that was not what we read out of the Taiwan Relations Act, and that's certainly not what the people in Taiwan read out of it, and they were somewhat reassured.

Well, there was a moratorium on approval of new weapons approvals, but that did not mean that one could not continue to provide that which had already been approved. Also it did not mean that one had to stop studying what should be asked for and what should be approved once that moratorium was over. We did establish an office, which I initially somewhat supervised until such a time as people arrived on the ground (I made sure they got into their offices and their houses and all the rest of it), an organization of retired U.S. military, who would have background in the military supply field and in general, so a greater savviness about how you deal with military and how you address military problems, because it was going to be the only office we had staffed by military - ex-military, of course, just as we were temporarily ex-FSOs (Foreign Service Officers). In any case, we had a very gifted and competent person who was the first figure there. He was especially chosen by people in the Defense Department, somebody who had just retired, and that was Larry Rupgut, who did a very, very good job. And one had to sort of hold their hands, the hands of the Taiwan military, and keep them somewhat satisfied. And of course, following on with the arms sales was important, and we had people who could do that, but the thing is that the best aspect was that we had very competent Taiwan military officers who had worked at the MAAG for years, and they knew how to run all this, and they did a very good job as well.

But then, of course, we had to move on to the more conceptual level. We had to begin to consider what would be the kind of scenarios for which they would wish to have new approvals. In other words, you get military equipment to take care of problems. What were the problems which they envisaged? The traditional, old scenario had been one of Peking doing a combined forces landing on the southern plains, narrow plain of Taiwan, and therefore was an invasion force. This of course meant that there was still a very considerable role for the ground army, which, of course, was the major political aspect of the Chinese military, there as well as on the Mainland.

Q: It employs more people, too.

PRATT: It employs more people, it is a major way of having their universal military service, because they believed that it was important to have every person on Taiwan go through their military service because it was the only way to tell them that they should be working to defend the Republic of China. This was the government of their country, and so on. They still were bedeviled by what they considered to be their failure on the Mainland where it was more political propaganda, keeping the troops politically correct, than it was actually having military competence. So they had a political department, which of course is something which the Communists had, both Chinese Communists and the Russians, from whom they all were learning that lesson. And until basically near the end of Chiang Ching-kuo's life, that remained one of the key focal points of the military. The military, of course, had, as I mentioned, a role within the KMT structure at other different levels, and therefore it was important that you had some kind of organization which would be politically functioning in the military, and since they did not have a military commission within the party, it was the party commission within the military which had as its secretariat and operating structure the GPWD, the General Political Warfare Department. So these were elements we had to take care of at the same time that we addressed what they considered to be the new approach to danger, and given the fact that the chief of the General Staff was an admiral, not surprisingly, one of the major threats would be blockade and moving against Taiwan with something short of a full-fledged invasion force. So we then had to address the control over the air as being in the way of trying to prevent even a blockade and the use of navy ships against Taiwan, and therefore the key thing that we had to face up to was how do we continue to produce aircraft which would be up to a proper level? And there again, the proper levels had been circumscribed by what they considered to be the assurances given to Peking, namely that there would be only "defensive" weaponry. And you know that's one of the hardest things to do because, as you know, the National Rifle Association says all guns are merely defensive weapons, it's only offensive people who are the problem.

Q: By this time, though, the whole idea of a "Return to the Mainland" and all that was pretty well dead, wasn't it?

PRATT: Yes. Basically the KMT had to maintain a bit of this so long as Chiang Kai-shek was living. A lot of the people below that never believed it. But by this time already Chiang Ching-kuo had said that return to the Mainland would be 70 percent political and only 30 percent military, and that would mean that there would have to be a major uprising on the Mainland which they would come to support and exploit. "Return to the Mainland" was still something that they had to be concerned about, but how they did it was a difficult matter. By the time I left there, however, there was really no reference to "Return to the Mainland" at all.

Q: Did we have - I'm not sure if the term is "offshore procurement" or something - I know I was in Korea round about this time, and they were beginning to move into this "let the Koreans build parts for F-16s" and that sort of thing. Had we done anything like that in Taiwan before this?

PRATT: Yes, in the first place, we had found that Taiwan had a very, very good work force, and therefore whenever we moved in to arrange something, we found that we could always find a very good pool of people to be used for this purpose, which is why we had them as one of the major support areas for our efforts in Vietnam. We had a facility down-island where we would maintain and do high-level maintenance, which means that replacement and all the rest of that for the F-4s and other aircraft which was being used in Vietnam. And these things were being phased out and turned over pretty much to the Taiwan side. We tried to get them to do more. We had a joint production facility which we were establishing for the Northrop F-5E aircraft. I think this was the reconnaissance model, but I think we just referred to it as the 5E. The next one along, however, was going to be F-5G. So we tried to get them to crank up that, at the same time that they were keeping their old F-104s and F-100s even, which were then pretty long in the tooth. They were able to keep these flying long after any American would be interested in getting behind the wheel. So this was something we knew - they could keep up this maintenance, and we could move rather gradually on the F-5, trying to expand the production both in quantity and in improvement in avionics and radar and so forth and the flier controls. So we were building on that.

We also had to address the question of what we did about submarines. We approved the anti-submarine warfare equipment that had previously been offered, and we felt we could move ahead after the moratorium with an expanded program on that score because we felt that this would be clearly defensive. We had problems, however, with submarine-fighting submarines, and later on, when I was back in Washington, they went to the Dutch for this equipment, and so the Dutch had their troubles with Peking and so on. But all of this was being done in the way of trying to be reassuring, because the whole basic position in the State Department side of things, and to a certain extent a lot of the people who were more savvy about Taiwan and Asia in general did believe that this was primarily a political problem and therefore we had to take care of the political aspects of it, and they had to be equally as important as any kind of, shall we say, purely military examination of the question. So we had to be reassuring to Taiwan, and we had to make Peking believe that this was something they could put up with.

Q: Well, one aspect of a military relationship in a very politically sensitive area is that it implies a certain amount of influence, if not control. If you loosen these defense ties, was there any concern on our part that it might allow the Taiwanese military to maybe go on their own and cause a situation that we wouldn't like?

PRATT: We were not really terribly afraid of that because we felt that in the first place most of the military were pretty savvy, and they looked across there and saw just how big China was. And most of the top leaders were, of course, Mainlanders. And these Mainlanders, in their 50s and 60s, had all been raised on the Mainland, and they had in many cases brothers and sisters even who would keep them well abreast of what was happening on the Mainland. So despite the fact that there was a bit of a blackout by the government, which wanted to propagandize the masses of the people on Taiwan, the elite at the top would have no illusions about what was really going on there, and they knew that to recover the Mainland was for the most part a slogan, a political slogan to use to explain to the people on Taiwan why it was that you had a government primarily devoted to maintaining itself for a return to the Mainland rather than being primarily concerned about the welfare of the people on Taiwan.

Now, Chiang Ching-kuo was the one who made that shift, and he was able, I think, very successfully (and he had a lot of problems along the way) to be able to say, "Yes, fine, the return to the Mainland may take place, it may not, and One China is still our basic policy, but my primary responsibility is to the people whom I govern, and it's the people on Taiwan whom I have to provide for what they need," in other words for a democracy based upon the island only, rather than a system like that of his father, which was, "We are only temporarily here, and I'm exploiting this situation to be able to get back to the Mainland." Well, we knew that this was no longer in the minds of Chiang Ching-kuo himself, nor of most of the top political and military leaders. They were much too savvy for that. We also saw one of the major reasons they wanted to keep the umbilical cord to the United States and the fact that if we said no to something they'd jolly well better accept it, because they felt that this umbilical cord worked two ways. It kept the United States involved in Taiwan as the only guarantor.

Q: Well, now, looking at the other side of the hill, how were we seeing the PRC, its military equipment situation and all, because this was not a time when the Soviets were particularly forthcoming, and I was wondering about their equipment. One does not think of Mainland China as having a very technologically advanced military apparatus at that time.

PRATT: That's right. And in addition to that, as you said, the Soviets had not been giving them the upper levels of their own technology, because after all the clashes along the border were fresh in the mind, and some of them occurred even later. So one should note that, indeed, one's looking at a situation in which we would look at the Peking side and say, "Listen, their aircraft are 1950s type. They're not even up to the level of the F-100s and the F-104s. In addition to that, we've been upgrading avionics and radar in ways which the Soviets have not been doing and the Chinese have not been able to do on their own." So we would say this is what's maintaining a certain balance. And that's why we don't need to go make a big quantum jump. This, of course, was what began to give the concept of balance. Now balance between a nation of 1.3 billion people and 22 or 23 million people is obviously a very difficult one to be talking about, and I never liked that concept, but nonetheless it was one which was used which meant that you had to look at numbers and you had to look at capabilities. So if the Taiwan had smaller numbers but had much better capability, then that could create a kind a balance.

Q: Well, we really had been dealing and continued to deal with this situation in our other major problem area, and that is with Israel and the Arab world. We had a small nation with, at least at the time, a tremendous spirit, at any rate a considerable superiority in both effectiveness of the military and of technology, and was this sort of . . . I mean, you being an Asian type, did you even talk to the Near Eastern types?

PRATT: Oh, yes. There was quite a bit of this, and of course, the Israelis had their own little office in Taipei, and there were indeed . . . there was more, basically, of a feeling between Israel and Taiwan of similarities than later on, when Israel began to see the possibility of a bigger market with China, and China being able to play a different role vis-ï¿½-vis the Arab opponents of Israel. As you may be aware, one of the current problems now is how technology goes, they were saying, from the U.S. via Israel to Peking. The Israelis keep saying, no it's only their own technology, not stuff coming from the U.S. which goes there. But the point is that was for a later period, more than 10 years after that.

Q: Were you feeling that the Israelis, in light of the joint cooperation between the American military and Israeli military, were feeding special advanced avionics and all that type of thing, missilery and all, to the Taiwanese?

PRATT: No. Not so much technical exchanges, but the thing is they did talk to the Israelis about the special need of a small force against a big force and the small force having to have a qualitative technological edge, and so that was the only thing which we could see that Israel would do directly. The two sides went back and forth because they both were interested in various things going on in the Arab world as well, because Taiwan, for example, was running air control to Libya. So Taiwan was involved in Israel's back yard, providing technological assistance to the Libyan air force.

Q: Were we concerned about that?

PRATT: No, we weren't. We felt that it might, if anything, be a great advantage because there would be people there who would be able to tell us perhaps what was really going on. And of course all of this is a question of timing, and Libya claimed afterwards that the Taiwans were thrown out, but the basic thing was that Taiwan was trying very hard to get the U.S. as involved as possible and to get as high-quality weaponry as possible and to get what they thought would take care of the real dangers from the Mainland. And they still had not quite gotten up to the level where they'd be today with their concern about missiles and possibly something merging on nuclear warfare.

Q: Well, now, let's move on from the defense side to whither Taiwan and our concerns at the time. You left there when?

PRATT: I left there in September of 1981.

Q: You wanted to talk about that.

PRATT: Yes, I've already mentioned the fact that there was such a thing as the Kaohsiung incident back in December 1979 and is one of the key things which we had to spend a lot of our resources on. I had to mobilize to get people out of the Consular Section to go attend the subsequent trials and so on. But we saw this as an important incident for several reasons, not the least of which is what the impact was on Chiang Ching-kuo's concept of his government. There is a new biography that Jay Taylor . . . I don't know whether you've interviewed him or not, but Jay Taylor is doing a biography of Chiang Ching-kuo, and I think he's gotten a lot of things . . . It's John J. Taylor, and he's half the time in Arlington and half the time down in Florida. [Ed: Jay Taylor, The Generalissimo's Son: Chiang Chingkuo and the Revolutions in China and Taiwan, Harvard University Press, 2000]

Q: He was what, a Foreign Service officer?

PRATT: Yes, he served in the NSC [Ed: National Security Council] as well as in regular State positions. But Chiang Ching-kuo was a very key figure in the changes, and I think I've made it clear that when he started out he had to deal not only the Madam, who is still alive, but also a lot of his father's old buddies, some of whom are also still alive. They're now 101 and 102 and so forth. And he was therefore somebody who had had real problems when he came back from Moscow, and people tried to undermine his position with his father, but in the end he was able to prevail, and one of the key things was that Ch'en Ch'eng, one of his fathers oldest buddies who had been vice-president also, premier and so forth, died just in a timely fashion so that Chiang Kai-shek was faced with having nobody he really could bring in if he didn't bring in his son. So he brought in his son. Maybe he intended to do so anyway. We don't know, but that's always been a very strange relationship and something which I hope Jay Taylor's book is going to clarify. But in any case, he always felt he had to move very slowly, and just as he decided that moving more slowly would be postponing the elections, which were scheduled for December of 1978, he would therefore feel that he had to move the liberalization, delaying it by a year from his original schedule - because I think he intended to have relatively straightforward and honest elections, despite the fact that the KMT controlled much of the apparatus of local government and also of the media and all the rest of it - but nonetheless to let a larger number of people emerge who were independents, which would eventually lead towards a two-party system or a system which was not just purely dominant KMT party.

So this was not, however, moving rapidly enough for the Taiwanese, and so the Taiwanese established a human rights group, and then they had a magazine, and then from that they moved to organizing human rights demonstrations around the island. They were carried away by the fact that they were not greeted with heavy-handed reproach in their first demonstrations. But by the time they got to the Kaohsiung incident, well, in the first place, it was taking place at a time when the KMT was holding its party convention up in Yangminshan, just north of Taipei, and that was just the moment when the old timers could have made the most trouble for Chiang Ching-kuo if he had not dealt with a very heavy hand. So they did deal with it with a very heavy hand, and the Garrison Command forces moved in, and some say they even instigated riots against the troops in order to justify the troops moving in and beating up the demonstrators.

In any case, the KMT government had a trial of the main opposition figures, including the leadership of the Presbyterian Church, which went on for weeks. As I say, it was one of the key things that we had to be following. After all, the trial was a major event on the island, and this was the time of the Carter Administration with its emphasis on human rights. And we made it very clear to the government there that this was really not a very good way to handle this question, especially if it resulted in mobilizing a lot of people in the United States, such as the Congress, the American people, the media, and the scholarly community in a way that feelings about Taiwan were anything but positive. So this is a very negative event for Taiwan, and we, I think, were able to convey that. Ramsey Clark came out, and while they sort of dismissed this as the wild fringe of the Democratic Party, nonetheless, they got enough of a critique from their friends in the Congress and elsewhere that they realized that this had not been a good way to handle the opposition and it was not, therefore, the great victory which some of the old timers thought it was. Coincidental with the trial was the murder of the mother and two of the three daughters of one of the defendants arrested as being the instigator of this when he had not even attended. And this, I think, was a key thing in illustrating to Chiang Ching-kuo that his security services could be very, very damaging to the interests of Taiwan and also that they were not under sufficient control.

One of the things that Jay Taylor I think will be working on is the timing of the medical difficulties that Chiang Ching-kuo had. As a person with fairly severe diabetes, which was not kept under good control when he was younger, he had periods when he had considerable problems, and he would occasionally be in the hospital, but even if not in the hospital would not be functioning at his best. And, I believe, he may have had one of these spells, at about the time that they were murdering, for example, Lin Yi-hsiung's family members. [Ed: Wikipedia article notation "Lin was arrested in December 1979 for his involvement in the Kaohsiung Incident. In February 28, 1980 Lin Yi-hsiung was in detention and beaten severely by the police. His mother saw him in prison and contacted the Amnesty International Osaka office. The next day Lin's mother and twin 7 year old daughters were stabbed to death. Lin's older daughter was badly wounded in his home. The authorities claimed to know nothing about it, even though his house was under 24 hour police surveillance."

Q: Did the fact that this was an unnecessary, unprovoked murder - was that known at the time?

PRATT: The KMT tried to give the impression that this was probably done by an American, Bruce Jacobs, who was a young American scholar then teaching in Australia and on the island conducting research. The authorities apparently selected him and inferred he might have been the one who went there and killed the mother and the two daughters. Of course, it was ludicrous. Nobody really believed that, but the thing is, it was their only way of trying at least to get plenty of newspaper coverage to distract attention to Jacobs and all the rest of it. But it was at the beginning a pretty shoddy thing, but it made us realize that this event closely implicated the security services, and in the end I finally came to the conclusion that this was probably something which had been encouraged by Chiang Ching-kuo's second son, Alex, who had always been a bit of an unguided missile. In any case, he had many friends within the security services, and he thought of this as a glamorous type of life. The story was that he was drunk at a bar and said, you know, "Really, somebody ought to take care Lin Yi-hsiung's mother and family to teach them a lesson," because the mother was even on the telephone to Taiwanese elements in Japan telling them how her son was being mistreated. Well, Lin Yi-hsiung is now the head of the DPP, the Democratic Progressive Party, and for many years after, however, being imprisoned and with, of course, the great shock of the murder of his mother and two of his three daughters (the third was stabbed but did not die), he somewhat retired from politics, but he's back in again. But in any case, this was something which most of the Taiwanese considered to be part of the nefarious activities of the security services.

And I think that this is something which Chiang Ching-kuo, ever the practical man, felt was, again, a bad thing. It made his job much, much more difficult. There he was; he had come out of these security services, and therefore he had to consider that this was one of the most powerful weapons, because after all they permitted him to get into power, and what if it were used by somebody else? This is where he decided he would cut back on this and try to tame these organizations to prevent the kind of freewheeling which they had felt they could do. Chiang Ching-kuo himself, I'm sure, felt that how could these people do things when I haven't told them to? And he had to realize that the political system was such that that could happen. Now this finally came to a head with the murder of Ch'en Wen-chen from Carnegie Mellon who was thrown off the fire escape of the Taiwan University, and then there was the late 1984 murder of Henry Liu in Daly City, California, which I think finally got him to clamp down and decide that he had to send his son off to Singapore. But that happened later.

Q: But up to this time, up to 1981, were we concerned about the Taiwan security people doing things in the United States?

PRATT: Yes, we knew they were doing them, and we knew that some of them, of course, were here on a declared basis. That was the National Security Bureau. When we got to the Henry Liu case a few years later, I'll mention something about the IDMND [Intelligence Bureau, Ministry of National Defense], which was a different type organization, but we obviously knew that this security organization was something which could create problems, and we always had difficulty in seeing that someone as bright and politically sensitive as Chiang Ching-kuo would permit these things to happen, and therefore how did they happen. Well, we had to figure that his health was one of the things. Secondly, we had to consider that he had decided that he needed to keep a strong hand and to provide a strong hand even if he were suddenly ill and in the hospital and if he were suddenly to die. And this is when he established this special organization which basically depended from his old-time right-hand man, Wang Shen. And this was something which could trump the government and the party, and this looked as though it was the organization that he was going to be putting into place and using to control things, in other words, how he will have an authoritarian system without an authority. In other words, he knew that he was the authority, but how could that system work if he weren't there? He had destroyed, basically, the old Leninist concept of having the party run various things. Because he ran the party, he could do certain things over here. He ran the military directly to do things over there. He ran the security services here, he ran the special committees on the premier and the vice-premier level to run the economy. So he was doing everything himself, but in an ad hoc system which was not limitless and therefore did not provide for an easy way for any person to take over. And this organization, which he set up and was basically set up in late 1980 or early 1981, was able to give instructions to various parties, bypassing the normal pattern. And this I think was basically designed to take effect either when he was incapacitated or if he were suddenly to die.

Q: Who was the designated heir or heir apparent?

PRATT: Well, that's the point. Wang Shen was the head of this organization, but he was considered merely to be the ad interim secretary general, and nobody was quite sure whether he would be the actual heir. And the question was, did his son, Alex Chiang (Chiang Hsiao-wu), did he believe that he could do this? What about would other people try to get him, either Chiang Ching-kuo's brother, Chiang Wei-kuo, or another member of the Chiang dynasty, would they go to meet Wang, who had been his former chief deputy in the non-military side of things? Of course, Wang Shen had been in politico-military and security side, and Lee Huan had been a party man, and would then he be the one who would emerge? And so this was how we were viewing things in 1981. As usual, Chiang Ching-kuo moved more rapidly than one anticipated, and therefore, the basic system that we saw emerging was rather disquieting because it was certainly not democratic. Two, it was not compatible with the electoral approach that Ching-kuo was doing. Third, it did not give adequate role to most of the technocrats, who were so helpful in running the economy and could have done a much better job in running the political system. And it seemed to have also no real structure about either the party or elections or the administration and so forth which would be stable because it was sort of designed to be an ad hoc thing, and could that move in and create a new structure? And if so, was the only reason the structure worked was that CCK was there, to use the other elements of the structure to keep things going?

Given the fact that his health had permitted such a decay of his ability to make sure the security services didn't do the right thing, we were very much afraid that this organization would be another one of those uncontrollable organizations. That was the way in which politics stood when I left in 1981, so we had concern because succession was indeed one of the key things. As you may be aware, there is a little office in the CIA which followed the health of many of the old figures in Asia, starting with Syngman Rhee and Sukarno and Chiang Kai-shek and then Chiang Ching-kuo and so forth, something which was the "'Thanatopsis' school of politics," as Marshall Green called it. We looked at this as something which was a problem, and back in 1985 even, and that's a few years later, the CIA was still saying that Peking was totally stable because Deng Xiaoping had a smooth succession to his two chosen successors, Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, whereas there would be chaos on Taiwan because Chiang Ching-kuo had not chosen a clear successor. And I took issue with that later, but that was a question, however, back in 1981 because succession was very much in the minds of everyone.

Q: Was there at all the idea that it might be a Mainland-supported Chinese group that might try to seize power, or was this out of the questions by this time?

PRATT: Well, this was not the way in which we viewed it. The old-timers would seize power for their own purposes. Now some of them might indeed be willing to work something out with the Mainland, but those KMT people who were on the Mainland, they did maintain a kind of shadow, what they called the "democratic Kuomintang," on the Mainland, but those figures had had no connection with Taiwan for so long that they were really out of it. The Mainland did not really understand Taiwan very well, any of its politics.

Q: Was there a merchant-industrial, rich-person class that was at all important there. In Iran I would talk about the bazaris. Was there the equivalent to that?

PRATT: In a way, yes. They were mostly Taiwanese because the land reform in Taiwan had resulted in stocks in the Japanese companies being given to landowners in exchange for giving up their lands. In other words, they did give them something, and of course, the bright people were able to parlay this into a developing capitalist economy. These were, therefore, mostly Taiwanese. When I was there, among the top 11 business, I think only two were headed by Mainland groups. The Mainlanders, of course, dominated the government corporations as well as, of course, the government itself. And so they indeed played a very important role because the banks, the power company, and all of these had government corporations in which there was private stockholding as well, and the Mainlanders would dominate this. But the Taiwanese businessmen were almost all kept in line by the KMT. They had to, for example, hire retired officers, colonels often, from the Taiwan Garrison general headquarters, nominally to take care of their security side of things, but really to keep track of the personnel. So whenever some people got to be a little bit too big for their britches, the government would find ways of getting at them. That happened, for example, when I was there with the Cathay Group, a very interesting family which fielded people for the KMT elections and also ran money and so on, and yet they felt that they were getting too big for their britches and not always listening when somebody in the KMT hierarchy told them what they ought to be doing.

But this was emerging, and most of these people, as I say, had to make their peace with the KMT, for example, the head of the Koo family, which is one of the wealthiest. They got their money down in the southern part of Taiwan through the cement corporation of which they were given the stock, the Japanese cement corporation, and they parlayed this into a much, much bigger cement operation, providing cement, for example, for the construction of Hong Kong. So Koo Chen-fu is now the head of the Taiwan office dealing with Wang Daohan, the former mayor of Shanghai on the Mainland. And so he, of course, is somebody, now in his 80s, I'm sure, who has made a great deal of money, was co-opted by the KMT (the KMT made sure he did make money), and then he in turn provides support, including support from the area down in the south where he comes from. So there were indeed businessmen merging, but they were still not a separate power factor the way they are now. Now they are a separate power factor, and many of them are supporting the oppositionists as well as the KMT. They have to be careful still, because a government which controls so much in the way of banking and insurance and approvals for construction and approvals for exports and imports and so on - when you've got a government like that, you have to make sure that you cover your bets. So there are some people who believe they can be very much independent from the KMT, but they don't necessarily try to skewer it.

Q: Well, looking at Mainland China, more today, but it was prevalent before, one of its serious problems is the rot of corruption throughout the military, throughout the political thing, nepotism, payoffs, local power, almost warlord governors and all this - had the KMT, being a smaller group, more under scrutiny, sort of cleaned up the act better than -

PRATT: Somewhat, somewhat. Of course they brought with them the old corruption from Nanjing and from Shanghai. But so much of this was gathered into the hands of the top leadership that they didn't, of course, need any corruption because they could get whatever money they needed. The slush fund for the president, for example, was enormous. And so if, for example, somebody whom he liked, he wanted to please them for one reason or another, he would give them the money so their son could go study abroad. However, one should keep in mind also that there is the corruption of power as well as the corruption of money, and this is when I was in Guangzhou, for example, people resented much more the corruption of power than they did the corruption of money. They didn't mind a bit of money being spent here and there and so forth, but when they found that their kids would be disadvantaged in going to a university because of politics - as those in power created set asides which advantaged high party members' children.

And of course from the Party's point of view, favoritism should go for advantaged party figures. So that system is run just the opposite of our system. And the public resented that. Well, that is true in Taiwan as well. When you look at the early people who came to the United States to study from Taiwan, in the '50s and even up to, well, basically, to the '50s, the Mainlanders were far more numerous than the Taiwanese, despite the fact that the Taiwanese are 85 percent of the population and the Mainlanders 15 percent. That, of course, evens out during the latter part of the '50s, and then of course there was not that much of a variation, even though the perception remained. But, as to money corruption, indeed, people supported themselves through that because they all had this relatively Leninist concept, which is you don't trust people by giving them a decent salary so they can get what they want. You keep control of them by: you are in charge of their housing; you are in charge of the education; you give them a small allowance, the way you would give to a teenager, to buy what a teenager gets; you have the car given to this (when you want them to have a car); you have servants provided; and so forth. So everything is part of the perks. It's not something where they have the money to do this. So anybody who wanted money, because they wanted to buy their own brand of cigarettes instead of taking the cigarette ration, would have to find a way of doing that. And that was true, of course, of customs.

When I first was going back to Taiwan in 1959, I traveled on the plane with somebody whom I had known in Tokyo for American Cyanamid. At that point they were engaging in the first big venture in Taiwan. And American Cyanamid said it had taken so long to get something going, because they were going to be producing, I believe, insecticides and fertilizers for Taiwan - things which everybody at the top political level, of course, wanted done - but you had to go through all these other offices, each one expecting something for him to make the approval. That's the system, which is not terribly different from what it was and is still on the Mainland: power translates into money, and you need a bit of money, but at the top level, whence you have the power, then of course you can have your access to all the things that money buys. Deng Xiaoping didn't have to take a penny. If he wanted a private train to go south, he'd get a private train to go south. He didn't have to figure out how many first-class tickets he had to get for his wife and entourage.

Q: Alright, well, why don't we move on now? In 1981 you went back to Washington, and you were in Washington from 1981 to '86? When you first went there, what was your job.

PRATT: I was deputy in the Regional Affairs Office of the East Asian Bureau.

Q: You did that how long?

PRATT: A little over a year.

Q: Well, let's talk about that first.

PRATT: There's not much to talk about that, because this is one of the stranger offices in the Bureau. We did have a politico-military officer in it, who was, I think, useful and handled relations with PM (Political-Military Affairs) and handled things of that sort, and yet many of the other things I found very strange and often better handled by individual desks, but they did want to have something, I guess, some people to coordinate and to attend meetings and so forth. One of the few things I did was try to defend the budget of the Asia Foundation, and that was under attack within the State Department. The State Department had odd people who did not wish to go to the Hill to defend the budget. We were, however, able to get around that because we did have Under Secretary Whitehead, who was gotten to by the Asia Foundation people, and they made, I think, a very good case. I've always been rather impressed by the role of the Asia Foundation in the countries I've visited in Asia, certainly in Laos and also in Taiwan, and felt that they did make a considerable contribution.

Q: At that time, what did the Asia Foundation do? What was the Asia Foundation?

PRATT: Well, the Asia Foundation was established with money coming in from various private donors but getting also support from the U.S. Government to manage many programs which were more easily done in countries where there was great suspicion of the U.S. Government and USIA (United States Information Agency) for example. And the Asia Foundation could handle these things and make grants, get people to the United States for study of agricultural economics or something of the sort, and do this in ways which were less offensive to people like Sihanouk. They had a very active and very good program in Cambodia at the time when Sihanouk was very much trying to reduce at least the visibility of the American role, in part because, of course, he wanted to do what his French friends wanted done, but also, of course, to diffuse criticism from leftists in Thailand. They did a very good job in Laos when I was there, and they were just sort of an additional wheel for the Americans and its approach and were more adaptable to the circumstances of a particularly occasionally than USIA could be, because USIA, of course, had much more direct Congressional supervision and all kinds of regulations and so on, whereas the Asia Foundation, once it got its money from Congress and, of course, it got most of its money from private donors, it was able to decide things as they saw fit. We found them basically to be a very good use of U.S. Government money.

Q: What was their tie to the academic community?

PRATT: Very close because they often drew on academics, and some of the professors would go off then to be head of the Asia Foundation in the country in which they had their specialty and then would go back to academia after having lived in this country and after having deepened their understanding of what went on there through actual working with the people in those governments. So we really felt that that was a really good one.

Another thing which was coming up at that time was what they called a Foundation for Democracy, the new organization.

Q: Yes, I can't think of the name. The United States Institute of Peace. No.

PRATT: No, this was a new organization which was being established with U.S. Government funding to support democracy abroad. Now this is what Bill Bradley says, you know, "If we can spend 800 million bucks on this program promoting democracy abroad, then why can't we use a similar amount of money out of the American coffers to pay for democracy back here in the United States?" - in other words, to have all campaigns handled through direct government funds. So as I say, this was in its early stages, and it was being run out of the, I guess, the office of the under secretary for political affairs. And I gather it's functioning pretty actively now, but it's U.S. Government funds plus private funds. The CIO [Ed: Congress of Industrial Organization] was very interested in this, and they were one of the major contributors, both of funds and of personnel and so on. So it's again one of those things which may be effective, but we certainly had plenty of time to see that the Asia Foundation was very effective in the very early years. I mean, it's like several other things. There had been a connection with CIA, and CIA had put up some of the seed money for this many years before, but CIA had been out of that business for so long, it had been direct government funds coming from the Congress.

Q: I can see that things of this nature that concerned you, knowing the activism of the Department of State, the Bureau of Asian and Pacific Affairs and all, everywhere else, I mean, you know, it's what's in the paper today. This is not the sort of thing that seizes the movers and shakers within the Department of State.

PRATT: That's right. This is something which they know they've got to do but it's one of those things which is done after they take care of the latest crisis in Indonesia.

Q: Was there any other issue, or should we move on to your next job?

PRATT: Well, there were a number of other issues, but I don't thing they were ones which were of really great moment, and I think we competently handled these serious questions and made a good input, but it was not even like, shall we say, the Youth Committee that Bobby Kennedy had established in the State Department, which poor Chip Bohlen had to handle. That was several years earlier, and I tried very hard to get a program going which I thought would have been very important, but the Defense Department was against it, so of course nobody was going to stand up to Defense. But we didn't have any programs like that, which I think were important, and then the democracy thing, with so much being run, as one would expect, by political appointees for their political reasons - they thought they had to do it because of the Congress and because people had, you know, Reaganomics, you have to have Reagan politics as well - so these things were ones we had to pay attention to, but they certainly, to my mind, were not nearly so interesting as what was going on next door, because my office was right next to the Taiwan office, and this was the time when they were still going through the early stages of Reagan's China-Taiwan policy.

Q: Okay, so in a way there would be a fall back because obviously you were keeping in touch. When did you move to the Taiwan office?

PRATT: That was in 1982, after the August, 1982, communiquï¿½ was arrived at, so it would have been September.

Q: And you did that until 1986.

PRATT: That's right.

Q: Okay, let's talk about how you were seeing, at that time and even maybe lapse over into the time when you were doing the regional affairs - the Reagan Administration took office in 1981, so you sort of arrived there in the Reagan Administration.

PRATT: That's right.

Q: There must have been a lot of apprehension about this new crew, because Reagan came out of the right wing of the Republican Party, you think of Senator Knowland and all that, and having been governor of California. He'd made his obligatory trip to Taiwan and all that. There must have been concerns about "Oh, my God, we're going to go back to square one or something like that."

PRATT: Well, as you can see, during the campaign, in 1980, already we were well aware of the various difficulties that could arise, how Reagan, who had a certain tendency to say what he really thought - and sometimes that was good, sometimes it wasn't - one of the visitors we had during the 1980s campaign time was George Shultz, and he of course was then at Bechtel, and we certainly got a very favorable impression of him, and of course we asked him whether he expected to be Secretary of State, and he said, "Oh, no, I don't think so because, after all, there are others who are standing in line ahead of me, and in order to balance things they are going to have to do something else, because Reagan is going to really have to take care of other aspect in the Republican Party. So we saw Allen, and we thought Allen did a very good job pulling Reagan back from-

Q: Allen being?

PRATT: Richard Allen, the Asian advisor who redrafted what Reagan had to say about Peking and Taiwan after Reagan had said that he was going to reestablish relations with Taiwan and send an embassy there; and Allen was able to pull that back, and then he took over as the principal Asian advisor in the White House. And this was at a time when Jim Lilley, for example, went there. And it looked as though they were going to be able to keep things on a good even keel, you know, taking care of Peking over here and Taiwan over there and the Congress behind them and the American military on the side. So it looked as though this might move fairly smoothly, but of course in the State Department we had Al Haig and we had John Holdridge, and we had a number of others who were drawn from a very different wing of the State Department, so to speak. And so we saw very quickly that Allen was not finding it easy to keep control. And then of course he got caught in the watches and money in his safe.

Q: He was the national security advisor.

PRATT: That's right. So he had to resign.

Q: It was a minor scandal which really had very little substance.

PRATT: I think it had very little substance and, knowing him, not well, but knowing him, I knew that this was the last thing that he would have been interested in. He probably just hadn't yet figured out what he was supposed to do with this stuff, and he probably didn't have anybody who came to him and said, "Well, listen." - a secretary who would say, "I'll call security and we'll call in the legal advisor and we'll find out how we handle all this." So this is when, for example, Jim Lilley decided he ought to bail out, because he was the Asian man under Richard Allen, and he bailed out and went to Taiwan because he knew that there was going to be a rough time in the White House at that point.

So Al Haig... Al Haig had been - how should I say it - if we think Brzezinski had been influenced by Kissinger, Al Haig certainly had, so he had great dreams of a big geopolitical thinker. One of my friends, a young chap who worked with me in Taiwan, worked on his staff and basically he sort of said, "Make sure that you don't get Peking screaming about anything. Give them whatever they need to stop them from screaming" - because he wanted to placate Peking. He felt that that was the great geopolitical thing he had to do in order to be able to keep the Soviets in line and all the rest of it.

Q: This has been sort of the major instrument of Mainland China, of protesting and screaming about everything and with considerable effectiveness.

PRATT: Quite true. Now I never was able to get the precise information as to why we'd even started negotiations with them about limitations of arms supplies into Taiwan because we had handled this in the recognition communiquï¿½ - in other words, that there would be a gradual... that we would address the arms question. But there was nothing about when and why we should pick this up, and frankly, I believe that it was basically persons who wanted to negotiate with Peking because they felt that this was one way to get them to stop complaining about something. In other words, this is what I feel to be one of the biggest problems we face in dealing with China: we do not analyze what it is they are really trying to get and whether we are going to be prepared to give it to them, and so we go off and talk to them. As we well know, Clinton loves to talk to everybody, but that's not necessarily the best option in dealing with China. If you're not prepared to give them what they want, you know, you face what they call - one we come up with, a verbal formula - "much thunder but no rain." And this was not necessarily helpful. But they were balled in this negotiation, which resulted in the August 1982 communiquï¿½ on limitation of arms sales to Taiwan, on which they had persons who did not understand how we gave arms because they weren't permitted to discuss this with the people who did the work. They therefore had to do it on the basis of good, high, lofty principles, and do it with little verbal tricks like "in quantity and quality" et cetera. And it resulted in an agreement with Peking which was basically inoperable.

Q: Did you have the feeling when you were in East Asian and Pacific Affairs - I mean you came hot out of Taiwan, and obviously you were very sensitive to this even when you were in the regional thing - did you feel that Taiwan had been sort of thrust in the background and that you had sort of a team that was thinking only of Mainland China, that was both caught up, you might say, in the glamour of dealing with this and was from your perspective and maybe that of some of the other colleagues more willing to make concessions than you felt was justified regarding Taiwan?

PRATT: The short word is yes. Let me say a bit more, though, because in addition to people being sort of interested in the big question, namely Big China rather than Small China, these were persons for the most part who had been associated with the Kissinger approach to China under the Nixon Administration. And while I think that Kissinger is a little more realistic certainly than Al Haig - Al Haig is more of an ideologue than he is a real realist as I think Kissinger can be. This was a crew which was given a great deal of leeway because of the fact that Richard Allen was out and we did not have a strong group in the White House yet. And they also had, I believe, inattention on the part of Reagan, with nobody to go to Reagan and say, "Do you realize what Al Haig is doing?" Now that finally happened, and that was when Al Haig, of course, was out. But that was a little later, when Judge Clark, who had been deputy secretary, supposedly the one designed to keep an eye on Al Haig for Reagan's purposes, went over to the White House, and then he was able to get the word through that Al Haig was not following through on what Reagan wanted done, particularly in meetings with China.

But I was not involved in the negotiations of the August communiquï¿½. I was not even able to follow them closely because, of course, this was handled very, very tightly, and they wanted to keep any of the persons who knew anything about Taiwan or really were concerned about Taiwan out of it, because they saw this as a somewhat adversarial situation because as on the occasion of the recognition communiquï¿½ they felt that if any of this leaked to the Congress the Congress would be very annoyed. We have seen afterwards, as you know, the Congress had said that the Taiwan Relations Act should take precedence over the communiquï¿½. This, of course, is just the sense of the Congress, but the thing is it shows at least that there is a problem they have with these executive agreements, which of course also have the force of law. Obviously the Congress considers that the Taiwan Relations Act, as an act of Congress, wherever the communiquï¿½s are in disagreement with the Taiwan Relations Act, it is the Taiwan Relations Act which takes precedence. And I think that that is a defensible position. Then again, you can say that because this agreement took place after the Taiwan Relations Act, and the President was well aware of the existence of the Taiwan Relations Act, this is merely a refinement of the Taiwan Relations Act. But you're going to get all kinds of political struggles, but it is a political problem. And we saw that from the very beginning in the way in which they were doing this communiquï¿½. But even more important that that, when I assumed my position handling the Taiwan Coordination Office, was how we implemented something which was drafted by amateurs.

Q: Who were the drafters? I've interviewed John Holdridge and Chas Freeman, but who were you seeing as the principal drafters?

PRATT: Well, Bill Rope was the head of the China Desk at that time, and he was one of the key persons doing the actual work. I believe he's now in Nanking. But he was however taking guidance of an intellectual basis from Chas Freeman, so Chas, I'm sure, can tell you exactly why they felt they had to do it this way. Chas was out of the loop. I've forgotten whether he was still in Bangkok, but he was very much the . . . Rope was his protï¿½gï¿½. He'd gotten Rope into this job by arguing in favor of Rope for getting it, and therefore this was part of that particular combine. And another figure, of course, was Holdridge because Holdridge had to approve all of this, but I don't think he would have been doing most of the drafting. Obviously he would take care of certain little points, just as he felt that he had taken care of certain points for the Shanghai communiquï¿½, but of course good old Marshall Green felt that he's the one who did that. Well, in any case, the major concern was to provide something which would take care of Peking's squawking; however, one of the big problems is that you cannot take care of Peking if what you do is not going to be in line with what they think an agreement means. In the end, of course, we've been doing things which aren't even in accordance with the agreement according to what we think it means - because, of course, it can't be done. But as I said, my principal task there, and it was a very important one, and I had one officer who spent basically all of his time working on this, and he was a very competent chap who subsequently left and went back to the University of Virginia Law School and, I guess, is probably enjoying his life as a lawyer instead, but nonetheless, he was a very shrewd chap. However, we missed out on certain things because, of course, the Department of Defense people were the ones who had to handle this primarily.

Q: It was essentially an arms agreement, wasn't it?

PRATT: It was a very vague statement that the arms would be limited to the quality of what was already in Taiwan's inventory. There would not be an increase in quality. Secondly, there would be no increase in quantity, and in fact there would be a gradual reduction leading to an eventual end of arms sales to Taiwan.

Q: It sounds like a sellout.

PRATT: Of course it sounds like a sellout, and of course double sellout when you say "limit quality" it has nothing to do with the qualities on the other side. And if you take quantity, then of course, given inflation (and arms inflation prices generally go up even more rapidly than regular prices - a loaf of bread), so that just even by keeping it even you are going to be ending up by reducing. So this, of course, went even beyond that. But the big problem was that arms sales to Taiwan are of two sorts. One is FMS (Foreign Military Sales), in which you have agreements to sell something, and that sale is considered to have taken place at the time of the signing of this agreement, not at the time when the goods are actually delivered. Secondly, you have what you call commercial sales. These sales do not take place in accordance with any agreement, and therefore their accounting system was on delivery. Well, something which was sold this year may not be delivered until next year or the year after that, and how are you going to keep track and keep in trade those things which are accounted the minute you approve them right now and those other things which may have delivery from previous years, which you cannot figure out and control when they are going to be. So it meant that the Department of Defense was engaging in various kinds of shenanigans.

We started out also by taking the highest previous years of arms delivery, which were not just the immediately preceding years because there had been a moratorium on arms in 1979 and going through 1980. So we had to then adjust that for inflation, which gave us our base figure. Well, of course, Peking immediately objected to our picking the average of the two highest previous years or the highest previous year, whatever it was, and then adjusting it for inflation and then using that as our base figure. They objected to that, of course, as we expected they would. Then, of course, they wanted to see very rapid reduction. Well, instead of that, because of the previous moratorium, we, if anything, were having even higher figures. But then in addition to that, the commercial sales would occasionally bunch up and come at a time when we had figured that we had plenty of space for these commercial sales, only it turned out that with a given FMS approval, which had to be counted because they were reported to the Congress - and we had also the figures coming in from U.S. Customs about the actual delivery - and you'd go over rather than being under.

So we had some very incensed people at one point. Mike Armacost was furious because he thought that we had let the Department of Defense get away with having commercial sales which we should have stopped. Come on, they had taken place long before we even focused on them, and they weren't trying to make this trouble; it's just that they did come through that way.

Q: Well, coming back to the basic thing, as you describe the communiquï¿½ to me, it sounded like the idea was to let Taiwan wither on the vine, which was absolutely opposed to how certainly Congress viewed its relation with Taiwan. And I would have through that you would look at this, particularly from the Taiwan point of view, and say, Okay, we'll play this game, but this isn't essentially going to work because of the Congress and the American public.

PRATT: That is true after Paul Wolfowitz, or even before Paul, when Gaston Sigur came in to replace Holdridge as the Assistant Secretary in the Asia Pacific Bureau.. By that time, Haig was out, and Shultz was in and we were able to get back to a much more stable approach to China and Taiwan and to China as viewed by Congress as well as by the President. I gather that it was Judge Clark who considered that he was responsible for blowing the whistle and telling Reagan just what the communiquï¿½ meant and how it was going to be in conflict with the Taiwan Relations Act, and it certainly resulted in a kind of selling out of Taiwan - something which Clark knew that Reagan had not intended to do.

So Reagan himself had been following these various communiquï¿½s, and when the final one came through with the notation, drafted by Bill Rope and okayed by Holdridge and so on, to the effect that they thought that Peking was still demanding that there be a time certain for an end to the arms sales (and also they wanted to have something more concrete about gradual reductions), Reagan scribbled on that, apparently, if they won't take this version, then go back to the drawing board because he would not accept these options, because, of course, always these things go through with high option, low option, and so on. And he took the medium option, but the thing is . . . No, I'm sorry, I guess it wasn't the medium option; it was the high option, saying that it had to be what it was and no budge on the dates. And he said if they don't like this, to hell with them. And so what Peking did, preemptively, was accept the version which had been negotiated, and of course many people considered that these American negotiators were basically just trying to present Peking's view to find a way of sneaking it through, believing that the importance of the U.S. relationship with China was so much greater than any of this crap about Taiwan, that the best thing to do was to find out from Peking what they thought would fly. They still thought that it would not fly without a date certain, and so they were a bit surprised when Peking . . . Well, they were surprised when Reagan said no, there's no question of a date certain. And then they were surprised when Peking accepted it. But I think that Peking got the word that they had gotten as much as they were going to get, and they were therefore anxious to take what it is they could get. Deng Xiaoping was a very practical man.

So as I say, we knew this was not done the right way, and it was not really in accord with what Reagan thought, and you'll hear Jim Lilley, for example, saying, "Well, the real meaning of that communiquï¿½ is what Reagan said it was, which was, 'This is not just something which is posited on Peking's having a peaceful policy towards resolution of the Taiwan question, but in addition to that it depends upon balance.'" In other words, we must still maintain a balance in the Taiwan Straits, and that this is the message which Reagan basically gave to congressional people who called on him and objected. And it also can be found in what it was that Holdridge said to the Congress when he went up to defend the thing. But we had to take these various threads and try to figure out how we could in action make the communiquï¿½ mean something which was acceptable to Taiwan, which would work with the facts in Taiwan - which was, of course, not easy because it did provide for an accounting system which was impossible to use, and we were bound to alienate basically probably everybody by trying to band together apples and oranges. And this was therefore again a big problem: what do we mean by "no increase in quality"?

When Gaston was there and even more when Wolfowitz was there, we were able to get through the concept that "no increase in quality" means that if something which they have in their inventory is no longer available and it's no longer produced, then you can move to the next higher level of quality because that's all there is. It does not mean that you have to artificially create something which is as limited as what it is they already have. This is why we are able to get to the whole question of how they get the new aircraft such as the F-5G.

Q: F-16 - that wasn't -

PRATT: That was disapproved. We had F - 16, we had F-4, and even some F-18. One of the reasons why F-5G was considered a good bet to begin with was that it was made in southern California, and the head of Northrop was a good friend of President Reagan. And he was able to say, "Listen, I've got a great aircraft. We'll call it F-20 for others so it will look like a really advanced one, and we'll call it F-5G for Taiwan so it's only one grade up from what they've already got, the F-5E."

In any case, this was one of the key problems. We were able to move to increase the level of avionics,the fire control, and air-to-air weaponry and so forth, which therefore would maintain a qualitative edge for Taiwan to give them the continuing increase in numbers.

Q: You're figuring all the time, okay, these agreements are going on by people who maybe don't understand what it is, but - we're talking about this 1982-86 period - you were looking at this with the bench line of saying we want to make sure that the Taiwanese don't lose their technological edge.

PRATT: That's right. Also, of course, we still considered it within the political framework and therefore, one, we had to try to make sure that we could at least provide an explanation to Peking why we were doing this. So we had to work that out. Secondly, we had to try to be reassuring by showing that there was still a pipeline and the pipeline would not be something which was useless. It would give them thins which would take care of their needs. Now obviously Taiwan always wanted a good deal more than we considered were their actual needs. They of course want something up here; we suggested something down there. When this came to quality, as I say, we had to crank it up, make a meaningful increase, but something which could be presented still to China as not being a breaking of the technological provisions of the 1982 communiquï¿½.

Then when it came to ships, we were going to provide design; they were going to send experts here to study what it is that we produced, and then they were going to build the ships themselves. And this, in the end, I guess they really didn't do. They have since bought some frigates from elsewhere. But some of the persons hewing to the Peking line would say we violated the agreement by providing technological information and other things in order to get around the fact that we weren't going to make the actual sales. Well, we don't agree with that, and we didn't defend it that way to Peking. We defended these approvals to Peking as being ones which were, indeed, just one cut above what it was the Taiwan already had, and about as low as you actually could produce given the state of the art of the day. So we didn't try that particular way to get around the 1982 agreement.

We then went, of course, to defense, radar, and radar control and so forth, and we got that basically sort state-of-the-art, because it's so purely defensive that we felt that a defensive thing would trump the fact that you don't give somebody an old vacuum tube radio when you've got microchips and all the rest of it. And then for the tank, we did a rather bad hybrid because they already had the M-48 tank, and we combined the M-48 turret with the M-61 (whatever it was) chassis, and that would keep the tank production in the United States going, because remember, we had also considerable contacts with the American arms producers for whom Taiwan was a very good market. They paid hard cash. This was not something where you would wait 10 years maybe to get the money back, and so everybody was of course anxious to sell to Taiwan, and they would come and talk to us and talk to the Department of Defense and try to convince people that the Taiwan should get whatever American companies were producing.

So this was the major point how you give through actions a definition to what is a very vague and, shall we say, political communiquï¿½ and have it mean something in economic and military matters.

Q: Well, you were helped to some extent during this particular period in that the Mainland Chinese were not still moving up the ladder technologically, particular in military things.

PRATT: That's right; however, it was a time when also the U.S. military were trying to get their camel's nose under the tent, and they indeed were beginning to move on some of these matters, and the same office in DOD which was handling the Peking side of things was handling the Taiwan side of things. So you indeed did have a dynamism there which... Fortunately, we had there at that time a very good team with Gaston Sigur and then Paul Wolfowitz, both of whom I think are very bright and very, very balanced. And over in the Defense Department - what's his name - he's emerging now as one of the special advisors to George W. Bush - it will come to us. In any case, he was the ISA chap, very helpful.

Q: Well, this might be a good place to stop now, Mark. We have talked about your dealing with the 1982 communiquï¿½ on the military side and all, and we're talking about the 1982-86 period. The next time we'll move to the other time, about dealing with relations with Taiwan during this period, issues, and I'd also like to ask you to talk about dealing within the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs as being sort of whether you felt you were in an adversarial situation or something with the people who were dealing with Mainland China and all that. We'll pick all this up next time.

PRATT: Very good.

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Q: Today is the 23rd of February, 2000. Mark, first let's talk a bit about during this 1982-86 period just plain straight relations with Taiwan. Any great problems, or was it all tied up with our relations with China?

PRATT: Well, obviously the relations with China were what influenced what the major problems we had dealing with Taiwan, mainly military equipment. So much of the time was spent on handling what the Taiwan side was requesting in the way of arms and what it is we would be prepared to do and how we could get it through the various aspects of the government, including ones which were, of course, very, very much, shall we say, feeling that they had a vested stake in the 1982 communiquï¿½, more so than in finding ways of living with it. So this leads into your question about adversarial relations.

For the most part, the people in the Defense Department had officers who were dealing with both China Mainland and Taiwan, in ISA [Ed: International Security Affiars] and other key policy making areas. And of course they were anxious to keep a good balance, but they were not, shall we say, very anxious to push the most restrictive interpretations of the 1982 communiquï¿½ because they had been so little involved in negotiating it. That was a political document which they considered had been worked on around them even though they in the end were expected to pick up the pieces of it. Therefore, from their point of view, they had a bit of an adversarial relationship with some of those in the Department of State who were leaning over backwards to do whatever Peking wanted. However, the major focus, the major, shall we say, strength of the pro-Peking side in the Department of State was basically reduced when Al Haig left, because Al Haig had been very much himself personally in favor of doing whatever he thought would be best received in Peking. He of course held what he considered to be the view of Henry Kissinger of great politics, which meant China was important, Taiwan was only an irritant. And there were a number of people who also believed that China was in the future the most important relationship we would have, eclipsing Japan; and they themselves felt personally involved in arriving at the text of that 1982 communiquï¿½, and they therefore wished it to be as much a reflection in implementation of Peking's view of that document as possible, whereas of course once Haig was out and Shultz came in and we had a group in both the National Security Council and in the State Department which was anxious to do what they considered to be what Reagan wanted (and this group, of course, was basically in the ascendancy), therefore while starting out when I first moved over to Taiwan from Regional Affairs, the basic flavor, with Holdridge and Haig and so forth, was one of trying to just say that a small amount of the prestige of Taiwan and concern about Taiwan that we had earlier, afterwards we really then had to make sure that we did not go overboard with Taiwan, either. And from a relatively hostile head of the China Desk, we acquired someone who was basically very, very well balanced - that was Don Anderson - and very much aware of the fact that we had our own U.S. interest in this.

Q: Who was the first head of the China Desk?

PRATT: This was Bill Rope, who was very much in the Chas Freeman group. And as I mentioned earlier, Mike Armacost and Mort Abramowitz, who was up in INR-[ED; Bureau of Intelligence and Research] there were persons who were also considered to be part of this group which felt that they had to defend China. We have always felt that China was pretty good at defending itself. But in any case, there were, and someone like Jim Lilley was even more sharply critical of this group and very frequently identified them as being either a Peking lobby or else occasionally sort of suggesting that some of them were indeed trying to get their instructions from Peking before they tried to find out what the State Department wanted. I know that Jim knew that this was carrying it a little bit to extremes, but nonetheless, it was something which went back some 20 years and therefore was not unusual.

Q: There was very much this feeling of division there between the - I won't say - pro-PRC, but the basic feeling that this is what counts, and Taiwan frankly doesn't count. These are sort of the great picture people as opposed to one who are taking a different course.

PRATT: That's true, and as I mentioned, even earlier part of this came about because some of the persons who were leaning so much towards China's position were persons who really disliked the KMT and disliked it so much they had read in their history books in the '40s and '50s, and from what they experienced when they either studied in Taiwan or served in Taiwan, and they were very much opposed, therefore, to the KMT rule on Taiwan and they were also of the opinion that once the U.S. indicated that it was headed out, as indeed recognition from their point of view was meant to signal, that the KMT would invoke its "One China" policy and turn the place over to Peking and therefore that would solve our problem for us. The other people, of course, did not feel that Taiwan was going to go down the drain nearly so easily as these others both though it would and hoped it would. You can find a number of documents which report the view that Taiwan would not be with us very long. But we, of course, who had been involved with Taiwan for a while, knew full well they were far more resilient. We also knew that it was far more complex than just a small group of old men from the Shanghai area who controlled the Kuomintang. So indeed, there was a very different appraisal of what Taiwan was.

There was also a very different appraisal of what Peking was. I'm sure you have read about the enthusiasm which Kissinger had for Mao and for Zhou Enlai, and then of course I gather Kissinger really had a rather low opinion of Deng Xiaoping, whereas of course most of us who had worked very hard on China over many years, as Kissinger never did, were well aware of the fact that Mao was, indeed, sui generis and being gradually exposed for the rather monstrous figure that he was. And Zhou Enlai was not always so perfect and effective under the shadow of Mao as he might well have been had he outlived Mao. Therefore, our view was more, shall we say, concerned about doing what really had to be done to take care of China but giving China time to move ahead from what continued to be, and was certainly even in the early '80's, certainly a highly authoritarian society, where Deng Xiaoping's reforms were just beginning. And there were no assurances that if Deng had died in 1981 or '82 that anybody that could have maintained his programs, because others who were still there - like Chung Yin and P'eng Chen and Bo Yibo and so forth - that they might well have turned it back into something far more retrograde from the U.S. point of view, including retrograde from the point of view of being open to the United States. So we felt that we had to spend a good deal of our time trying to defend U.S. interests rather than just trying to find out what China wanted done.

Q: Were you able at that time to make the argument, that look at Taiwan and if you draw a line about where it's going, it looks pretty good, I mean as far as American values go, and China, it doesn't look good? Was this in this 1982-86 period a valid argument or used or was this a little premature?

PRATT: No, I'd say at that time it was already fairly clear. In the first place, one had the whole concept of the economic liberalization and what that would inevitably do for politics and, of course, what it actually did do in Taiwan and has done elsewhere: that is, when you get an authoritarian government relinquishing many of the areas in which it exercises authority directly and turns it over to capitalism and government-regulated and then regulating less and less, you're getting a society which is going to be far more free. And whether all the elections are going to be as free and whether it's going to have, shall we say, an election which results in throwing the scoundrels out . . . which of course is one of the principal things which elections can serve as. Whether it's turning them out for the right reason or not, it doesn't matter; at least it provides for a succession including a hostile succession, which keeps people on their toes - and Taiwan was certainly headed in that direction. And we also knew that while the people who were in the Communist movement had gotten involved in what was a forward-looking movement in the nineteen-teens, namely Leninism, they also went through the period of Stalinism, and that's not necessarily the best education - whereas the Kuomintang, which had also had considerable Leninist tendencies. Chiang Kai-shek came out of a basically Leninist and militarist era.

Nonetheless, everything else had been handled very differently. Most of the top figures had studied economics and studied in the United States. They were basically persons who were liberalizers, first of the economy and then eventually of such things as even elections. But greater freedom of the press and so forth happened before that. Admittedly there were pockets which were very retrograde such as the security services in Taiwan, as I mentioned the last time in my appraisal of where Chiang Ching-kuo was going. We weren't quite sure just how he was going to end up doing it. This was a time, however, when things were becoming clearer - that is, after I had left Taiwan they became clearer. But nonetheless, the basic tendencies and the basic aspects were far more favorable. In the first place, during a time when China had one of its most unpleasant and not terribly well-organized periods, 1895-1945 - this was a time when Taiwan had been ruled by Japan, which despite its war in the Pacific had nonetheless been far more advanced in its appraisal of science and technology and economics from the West. So Taiwan had benefited from not having gone through the historical troubles of the war between the Communists and the Nationalists on the Mainland from the 1920s and '30s and '40s. It also, of course, having been occupied by Japan much earlier, had a friendly period from 1931, when Japan started its attack on China, starting in Manchuria and then moving down to Peking and so forth, so 1931-1945 were times of deep trouble in China from the Japanese, and Taiwan did not have that. Now admittedly, it was run as a colony and therefore somewhat of a backwater, but nonetheless, a lot of the top leaders, like the current president [Ed: Lee Teng-hui] and like the person handling foreign relations, were studying in Japan at a time when the Japanese universities were among the best in the world. Japanese education, from the Meiji period on, had been very a remarkable institution. But in any case, we know that the basic background for Taiwan provided many, many factors which were more favorable than those which the Communists had on the Mainland. So our position was that, yes, indeed, they're moving very rapidly, and the only question is when an authoritarian figure with a great deal of power, like, President Chiang, when he decides that something is going to happen, he has a means of making sure it does happen because he can calculate all of the opposition and override it, something which couldn't be done in Peking.

Q: Well, there was real difference in the type of government. I mean, the Taiwan had a government where if the leader decided things had to be done, he could sort of say it could be done, whereas the Politburo in China, I mean, this was not a monolithic organization. I mean, it was basically a committee of geriatrics, wasn't it?

PRATT: Quite true, and in addition to that, their party system, while giving full central control to the party in almost all the areas, nonetheless, their concept of collective leadership meant that any one of the top leaders could have a very powerful role, particularly in some of the areas of their special concern, so that some of them such as Deng Xiaoping had a lot more power than, say, Hua Guofang, his immediate predecessor, had had. But nonetheless, he had to share this with a number of others because he was there because he was the one most accessible to these various top leaders. This was not the case by the time Chiang really made himself. He of course had full power after the death of his own father, when he was really only vice-president. But he could tell the president what to do, and the president knew that he ought to do it. So he was somebody who had had really power such as nobody had had on the Mainland. Even Mao had greater problems. And therefore, he was able to get through many things over the objections of others. However, as a person who did not like to jam things through, because CCK felt that the repercussions would often be worse than trying to produce the same effect more slowly and to get it done after you can get more people on board. This meant that he was making sure that there would not be a reversal of anything which he was able to get done. And he therefore moved very slowly. He was indeed, I think, too confident of his ability to pull it all off, and therefore could do it at his convenience, when he thought it would be most easily done. What he did not initially take adequately into account was his own health, because his own health, which had several periods of failure, was what reminded him that he had to move more rapidly because he might not be there. And he therefore did create the major changes there which were needed for Taiwan to become politically speaking what it is today.

Q: Did you see almost a difference in background, experience, or approach between the people who were dealing with Taiwan in the State Department and those dealing with the Mainland?

PRATT: Well, within the Foreign Service, we of course knew all of these persons, and we had been to school with many of them and often had studied before they had and therefore could follow what they were doing in their studies and then follow what they were doing when they got their first assignments following language training. However, some of these, indeed, got an initial push-up because they were among the first group to go to Peking and develop the new relationship. I believe that group contained some who turned out to be sort of prepared to do everything according to Peking, and others like Don Anderson, to whom at times we had to say, listen, what they wanted is not necessarily what we should want. So we had a group of each, and it was very hard to figure out what would be the qualities of mind or temperament which would have them go more in one direction or the other. And the only thread which appeared to be there was those who felt that they got their initial real push forward from being involved in the early stages of Normalization and of being able to push policies through which they then would be associated with. And of course in the early time, there was more of a problem to overcome some of the reluctance, true of course even during the Kissinger period, when they of course were so concerned about Kissinger's own relationship with the Secretary of State and then later with the Congress and so on, and then of course with the Carter and the Carter effort, and then the Taiwan Relations Act, which indeed was a bit of a rebuke to the President, including a rebuke coming from some of his staunchest supporters in the Congress. So these persons, however, continued, and that includes as much Brzezinski as it does Kissinger, persons who felt that they were the ones who were responsible for getting things done, and therefore they had to defend their own work. I think this is a very common thing, of people trying to defend ...

Q: It becomes your baby.

PRATT: Your baby, and your child, and therefore, your child can basically do no wrong. And those whom you have to contend with are those persons who don't realize really what a marvelous child he is.

Q: Well, now, who on the Taiwan side in Congress . . . whom did you look upon to be your strongest supporters?

PRATT: Well, we found them in both parties, and we found there again, they were persons who also made themselves good, effective figures in getting the Taiwan Relations Act through. They were also persons who began to know more about Asia, and so of course, we certainly felt that the old team with Zablocki and Lester Wolf - they were great figures, of course, and then they vanish from the scene. And obviously in the Senate, from the early period on, there were two figures - Pell and Kennedy - both of whom had very strong staff, and the staff of both of them were very interested in what was going on in Taiwan, and they were very interested in human rights, and they were very much able to see that, although there were little snafus occasionally, the basic tendency in Taiwan was far more compatible to U.S. concerns about human rights, and then of course political rights and democracy, than anything in Peking was. So I'm trying to think also of the - name will come to me later - but he's the chap who was the head of the subcommittee in the House on foreign relations.

Q: It was Solarz.

PRATT: Yes, Steve Solarz.

Q: Whom I've interviewed.

PRATT: Steve Solarz was a very powerful and important figure because he was interested in both Peking and Taipei and he had a very, very good staunch figure, Richard Bush, now head of the American Institute in Taiwan, who was one of Solarz' key figures in making sure that people kept track of, shall we say, the important things which were happening in Taiwan and how they should be put into perspective. So we had persons who were often incensed by some of the stupidity and the horrible things which occasionally could be done in Taiwan, but they were as well aware of the fact that this was something which was not even necessarily supported by the president, and in any case something which would not be going on for long.

Q: I would have thought that you would also have a problem, although times have changed, with the equivalent of the old China Lobby, the very strongly anti-Communist, almost know-nothing types in Congress - no subtlety or real knowledge except "It's them Communists over there and these guys are not Communists, therefore they're our people." And this is not a very helpful group in foreign policy.

PRATT: No, because some of them - and there are still a few around, and every now and then I had to share a platform with one - but they are really so supportive of the KMT on Taiwan that they will find that even the Taiwan Government does not become as shrill in tooting its own horn as they think it ought to, and they consider the U.S. Government to be basically hostile, that the executive branch basically is much too inclined to listen to Peking and not pay attention to what really ought to be done for Taiwan and does not tell Peking to go to hell. Now occasionally we would get that even from, shall we say, Senator Helms's side, where occasionally, when we'd go up and try to tell them how much we were providing for Taiwan in the way of military equipment and how this would take care of so many of their needs, and obviously we knew we were going to have some problems with Peking, but this was how we intended to handle it, they would then go to Helms and they'd get messages back saying, you know, to "tell Peking to go to hell," and they ought to do more, et cetera et cetera. Now we were getting so we sought what was going to be feasible, but this group of people, of course, had never been concerned with what was feasible.

Q: Did events in the Soviet Union, as Gorbachev began to start his reforms and all - this is before the Soviet Union split up and all - were we looking at that and saying, I wonder if this is going to happen to China, and were we thinking along those terms?

PRATT: Well, we certainly considered that Gorbachev, while many were initially saying, how different can he be from his two predecessors, who of course weren't there very long - you're looking at almost like a succession in the Papacy in that by the time they got to power you couldn't be sure how long they'd be there and whether everything would be overturned and so forth - and since he was the protï¿½gï¿½ of persons who were very old and very much in the party apparatus, there was a considerable suspicion that we had, and that of course Peking had, over what this really could mean. Is he gong to be able to stick around? Is he really going to be able to make that much of a change? Then, of course, when Maggie Thatcher was able to tell Reagan we can do business with this man, then, of course, people began to revise their views that maybe he would be around long enough at least to do business for a time.

We saw this as being one of the things which we hoped would reduce the earlier concern that Kissinger had, which was that we must make up with Peking as a weapon against Moscow, because we felt that was very misguided. I mean, those of us in the Foreign Service who worked on Asia, said that the Chinese, for their own reasons, are against the Russians, and the Russians have always been afraid of the Chinese anyway, because there are very vulnerable parts of their own territory so close to a much, much larger China, so we really don't have to take the Soviet Union as a justification for doing what we ought to do about China, and we certainly hope that if it can show that there was no longer a strategic triangle between Washington, Peking, and Moscow, but rather something where we had to have good bilateral relations with both Peking and Moscow, that we could begin to address all of the China questions on their own merits, because many of the persons who were arguing for us to dump Taiwan were saying we need China so much because it ties down all these divisions of the Soviets in Central Asia and therefore we need China so much for our real concerns about the Soviet Union. Well, it turned out, of course, that we shouldn't have had nearly so much of an anxiety about the Soviet Union, that economically, and therefore eventually militarily, they weren't the great power which they had been portrayed as being. None of that, of course, was able to trickle through to us in the East Asian side, but since very clearly it emerged that they did not have the strength which we had used to justify doing so many things with Peking. We should be able, therefore, to approach everything we're doing with Peking on the basis of what was important from the point of view of U.S. interests and U.S. concerns about East Asia. And that, of course, should make it far easier to see that we don't have to sacrifice Taiwan - or Japan or Korea or any other place - just to be able to have China be anti-Soviet. So we considered that this, insofar as we were given much information about it - we'd gotten a little more than what we'd get out of the American press, which is, I think, very, very negligent in handling this, just as I think the CIA was.

Q: Well, now, back to sort of the nitty-gritty. I can't remember if we covered it before, but what about the Taiwanese security services and their activities in the United States during this 1982-86 period? Did they cause you any headaches?

PRATT: Very much so because, although I had very good relations with the formal head of the organization which was sort of openly declared here in the United States - the National Security Bureau - and used to have periodic meetings with him, nonetheless, we were aware that things were still going on back in Taiwan which were made for novels. The security services back there were not all as intelligent and as open as the office was here in Washington. They were, of course, required to be because they knew they had to get along both with the CIA and with the State Department and so on. So these people were by far the most, shall we say, enlightened. But the previous head, one whom I overlapped with only slightly, when he went back was taken out of the National Security Bureau system, which was foreign intelligence, and put in to the intelligence bureau of the Ministry of National Defense, which has a foreign section basically aimed at Mainland China but also had certain undeclared offices in the United States. This is where, eventually, the trouble came from.

We had had enough trouble with Americans being harassed and killed, permanent residents from the United States having their troubles back in Taiwan, but for the first time we had the Henry Liu case, which was an assassination of a person of Mainland origin but raised and educated in Taiwan, and he was killed by elements of what was called the "Bamboo Gang," which is apparently still functioning in Taiwan, one of the big problems Taiwan still has, and the reason why it is such a problem is that these gangs were often intermixed with the security services. They were not, therefore, a target of the security systems. They were adjuncts. They were elements which they felt they could use and whose mentality they had confidence in and so on. And this is something that still is a problem in Taiwan, because they have not been rooted out. And as I'm sure you have heard also, that the old Triads from Hong Kong and branches of them in Guangdong Province, means that the Triads and therefore gang elements in south China and in Hong Kong remain a big problem for Peking. They have not been able to root it out. In many cases, of course, the governments have felt that these are good adjuncts for their own power, and that goes back to the time when the Green Gang was one of the big supporters of Chiang Kai-shek in Shanghai, in the '30s and so forth. So this was something where we eventually had very considerable problems.

Q: On your watch did you have it then?

PRATT: Yes, that was on my watch.

Q: Can you talk about what happened and what we did?

PRATT: There is a whole book written by a chap in San Francisco on the subject. Henry Liu was assassinated in Daly City, and it was therefore an event of some importance. [Ed: see David Kaplan, Fires of the Dragon: Politics, Murder and the Kuomintang]

Q: Daly City is in -

PRATT: Just south of San Francisco. And I have not read the book because I felt that I had my own ideas and I would hate to sit there and get annoyed by what he maybe said wrong. He called me many times, and so we had long chats, and I know I mentioned before the book, and I hope that he got me down correctly, but that's one of the big problems in dealing with many authors, that you will find that they have their own thesis which goes beyond what I think to be justifiable. But in any case, this was a case which caused problems between the State Department and the Justice Department and particularly the FBI in the beginning because apparently there was far more of a role in the FBI in this event than they were ever willing to tell us, because you know they have a sense of "need to know" which is very different from that even of the CIA's. And from their point of view, if they could bamboozle us to get us to do what they want us to do, then that's much, much better than trying to tell us exactly what went wrong and what they would like to have us do to help them out. In the end, we did get to, I think, a very highly principled figure in the Department of Justice who was able to make sure that we got all the . . . he was limited in what he could tell us about what the FBI role had actually been, but nonetheless he was very frank with us about what he was doing, because we had to facilitate several trips for these teams from the Justice Department to go to Taiwan and interview persons who were involved in the events surrounding the murder.

This apparently, this Bamboo Gang group was, as usual, trying to have better relations with the security services in Taiwan because that meant that their own activities would therefore not be looked askance at by the security services, the only ones they were really afraid of. So they thought that they were being given encouragement to get rid of this Henry Liu, to kill him, and there were two factors. One, Henry Liu was considered to be disloyal to the KMT, even though he was a Mainlander, he had been raised in Taiwan and gone to school there, because of alleged dealings with Peking. That perhaps was one of the more important things in the minds of the Bamboo Gang. But secondly, they thought that they could curry personal favor with President Chiang because Henry Liu was coming out with a biography of President Chiang which would be rather unfavorable with, quote, a lot of the worst and most scurrilous gossip, unquote, which they and a broad range of Mainlanders on Taiwan knew. So they would gain favor not only with the anti-Communist security services but then also personally with the family of President Chiang, and what they were not so much aware of (which I think was still one of the principal reasons why the security services facilitated their assassination attempt and its success) was that Henry Liu had himself been involved with Taiwan intelligence from the very beginning of his career. He was trained at one of the universities where the role of the security services in curriculum and teaching and so on was very prominent, and he therefore was expected to be an agent for them whenever they called upon him, even though he functioned as a journalist, first in Washington and then out in San Francisco. Nonetheless, the key thing was that they figured that he should still be under their discipline as an agent. And if they felt that an agent had been turned by Peking, and there was indication that this might have been somewhat what Henry Liu was doing - mainly he was telling Peking more about what he learned about Taiwan than he was telling Taiwan about what he learned about Peking, and at the same time he also apparently was an agent for the FBI and I guess they wondered which one he was telling most to, Peking, Taipei, or Washington. In any case, a rather dangerous game for anyone to play. Double agent is bad enough, but triple agent is often even more dangerous.

In any case, this Bamboo Gang team came to the United States, and apparently they were involved with some of the people whom the FBI was involved with. Now whether these were people who reported also to FBI or whether these were people whom they had identified as problem people and they were listening in to their phones and all the rest, I don't know. In any case, the FBI was on to what happened far too rapidly. It appeared that they had indeed been able to intercept a telephone call that the Bamboo people made right after the killing to the people whom they were reporting to in Taipei. So what actually the FBI role is we were never told, but it looked as though they had been involved with him, despite the fact that he had volunteered his service primarily to the CIA and the CIA had declined to have any contact with him. So then he went to the FBI and volunteered to be of assistance to them. Apparently he just liked, he had grown up, I guess, with the idea of being involved with security services, and more is better than less. So if you can get three services you're working with, then you're better off. In any case, he was not, I guess, a terribly pleasant chap. I knew a lot of the journalists here who had known him earlier, and they told me a great deal about him. He could be cantankerous and difficult, but nonetheless he was an American citizen, and obviously we were not very happy to have Taiwan feel they could use a criminal gang to assassinate people in our country with the connivance of and encouragement from the security services in Taiwan.

Q: Well, how did it play out?

PRATT: Well, in the end, the Bamboo Gang, which was also a group which had branches in Hong Kong and in Bangkok and was involved in drug trafficking, had one person who was involved in their team who went from San Francisco to New York and then went down to Latin America, and this was when we, of course, were able to get the name, able to try to get him extradited from I think it was Brazil. And of course, then we ran into Rudy Giuliani. He was then the attorney for the southern district of New York, and of course, he wanted him first for a drug trial in New York, which meant we had to postpone things for the murder trial in San Francisco.

So we of course were involved with all of these things, but particularly the effort of the Justice Department to get evidence through testimony in Taipei. They did talk to most of the key figures; however, they did want to talk to the president because they felt that his role in both condoning it or giving the green light or the role of his son in giving such a green light would probably explain why it is the security services, were supporting them to make sure that they could get the proper kind of passport so they could then get visas to come to the United States. So I thought that they did a really very good job. We didn't get a complete report, but we got pretty full reports of what they were doing, and they did a pretty good job of trying to get as much information as they could. It was indeed I think sort of the last straw for President Chiang because he afterwards sent his son off to Singapore and asked Lee Kuan Yew to try to keep him in line. He also dropped from his entourage Y. F. Chiang, who had been one of his closest friends for years, but he had asked Y. F. Chiang to try to take his son in hand, and Y. F. Chiang in the end said, "I'm sorry, I don't think there's anything I can do. He's not that interested in what I have to tell him. He won't listen to my advice." He was just too taken with the concept of being involved with the security services and other things, which were much sexier to him than, say, Y. F. Chiang, who was very good in education and foreign affairs and the good stable administration and so on. So we could see that President Chiang had been very much shaken by this and realized that some of his people had gone too far, although he had to admit that indirectly he had some responsibility for this because it was probably his son who led people to believe that this would be looked upon favorably by the old man himself, and yet of course, this was the last thing he would want.

Q: Well, then, was there anything else we should talk about during this period, up to 1986, or did we get the -

PRATT: I think I'll say a few words about the divided establishment we had between the State Department and the American Institute in Taiwan(AIT). As you are I'm sure aware, David Dean was brought into this at the very beginning, in fact asked to retire early in order to take over the leadership of the AIT itself. And he worked as head of that first when I was in Taiwan, and then he was still at it when I came and worked on the Desk here - in fact, almost to the end of my stay here in the Taiwan Coordination Office. And he provided therefore both continuity and I think very strong leadership in trying to make sure that this unusual relationship, of having a State Department office which had to be considered merely a coordination advisor attached to the regional affairs office and an AIT office, which is across the water in Rosslyn, could function together and have a cohesive operation with the various tasks sort of portioned out, so that I would be the one who would deal with the Defense Department on much of the military stuff. They would have a military man over at AIT as well, retired military, and they would host military meetings over there, and yet within the State Department I would have to make sure that everything was coordinated and all the people in PM and elsewhere in the building and also the Defense Department, to make sure on the policy level that we were handling things properly. Then, of course, we had both had to deal with the Taiwan office here. We had the good luck to have a person who was rather cantankerous and difficult in some ways but very intelligent and very knowledgeable about the United States, who was Fred Chien, who later became foreign minister, but he was the head of the office here, and a very competent person although occasionally very abrasive. But he also was very, very good in wooing the Congress, and therefore, if we could sort of get to him and say, now, don't try to push the Congress to do something which they shouldn't do because we won't be able to back it up and it will look therefore more of a humiliation if something comes over and we then we have to say, Sorry, but we will pay no attention to it.

So I think during those early years we established very well several basic principles, and that is you can conduct these affairs through at least what is a nominally independent, non-official office. Admittedly, it's incorporated in the State of Delaware, but the sole stockholder is the Secretary of State, and therefore, sure, it's independent, but it's not that independent if it's wholly owned. Secondly, of course, you can figure out which side does what, and you don't have to have the one person being the one who handles all of these matters for Taiwan if you can farm it out so that David Dean would do his job and I would do mine, and we would coordinate and make sure that things worked smoothly. We later on had a different head of that office who wanted to have the State Department abandoned. He wanted to privatize the -

Q: This was a political appointee, wasn't it?

PRATT: Well, David Dean, of course, was a retired Foreign Service officer, but the one who was making for the problems later on was a real political appointee. He was just a lawyer from Little Rock. And so it made it very clear, however, that if you have people both of whom come from the same background and know what you're doing, you don't feel quarrels of face or prestige, but instead are mainly concerned with getting the job done - that this sort of thing can work. Secondly, we had tried to convince Taiwan that this informal mechanism could work adequately, that if Chinese are very much concerned with face, and of course we found the American politicians were very much concerned with their own face. And therefore if a political appointee wanted very much to deal with the top political figure from Taiwan, you're not very happy to see this be done by AIT, which is an unofficial representative et cetera, and so we had as much problem in trying to curtail visits to Taiwan and grandstanding by a cabinet member as we did from the Taiwan side, which was constantly trying to augment the official nature of their contacts by having top political figures in Taiwan meet with top American political figures. We did, of course, arrange for this to happen on certain occasions, and often we tried to get it done on neutral grounds, as in Singapore or in the context of meetings at APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) or something of the sort.

But the constant pressure was there for people who felt that once they had gotten into an exalted position then they alone were capable of really doing anything that handles Taiwan. So that's why you have pressure up on the Hill and a certain amount of pressure from political appointees who want to be able to do these things because they have their concept that once they get to a high position then they alone have the real authority and clout to get anything accomplished. And all of these "hired hands," of course, should get out of the way. We have this, of course, particularly with the American military. The American military finds it very difficult to feel that even their own subordinates can do things when, of course, if you're going to have a high-ranking general then you have to have a high-ranking general on our side to deal with him. So this is what we have also with some of the military contacts with Peking, and they don't realize, really, that regardless of whom they come in contact with from Peking, they're dealing with the same organization. They seem to think they can make personal friends and that alters the whole way in which Peking is going to react. And the ego trips of a lot of the political figures - and of course when military generals get pretty high up they begin to consider themselves to have quite an ego as well: MacArthur wasn't the first or the last. So one did have always that problem, by saying, Listen, we can do this, and we'll load two bases, but you had people on the American side as well as people on the Taiwan side not wanting to load two bases - Taiwan, because of course their own culture is very much a question of face, and therefore they wanted to have all of their figures deal with people who looked as though they were as prominent as they were. You could say, well, listen, you're only the smallest province of China. And that, of course, would get them really set off because Taiwan had to be considered a good deal differently than just the smallest province of China when you're dealing with the United States.

But then, of course, as I say, the system, which was an unofficial one, worked really very well. One did not need to have high-level political contacts, high-level political visits, all the rest of that accoutrement, provided you got people who knew what they were doing and got clear instructions as to what one desired to have from the top leadership. I mean the biggest failure, I think, was the renegotiation of the August 1982 communiquï¿½, and that was not something which was done on the Taiwan side. It was done on the American side, and they were dealing with fairly low level, and yet they did not get something which served U.S. interests well and they did not do something which was sufficiently coordinated so that the document and the agreements which they concluded would reflect what could be accomplished.

So I think one of the key things is that, indeed, it's a bit anomalous to have Taiwan, which satisfies so many of the criteria for the United Nations membership, be a place where we cannot have formal diplomatic relations, when we have formal diplomatic relations with a lot of countries we get along with a lot less well and who have far less of the attributes of a full state. I mean, when you consider the population of some of the mini-states, the island states and so on, it really is rather silly, because after all Taiwan with 22 million is a fairly large country by the standards of the United Nations. In addition to that, as a sort of 10th largest trading nation, just in economic terms it's a pretty large spot. So nonetheless, although it's anomalous, other arrangements can be made to make sure that all of this works, and I think the key thing was that President Chiang directed his people, who were very competent, to make it work. And although he was very much annoyed, as I discussed earlier when we did change recognition, and felt we were making a big mistake that we would live to regret, and on and on, nonetheless, he did direct that once we got something going, there was a make-it-work and not to throw in a monkey wrench every time, even though they could always find ways of doing it. He told them, Don't try to get the Congress to block what it is the American administration is going to be doing because while the Congress can help, and particularly in the broad framework of the law and the Taiwan Relations Act, it's the American executive branch which is going to give us the approvals for military equipment and get to us the things we need for both symbolic and real purposes.

So I think that that was another very, very good and important example. The fact also I mentioned earlier that the Taiwan Relations Act, as a domestic law designed to handle foreign relations, was something which was also unprecedented, and that has worked very well despite the views of many lawyers that various consulates would be called into question, really perhaps even as being unconstitutional. Nonetheless, that's not happened. So I think that the Taiwan handling has to be considered as a relative success and really one of the more interesting successes which is deserving, I think, of a full book to look at this from legal and other aspects.

And yet at the same time, we have this continuing conflict with Peking over how Taiwan is handled. But at least we have avoided, from the Shanghai communiquï¿½ on, any real battle. The closest we came was in 1996 with the two aircraft battle groups sailing in the vicinity of Taiwan, but that, I don't think, really at any point came close to being a real conflict. So I think that despite the fact that we had that - yesterday or the day before - 11 thousandth white paper on Taiwan, we have to consider that if all we get are white papers, then we're doing something right.

Q: This is from Mainland China?

PRATT: From Mainland China, yes. So, as I say, Taiwan has remained a key problem, despite the fact that many persons thought that it would just plain go away. Those of us who knew Taiwan knew it wouldn't go away. The only question was how do you keep it from coming to a real flashpoint? As you know, we in the Foreign Service often have considered that what we are trying to do is not to solve problems but to manage situations, and I think if there is anything which was a real situation to be managed, it was Taiwan and Taiwan vis-ï¿½-vis Peking. And therefore, so long as your constant instructions are to manage it - and that's what the people in Taiwan gave their emissaries, and for most part what we got here in Washington - you can keep it from being a disaster. And again, most of us in the Foreign Service know the major thing is make sure you avoid the worst; don't expect to accomplish the best. I think by both these measures Taiwan has been really a success; however, it's one that requires constant attention, and this is what the problem [is] with, shall we say, and American problem-solving President who wants to go barging in, solve this problem, and then move on to the next one.

Q: You're talking about the present administration.

PRATT: Well, almost every president generally feels: "don't bother me with anything that just has to be tinkered with; I want to get the prestige of historical accomplishment of solving something." And therefore, given the general attitude of Americans, which is problem-solving and then moving on to the next problem, knowing that we're always going to have problems but wanting to get this one swept out of the way so they can do something else, you've got a real problem. And this is, I think, again, partly the phenomenon of, shall we say, political appointees who know they're coming for a short period of time, and the last thing they want to be known as is as having been "good stewards" of a number of problems and having made sure that none of them blew up in their face, when they would instead like to solve the Northern Ireland question and take care of everything that's going on in the Balkans and solve the Middle Eastern peace process and so forth. Fortunately, we have enough people around who keep saying, "Listen, people have been solving the Middle East peace problem over many years, and probably long after you're gone they'll still be solving it."

Q: Well, now, in 1986, you left this containing-the-problem job, and you went where?

PRATT: I went to Guangzhou as consul general, and Guangzhou is, of course, formerly called Canton. And so this was the principal consulate outside Peking itself, because we handled all the immigrant visas there, and therefore it was the largest American diplomatic mission in China, except the embassy in Peking.

Q: Well, now, you were there from 1986 to when?

PRATT: From 1986 to 1989.

Q: This was your first time in the place that had always been over the horizon.

PRATT: Well, except for when I was there in 1947, when I was a little boy. So yes, however, it had been so much on the periphery of or, shall we say, involved in what I was doing, so I can't say it was an anticlimax, but nonetheless it wasn't quite going home either, but it was certainly neither strange nor totally familiar.

Q: Was there at all a sort of problem from the Mainlander China group within the State Department sending you there? I mean, if you were seen as pro-Taiwan, or something like that.

PRATT: By that time, we had basically very congenial persons who realized that I had been very helpful for them in many areas and always completely consulted with them about anything we were doing which could have an impact on what Peking would think. And so we worked very closely together. Also at that time we had Paul Wolfowitz as the assistant secretary, and he was very staunchly supportive of the Taiwan side and those of us who were working on it. I had also, here in Washington, because of my handling of the Taiwan side, been cultivated by the people in the Peking Embassy, and that maintained, really, even after I came back from Guangzhou. So they have always had me in their sort of card file as somebody whom they may not be too happy with some of the things I was doing, but somebody with whom they'd keep very much in touch. So I had had close contacts with the other DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) here, and before we went off to Guangzhou, my wife and I were invited there to their house for dinner, and other people I would see periodically - either the DCM or the political counselor - and we really had very good relations because they knew the limits of what they could expect to accomplish.

This is another thing which I think was very much a part of what was doing with Taiwan, and that is how you do things vis-ï¿½-vis Peking is often more important than what you do. That again, is a very Asian aspect. So long as you don't hit them in the face, so long as you do things in the right way, they may not be too happy about it, but you're not going to really incense them. And of course you do have to be constantly aware of where their interests lie, overall national interests and also the interests of the particular organization to which they belong, because China is no more totally unitary than is the United States. And while it doesn't break down the same way between Congress and House and Senate and State Department and so forth, nonetheless, there are very important different constituencies, and they are not always getting along that well. You've got to know which ones to deal with and how.

Q: Well, now, Guangzhou, when you went out there in 1986, what was, as you saw it, the situation there, the government, how things were going in Guangzhou? Talk about the greater area.

PRATT: Sure. Our consulate covered four provinces. It started out being three provinces and then the island of Hainan was made a province, so in the end there were four provinces. Each one was very different, but they all were part of the greater south and, shall we say, the more economically inclined area of China. Early on in his career Deng Xiaoping had established special economic zones, of which the original ones, there were in Guangdong Province, and one was in Fukien Province, and therefore all four of them were within my consular district.

And these were ways that Deng was using to break from the centralized planning and centralized ownership and control system that was in place when he came in. He sent people to canvass how economies were run in Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore, and to compare all these notes and then submit a proposal about how they could get some of these methods which appeared to work in these areas and to establish those in special economic zones in the southern part of China, where they could be sort of cordoned off and made sure that if they developed any kind of "bad habits" they wouldn't spread elsewhere in China, but the major thing being that they would be test areas to figure out what could be done on the Mainland, based on what Deng considered the Chinese-type policies, the Confucianist background and all the rest of it, that South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore had found was compatible with the Chinese character.

So this was a very interesting approach, and he pioneered in many of these areas methods which subsequently were found to work and some of which they found didn't work and were abandoned and so forth. But this is very much part of the pragmatic approach of Deng Xiaoping, which of course is not at all a Leninist approach, and therefore this was the beginning of what has turned out to be the way in which China has taken almost a whole coastline and transformed it to what are often called capitalist principles, but aren't really capitalist. They are still much more bureaucratic capitalism or a whole range of things, but nonetheless where the economics is important. And that's where it's different from, say, the Stalinist and even the Leninist principle, which was that you do it regardless of what the cost in mere money is. And from the point of view of these other people, though, money is merely the means of finding out what it does cost you.

Q: What were our concerns in this area?

PRATT: Well, our concerns were that this was the area which was advancing most rapidly. I'm sure you know of Ezra Vogel's book, the two of them, on Guangzhou, one i1964 and one later on which he was editing. He was completing his second book while we were posted there in Guangzhou. [Ed: Vogel, Ezra F., Canton Under Communism (1969) and The Four Little Dragons: The Spread of Industrialization in East Asia (1991), both Harvard University Press]

And therefore, this was from our point of view economic events in Guangzhou seemed to be pointing to the future. And making work economic rationality and the various aspects of this, but the primary thing was beginning to know what things cost so you know what's worth doing and what isn't.

Q: Were we concerned as this developed that maybe the Chinese might turn into another Japan - in other words, milk our money and send us stuff? We have a very critical balance of trade problem. We've had it for some time, and during this period we had it. Was this a concern, Mark?

PRATT: Oh, yes. And of course one of the principal purposes of our commercial attachï¿½ was to make sure that we did the most we could to try to expand U.S. sales in China. However, we did consider that the Chinese had a very different economy, after all, from the Japanese. The Japanese could sort of mount an export focused economy without necessarily being aware that they had so many consumers back at home, whereas nobody in Peking can consider that they have no consumers back in China. They've got 1.2 billion of them. Therefore this is not so easily done. Secondly, of course, Japan Incorporated - perhaps a rather accurate term to refer to the way in which a government business and so forth all work together. That was never the case in China, and of course I was there in south China, where things are run very differently from the way in which they are run up in the Shanghai area, which is again different from Xinjiang and Mukden [Ed: in Chinese, Shenyang] in Manchuria. We could see that there were a lot of different things going on. It was nothing like Japan.

Secondly, many of the goods which were being produced for the U.S. market, which were beginning to be produced in Guangdong Province, had previously been produced in Hong Kong or in Taiwan or occasionally in South Korea, and therefore this was merely a transfer. This was not a net increase, and therefore the trade deficit with China, which of course developed basically after I left - I mean, it was important by the time I was leaving but even more important afterwards - nonetheless, this was based on a decrease in the deficit with Taiwan and with Hong Kong, because goods were nominally being produced in China and being carried on ledger books as coming from China even though the company that may have been producing the stuff either was an American company which had previously produced the stuff in Taiwan or maybe a Taiwan company which was producing it on the Mainland. So you're merely shifting it from one ï¿½tiquette to another; it's not a net increase.

Thirdly, China was far more open to joint ventures. Admittedly, we had problems with some, and often different problems in different parts of China, and we had the fewest problems perhaps in Guangdong province. In part, that was due to the experience of the Hong Kong people who had started many of these ventures or the Hong Kong partners who were involved with the Americans doing it, so if the Americans were running something they often would make sure that they would get somebody whom they knew in Hong Kong who would know the right people to try to handle in Guangdong Province, and sometimes the Hong Kong people would then pick people from Bangkok who were related to the people in part of Guangdong Province, the northeastern part, who would be able to line up political support.

And so what you get is basically very much a, say, rational economic proposal which would pass muster in the banks of Bangkok and in the money houses and export people and the design people and so forth of Hong Kong and getting the more rationally minded figures, which included some of the party types in Guangdong Province. So this was economic rationality, and down in that area we were able to benefit from it.

Q: How successful was your consulate general in promoting U.S. trade? Were Chinese entrepreneurs coming to you and saying, "What have you got in the line of toilet covers or air conditioners?" - or what have you?

PRATT: No, it was handled a little differently. Guangdong had a big exposition hall, and they had their annual trade fair for the promotion of Chinese goods, and Americans had previously come in to look at things at this fair and try to get an idea of what they wanted to buy. For sale of American products, we occasionally had shows which were run by the Commerce Department, generally focused shows of a particular type. We had one wine tasting, for example, which was not going to be doing very much for selling California wines, but in general the Americans would go out there and scout out the market and figure out what it is they could do. And they often would go in through joint ventures. So you had Beatrice, the food corporation. You had Heinz.

Q: Another food.

PRATT: Another big food one. And you had Procter and Gamble coming in for shampoos and things of that sort. They of course had to work out what it was they thought might sell in China, and of course, initial estimates were all very, very pessimistic about the level of consumption of people of China because people were really not doing a very good geographic examination of China to determine that the economy was very different in the coastal area from what it was in the interior, and therefore beauty products and things of that sort could be sold very easily in the more prosperous city areas of the coastal part of China. And so that's when they found that Head & Shoulders and other things of that sort could sell at prices comparable to the U.S.. Also they had not really looked at the Chinese. I mean they knew what their monthly wages were, but they didn't realize that if they had an apartment the rent of which cost three-quarters of what the electric bill was and they were only allowed to have one 25-watt light bulb per room, then you realize that you're dealing with people getting so much as a monthly income, this is almost what a teenager would get who's living at home. It's available for such things as shampoo and beauty products and things of that sort. So China was developing a market much more rapidly than people had thought at first, and therefore baby food, for example, which Beatrice was doing and Heinz was doing, and a number of other things were being produced which could be sold on the Mainland as well as having things exported to Hong Kong and other areas in the region.

So that was part particularly of what we were doing in Guangdong Province. Continental Grain, for example, came in to produce feed grains for raising shrimp and chicken and pigs and so forth, and they were able to find ways of getting the grain stuffs from the northeast through military connections, and they, for example, got the backing of the agricultural head because they named his brother a member of the board and therefore he was getting money out of this, and they had the okay of the party secretary because his brother was connected with the banker who was brought in from Bangkok. So you know, when you've got these various factors together, you could get something going which could rely on American management and American expertise and gradually permit us to train other people. We did not try to do things as advanced as, for example, the Peugeot factory. The French established a factory for manufacturing automobiles in Guangdong Province, but they were piggy-backing on an old company that used to make buses and so forth, and they had all the kinds of usual problems with the Communist Party organization within the enterprise and the labor organizations which made difficulties. Most of the Americans coming in were able to establish an organization where they could make sure they got on the right side of some of the right people there, and some of these right people, no doubt, were getting paid off. And of course, as we found in the case of the Soviet Union, a little bit of corruption sort of get wheels moving. When you get a lot of corruption, then you get a falsification of the economic system.

Q: Speaking of corruption, I would imagine this would be one of the things you'd be monitoring rather closely, to see what it was doing to the system.

PRATT: Well, obviously, one of the problems we have is the American law which does not permit Americans to engage in the kind of corruption which others do.

Q: The Foreign Corrupt Practices Act.

PRATT: The Foreign Corrupt Practices Act is not something which the French or the Japanese and so forth have ever adopted. So we had to look at this and sort of see that, well, probably they were having their partner in Hong Kong do the payoff.

Q: I was thinking more not so much on the American economic side, but looking at basically the political system in this 1986-89 period. Were you seeing the corruption as being a major factor in sort of the politico-economic life of China?

PRATT: Well, when I arrived in '86, the primary corruption was still political. In other words, the Communist Party membership gave you many rights and privileges, many of which were not financial, many of which were that your children would be able to get access to the better schools. They could go into the faculty of the school that they wanted to go into. They could get the degree they wanted. They could then go on to graduate school where they wanted to go. They then would not be sent out to the boonies but would get a job in some of the central enterprises and so forth. This was the kind of political corruption which was most offensive to many of the younger people there, particularly since, of course, that corruption often favored political figures who were not from the province. And therefore the carpetbaggers, from their point of view, would be the ones who were favored. They would get the better housing. They would be able to get all the perks. When they retired they would get much better housing and they would have a car and driver assigned to them and so forth. So that's the kind of corruption which I think is most common in Communist systems.

Let me give you an illustration of the sort of things that I suggested. When Vaclav Havel was able to open things up in Czechoslovakia, he spread the news about the special facilities for high party figures, all of the special resort areas, all the special housing, all the special clubs, and all the rest of it - to show that Czechoslovakia was not, shall we say, a workers paradise. It was the party's paradise. Well, this was very true in Guangzhou. The whole area, you may be aware of, is this whole area in which Mao used to go because they liked to go south during the winter, and his wife had her special place which was very palatial. They had special trains which would transport them from the north. So this is the kind of privilege of the party figures which from the point of view of the people there was the most annoying aspect of corruption. Monetary corruption, of course, was still, shall we say, in early stages because there wasn't much you could do with money. If you got a lot of money, what could you do with it? If you couldn't get it out of the country into a bank account abroad so that when you were abroad you could either gamble at Las Vegas or buy something for your children who were studying in the United States, what was the sense of having the money? You could get everything you needed through power.

Q: How about your reporting work, your contact with the governments of your four provinces? What was your interest concern, outside of sort of keeping a finger on the pulse?

PRATT: Well, of course, one of the key things we were always interested in was economic development and then the potential role of the United States, either in investing or in selling things there for a certain project which they were interested in. And for that, we did find that the economic zones were often the areas in which we would have the greatest success because these were where people who were sort of the entrepreneurial types from all over China might gravitate, because they made the first - and particularly Shenchen, near Hong Kong - this was the first sort of real Chinese city composed of people from all over China. In other words, it was not Shanghai and all Shanghainese, and it wasn't Peking with a lot of bureaucrats plus a few people from Peking. This was the children of some of the top leaders all over the country converging on Shenchen and making an overall-type Chinese environment, which again was very open, particularly to Hong Kong, but then also open to the U.S., because Hong Kong is certainly very open to the U.S.. So we would go around primarily to be seeing those places where there was some economic venture which they could want our assistance for or we could facilitate. For example, I went down to the opening of an automobile showroom in Hainan, and there weren't going to be many American automobiles, but it was an American-connected venture, through Hong Kong. And so I think in the end, probably from one of the aspects of corruption that was important there, because Hainan Island had had special import arrangements, and this had resulted in one of the biggest scandals just before I got there of their buying automobiles through this special privilege and then shipping them across the water into Guangdong Province. And one of the more gifted economic figures was finally coming back to Guangdong after being disgraced as the party figure in Hainan Island.

Q: Were you running into the problem that I've heard of - of cars being stolen elsewhere, particularly in Hong Kong at this particular time, being taken into China and then the army higher-ups were picking them up at margin rates?

PRATT: Yes, well, this happened near the end of my stay, because the smuggling . . . Well, they recently had a very important clamp-down on smuggling in Fujian Province in Xiamen. And prior to that, of course, there was a great deal of smuggling into China from Hong Kong, including, as you mention, very high-quality cars being nabbed down there and then peddled on the Mainland. However, a lot of the cars in Hong Kong, of course they drive on the left-hand side of the road, and therefore they were readily noticeable when they suddenly turned up in, say, Chengdu, because who would get the left-hand drive for Chengdu? So there were certain limits to this. The better way of doing things is when they falsified what the customs declaration said, so that it would come in as one thing when it really was another, and a different duty would apply.

Of course, smuggling out of the country was also a key thing I was interested in, as you can probably gather from looking around here. I bought a lot of Chinese things over my career, and those stacks of boxes there contain porcelain I bought mostly inside China, but that one, for example, is a piece which was smuggled out of China, and I bought it in Hong Kong. So there was a very active market for Chinese antiquities, lots of them dug up in western China at a time when they were putting in airfields and roads, including one major road for the rocketry and nuclear testing area, where they farmed out the land just ahead of the road builders, and the various smugglers would come in and dig up what they wanted and get assistance from the military in getting it down to Guangdong Province, from which it was then shipped across to Hong Kong. So indeed, there were aspects of corruption of this sort, but one of the things to keep in mind, as I say, is that when the president, the head of a country, Deng Xiaoping, would boast of having a salary of $240 a month, you realize that how is he going to get private trains and private planes and all the rest of it based on that. Well, at some point also maybe he's going to want to have actual money, and this is one of the things, for example, which was addressed at one of the conferences we had with the education people. Deans of colleges would have housing provided. They would have servants provided. They'd have a car provided. But with the prosperity which was growing in their part of China, they would get as monetary reward far less than a taxi driver or a waiter at a joint venture hotel. And therefore, they could have all these perks, but how could you transform these perks into the common currency which would permit them to decide if they wanted to buy more cigarettes or if they wanted instead to buy a painting. All of this was -

Q: Or pass on to their children.

PRATT: Or pass on to their children, because they couldn't pass the housing, they couldn't pass the car and driver, they couldn't pass the cook in the kitchen. So indeed, the perks, which were fine under a Communist system and of course went way beyond what many other people would get, are not something in the end which even satisfies the people who get the perks - if you permit economic development at the same time, which then permits some people to get money. And this was where we got the animosity against economic development, because the people who were getting the money out of it were not the people who benefited from the political perks. In addition to that, one of the person whom we knew was the vice-chancellor of the University of Xiamen, who was a very gifted economist, had studied in Europe, and he also ran the Taiwan and the Southeast Asian special departments because he was an economist and then he worked on economic matters, too. And he said a lot of his professors in the economic area were also called in as advisors, consultants for the special economic zone there in Xiamen. He said, "What can a professor of Confucianism or a professor even of Marxism-Leninism - what can he go to offer somebody to be able to get monetary reward which is basically three or four times what he gets as his salary as a professor?" So these dislocations in the society which are produced by economic reforms had, indeed, contradictions which were making for political and other problems. They tried to raise salaries and they tried to equalize these things, but one of the most difficult things is their collecting their taxes. One of the very interesting things about Guangdong Province is they negotiated a kind of overall fee from Guangdong Province to pay to the central government, and once they came to that negotiated figure, it would remain the same for five years. While an economy which is growing 20 per cent a year, you could figure out that whatever figure you worked out of this year, five years later it was awfully low.

Q: Did you at this point, this 1986-1989 period, was Marxism dead, I mean, as far as a belief in your area, or not?

PRATT: Well, shall we say, it was like many state religions: you can't be sure how many believe it, but you know that you dare not attack it. And what was more important was that fear of the thought police, the government, the party - well, not the government so much, but the party - had diminished following Deng Xiaoping. Deng Xiaoping had broken the back of the great fear mechanism, where everybody was so constantly paralyzed with fear. They had, shall we say, sensible caution about what might happen if you said the wrong thing or if you did the wrong thing, but you didn't have an all-pervasive fear of, my God, what can happen next? - which had, of course, existed during the anti-rightist movement, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution. So people no longer had the same fear. Now they knew that they had to be careful, and they also knew that there were certain people to protect them from others and there were other people who they would need protection from, so it was beginning to be a more complicated society, and Marxism was no so much the question as the state religion and being able to go to your catechism class and to learn how to say it. However, after 1989 and the Tiananmen incident, they tried to go back to the old system of having party hacks go in and lecture students and try to do what they did during the anti-rightist movement, where they had nuclear physics professors who had read Marx in the original German and Lenin in the original Russian be lectured by soldiers about Marxism-Leninism. So you know, this kind of system they could not go back to because the students laughed them out of the room. They only had to go sit there, and for days they had to discuss the terrible, terrible evens of Tiananmen - their version, namely that this was an anti-party and counterrevolutionary movement - and they were required to do this in such simplistic terms that university students just found it ludicrous. And they sort of let, therefore, the teachers know that it was ludicrous, and of course the teachers knew it, too. So there had been a lot of change since the Cultural Revolution, and Marxism, you know, was never quite what people think it was. Mao Zedong - what did he understand of Marxism? Even when he moved to Yenan and was already head of the party, he had read in translation only two documents connected with Marxism-Leninism: The Communist Manifesto and Imperialism: The final Stage of Capitalism, of Lenin. So he knew very little. He finally ordered them to translate more of these works into Chinese. There's a question whether he read very much of them. So Marxism I think has been always a big problem. If you call them traditional and Confucianist, that doesn't make much sense either, but certainly you would have to be far more complex in the discussion of what they are. The attitudes, indeed, were anti-imperialist, but that's often xenophobia, and what has xenophobia got to do with Marxian internationalism?

Q: Yes. When you were dealing with this, did you find that Marx's slogans were given to you by party people and all that, or was this kind of a dying thing?

PRATT: Well, this was dying, and when people came in from the north and addressed formal gatherings and they referred to "comrades" at one point, this was something which the local people would sort of shake their head at because they were losing that term and were using "gentlemen" and "ladies" instead, going back to their previous locution. So a lot of these words which were introduced, for example - they used the word lover as the word for wife, instead of the more formal tai tai. Well, by the time we were leaving, tai tai was back, and airen was not being used. Now admittedly there's a certain influence from Hong Kong, but also it's the fact that many of these people there were rather conservative and had never really liked some of the more barbaric terms which the Communists tried to introduce.

Q: Did you find, as somebody who dealt for so long with Taiwanese affairs, that you were getting genuine questions on our Taiwan policy and all that, or was this a burning issue?

PRATT: It was not a burning issue because, of course, they couldn't care less. Taiwan was farther north and was connected with Fukien Province, but even in Fukien Province they were interested in Taiwan, they wanted to know what I thought was going on there, what I thought was happening, but it was very objective. They were not sort of trying to convince me that they knew what Taiwan was about and the Americans were mainly causing the problems. And in fact, many of them figured that the big power factor in maintaining Taiwan separate from China was Japan, not the U.S., and they said, "That's the trouble with you Americans. You're very trusting and naï¿½ve and you don't realize how devious these Japanese are. They are using you to preserve their role in Taiwan. After all, they ruled Taiwan for 50 years, and they have people who really have fond memories of Taiwan as part of Japan and wished it would become part of Japan again, and therefore you Americans are merely serving Japanese interests." So that's the framework in which they would occasionally approach it, but not just lecturing me, you know, "You've got to turn her over or else we'll bomb Los Angeles." I mean, that's something which they will say for people up in Peking who could be that heavy-handed.

Q: What about visas? This was your principal stock in trade in a way in Guangzhou. Was this something you could turn over to your consular section and let go, or did visas impinge on your work?

PRATT: Well, not too much, much less so that probably in Hong Kong in the good old days. But it was, after all, it was a relatively small number of people who would try to come in to apply for either student visas or business visas. So these non-immigrant visas were rather limited, and they, of course, would be - you'd have to get all the documents which the government would give, and the government was more concerned about who went off to study in the United States than American universities were. Therefore, most of these were pretty much straightforward. It was not like Taiwan or Hong Kong, where many people wanted to go to the United States to be able to get out, and they could still get passports to get out. In China they couldn't get passports to leave unless they had fulfilled their military requirement and graduated from the proper university and were going for the proper course of study in the U.S. and all the rest of it. So those were not so much of a problem.

Then, of course, the rest, the biggest number of visas were immigrant visas, and those, of course, were done basically pretty much by rote, and therefore with any good consular section you handled that without much trouble. The one exception was when we got a few people - it was a small number - who were trying to get out of China after the Tiananmen incident because they themselves were implicated in the Tiananmen incident.

Q: You were there after the Tiananmen incident.

PRATT: Oh, yes, and up until October and so forth, all the fall out from that we were very much exposed to. And we therefore had a number of people who had been on the staff of Zhao Ziyang, for example, who were able through friends and other ways of getting down to Guangzhou. However, if they were going to get into Hong Kong, it would greatly help them if they already had in their passport a visa for the United States, so in a number of cases we facilitated giving visas without excessive concern about what their bona fides as a bona fide non-immigrant were. We would sort of say, "Non-immigrant? Well, they might qualify for political refugee, political asylum in the U.S.." And therefore we could conclude that we were giving them visas on the proper grounds. We got basically an okay from Washington to do that because we were the last position on the underground railroad before they finally got out to Hong Kong or elsewhere, and in order, as I say, to be able to get by in Hong Kong and not be turned back it was much easier if they had a visa for them to go on to the United States. They did not all go on to the United States. In fact, one went directly to Paris, because once they got to Hong Kong, they were able to contact the French consulate general and get a way of getting out there, but they didn't have a French consulate general in Guangzhou at that time.

Q: Well, then, let's talk about Tiananmen Square. This is what, June or May of 1989?

PRATT: Well, the whole incident really started in April of 1989. One should keep in mind that 1989 is after all the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution, and the French Revolution was very, very important in the thinking of many of the Chinese political movements of the 20th century. They went back to the French Revolution as much as to the Russian Revolution of 1917. Also it was the 70th anniversary of the May 4th Movement of 1919. In addition to that, it was the 40th anniversary, 1949-1989, of the establishment of the People's Republic. So there were three very important anniversaries coming up, and in particular there was an interest among many students to do again what students had done for the May 4th movement. In other words, they had gone against their elders and were in the forefront of pushing nationalist and other important issues. So even before the deaths on April 14th or 15th of the former party chairman - it will come to me during the course . . . Even before his death, you had already had students coming in from the United States and elsewhere to make plans for a big demonstration on May 4th. And when he died, one of the key things they had was a memorial service for him, and this is when they had the first of the big demonstrations, because he was considered somebody who had pushed for some of the reforms and had been ousted as party secretary because of his interest in reform. There are other reasons, I'm quite sure, and I've heard a number of them, but certainly from the point of view of the students, he was one of the few "good guys" in the top party organization. And so they demonstrated very forcefully in his favor, and this was somewhat along the lines of the demonstrations which Deng Xiaoping had been involved in with the death of Zhou Enlai. So this, again, was harking back to previous political events, and therefore the symbolism was not lost on the Chinese in general. And so these things went on, these demonstrations, regularly, and one of the big problems, of course, for Deng Xiaoping was he had wanted to have the business of Gorbachev go smoothly -

Q: This was the first visit since Khrushchev.

PRATT: That's right, the first visit since Khrushchev.

Q: So it was sort of reopening that tie to what was still the Soviet Union.

PRATT: That's right, but also obviously a Soviet Union which had greatly changed and one where Gorbachev was certainly prepared to make sure that there was no hectoring from Moscow to Peking. He was going to be open and placating and not necessarily say that China was the older brother, but he wouldn't say that Russia was the older brother either. So this was going to be a very different relationship, and it was very important for Deng Xiaoping because he had been the focal figure in the Sino-Soviet split some 20 years or more before that - 1957, I guess it was.

Q: 30 years.

PRATT: So 30 years before that he had been the key figure to say very tough, nasty things to Moscow. And here was going to be an occasion for sort of a love feast. Now one of the key things which Deng made his point to tell President Bush when they met before the Gorbachev visit - and perhaps I'll say a few words about that Bush visit later - but one of the few things he said was that this is, however, not going to be a new alliance; it's not going to be something that is aimed at the United States, and so on. But the only message he was really trying to get across to Bush, which shows the importance he attached to the Gorbachev visit and how annoyed he was to find that he could not even greet him in the Tiananmen. They had to meet elsewhere, near the airport, and not go through the streets of the city and so forth. Now this, for a Chinese autocrat, was a great loss of face.

Q: I think for all of us who were watching this thing, were wondering. First it seemed interesting, but it kept going on and on, this camping, and it seemed like the Politburo was paralyzed. I mean, here you were, a Chinese hand of long experience, and from you colleagues in Guangzhou, were people wondering what the hell is happening here? I'm talking about Chinese, too. I mean, why aren't they at least making nice to the students or wiping them out or doing something?

PRATT: See, the perspective, when you mentioned the Politburo, it's a very important point. This, however, is not what was coming out of our embassy, and it was not what people in Washington were talking about. But it was what people in Guangzhou were talking about because they saw this as an example of quarrels within the top. In the first place, Hu Yaobang (the name came to me), the party secretary general who had been removed-

Q: He's the one who died.

PRATT: He's the one who had died. But he had been thrown out a little more than a year before that, and so that showed a division because Deng Xiaoping had said he was basing his succession on two figures, Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, the one taking over the party, the other taking over the government administration. Well, one of them was out, and then, of course, Zhao Ziyang was told to pick up the party position, a position in which he had no real deep roots, and he had to give up the State Council, the premier position, in which at least he had some important roots - colleagues, person whom he'd put in there, people who had served with him in a variety of positions where they knew each other and had shared interests. Got him over to the party, sorry that's not where he had any of these advantages. So people down in Guangzhou were saying, Zhao Ziyang had been the major protector of Guangdong Province and its rather central economic past because he had been down there in Guangdong province in the late 1940s and '50s. He had been a principal assistant to the head of the political movement in Guangdong province, and from their point of view it was someone like Zhao Ziyang who would be defending them. And indeed, one of the key economic figures was the senior governor, and a couple of times I was going to Peking he would be on the same flight because he had to fly up to Peking to find out what it was that his friends and the friend of Guangdong Province wanted them to do, because he didn't trust the bureaucracy in between and he didn't trust the communications. So this was very clearly a demonstration of these problems which existed within the top leadership. And we heard that this indeed was paralysis. Zhao Ziyang was party general secretary, and he had been sent off to Korea just as this was boiling up and just when they were having some of these really hard-liners, the ideologues, draft a big editorial to the effect that the demonstration in Tiananmen were not only anti-party but were counterrevolutionary. And this, of course, was a criminalization of this demonstration. Poor Zhao Ziyang was off in Korea when this was taking place, showing, I think, that they were not at all unhappy to have to governor out of the way because they knew that he would be opposed to this. He sent a pro forma statement back okaying the editorial, but the minute he got back he tried to fight against it and to have the demonstrations characterized by far more gentle terms, hoping, of course, to be able to defuse it because there were many of the objections which the students were coming up with which were so similar to the ones which had been used during the May 4th Movement, that they struck very strong chords within the minds of many of the Chinese people, and as you probably saw at the time, there were banners outside a number of the ministries, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, supporting the students. And they began to get workers supporting the students. So there was no question that the tenor of the population in Peking was very much favorably disposed towards the students, because in general students in China are, I can't say coddled, but in any case they're respected because everybody hopes that their son will turn out to be bright enough to get into one of those prestigious central universities. And therefore they have this esteem for intellectualism, and of course Mao had a great deal of contempt for it. But the average Chinese continued to believe that the students could be the saving grace of China.

Q: While this was going on, could you say, as it started, what were you getting from the embassy and were you all wondering was this the beginning of the great revolution or not? I mean, were you looking at it or were you seeing this as another blip?

PRATT: Well, we were, of course, getting a certain amount of characterization of the events and facts about those people who went and talked to people in the square, but down in Guangzhou, this was viewed as basically the sideshow, that the real fight was going on within the councils of the central leadership. They said, you know, "Don't look at what's going on in the square because, although that is significant and what all the people are seeing, that is merely the outside of what is really going on, which is going on inside the very closely . . . " You know Peking's geography - Zhongnanhai, which is where all the top leaders lived, and that basically had one gate which goes almost directly on to the Tiananmen Square. So it's all very close together. But they said the real struggle is going on in the top leadership. And they are not in agreement, and they don't view it the same way, they don't know how to handle it, and this is therefore a typical Chinese event with something on the surface that everybody is paying attention to, but it means that they are not looking at what the real drama is, and that, of course, was the effort to get rid of Zhao Ziyang. And one of the things which they told me down there in Guangzhou was that it looked for while as though when Zhao Ziyang was in the square and when he told the students, "I have come perhaps too late," and he apparently even had tears in his eyes, terribly impressing some of them as being very emotional and sympathetic, that this sort of showed the degree to which he knew that he would rise or fall based on what went on in the square because he was under attack.

Subsequently there has been other information out. Xu Dao Zhin [Ed: ?], who had been party secretary in Hong Kong, apparently a good friend of Zhao Ziyang, they tried to see Deng Xiaoping during this difficult period and Deng's office shut him off and let them go. So they went to see Yang Shangkun and asked him to tell Deng that they would like to see him because they would like to explain what they thought was really going on with the student demonstration and what was going on behind the scene with those trying to take a tough line towards the student demonstration. Subsequently, I guess they learned that Yang Shangkun had already gone over to the other side, those opposing Deng, and certainly opposing Zhao Ziyang, and he never passed this message to Deng.

So it's this kind of internal efforts which have been so typical in Chinese dynasties around the emperor, and this was apparently what was a spin-off into what was going on with the student movement because, of course, as you can imagine, if you get that number of students together, and you can get a lot of people of security services right out there as well, because they have always had very strong security services in all the universities anyway, because students are one of the elements that they are most concerned about and have the greatest difficulty in sort of having confidence that they will do the right thing because they are often very bright and they will do what they think rather than what they're told to do. In any case, we heard afterwards that there were many agents provocateurs there, who were trying to make sure the students couldn't come to an agreement on anything, so that when they were saying, "Zhao Ziyang says he will listen to us but wants us to get off the square, so let's do that," they could not get people together to get a consensus, and they could not do anything without having a consensus. And so this is when these agents, who were trying to make sure they couldn't do anything except what they were told by their own bosses to do, were very successful, and afterwards one of the student organizers whom I knew said, "Well, you know, we have made several big mistakes. One, we accepted a consensus rule rather than a majority of a committee, which would be feasible and could take decisions." Well, in addition to that, almost all these people, of course - or many of them - were children of some of the top leaders, and so they knew that there was a squabble going on in the central office there, and instead of trying to work with those people who would have been closer to their side against the others, they were trying to oppose both of them. And that's when Wuer Kaixi and the others who said to hell with all of them, to hell with Li Peng, to hell with Zhao Ziyang, without considering that if you're in favor of Zhao Ziyang, you've got at least one ally against Li Peng. So this was another big failure which he said they'd made: they did not understand that the enemy of my enemy may be at least in part a friend.

So this was a big failure on the part of the students to be able to figure out what was going on around them, to be able to manipulate and to be able to adapt to the squabbles which were going on. You know, some of the military were asked to participate and found that they were busy or . . . One of the ones I knew went to the hospital to be able to say, "Sorry, I'm in the hospital and cannot attend this meeting."

Q: Well, now, were there comparable demonstrations in Guangzhou, or as this not a student area?

PRATT: Well, there were demonstrations, but they were beautifully controlled there because everybody was agreed as to how to handle them and to make sure that they could go on without a big confrontation. They only permitted a bridge across the river to be blocked for one short period so that people could still get across by boat and by the other bridges. So they did arrest a few people, but they said they had arrested people who were "outside agitators," not students from Guangdong Province. They had a meeting every afternoon in the governor's office, looking down on some of the principal areas where they were demonstrating, and all of the aspects of the government - the party and security services and so forth - were there, and the governor had sufficient clout with the military to make sure they didn't do anything prematurely. Though they were told they should get tanks ready south of town, he made sure they were never brought in and that no real military were every brought in. In addition to that, they had agents within the students, and of course we had our consulate people out there talking with both the students and the other people around there. And so it was handled in a rather kid gloves way, with due respect for the students and their concerns, and none of the real confrontation which existed in some other places. Shanghai was handled pretty well, and that's one of the reasons shy Zhang Zemin is now in power. He was considered to have played at least a skillful role in making sure the demonstrations did not get out of hand in Shanghai. But they went even more smoothly in Guangzhou.

Q: I think this may be a good place to stop, and let's pick up the aftermath of the Tiananmen thing - what were the repercussions, and you mentioned a Presidential visit. Was there a Presidential visit earlier on?

PRATT: Just before the Tiananmen incident.

Q: Okay, so we'll talk about that.

PRATT: Good.***

Q: Today is the 14th of March, 2000. Mark, let's talk about the Presidential visit. This is George Bush, who came there in February of 1989, is that right?

PRATT: That's correct. \

Q: And you were called up to help?

PRATT: Yes, all the consuls general were there to assist because there many protocolarities as well as other things to be done, and since we were often the old China hands there in the country, it was useful to have us there because we spoke the language and knew the cast of characters and so on. And there was, of course, quite a bit going on. The Presidential visit was set up rather hastily in that it was originally designed for Bush to attend the services for the death of Emperor Hirohito, and therefore originally this was supposed to be in Japan, the visit, and then when they added on, obviously that could not be done in advance of the emperor's death, so of course the timing of this was relatively short for most presidential visits, and particularly short for the visit to China.

I think I've mentioned earlier the fact that one of the problems was that the President himself, of course, had been head of the liaison office in Peking. He had met many of these persons during that particular period, which of course was still very early. It was, after all, before Deng Xiaoping was really in power. But nonetheless, he felt that he had maintained an awareness of what was going on in China through subsequent postings such as head of CIA and so on. And he certainly had a great deal of interest in this. He had obviously, during the period of Reagan, been one of the persons who was fielded whenever they had an important Chinese matter. So indeed, he considered that he was still very much a China hand, even though it was a very strange career for a China hand. But it did make for certain problems in that it was very difficult to get information through to him and be sure that it was going to go, because everybody was very antsy along the way about what they would try to tell the desk officer for China. Baker at one point apparently told people not to expect him to raise any matter of concern to China with the President because that was the President's area, not his. So we had a bit of a frustration in that, with the visit set up so soon before it took place, we were concerned about getting the President aware of what had evolved in China since he had been able to keep hands on, because after all as President he didn't really have enough time to be a really good desk officer.

So there had been, of course, starting in 1986, the attack on Hu Yaobang, and this had resulted in his being eliminated from the hierarchy. And then of course, there was the fact that Zhao Ziyang had been made secretary general over his own objections, and his arguments with Deng were that he had no real strength to have any real force in that area. So it was clear that there was a big struggle going on in China trying to limit what Deng could do, particularly how Deng could create his own succession program. But this would be very difficult to get across, and indeed it was. What was sent from Guangzhou would not be easily signed off on to be going to Washington by the embassy because they were not anxious to say something which would not be well received. There were obviously questions of all kinds of programming, and I'm sure you are aware of the big fight over Fang Lizhi and how he was going to be put at the dinner that the President gave, and yet we were told that the Chinese side would not be very happy to have him on the guest list. And for the most part, we were letting the Chinese prepare their own guest list. So this was going to be a problem. There's a big dispute as to whether this proposal was something which was or was not signed off on by Washington.

Q: Winston Lord took great umbrage. He felt that he had warned them about this dissident being on the list, but the political consequences one way or the other. It wasn't an either/or. But he said after it got blown up even more, the White House, which may or may not be true. . . but what usually happens is the White House staff had to blame somebody.

PRATT: Sure, and it was Win Lord -

Q: And it was Win Lord who took it, and he was, to use the diplomatic term, pissed off at how they had done that.

PRATT: That was, I think, emblematic of the problems of real communication between China and the President, because nobody knows whether they actually raised this with the President and whether Bush and others, when he had gone to the Soviet Union, had insisted on seeing dissidents and therefore this was viewed by Win Lord as something which they would be expecting to do, either to see him there, or at some point to do deal with somebody as prestigious as Fang Lizhi. And I think if you have a chance to interview Doug Paal -

Q: Who is this?

PRATT: Doug Paal. P-a-a-l. He who was in the Bush White House [Ed: NSC], and he has some rather nasty things to say about Win Lord and the way in which they viewed the whole operation of the American Embassy. Doug is a very intelligent and very capable officer, and he now is in private business here. But a very good observer and a very sharp mind, very competent. In any case, this was part of the difficulty we felt, in that we were trying to get word, and you had so many filters, because the embassy was not anxious to present stuff to Washington which they thought might upset people there. When it got to the State Department, they were upset about how they could present stuff to go all the way up to Baker, and then Baker himself was not anxious to be trying to tell the President what to do on a matter concerning China. And Doug Paal was, I think, a very competent person there, and how this slipped by I don't know. But it was, as I say, very clearly a part of the problem of trying to get the President to be aware of what he would run into when he got there. And as someone commented to me who was involved and attended many of the meetings and knew what had happened, almost all the position papers which had gone to the President distorted or, rather, did not prepare him for what it was he ran into.

We, of course, had never been very fond of Li Peng. Li Peng made a visit to the United States, escorted by Jim Lilley, who I think made sure that other people realized that we were dealing with somebody who was not either a friend of the United States nor somebody who would be easy for us to deal with. So he, of course, was in Zhongnanhai, and they wanted to have merely a protocolarity exchange with Li Peng and not to try to do anything of real substance. They wanted to discuss the economy with Zhao Ziyang, the premier, who was basically one of the sharpest economic minds in China, and they wanted then to discuss a number of other things with his old friend Deng Xiaoping. Well, it turned out that Deng would discuss only one thing, and that was the visit of Gorbachev and the fact that this did not mean that there was going to be a resumption of any strong ties between China and Russia - in other words, allaying any Presidential fears in this regard. And Zhao Ziyang was not permitted to discuss the economy. The only thing he was trying to present was the need for a greater control over the political side, and therefore this was a kind of neo-authoritarianism which he had been associated with, which was designed, of course, in his mind as a reformer, to be able to say we're not going to have the old, stupid type of the old timers still in power; we intend to have a much more flexible way of dealing with this and moving toward political reform as well, be it that any political reform matters on his agenda. But he was able do discuss only a very small range of that, and almost all the other substantive conversations were ones which Li Peng had been charged with handling. And of course, on the American side that means the last person he wanted to talk to about anything we had which was substantive.

So this made, I think, for a visit which was, I think, very revealing for the President because it was far less of the, shall we say, ability of the old friend of China, George Bush, to be able to do things the way he wanted to with people whom he had previously known and whom he thought he could really be friendly with. I think you're aware of the fact that he was very, very much - I shan't say an egotist - but he was very much a person who believed in his own persuasiveness and himself, and took up the telephone and talked through interpreters, to people all around the world when he was President and thought that was one of his really important accomplishments. And indeed, in most cases it was. Certainly, the way he was able to muster support for the Gulf War was -

Q: And the fall of the Soviet Union.

PRATT: Yes, the fall of the Soviet Union as well, and indeed, obviously, the current President believes in soft-soaping people his own way as well. I mean, it's part of, I guess, the ego satisfaction one gets from being the head of the United States. But in any case, he wasn't able to dictate what happened there, and therefore, as we tried to say subsequently, this should be a good illustration of why it is we ought to be concerned about what might blow up next, because China was obviously going through a period of considerable problems. If Deng Xiaoping himself could not sort of respond openly and have a free-ranging discussion with our President, then obviously he must be having trouble with other people in his country, even though he was supposed to be the paramount leader.

So in this framework we were stirring around, and I was in charge of escorting people to the room where they had the cocktails before the dinner began. I sat at the second table after the high table, which was a nice long one with people arranged in protocol order, and I was going to have at my table Ji Pengfei, who had been foreign minister, and I had seen him in Paris in 1973, at the Paris conference, and had chatted with him there, so I was looking forward to finding out what he was doing. And of course, he was, although out as foreign minister and nominally not a person of high position, still very, very influential as one of the people who still had his own special office and was really a top coordinator of foreign policy matters for Deng Xiaoping. So indeed, he was a considerable figure, and he was whipped away to take one of the seats at the high table after one of the persons who did have high position either was told to move down below because Ji Pengfei really outranked him, or something else occurred - we don't know exactly because the Chinese handled their own side pretty much.

But over in the corner was the corner was the table at which Fang Lizhi was supposed to be, and my commercial consul was going to be the head American representative at that table. She was the granddaughter of Sun Yat-sen, and therefore she knew loads of people.

Q: What's her name?

PRATT: Sun . . . Nora Sun, as it would be pronounced. And Sun Fei-feng is her Chinese name. In any case, she is now living back in Shanghai. She's left the Department of Commerce and is in business of her own. But as I say, this was a dinner which we had hoped would move rather smoothly, and but for the Fang Lizhi incident, I guess it did move pretty well, as the rest of the visit did. But the major point was that for those of us who were old China hands, we saw that there were indeed many strains, and it was not as though Deng was the full-scale emperor able to command everything, and therefore it was indicative of the troubles which we saw still coming.

Q: Did you see this at the time as being - I won't say a paralysis - but maybe a government put on hold as far as relations with the United States? With what happened, did it pertain to the United States - sort of freeze us out - or was it more just the internal workings that they weren't able to deal with, a major foreign country?

PRATT: Well, obviously there are certain foreign policy matters in which relations with the United States cut into high-level quarrels within the Chinese leadership. One, obviously, is Taiwan. It's up again, and it has always been and will continue to be a major issue where you cannot separate fights within the leadership from the relationship with the U.S.. Also aspects of economic development are tied in with that. Zhao Ziyang had been very open to suggestions from the United States about various ways of reforming their economy. Now reform, of course, basically is far more than just a tinkering with little things around the edges, when you're dealing with a command economy on the Stalinist approach, and you're dealing then with the determination to marketize it and also to break down the threads of control which this authoritarian system used primarily through the economic side of things. He was trying, for example, to free up housing. Housing is one of the things which they used to dominate their population. If you had housing of your own, then of course you at least had that much freedom from what you had to look forward to when you go home tonight, because you've got a house to go home to tonight. But then they can at any moment cancel that if they have the system which they previously had. Same way with retirement and, of course, also education and health care. These things were all tied in with their state-owned enterprise economic system with the strong role of the party committee within these state-owned enterprises.

So the whole reform question was one which was getting a lot of attention, and this of course was one of the reasons why many of the people were trying to get rid of Zhao Ziyang, and the attack on Zhao Ziyang had already started, even at this time. It was early in this, but we had already heard that there was a clique - and of course Chungyin [Ed: ?] was considered to be the top figure behind it, and he was using his old buddy Bo Yibo to attack Zhao Ziyang and his policies, and of course he was in a much more vulnerable position as secretary general than he had been when he was in the state councils as premier. So we saw this, and of course the fact that Li Peng was the one who was delegated to speak for everybody and Li Peng being renowned as the person who is most suspicious of the United States - he, for example, was very much opposed to having too many students go to the United States to study, especially graduate courses, despite the fact that this was one of the key points that Deng was in favor of - so he had Li Peng, who was known to have positions which were known to be very much opposed to those of Deng Xiaoping being the person who was supposed to be talking with us. It meant that they felt that they had to keep us at arm's length and keep the people who did understand what we would be saying from talking about these things and just having Li Peng, who could be most relied upon to keep us at arm's distance.

So yes, it did have a connection with U.S. relations. However, even more important than that was, of course, when you had the actual end of this affair, with the Tiananmen incident, the internal political side also had a great deal of impact upon American relations through human rights questions and through the fact that this was on everybody's television screens on a Sunday morning, when there's nothing more interesting to look at than to see what was going on in Tiananmen. And this is one of the things which we were trying to tell both the ambassador, Win Lord, and other people in Washington - that what happens inside China can also have an impact on U.S.-China relations. These persons felt that we could insulate the two. All we have to pay attention to is just how we stroke the Chinese on our own relations; we don't have to worry about what happens within China. We felt that that had been what had taken place, and even Mao Zedong had been willing to have relations with us. But those were rather extraordinary circumstances. That was a time when he was terribly worried about the Soviet Union, and therefore he would compromise, in the minds of anybody who had been following what it is he had been writing all those years, his own principles by joining with the United States to try to have a joint program against the Soviet Union. So that was not a typical aspect of how China would deal with the United States. We were in a much more typical way when we had Deng fighting to be able to maintain at least some shreds of a good U.S. connection.

Q: Well, do you think Bush and Baker caught the spirit of what was happening? You know, you have these visits, and they're busy and then they move on to something else. Did Baker and particularly Bush come away feeling disappointed that it hadn't worked very well?

PRATT: I think he did. However, of course, he then had to move on to something else. But I think that the most important aspect was that he did not know why this had happened, and he didn't ask anybody why the trip had gone this way.

Q: Do you think that too much emphasis had been put on the - I'm going to get my pronunciation wrong - Fang Lizhi incident, as opposed tsomething much more basic?

PRATT: Yes, I think that scholars and op-ed writers felt that that as an incident was far more important than it really was, and they felt that therefore it was all our fault, too. And the fact that it should be structural problems within China, which is not our fault but their fault - or rather, their system, if not their fault - was far more important. And the whole Fang Lizhi incident was just a facet of that. And this was not just that Deng Xiaoping was annoyed that the U.S. should try to see Fang Lizhi - because I don't think Deng would have minded that much - it was that there were other people in the security services and the good old conservative ideologues who were annoyed, and they were able to use this with Deng against the U.S..

Q: For the record, Mark could you give a brief summary of who Fang Lizhi was and what was the incidents because it's mentioned in other accounts, but I think we'd better put it on this one, too?

PRATT: Very well, when Deng came in, he had four modernizations, and the military was the last of them. It was basically agriculture, to start, then industry, science and national defense. And part of the young students were very interested in the fact that there should be four modernizations - which of course meant reforms of various kinds - but they wanted to add - democracy, political reform, as the fifth modernization. And of course, he was immediately thrown in jail for that. Well, Fang Lizhi was a far more prestigious figure. He, after all, was an astrophysicist who had been vice president of the Univeristy of Science and Technology in Anhui Province. He later had been part of the, shall we say, ferment which was used to get rid of Hu Yaobang as party general secretary in 1986-87. And he was then later on in Peking when they thought they could keep a closer eye on him, but he also was involved in saying that there needed to be reform in politics as well and that until you did get political reform you could not really even expect the economic reforms to work. So he was obviously far in advance of what the top leadership was prepared to accept at that time. And even Zhao Ziyang, with his neo-authoritarianism, had a program to placate the top old-timers, hard-liners, Maoist types, and therefore had to be in opposition to Fang Lizhi. And so Fang Lizhi was clearly, openly seen as somebody who was not only going far beyond what was acceptable to the hard-liners, but even what the softer-liners, who knew they had to try to get an improved program including political reform, were prepared to condone at that time. So he was not persona grata to any of the top people because they had a big fight over how they could handle this, and as far as they could move was Zhao's position, and Zhao's position was also anathema to many of the old timers. And Zhao was already under considerable attack.

So to include him in a guest list was indeed something which, as others said, "Well, at least you should go to the Chinese side, tell them you're doing it, and find out if they'll accept it; and if they won't, then drop him - before you contact him." However, that's not what apparently the procedure had been when they had thought this up, and so they had sent an invitation to him through an American scholar who was working with him in Peking at that time, and that scholar had said he would both take the invitation and then accompany him to the door, in any case, of the dinner. So this was how it was arranged, and of course since he was under police surveillance, they were able to intercept the car and make sure it did not get to the banquet hall. If he had gotten through the front door, then he probably would not have gotten by the security people because they had found out about it, and therefore they were waiting for him and, of course, would make sure it didn't occur. There were, however, other dissident leaders who were not so prominent who did get through and sat at the table with my friend Nora. And so, indeed, the point had been made, and certainly the point had been made also about Fang Lizhi that it means that we ought to be able to talk to those persons who were not, shall we say, personae gratae to the top leadership. And as you may remember, he took refuge later in the ambassador's residence, and we finally were able to negotiate him out. That was Jim Lilley's accomplishment.

Q: Well, we've talked about Tiananmen Square in Shanghai, but not the aftermath. We've talked about the immediate what happened, but you had some other points you wanted to talk about, didn't you?

PRATT: Yes, one point which, of course, emerged from this was the fact that it was very difficult to have Americans believe that there are internal politics in other countries which can, indeed, in the end have an impact on our own relations. And this was part of the real struggle there, starting with, of course, the President's visit and the internal fighting that had an impact on who would talk with him about what. But then, of course, this meant also who was up, who was down, who was half under attack, and who was going to be perhaps even forced out. And this is the background for the events of Tiananmen.

This incident was one which I shan't say was totally predictable, but nonetheless it was clear that something was happening, and the question would be just when and how. It had a greater impact on how we did things in China than we think it needed to have, but that was because having it take place on American television on a Sunday morning meant that the reaction that Bush and particularly Baker would feel was the domestic impact here in Washington. They immediately felt that they had to respond by distancing themselves from what had happened in the square. Students, who used to be a privileged class in China (and this is why this was such a bad incident from the Chinese point of view), but also young people in the United States, students or not, have a great deal of resonance with the general body politic and particularly journalism. So, of course, it was very difficult. They felt that they had to take actions which made no real sense in the China framework but made sense from the point of view of what you felt you had to do in the United States. And this is something which we felt caused some of the less intelligent reactions. I think Jim Lilley has probably told you about the problems when the Department refused to give permission for dependents who wished to leave to leave. They said no, you must make a country-wide decision, and it will apply to everybody, and it's a single bureaucratic, administrative fiat. All dependents, not those who wish to leave, but all dependents. Don't give anybody any chance to do what he thinks he ought to do or what seems to make sense under the circumstances. They all have to leave, and they have to leave from every place in China, even though some places had no problems whatsoever - such as Guangzhou. We had no problems of security or anything of that sort. And therefore, this was the administrative fiat, which they said they can only do it on a country-wide bases, and if so, people in the department ought to have their heads examined, because if you have a country as large as China and you're removing dependents because of a flood, well, you don't remove them from the desert areas. So I can't imagine that this is really what they really had to do under law. But they were telling us that under the laws and regulations, if you get the money from Congress to be able to get people out for any one place in the country, you had to be able to say you were doing it for everybody throughout the country.

So he lost, for example, in Peking. We had enough problems in Guangzhou, but they lost, of course, their local employees. We didn't really lose ours in Guangzhou. Things were moving pretty much as usual. But it meant that they had nobody to man telephones except some of the Chinese wives of some of the American employees. Well, they were suddenly told they had to be whipped out, and this was a time when we had received instructions also to assist people throughout china to be able to get out in case they felt they should - that is, scholars and businessmen and so forth. And they had nobody to answer the phones to be able to make contact with some of these people and to try to help make some of the arrangement to get people out. It was very, very complicated, very difficult. And this, of course, was part of the bureaucratic approach which was made. Also, of course, this was made, and they were trying to say that this will bring the Chinese Government to their knees.

And my wife, of course, was forced out to go to Hong Kong, and they wanted her to go back to the United States, and then, of course, they were going to say she couldn't go back to post and help me to pack up to move out because it was too close to my actual departure and so on, so she was going to stay in Hong Kong regardless of whether they paid for it or not. So she, of course, being a little bit irreverent, said, "Yes, there's nothing which is going to make Deng Xiaoping come to his knees quicker than to learn that I have been sent from Guangzhou to Hong Kong."

Q: Yes.

PRATT: This is part of the silliness, when you look at it from the point of view of what you say you are trying to do. And this is what Baker, of course, was trying to make sure the press, the media, and the Congress got, and that is, "We'll show these Chinese that we can be tough on them: we'll take all of our dependents out." Well this was, I think part of a game of the way in which combines between the political appointees and the, I think, excessive concern about American media and public which can always be educated. I mean the media may be difficult to educate, but the public, I think, can generally be educated if you tell them why you're doing something, if you're doing something which makes sense.

And of course, the administrative side, which is very much interested in doing things in a hectoring and dictatorial fashion whenever they get a chance, because I think that they are so much smartened by the fact that they didn't get to be ambassadors and therefore they were very much resentful of people saying, "Listen, this is what foreign policy calls for us to do."

Q: Well, how long were you in . . . or were there some other points?

PRATT: Yes, one point I wanted to raise was the security side of things, because while I was there, Anne Armstrong, who was the head of the Special Intelligence and Security Group at that time, made a visit to Guangzhou with the Special Committee, and she was looking at the basic security situation in the Chinese posts. And we learned certain things which we had sort of expected that any security officer in the embassy could and should have told us. For example, we had a storeroom to which local employees had access on the floor directly below our communications area, and apparently you're supposed to have 10 feet of secure space around your communications equipment. I've forgotten what they call it, but there's something like this zone. And we could immediately improve that situation, as we did. We moved my office down there and had that as a space which was not open to local employees unescorted. So this sort of pointed out, one, the interest in security, which indeed we all should have and as you know most people who are in the political and economic side are well aware of the importance of security. Certainly American business is often very concerned about its security. But admin, of course, is not always understanding what real security is and what some of the problems are. They only have a rather mechanical concept of a piece of paper which has something stamped on it which is left out. And so we found that Anne Armstrong had some very tough security people with her who had previously worked, I guess, with the Congress, and of course, they were, I think, anxious to point out the inadequacies which most of us were well aware of and talking of standards which, of course, would perhaps never be possible in a place that we would occupy in China. Obviously the problems of Moscow were very much in people's minds. That was after the 1987 problems with the embassy in Moscow.

But it pointed out the problems, the kind of security which we really thought was important was often what people were telling us, because that would be what would cause problems for those people. Many aspects of communication such as a lot of secret cables had information which was fairly secret but information which was given to us by the Chinese Government and therefore it was secret but secret for the Chinese, too, and therefore they weren't going to be annoyed because they had told us.

But it was those things which were told to us which were not done with authorization which we had to be concerned about, and we found it very difficult to have some of the people, including the administrative officer in my consulate general, who was of course acting security officer, and he hadn't the foggiest notion. He would discuss the most sensitive matters in areas which were clearly bugged by the Chinese side. But because it wasn't a piece of paper with something stamped on it, it didn't really strike his security consciousness.

Well, this again was part of the problem we had when we were trying to get the premises because DS (Diplomatic Security) was becoming increasingly - how should I say - professionalized. These were not persons who served sometimes as a personnel officer, then they served as a security officer, then they became and admin counselor or something of the sort; but it was becoming more of a professional group. And of course it was recruiting increasingly from the FBI, and it was indeed more and more within an FBI framework. They had approved the arrangements at our premises in Guangzhou, and the last thing they wanted to do was to let us move to any other place, because from their point of view it might be better, but the last thing they wanted was something which they would have to sign off on under new and more rigorous requirements, because it was somebody else who had approved where we were at that point. So every time we were thinking of trying to improve anything, we would run into those who said, "Listen, we would have to approve that, and we can't do it because it doesn't meet our standards, and what you have now is even farther from our standards, but we don't care about that because somebody else previously approved that." And this meant the perfect being the enemy of the better. We finally found that this was broken through only by a very, I think, gifted and very determined real estate developer type named Nicholas Salgo, who had been ambassador to Hungary [Ed: a non-career appointee who served as Ambassador in Hungary from November 1983 to August 1986].

Q: I've interviewed him, yes.

PRATT: You have? Very interesting and, I think, very helpful for all aspects of China security and premises. He, of course, was able to get through this only because he had the backing of Whitehead, who was Deputy Secretary of State.

Q: John Whitehead.

PRATT: John Whitehead - because only through that could you face down the determined opposition of the security people, because they of course could bamboozle any head of M (Bureau of Management) who was merely a career officer or even someone who was not a career officer, like Dick Moose. So I think that we sort of saw at that time that the diplomatic security element . . . Of course, it used to be SY, and then it became DS, and as usual when you change your initials often, you change what you actually feel you can do. And it was becoming far more important and far more, shall we say, difficult to deal with. Another aspect was that the FBI was getting greater inroads in that area, and then, of course, when they established OFM, then, of course -

Q: What does OFM mean?

PRATT: Office of Foreign Missions. Then, of course, that became a new bastion of the FBI in the State Department. And it was interesting that this was all taking place just as our major adversary, the Soviet Union, was in at least the beginning stages of its collapse. I think that the security side has become even more oppressive in recent years. I, of course, have been away from it since 1989, but from what I have heard, it is increasingly a problem, and it's enlisted people in the Congress and enlisted in the press, including David Ignatius (I think it's he), who has been writing a series of articles pointing out how the State Department is totally unconcerned about security and you've got to believe these people from the FBI who have moved in on this problem that the great difficulties are still there. Well, obviously, Kennan had a very sharp response to that, as well as Art Hartman, if you've talked to him, he had a lot of problems when he was ambassador because, of course, the security people would be perfectly happy if everybody were withdrawn from abroad because we could keep better tabs on them here in Washington - so let's pack up our embassies and pull them in.

Q: Well, anyway, I want to come back to your time in Guangzhou. Did you see a change? You left there in what, in 1989? Was the personal computer having any impact at all at that point, because in away this is a much more freewheeling form of communication - interest groups can get together and all - and I think it was probably in its infancy even in the States at that time; but were you seeing any beginning of change?

PRATT: Well, the big beginning of change was the use of the cell phone, which of course was less high-tech, and the introduction of the fax machine, because both of these meant that communications could be facilitated, and the fax machines were used to great effect during the Tiananmen incident. Many people in the United States sent fax messages to every known fax address in China, which of course blocked a lot things which were going on inside China and also got information to people in China, until the security services began cutting off all the fax machines. So this was, I think, a precursor because the computers were then relatively limited because there weren't any real PCs in China at that time.

Q: A PC being a personal computer.

PRATT: Personal computers. Except those the Americans themselves brought in. And the Chinese were, of course, just fascinated by them and liked them very much, but their computers . . . I mean, they had enough difficulty getting the airlines to have decent computer service between airports and so forth, and when people traveled there, you could have your reservations, but you got to the next place and you couldn't make a round-trip reservation because their computers weren't set up for it. So when even airlines and travel agencies had computers in such a sad state that you really had to rely on telephones for almost everything, it obviously was not an environment in which the PC was that important. Now when I've gone back to China since that time, in 1995 and 1996, then of course that had changed considerably, and people were getting their computers, and using the Internet. The nodes was difficult, but the thing is it's moving, and my Chinese friends here in the United States, for example, the one problem they have is that some of their friends in China are still very sort of nationalistic, and they want to have all of it go on in Chinese. And of course, English is so much . . . you can type the thing with just 26 letters and so forth. If you've ever seen a Chinese word processor . . . but it's a job to get any . . . They've improved the programs enormously, so if you type in the sounds for something or other, often the computer now can fill in the proper characters just from knowing what this would sound like if you were speaking. And so eventually, when they get the computers which will hear clearly, this will perhaps improve things considerably. But it's a long hike, so English is very much, again, the rich national computer language in China as well.

Q: Well, did you find that the fact that you represented in Guangzhou an English-speaking country a tremendous asset. I mean, were the younger Chinese focusing on English as being a tool that they really needed to have? I mean, those who were thrusting ahead.

PRATT: Yes, it was very clearly the international language, and of course many of these persons had contact with Hong Kong, where English was, of course, even more pervasive than inside China. The government had also, in the late 1950s, dropped Russian as the principal foreign language and had not even considered Japanese but had moved to English. So English was indeed considered the most important language, and even those persons who had done their studies in Russia in the '40s and '50s, they realized that if they were going to move ahead they would have to know English rather than just staying with Russian. And of course the top leadership to this day, Li Peng and Zhang Zemin - these are all persons whose Russian is a good deal better even than their English. I don't think Li Peng's English is very good at all, but Zhang Zemin speaks pretty good English, but then his Russian is better.

Q: How about the overseas Chinese.. Were they playing any role as far as you saw in what was happening?

PRATT: Yes, because many of them were working for American firms. They often had been, well some of them, of course, had been naturalized American citizens, but some were native-born American citizens but of Chinese origin, and they had learned enough Chinese so that they could be of use to American companies, so a lot of even top managers were ones who were sort of being selected to make these programs work in China, and of course, many of them, if they were from Hong Kong or Guangdong Province and so forth, would know Cantonese often as well as Mandarin, so that they performed as a very good cadre for American companies to work from. And of course, in addition to that, the Taiwanese were beginning to invest in south China, not just in Fukien Province opposite the island but also in Guangdong province. And they, of course, or many of them, were relatives. Shall we say, they were the owners who remained in Taipei, but the cousin who had gone to the United States and studied engineering would be the person whom they would pick to go work in China for a Taiwan firm. So indeed, yes, overseas Chinese were going back in considerable numbers, and the expansion of investment and trade with China had, shall we say, an increase in presence of overseas Chinese which was about keeping pace with the very rapid expansion of trade and investment.

Q: As a consular officer, I've dealt with Greek-Americans, Korean-Americans, Yugoslav-Americans, et cetera, et cetera, who go back to their country of origin - either of birth or of origin - and often, I mean, they're a special breed. I mean they're often 110 percent American - and German-Americans, too, I've had - and sometimes a bit contemptuous or at least they don't always mix too well with the people of the country because, by God, they're not doing it in the American way and all that. Was this a problem? Did you see this with the Chinese?

PRATT: Yes, occasionally, and more frequently what we would find is that they would be confused by the Chinese system because they had so learned the American concept of business, it's the bottom line, and if it makes economic sense you do it, and so on. And the fact that these people have a different environment in which bureaucracy is very important and nepotism is very important and corruption is very important - these were all things which occasionally they could not understand. We had one, for example, American Chinese - I mean he was originally from Hong Kong but American citizen - who took the longest while to see that he had a big problem. He had a joint partnership, and this joint partnership included two elements of the Guangdong provincial government, but the two elements were under two separate vice-governors. One was open, and that was the trade vice-governor, and the other was one of the most backward aspects, namely agriculture, which was closest to the party structure. And the two partners hated each other's guts, and one of them got the American partner to fire the accountant who happened to be the brother of the other partner, and this chap could not understand why they were having so much difficulty and why they could go to one vice-governor and he would say, "Well, this is very difficult." I mean he was the senior vice-governor. Why couldn't he tell the junior vice-governor to go to hell? Well, he couldn't because of the nature of the Communist system. And this was something which was very difficult sometimes, because it wasn't as though they were dealing with real businessmen. They were dealing within a political framework, which, of course, is part of the current difficulty in China. One of my friends there was an American journalist in Peking who had written a book on the Beijing Jeep [Ed: Jim Mann, Beijing Jeep, 1997] problem and the difficulties of dealing with the municipal government and all the other aspects of the bureaucracy.

The biggest sort of factory we had in the Guangdong area was a French joint venture building Peugeot cars, and their stories, of course, were fairly illustrative of the great difficulties of dealing with the established political order there, much worse than most of the American ventures, which were plugged in at different levels and to different types of things without the same kind of deep roots in the labor movement and the Communist Party. So yes, Guangdong province was about the most advanced and economically oriented and able to make the most sensible decisions of any place in China, but even there it was very, very difficult.

Q: Well, then, you left there in 1989. What happened?

PRATT: To me or to Guangdong?

Q: To you because this is your account.

PRATT: I see. I retired out there in Guangzhou, timed, as it happened, just before the end of September so that I could avoid having to take part in the October 1st event.

Q: The October 1st event was the -

PRATT: The national day of Communist China. So we left and went to Hong Kong and spent some time in Hong Kong and Macao because I wanted to go to Taiwan afterwards, but I wanted to avoid Double Ten in Taiwan.

Q: That's the -

PRATT: That's the Taiwan national day. So we sat it out in Hong Kong and Macao, a very pleasant little backwater, until we went to Taiwan, where I compared notes with my friends there, including telling them how I found that the people in south China responded on the Taiwan question. And then Japan as well. And finally from Japan we moved to California.

Q: Well, what was the reaction in Taiwan that you were getting from your friends and colleagues about the Tiananmen incident? How did that play, from what you were hearing?

PRATT: Well, I found it still very typical of the reaction I had noticed earlier, shall we say, when I was in Taiwan or working on Taiwan affairs. Almost anything to do with the Mainland was of concern only to the Mainlander side of Taiwan. Now this is changing, but at that time it was still the case. I got there and found that one of the dinners where I had thought people would be discussing the Mainland and what Tiananmen meant or how people on Taiwan viewed the prospects of political, even shall we say, interchange with the Mainland, but they weren't interested, because one of the women, for example, whom I had known well, was campaigning to be magistrate, and she had just come back from her place where they had burned down her house. And so, of course, the internal politics, the internal real fight between the Mainlanders/Kuomintang, and the Taiwanese and the dissidents or the oppositionists was still the major thing of interest. Peking and all problems of Peking were all very far away.

I think that this is changing now. I mean certainly when I talk to some of the people here now, it's a much closer thing, but they still don't understand Peking, and they basically are not that interested in Peking. From their point of view, if they can just manipulate the United States, they can get us to handle Peking for them. In fact, I've been told specifically, even as recently as 1996 when I was there. "China is a big country, and therefore something which we can't really do much about because we're just a small country. It's you American who've got to take care of China because you're a big country and China is a big country, and it's your responsibility to take care of China for us." So I think this is, indeed, part of the real problem we have, in that we keep trying to say, well, we've got to make sure that these people in Taiwan don't declare independence because we'll be caught up in the middle of it if they do, when of course we ought to realize that they are really expecting us to take care of this, and no matter what we tell them, they're going to say, "You're a big country. What can we do? We can't do anything which is big." So, you know, this is not our problem, that's your problem.

Q: Fascinating.

PRATT: And we keep trying to tell them, no, it's your problem, you have got to learn how to handle Peking.

Q: But also at this point there is talk . . . the Mainland Chinese have just very recently talked about there have got to be serious talks and all that between the two parties, yet if this is the attitude, why have serious talks, because we're not going to do it, it's you Americans?

PRATT: Well, that's partially the problem, but I think the other thing is that the reaction to the white paper has been quite overblown-

Q: This is the very recent white paper.

PRATT: The recent one of February - because it really doesn't promise anything specific, and it's certainly a good deal better than what they did at the time of the prior elections in 1996, when they had a combined operation and launched missiles near the two harbors, north and south, of Taiwan. So if this is the best they can do in Peking, it's not bad at all, and when they say "We cannot wait indefinitely..." well, good Lord, in the late 1970s, Deng Xiaoping declared that resolving the Taiwan questions was one of the key tasks of the 1980s. Well, we're 20 years later and it's still-

Q: In Chinese terms -

PRATT: And it's still indefinite, and even someone as savvy as David Dean was telling me the other day, "Well, now we really have got to do something and make our position very clear because it looks as though they are going to be pushing for something very, very soon." So he wanted us to change our policy, Hal Sonnenfeld fortunately saying, "Well, why change our policy - it seems to have worked pretty well - provided we just limit ourselves to the basic principle that whatever resolution there is, let it be arrived at peacefully." That means if Peking says it's not going to accept the total independence, well, then that won't be done peacefully. If the Taiwan says we don't want to have Peking come over and establish their government here, then it won't be done peacefully. We've got a system which is working now, and let's leave it at that. Hal's an old, most basically Soviet hand, but nonetheless, I was really surprised to find David Dean saying, oh, now we've got to move in and solve the thing for them.

Q: That's very American.

PRATT: It is very American, yes, because it's very hard for us to keep our hands off something.

Q: Well, I think this might be a good place to stop.

PRATT: I think probably so.

End of interview

[Ed: Events which he witnessed as a career Foreign Service officer continued to draw his attention in retirement. Mr. Pratt was among those who gave depositions for the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs (1991-1993), see National Archives Reference Information Paper 90, Appendix K at http://www.archives.gov/publications/ref-info-papers/90/index.html

In June of 1997 he read a statement before the Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims on the Hmong Veterans Naturalization act of 1997, see http://judiciary.house.gov/Legacy/6019.htm.]