Interview with Robinson McIlvaine

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

AMBASSADOR ROBINSON MCILVAINE

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Mr. Ambassador, I wonder if you could give me somewhat of your background that led you towards a career in foreign affairs.

MCILVAINE: I became interested in it while I was in college at Harvard. I took the Foreign Service exams in 1936, and missed by one point. I couldn't afford to hang around any longer, and I went into advertising, then the Navy, then journalism, and then came back into the State Department in the Public Affairs Bureau in the early Fifties, and became a “Wristonee,” when that program started in '55 or '56, I think it was.

Q: Can we go back a little? As a newspaperman, what type of work were you doing?

MCILVAINE: I owned and edited and ran the linotype and everything on a country weekly newspaper in Pennsylvania.

Q: Were you able to do anything in the field of foreign affairs?

MCILVAINE: Absolutely nothing.

Q: So what had moved you from being the country editor and general factotum towards the State Department?

MCILVAINE: I had achieved a certain amount of—I don't know whether notoriety is the correct word, but anyhow, I had won a few prizes as a country editor. This was at the time of the McCarthy business. I was brought in to be Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, to be exact, and try to help convince the American people that the State Department Foreign Service wasn't all a bunch of pinkos. You remember the phrases that were thrown around in those days. I found myself at least in the building where foreign affairs (my first interest) was being conducted. Then I later took advantage of the Wriston program to go into a career in the Foreign Service.

Q: Did somebody know you? What brought you in? Because you came in at a relatively senior position then in the State Department.

MCILVAINE: Yes. The then-Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs had been the correspondent for the Philadelphia Bulletin and I knew him then. My paper was in eastern Pennsylvania.

Q: How did you operate during the McCarthy period in this particular environment? I feel this is a very interesting period of history.

MCILVAINE: I think our basic approach was to open up the Department more than it had been. We started a very vigorous public speaking program for Foreign Service officers to get them seen and show that they didn't have horns or didn't have the terrible things that McCarthy types were alleging. There were a whole series of programs in the Bureau of Public Affairs to open the place up and try to reach as many of the American people as we could.

Q: Did you find that there was a sort of innate resistance on the part of the Foreign Service to get out and talk to the American people?

MCILVAINE: Yes, there was.

Q: I think there still is, but probably then there must have been much more.

MCILVAINE: One of the best things that ever happened—I can't remember who it was now—somebody left some money and donated a couple of cars with house trailers, and we were able to offer these, after some vetting to make sure the candidate would be worthwhile—to a Foreign Service officer coming on home leave, and he would pick the car up here in Washington or some place and go across the continent. We would work out an area that we'd like him to go to, and he'd take his whole family. That was a great success, because they would meet with local Rotary Clubs, Lions, and other service groups such as that, and be entertained in people's houses, and it also gave them a great re-Americanization at practically no cost.

Q: Did you get positive reports back from this program?

MCILVAINE: Yes, very definitely.

Q: You came in 1953. I wonder if you could explain just briefly for the record what was the Wriston program and why you took advantage of it.

MCILVAINE: Let me see if I can remember that correctly. A commission was appointed, headed by a Dr. Wriston, who had been, I think, president of Trinity College. Was he the same Wriston who was later the head of the Stock Exchange, or his father? I'm not sure.

Q: He was from Brown University, too.

MCILVAINE: Yes. There was a committee, and they made a study of the whole personnel system in foreign affairs. The gist of it was that everybody should be the same, instead of

having Foreign Service and Civil Service, and everybody, except for clerical and certain other very specific types, were, in effect, forced to join the Foreign Service and compete. They became “lateral entrants” after an oral interview. Now, this did not work out in all cases, I can assure you, because there were some people who never intended to serve abroad and who were suddenly forced to do so and to compete with people that were obviously much better qualified to compete. That was it. It was a big reshuffling of the whole personnel system.

Q: This sort of fitted in, then, to your earlier desire to get into the Foreign Service.

MCILVAINE: Yes. I had not intended to stay. I had intended to go back to my newspaper, but I got all swept up in this thing, and I decided I had a good managing editor, and let him run it, and in case I got situated where I wanted to thumb my nose at the government, I would have someplace to go back. The long and short of it was that I didn't wish to do that, and I couldn't go on with the absentee ownership, so I sold the paper while I was DCM in Lisbon.

Q: Before we leave your time in Public Affairs, did you find yourself under any particular attack by anybody on the McCarthy side, from the conservative right wing or whatever you want to call it?

MCILVAINE: No, I didn't.

Q: How did we treat the cases of officers, such as John Stuart Service and others who were under attack at that time? What were the departmental instructions to the people in Public Affairs?

MCILVAINE: I don't think there was any instruction. [Laughter] I personally don't think they were treated very well by the very highest echelon. It was a very difficult time; there isn't any doubt about it.

I knew none of the accused (by McCarthy) personally. However, someone specifically called a particular case to my attention. I had a long talk with the officer accused by McCarthy of being a Communist. It turned out that he had the same name as a bona fide Communist outside the U.S. government. Typical of the idiocy of that era was the fact that this fellow “was known to lunch with Communists” was used as confirmation that he was indeed a Communist. The fact that he was at the time political officer in one of our iron curtain posts and therefore, was duty bound to entertain local officials who were, of course, Communists was irrelevant to the McCarthy types. He was eventually exonerated but only after a traumatic suspension and months of self justification.

Q: I notice you were with the Caribbean Commission, too.

MCILVAINE: Yes.

Q: What was that?

MCILVAINE: That was a small “United Nations” made up of the dependent territories in the Caribbean. In other words, they were not independent.

Q: This was the pre-independence period in the Caribbean.

MCILVAINE: Yes. It had a secretariat based in Trinidad, and the commission was composed of two members, one from each metropole, and in our case, one from the Virgin Islands or Puerto Rico, our reason for being in it. In the case of the British, they had a British ambassador somewhere in the area; the French, the same way; and the Dutch. Then a senior member from one of their island dominions. We had two meetings a year in a different one of these territories each time, and it all had to do with economic development, etc... I was certainly not very well qualified to be on it, but I had enough executive experience and perhaps journalistic, analytic experience to have an idea of what was needed and help find the answers to the problems.

Q: Do you think it was a very effective instrument for the time, and useful?

MCILVAINE: Yes, I do, because I think it gave them a lot of experience in running their own things and having a little bit of an international experience before they became independent.

Q: Within about five years or so, most of them were beginning to move toward independence.

MCILVAINE: That's right. This was in '53. I don't suppose they got really independent until ten years later or more, but it was the beginning of that process.

Q: Moving to your time when you entered the Foreign Service, your first posting was Lisbon. Was this a requested post or it just happened?

MCILVAINE: No, it was very interesting. My first assignment was to Israel, and I ran into Loy Henderson in the men's “loo” on whatever the command floor was in those days, the seventh or ninth, and he said to me, “Where are you going?”

I said, “Don't you know? He was then Deputy Under Secretary for Management, Personnel and the whole bit. As you may recall, he really ran that. I said, “I'm going to Israel.”

He said, “Oh, God, you don't want to go there!”

I said, “Why not?”

He said, “I can tell you from experience if something ever comes up where you disagree with what the Israelis are doing there, it'll be the end of your career.”

I said, “I don't care.”

He said, “No, you don't want to do that. If you had a choice, where would you go?”

I said, “Any place that has a foreign language that I could get under my belt.”

So that was that. I went back to my business, and the next thing I know, I was shifted to Portugal.

Q: As Deputy Chief of Mission, DCM.

MCILVAINE: I was going as DCM to Israel, too.

Q: Who was the ambassador in Lisbon when you arrived?

MCILVAINE: I had two of the best in succession. First was Jamie Bonbright, who had been Deputy Assistant Secretary for EUR, and he was succeeded by Burke Elbrick, who had been Assistant Secretary for EUR.

Q: Could you describe a little, just to get an idea of how the DCM, the deputy, observed it? How did Bonbright run an embassy? Was there a difference between the way Bonbright did it and Elbrick?

MCILVAINE: Not too much. They were both very experienced. I assume it was pretty much the classic way. Later I tried to run my embassies in the same way. We generally had a little bull session with two or three of the top staff every morning and exchanged gossip of what everybody had picked up, so on and so forth. Both of them let me run the embassy, the basic comings and goings, who did what to whom. If there was something they didn't like, they'd bring it up in these informal gatherings. Of course, I would see them ten, 15 times a day in between. So it was a very close working relationship. It's been said that a DCM absolutely has to be an alter ego to the ambassador, and if you have a pair that don't get along, it's clearly not a good situation. And if they do get along, it's great.

Q: I know. I worked with Burke Elbrick when he went to Yugoslavia.

MCILVAINE: Oh, you did?

Q: A fine man. Ambassador Bonbright, too. These are good, solid professionals. What were the major problems that you were dealing with when you were in Portugal?

MCILVAINE: There really were very few. You talk about stability—that's what Portugal was in those days. Salazar, had been in charge for something like 20 years and had another ten or 15 to go. Our main concern was the Azores bases, and every so often that had to be renegotiated. One was during the period I was there. And the Portuguese would always try to do a cliff-hanger and keep us in doubt about what they were going to do, for how much, etc. But in the end, it was settled amicably.

Q: Then we move to the time that I'm particularly interested in—that is, serving in Africa. You were assigned from Lisbon to Leopoldville.

MCILVAINE: Yes.

Q: Now, how did this come about?

MCILVAINE: That shows you how career planning works. I was picked from Lisbon to go to Brazil, and that's quite logical. I spoke some Portuguese, and I was on my way via Washington. I again ran into Loy Henderson, this time in a restaurant. He said, “What are you up to?”

I said, “Well, I'm on my way to Rio, you know.” I'd exchanged letters with him.

He said, “Well, I want to see you.”

I said, “Don't worry.” I'd just hit town. I said, “I'm coming to the Department this afternoon to make an appointment with you.” So I went to see him.

He said, “Now, have you ever heard of the Senior Seminar?”

I said, “Yes.”

He said, “This is something I've gotten going to compete with the War College, and it's terribly important. I want you to go there.”

I said, “What about Brazil? Jack Cabot is expecting me next week.”

He said, “Well, I've already talked to him.”

And I said, “Oh, what did he say?”

“He says it's all right if you go to the senior seminar.”

I said, “Well, I do what I'm told. Fine.” So I went to the senior seminar.

He said, “If you'll just do this for me, I'll give you any post you want. What do you want?”

I said, “Well, I want a post in Africa.” Because Africa was opening up and I thought that was going to be the most interesting part of the world for a while, and I have proved to be right.

So I went to the senior seminar, and during the course of that, he, Loy Henderson, called me up and said, “How about going as consul general to Leopoldville and turn it into an embassy?”

So I said, “Fine.” And so that, in effect, is what happened six months later.

Q: So we're talking about what years?

MCILVAINE: That was '59-'60.

Q: You were in the senior seminar.

MCILVAINE: I started in mid-September.

Q: So you were finished in June of 1960. You were going as consul general. Could you explain what the embassy situation was then?

MCILVAINE: The Congo, as it was called then, belonged to Belgium. It was not an independent country. Therefore, we did not have an embassy; we had a consulate. The top officer there had, for some time, been a consul general. However, once independence came, this entity was transferred into an embassy, so I went from being consul general to charg# d'affaires, until we got an ambassador, who was Clare Timberlake. This all happened practically simultaneously.

Q: You arrived there at a very turbulent time in the Congo. Did you have any instructions or any idea of what our policy was and what we wanted when you were sent out there?

MCILVAINE: Only in the vaguest terms. I don't think anybody in the U.S. Government had much idea about this part of the world. Those who had any idea had it primarily from the point of view of those who had served in the few posts that there were in Africa—all of them were consulates—from the point of view of a colony. There was almost nobody who had any idea what was going to happen to these countries once they were independent. Of course, the Congo was the classic example of the horrors that people feared actually happening. The Congo was chaotic for four or five—six years, I guess. Fortunately, it did not turn out to be the norm for all of Africa, as a lot of people feared, but it was bad enough.

Q: Did you get any sort of good knowledge, then, from the State Department before you went out? Were they able to tell you what the situation was and where they thought it was going?

MCILVAINE: I don't recall anything very solid from that point of view. There were briefings in the bureau and I spent a couple of days in Brussels getting their view of things.

Q: When you arrived there, what sort of a staff did we have in Leopoldville at the time?

MCILVAINE: We had a political officer, who was very good. His name was Jerry Lavalle. He spoke impeccable French; The language there was French. We had a junior political officer who was the best I ever ran into in the Foreign Service; his name was Frank Carlucci. He's now Secretary of Defense. [Laughter] Indeed, I wrote in his efficiency report in the section where you're supposed to say if the young officer is ever going to make ambassador, I said, “Not only will he do it before most of his class, but if there's ever a time a career Foreign Service officer could be a cabinet member, Carlucci will be the boy.” I'm very proud of that prognostication. We had a PAO, a public affairs officer, and usual administrative setup. It was a middle-sized embassy. We had some military attach#s, and the beginnings of an AID mission.

Q: Were they plugged in or connected with the emerging Congolese government?

MCILVAINE: Yes, very much so. The group that were there when I arrived had spent the entire preceding year plugging into the new politicians. Before that, it was very unhealthy to do so, because the Belgians didn't like it and they would generally PNG any...

Q: That's make you a persona non grata.

MCILVAINE: In other words, throw them out, anybody who looked as though they were fooling around with “insurgents.” [Laughter] But by the time the Belgians had more or less made up their mind to give the Congo independence, they relaxed on that, although every now and then there would be cases of a hard-nosed old colonial type getting very upset about what the Americans were doing, such as talking to people who later became president of the country.

Q: What was the legal situation in the Congo when you arrived in June?

MCILVAINE: Independence was June 30th. I arrived the week before, say, the 25th. Then they had the big ceremony, and the King of the Belgians came for that, and he was insulted. I think we got through to the Fourth of July—it was the sixth when the whole place fell apart. The Force Publique Army had been trained by the Belgians, totally fell apart, the white officers fled, and the troops more or less went amuck. That was really the cause of most of the problems for the next long time.

It was shortly following that, when nothing could be done, that an appeal was made to the United Nations, and United Nations troops were sent in from something like 19 or 20 different countries, many of them other African countries and Third World countries. The only troops that were furnished from the Western world were the Irish, Canadians, as I recall, and the rest were Ghanaians, Nigerians, Moroccans, Indians, Pakistanis, Malaysian, on and on. I think there were about 19 or 20 different nations supplying troops. It was a remarkable experience because it worked. It somehow or other stopped the chaos. It didn't work as well as a lot of people hoped, but everything is relative in Africa, and I consider that to be one of the great international efforts in modern times. It was a success. Q: By that time, you were the DCM, and the ambassador was Clare Timberlake. How did you work with him?

MCILVAINE: In the same way I'd worked with others—very closely. I was then a bachelor, so I was around, in and out of his house a great deal. Mind you, I didn't even get to move into my house until a couple of weeks after arrival because everything was so chaotic. I was living in a common clerk's apartment in the chancery.

Q: That's a communications clerk.

MCILVAINE: Yes, his apartment in the chancery, in the office, that is.

Q: Was the staff in the embassy under any threat at that time?

MCILVAINE: No, not per se, but everything was so wild and unpredictable, you know, you never knew when you were going to be stopped by somebody with a machine gun, and accused of being a “sale flamand”, a dirty Belgian. It took a little while to explain that you weren't. I had many experiences during the year that I was there of that nature. In fact, I was in jail several times in Stanleyville. But none of it was directed at me personally or at Americans. Belgians were the enemy.

Q: Was there really any understanding at that point by those in leadership of the Congo of what the United States was?

MCILVAINE: Minimal.

Q: What were we trying to do there? I'm speaking of our embassy?

MCILVAINE: We were trying to help create an atmosphere of stability under which they could get on with development and governing themselves. As it turned out, the first thing that had to be done was to get this force publique under control and the United Nations did that. Of course, the important thing about this whole effort was that it was not us or the Belgians doing it alone, which has all sorts of connotations of imperialism. This was the United Nations, and the people actually confronting the Congolese, moving them around and calming them down were other Third World people, and many of them other Africans, so that it was much more acceptable, in my opinion, than if it had been done entirely by the U.S. or entirely by the Belgians or any other one nation.

Q: Were you, as part of your job, monitoring the efforts of the various United Nations groups to see how they were doing it and to be concerned about maybe they were trying to establish a larger foothold in the area than we would like?

MCILVAINE: Oh, yes. We tried to follow everything that was going on. It wasn't easy, because for that first year after independence, very little got accomplished other than just trying to calm things down and get things going. AID programs were impossible for another year or so, I would imagine. I left after a year, but the United Nations' main job was just keeping a lid on things in an effort to allow some of the politicians to acquire some kind of a following and get some sort of a national spirit going.

You see, the Congo had been run by the Belgians for umpty-ump years. It was, like most places, in Africa, not a nation at all; it was a conglomeration of tribes, many of whom hated each other and had always fought each other. So you know, once they were finished fighting with the Belgians, they took to fighting with each other, and it was the United Nations' job to keep a lid on all that, while a political system developed.

Regimes changed remarkably easily, it seemed to me. When Mobutu first took over, he simply got up on a chair in a restaurant in downtown Leopoldville and announced that he'd taken over. That was that, and nobody contested it. From then on he was in charge. Then he allowed certain politicians to take over. There was Adoula, who was a very fine man, but it was an awfully big job, and no one guy could do it. In the end, two or three years later, Mobutu deposed everybody else and took over again himself, and has been running it ever since to this day. No matter what you may think about him, he certainly has provided “stability” for the Congo, now called Zaire.

Q: How did we look upon some of these leaders? Lumumba was there. Well, he was killed in February of 1961. I'm speaking about the embassy when you were reporting. Was he considered the threat that seemed to be reflected here in the United States in the press?

MCILVAINE: He certainly was a pain in the neck from almost all points of view. He was very volatile and didn't have great experience except as a labor leader. He'd been a postal clerk, about his only job, which is not much in the way of executive training. And he was very definitely aligned with leftish movements in Africa. What that really meant in the long

run, I'm not at all sure. But he certainly didn't add much to the stability the short time he was in charge, and that was why he was thrown out by Mobutu, who had been his aide de camp and secretary general of his party. Mobutu just stood up on a table in a restaurant, and that was the end of Lumumba. Then there was a lot of back and forth. As you may recall, he was sent by Kasavubu and company to Elisabethville, where Tshombe was, and that's the last he was heard of. Presumably, the Tshombe types did him in.

Q: Tshombe was in Elisabethville?

MCILVAINE: Yes. At the time of independence, the major political leaders were Tshombe (he was a regional leader in the Elisabethville area; that's near Zambia, the copper area.) Kasavubu, who was from a tribe near the coast, and Lumumba, those three were the big ones, but there were lesser ones around. Kasavubu was president, Lumumba was prime minister, and Tshombe was just a regional governor. But they all changed chairs as time went on. Tshombe later became prime minister for a while, Kasavubu was thrown out as president, until you came to the final phase of Mobutu, which is the phase we're still in. But I think it must be over 20 years that he's been running the place.

Q: What sort of contact would we have with these leaders insofar as the embassy was concerned?

MCILVAINE: We had pretty good contact. Jerry Lavalle, who was there before I got there, knew them all very well. I got to know them quite well. It's just that things were moving so fast, you never knew who was on first and who was on second and who was up or down, and it didn't seem to matter too much.

Q: At the time, the Soviet bloc included China, I believe. What was our concern with these people?

MCILVAINE: It was thought—probably correctly—that they wished to try to get in on this very rich—you must bear in mind that the Congo, (Zaire), has some of the greatest

mineral wealth of Africa. In fact, most of it. Obviously the Soviets wanted to have a hand in that, and they, I think, chose Lumumba as their instrument. Indeed, many of the things he did favored their influence. Now, of course, that meant that anybody, who tribally and otherwise was opposed to Lumumba, automatically went to the other side, and therefore favored the West.

In so many of these cases in Africa, you know, people talk about ideology. I've learned over the years that they're pretty weak ideologues. It depends on how the bread is buttered and what's in their own personal interests. I've seen more left-wingers turn right and right-wingers turn left over the years, that I don't take those labels too seriously. I don't know. Had Lumumba lasted, conceivably he might have turned out to be way to the right of what he certainly seemed to be then if he thought it was in his personal interest.

I don't think they understood what Communism was about or capitalism. Actually most Africans are rampant capitalists. I mean, land to them is everything. They love to trade, and their women are great traders. I've never seen yet an African who took to state socialism, where everybody was working on a state farm for free and having to turn its produce in, or anything like that at all.

Q: The year you were there was a period of absolute chaos. We couldn't have an AID program, and obviously military intervention on our part was out. Did we have any cards with which to play with in order to bring about a situation that we were interested in, or were we basically bystanders at this point?

MCILVAINE: We were bystanders, but we felt that the entire United Nations' effort was in our long-run interest, because it was advancing stability. And as it turned out, that was the case.

Q: So did you deal with the various United Nations commands?

MCILVAINE: Yes.

Q: Any problems with them?

MCILVAINE: Oh, sure, occasionally they would see things somewhat differently than we did. But in the long run, it was a very good relationship. The first one that I dealt with a lot was Ralph Bunche, who was out there the summer of '60, right after things got started. He was a remarkable man of great wisdom, and did a fabulous job of keeping things on an even keel. He was succeeded by his assistant Brian Urquhart, who was an Englishman, a top-notch type. Urquhart just retired from the UN last year, and was, I think, the top UN civil servant at the time of his retirement. Those people we worked very closely with. Of course, there was some criticism on some sides that these guys were toadying to U.S. points of view, and so that made it very hard for them.

Then there was another UN top fellow there named Dayal, he was an Indian. We had much more trouble with him. He saw things quite differently than we did. So there was always a certain amount of pulling and hauling and, “Oh, you're favoring this and favoring that,” and so on and so forth.

Q: How did some of the differences with Dayal translate? Do you recall any examples?

MCILVAINE: I can't offhand. I'd have to think about that for a minute. We're talking about 30 years ago!

Q: What about some of the other groups? In the first place, you had a lot of American media, I suppose, there. This is where the action was.

MCILVAINE: Yes. There must have been 100, at least, in the early days. As I recall, the Congo, as it was called then—you have to remember it's now Zaire—was on the front pages of the world's press for almost five years, nearly every day or at least once a week. So there were a lot of them there. They didn't know what the hell was going on. They used to come around, particularly during the first summer of '60. I remember they'd come into my office after 8:00 or 9:00 at night and sit with Lavalle, Frank Carlucci and

myself, and try to piece out what the devil had gone on during that day and who had done what to whom and who had said what to whom, and so on and so forth. That was very interesting, because it was a very good exchange, and there was absolutely no such thing as classified anything, because things happened so fast. [Laughter] So we would have a very good exchange of ideas.

We generally knew more than they did, I must say, and Frank Carlucci was the star of that exercise, because he really got around. He knew mostly who was doing what to whom. We'd sit there, and he'd tell me about it and the other guys in the press, just as if we were having a staff meeting.

Q: What was the secret to Carlucci's success as a political reporter?

MCILVAINE: He didn't sit on his duff. He got out and he got around, and he got to know all these people. He was a junior FSO-6 or something like that, maybe five, at the time, and he was a self-starter. He also had judgment, too, in analyzing. He didn't get carried away by some of the extreme statements that some people would make, particularly Lumumba and Kasavubu and all the ins and outs. He'd sort of say, “Now, you know, the guy has to say that. Let's not get too excited.” I found he was very wise and absolutely fearless. One time an embassy car ran into a bicycle on the way to the airport and killed the Congolese bicyclist. Frank Carlucci came along just afterwards, and the whole mob surrounded him. He got the other people out of the place, and he got a knife in his shoulder for his pains. Another embassy officer, a girl, our consular officer, her name was Tally Palmer, she came along and she swept up Carlucci and took him out of the crowd. Carlucci was very courageous. He didn't just sit around and count his beads or anything like that.

Q: How about the American missionaries? There was a sizable missionary contingent, and it was a dangerous situation for anybody of European stock at that time, wasn't it?

MCILVAINE: We didn't see too much of them. Mind you, I believe there were something like 40-odd Protestant sects. If you want to find anything more confusing than that, if you're

an African, and you're told that the only true religion is 48 different things and you shouldn't do this, and you shouldn't do that, well, that's what it was. Missionaries are mixed groups. Some of them are tremendous, devoted, hard working people but there were an awful lot of them who were just out there living a lot better than they could at home. I've run into missionaries who hadn't made a conversion in 40 years, and you just wonder why they're there, and they're not sure why they're there either. Anyhow, we felt we had to get them out of the country, and we did get most of them out. But then there were a number, particularly in the eastern part, that refused to leave. Some of those survived fine; others didn't.

Q: We were trying to order people out at that time.

MCILVAINE: Yes.

Q: It just wasn't a safe place to be.

MCILVAINE: Yes. You know, the classic situation is you get a place like that with a lot of troubles, and somebody's hurt and killed, and there's a big hue and cry, “Why didn't the State Department get them out of there and do something?” So I think the State Department sometimes leans a little bit towards premature evacuation, but then that's just like doctors who do operations that aren't necessary for fear you'll sue them for not doing it.

Q: Let me just switch tapes.What about getting out and around? Did you get to Elisabethville and Stanleyville and places like that?

MCILVAINE: Yes, I got to each of those once, but getting out and around was almost impossible, compared with what I'd done previously in other countries and did later in other countries in Africa, where I visited every single village. You couldn't get around in the Congo in those days. The roads were largely impassable, you never knew what was going to happen, so we didn't do much going around by vehicle.

Q: Did we have any representation in Elisabethville at that time?

MCILVAINE: Yes, we had a consulate there.

Q: Stanleyville, too?

MCILVAINE: No, we didn't in Stanleyville at that time. Later there was.

Q: What sort of reporting was coming out of Elisabethville?

MCILVAINE: That was mostly what Tshombe was thinking, which was somewhat different from what everybody else was thinking in Leopoldville.

Q: Did we try to use our consulate there to bring Tshombe around?

MCILVAINE: Oh, yes, indeed. Yes, indeed. In fact, several of them had a rough time trying to do that.

Q: Do you remember who was out there at the time?

MCILVAINE: I think Bill Connett was there at one time and Lou Hoffacker, but neither of those was the ones that were there when I was, and I can't remember who it was.

Q: But the situation in Elisabethville was not a dangerous one compared to some of the other places?

MCILVAINE: For much of the time, no, but then some time in '61, the business between the UN and Tshombe sort of came to a head, and it got to be very dicey. The Tshombe people were roughing people up and so on and so forth.

This fellow Brian Urquhart I was telling you about had a very unfortunate experience there.

Q: Terry McNamara went out there a little later, too.

MCILVAINE: I think that was a little later, yes.

Q: How about with the Belgians? Did you have much contact with the Belgians, or were they sort of discredited and nobody talked to them?

MCILVAINE: First of all, they were thrown out almost immediately after the initial uprising in July of 1960. I can't remember when it was that they came back in. Probably in the fall. But the answer is yes, one had very little contact with them, because by this time, they really didn't matter much and were sort of a liability.

Q: I noted that Henry Labouisse was a special assistant to Hammarskjold of the U.N. Was he out there at that time, too?

MCILVAINE: Yes, I think Henry came one time with Hammarskjold, yes. I'm pretty sure he did.

Q: He wasn't a particular player?

MCILVAINE: He didn't stay. Hammarskjold came twice or maybe more often when I was there, and I think Henry was with him one time. No, the ones who I've already mentioned, they were, first of all, Bunche, Dayal was representing the UN, and then a number of military types. In command of the UN forces was a Swedish general Van Horn, as I recall. Among the Nigerian contingent of about 1,000 men, there were, I think, something like three officers who were then majors and colonels, who later became presidents of Nigeria. [Laughter]

Q: I note that right after you arrived, there was an invasion of the embassy by Congolese troops after some United States photographers. Were you there at the time?

MCILVAINE: Yes.

Q: What happened then?

MCILVAINE: It wasn't an invasion. The place was jammed with Belgian refugees. Of course, they were looking for them. It had great glass doors, typical modern architecture, just the wrong thing for that part of the world. Anyhow, we were upstairs in the office, and we heard that there was a Congolese soldier with his rifle, getting ready to break down the glass doors. So I dashed down, and Ambassador Timberlake followed me. I opened the door and asked him what it was all about, and gave him a cigarette. He wanted to get them. Timberlake arrived, and we chatted the guy up and gave him cigarettes, and finally we got him to leave. He did not break in. [Laughter] But he was all ready to do it. As I opened the door, he had the rifle butt up. But you know, they were generally hopped up on hashish or something, wild men.

Q: This is an unclassified interview, but what was the role of the CIA? Were they doing much there, or were they as confused as everybody else?

MCILVAINE: We were often told that the CIA did this or the Americans did this, that, and the other thing. I can assure you nobody in that place could organize a coup or anything like that. The Mobutu thing, in the fall of 1960, was typical. Frank Carlucci called me and said, “I hear Mobutu's going to make a speech at the bumty-bump hotel.” I can't remember the name of it.

I said, “Great. I'll meet you down there.” So I jumped in my car. He lived someplace else, but we met down there. Mobutu gets up on the table, and there are a whole bunch of correspondents around there, and he announces that he has overthrown the government!

Q: This is really to a European, a non-Congolese crowd.

MCILVAINE: Yes! The international press I remember talking to our CIA man. I said, “Well, I see you pulled a coup.”

He said, “What can we do?” [Laughter] God! Nobody would have thought of doing it that way, you know.

Q: Did you have any dealings with Mobutu at the time?

MCILVAINE: I didn't have many personally, no.

Q: What was our estimate of Mobutu?

MCILVAINE: I think the general estimate was that he was basically on our side, and therefore was a good guy to be with and to have on our side in all the goings on and struggles for influence on the new government.

Q: Looking back on it in this period, what was the effectiveness of the role of the United States? I'm speaking about the period you were there in the Congo.

MCILVAINE: I think, basically, it was our effort to get the United Nations involved and to get it out of the polarization of East-West and that sort of thing. I think that was the main role. We certainly did. In fact, I had a lot to do with it, in getting the United Nations there. So I think that over the long haul, that was the most important thing we did. Forget about all the little pullings and haulings and this; I can't even remember what they were now.

Q: You said you played a role in getting the United Nations there. How did this work?

MCILVAINE: Well, Timberlake had gone back to the U.S., and I was charg#. Lumumba was going, so Timberlake had to go back. Things went from bad to worse. Gizenga, who was Lumumba's deputy, called me on the phone. Here's Gizenga, who, in everybody's book, is a Communist. And he wants me to bring in the U.S. Marines and establish order. I said, no, no, that wouldn't be a good idea. [Laughter]

Q: What's the time frame of this?

MCILVAINE: Late in July 1960. I said, “The thing to do is get the United Nations.” I sent off a report about the conversation. I said, “Really, before we all get mired down in this place in some kind of an East-West battle, let's see if we can't get the United Nations in.” The long and short of it was they, back in Washington, did accomplish that. I think it would have been a disaster if we'd sent in the Marines. Talk about Vietnam and some of the other places, that's one Vietnam we didn't have.

Q: Did you notice any change? While you were there, the Kennedy Administration replaced the Eisenhower Administration. It was very much an administration dedicated to freeing Africa and all. Was there a chance, before you left the Congo, to have any feel as far as the direction of your work was concerned?

MCILVAINE: The answer is no, because by the time I left, Kennedy selected me to be ambassador in Dahomey. That's why I left when I did. But by that time, I don't think that the new administration had gotten its act together at all in that respect. It's true that you felt there was more interest in Africa in Washington than there had been before, and that there might be more people listening when you tried to recommend something.

Q: You were appointed by the President to go to Dahomey. Dahomey now has changed its name, is that correct?

MCILVAINE: That's right. It's called Benin.

Q: How did you get the appointment as ambassador?

MCILVAINE: I received a telegram in Leopoldville saying, “The President wishes to appoint you ambassador to Dahomey. Do you accept?” And I quickly went to the map to make sure I knew where it was, and said, “I do.”

Q: Do you feel this was an assignment because you now were an Africanist?

MCILVAINE: Yes, by this time. I can tell you those ten months in the Congo were like ten years in anyplace else.

Q: So your feeling is the appointment came because, really, basically, through your work in the Congo.

MCILVAINE: I was one of the few people with any experience in post-independence Africa. In early 1960, the Congo, Ghana, and Guinea were the only newly independent countries.

Q: Did you come back to Washington after leaving the Congo, to get ready to go?

MCILVAINE: Yes.

Q: Did you get a feel for the new administration? I'm thinking particularly in the African bureau and the feeling towards Africa. We had a new administration that had just a chance to get their feet a little bit wet on this. What was your impression at that time?

MCILVAINE: The new Assistant Secretary was a major Democratic politico, G. Mennen Williams, who had been governor of Michigan a number of times, and I am sure expected something higher in the administration of John Kennedy than Assistant Secretary for Africa. But anyhow, that's what he got, and he made as much of it as he could. He definitely was very much interested in these countries and set much more of an emotional tone than we'd had before under a professional career Assistant Secretary, who was dealing with everything from a more analytical point of view than emotional point of view.

Q: How did this emotional point of view translate itself, say, in Dahomey?

MCILVAINE: I can tell you one thing, in those days—I don't know whether it's still done or not—ambassadors were supposed to write a “year-ender”, which was to be a compendium of what they thought about the country, our policy, how it was working, what it should be,

and so on and so forth. I was noted for not being too verbose, so I wrote a one-pager, and the gist of it was that this was a very interesting country, had a long ways to go—this is about Dahomey now—and it was basically a French problem, we should be in there in a small way to help do whatever we could within our budget restrictions, but really, the bottom line was it did not make any difference to U.S. national security interests what happened to Dahomey. Well, “Soapy” Williams was furious with that, I learned later from friends. I got to be a very good friend of Soapy's, but he didn't like that sort of hard-nosed analytical point of view from any of his ambassadors. I should be emotionally involved and for anything the Dahomians wanted. So on that little bit, we disagreed, but he never, in the end, held it against me. As I said, I remained good friends with him.

Q: Before you went out there, did you have any instructions or goals to do, or was it just, “Go out”?

MCILVAINE: Nobody ever took me aside to give me any instructions. I had the usual briefings.

Q: What was the situation in Dahomey when you arrived there, the political and economic situation? What sort of country was it?

MCILVAINE: The Dahomians were very interesting, I learned later, in that they were the best educated in all of Francophone Africa, and nobody's ever been able to satisfactorily explain why, whether they were brighter or what. Anyhow, they held all over the French African empire, the secondary spots in the French Civil Service. They were tower operators at airports; they were in all the sort of civil service jobs that required a certain amount of education, but not necessarily the top, were occupied by Dahomians all around, in Senegal, in Congo Brazzaville, in Ivory Coast, in Gabon, etc., etc. So they were very bright and had acquired all this education unusual for those countries at that time.

But there was absolutely nothing in Dahomey in the way of natural resources or anything. The entire economy was palm oil, palm plantations from which palm oil is extracted and

made into Palmolive soap or whatever you make out of palm oil. So here we had a country with these rather well educated and competent people and not much to do.

Then when the other countries like the Ivory Coast became independent, and they had a pogrom, if you wish, and they expelled 12,000 Dahomians, all of them very well educated and all of them occupying major posts around the country. The same thing happened in Brazzaville, up and down the coast, all these thousands of Dahomians came home. Well, that produced a very unstable situation.

Q: This was when?

MCILVAINE: This was all within a year, '61-'62. So I guess it was '63, we had the first coup d'etat in Dahomey, and they had a coup d'etat every couple of years from then on until the current man came in, and he was a lieutenant in the Army when I was there. I hardly knew him. But he is left leaning and has a Marxist point of view, and he's stayed in power just the way Mobutu has ever since, which is now about 18 years.

Q: When you went out to Dahomey, how was the staff of the embassy? Did you have a feeling of a certain amount of expertise in Africanness at this time, or was it still learning?

MCILVAINE: No, no. We had a DCM, a girl political officer, an admin officer, and that was it. None of them had ever been in Africa before. I was the expert; I'd been a year. [Laughter]

Q: So you spoke from depth of experience.

MCILVAINE: Yes. [Laughter]

Q: What were you doing at the embassy?

MCILVAINE: That's a good question. President Kennedy asked me that. [Laughter] I said, “I visited every single village at least once, some of them several times, maintaining a

presence and investigating possible agricultural extension work." That's about it. We had a very small AID program, had no Peace Corps. We had a good public affairs officer, and we had some events, and visiting orchestras and other cultural groups and that sort of thing. We just got to know Dahomians and did pretty damn well at it, too. I still have them show up here occasionally and look me up.

Q: What was the role of the French? Did you deal with the French quite a bit there?

MCILVAINE: Yes. A new French ambassador arrived after I'd been there about a year, and came to call on me. He'd just been French ambassador in Ecuador or some place in Latin America, and he said, "Well, I used to have a lot of fun when I was ambassador in Ecuador for four years and watching my American colleagues squirm about this and worry about that and so on. I just would play tennis. I rather suppose that our roles are reversed here, that you're the one who has the good time, and I have to worry."

I said, "That's right and we're going to keep it that way." [Laughter] But you see, the French were always suspicious that we were trying to take over their colonies. In my view, the last thing we wanted to do was take over anybody's headaches, and all of these countries are headaches in a certain sense. There's absolutely no point in encouraging anybody to think that you're going to take them over or take over responsibility for them.

Q: Were you getting any pressure, subtle or otherwise, though, from Governor Williams and the African bureau and all to try to look for more things to do in Dahomey than you felt was really warranted?

MCILVAINE: No, not really, because they had budgetary problems. This comes a little later. I was later ambassador to Guinea and Kenya, and by the time I finished all of this, I made up my mind that in none of these posts, if a mythical U.S. President had said to me, "McIlvaine, you have carte blanche from the U.S. Treasury. Ask and it will be given, whatever you think is needed." I wouldn't have asked for another nickel, because I couldn't be sure that it could be effectively spent and do any good. You can always have more

projects, and they're always after you for more, and there are always people who have their special requests. But development in Africa depends so much on the state—as the French call it, the cadre. Have you got the people to run whatever it is you're planning to do? In most cases, you didn't. Therefore, building a steel mill or building a lot of too sophisticated projects was a waste of money, because we now have seen them go to pot in a lot of places around the world.

So in any case, did Soapy Williams push? No, not specifically on that. I felt the whole time I was in Africa that from the point of view of a Foreign Service officer, it was very satisfying. Washington did listen to us in the field. In most cases, we knew more about it than anybody in Washington, and you didn't have what these poor guys in Europe must have, of presidents talking to presidents back and forth all the time, and ambassadors never catching up to what's going on. In Africa, the embassies and the ambassadors were the kingpins; we made the policy. Of course, sometimes it didn't get followed, but we were listened to, anyhow.

Q: You mentioned that you had a woman political officer when you were there. Since there's been some controversy at that time, it was said that the Foreign Service as an institution tried to keep women out of major roles, with the idea that they couldn't be as effective as males. How did you find having a woman political officer in Dahomey?

MCILVAINE: This case wasn't too good an example. I'm very fond of this gal, she's very nice and very bright and a good linguist, but she was a little vague. At one point she even lost the Great Seal and had a hell of a time finding it. [Laughter] Little things like that. So I don't think that was a fair example. On the other hand, I don't know if you ever knew Nancy Rawles, but she was our economic officer in Nairobi, and I recommended her strongly to be an ambassador, and she was later; she was ambassador to Togo and the Ivory Coast, but, alas, died a couple of years ago of cancer. She was a great officer in any milieu, no matter what. So to me, all these things about women, blacks, and others, it

depends on the individual. It's unfortunate, I think, to have to do things by percentages, but maybe that's the only way you can correct imbalances. I don't know.

Q: You returned to the United States in 1964. Is that right?

MCILVAINE: Right.

Q: Then you became the Coordinator of the Foreign Service Institute's Interdepartmental Seminar. How did that come about?

MCILVAINE: That was familiarly renown as “the counterinsurgency school,” something that Bobby Kennedy was very big on. How it came about, I can't tell you. Somebody pushed some buttons, and my name came up, having been through the whole business in the Congo and a coup d'etat or two in Dahomey. Therefore, I ought to know something about counterinsurgency. Of course, the school was all oriented towards Vietnam, about which I knew nothing and have never seen to this day, but never mind. So I was brought back to do that, to be headmaster of that school. It didn't last very long, because the Congo blew up again, and so I got jerked out of the school and put in charge of the Congo task force. That was at the time when we flew Belgian paratroopers in to rescue various U.S. and other missionaries and whatnot in Stanleyville.

Q: You said you had several coups when you were in Dahomey. How does the embassy operate during a time of a coup?

MCILVAINE: [Laughter] They're all very gentlemanly in Dahomey. One of them happened while I was away. You just had a different set of people, musical chairs, all of whom he knew intimately. To give you an example, I was in Paris in later years, and I walked up the Champs-Elys#es, and at three different restaurants, somebody said, “Eh, dit-on, mon vieux!” And it was an ex-president of Dahomey, and I sat and had a beer with him. Then I'd go to the next one, I got another call. I ran into three of them on the same day. [Laughter] In three separate restaurants, they were all in exile in France.

Then the first president, who had been there while I was ambassador, came back to power. This is while I was in Kenya quite a few years later. I stopped off to visit Dahomey on the way through from being on a promotion panel here. And then two summers ago, we swapped houses in France, and while we were in Paris, we looked up three of the ex-presidents and had dinner with all three of them—separately; they don't talk to each other.

So in Dahomey, nobody was ever hurt in any of these coups d'etats. It was done in a very civilized manner.

Q: President Olympia was assassinated.

MCILVAINE: He was next door in Togo, yes. He was assassinated, but that wasn't in Dahomey. That was Togo.

Q: Then you were assigned in 1966 to Guinea.

MCILVAINE: Right.

Q: How did this appointment come about?

MCILVAINE: You're never sure. By this time, I was working for Averell Harriman.

Q: He was doing what?

MCILVAINE: He was ambassador-at-large, so he was not very busy; he wasn't doing anything. I wasn't terribly busy except when he was busy. What had happened was that my name, I discovered later, had been sent over to the White House to be ambassador to Senegal. LBJ, who was noted for his sort of testiness, looked at it and said, “I won't have another goddamned Harvard guy in this thing,” and threw my name out. So I didn't get that job. So that's when Averell Harriman took me on. I had gotten to know him pretty well while running the Congolese Task Group. So I was just lodged there 'til we could try another ploy.So six or eight months later, a vacancy came up in Guinea, and my name was sent

over, and sure as hell, nobody wanted to go there, so I didn't have any competition. I got through. I guess the President wasn't looking at what he was signing.

Q: You were going to Africa at a time when there was no political competition for these posts.

MCILVAINE: Yes.

Q: That came, really, as a rather recent matter.

MCILVAINE: Kennedy named some very good guys who were non-career, but after that, there were none 'til just recently. This administration has done it in spades.

Q: What was the situation in Guinea when you went there?

MCILVAINE: It was a Marxist country. Sekou Toure was president, a leader along with Kwame Nkrumah, of the whole leftish African scene. Nkrumah had been thrown out of Ghana while he'd been on a trip to China, and he had been given asylum in Guinea by his friend Sekou Toure, even though they couldn't talk to each other. One spoke French and the other English. Indeed, Sekou Toure had made Nkrumah co-president of Guinea. Well, that had the State Department in a total snit, and for a long time they wouldn't send an ambassador, because it might be considered recognizing Nkrumah. So when they finally decided to send me, they said, “How are you going to handle this if Nkrumah's there when you present your credentials?”

I said, “Well, I know the difference between Nkrumah and Sekou Toure. I'll give them to Sekou Toure.”

“Oh,” they said. [Laughter]

So our relationships were tense, but Guinea had—and has— the greatest bauxite resources in the world. A number of people felt it was very important that we, the West,

got those bauxite resources, and not the East. The long and short of it was that we did, but that's rather a long story, and that's the main thing I was involved with the three years I was there.

As you may recall, we were the first diplomatic hostages. That was before Tehran. The entire American community, everybody in the embassy, all the Peace Corps, (we had several hundred Peace Corps volunteers), were all put under house arrest, and there was a big brouhaha about that.

Q: This happened shortly after you arrived?

MCILVAINE: It happened within days of our arrival. Well, the day after I had a very warm meeting with Sekou Toure presenting my letters of credence. [Laughter]

Q: Could you give some of the background? This is October of 1966. What was the background of being taken hostage?

MCILVAINE: There was a meeting coming up of the Organization of African Unity, OAU. The foreign minister of Guinea, Mr. Beavogui, was going to that meeting. As is custom in those countries and in some others, the diplomatic corps always goes to the airport to see the foreign minister in and out. So I, the brand-new ambassador, one day after presenting my letters of credence, go to the airport to see Mr. Beavogui off. I saw him off on a KLM plane. I didn't know where that flight was going. All I knew was he was going to Addis Ababa. Well, of course, it turns out that he took the KLM from Conakry to Monrovia, where he got on a Pan Am plane. In those days, the only way you could cross Africa was via Pan Am, the only airline that went from west to east. In other words, anybody going to Addis Ababa from the west coast had to go on Pan Am. So all the other foreign ministers were getting on as the plane went down the coast. It came to Accra, Ghana, where Kwame Nkrumah had been overthrown, and the new “revolutionary government” wanted his hide. They saw that the Guinean foreign minister was on the plane; and they went on and roughly hauled him off and arrested him, along with about six Guinean students who were

on their way to Lagos. So the Ghanaians, in effect, kidnaped the Guinean foreign minister and then told Sekou Toure, “All right, you want your foreign minister back? Give us Kwame Nkrumah.”

Well, needless to say, I knew nothing about this. What happened was that our embassy in Ghana had apparently sent me a rocket on what had happened, but it got garbled, and we never got it until three days later. Anyhow, the first thing we knew of it was on a Sunday morning. We were going to go out for the first time on a boat to see the little islands off the coast, and DCM Charlie Whitehouse's was coming around to pick us up. I went to the gate, and there was a soldier there on guard. Charles came to the gate, and couldn't get in, and I couldn't get out. So we wanted to know what it was. The soldier didn't know. [Laughter] We finally reached the top civil servant in the foreign ministry, and he said, “Oh, well, there's been some problem. It's very serious. You have captured our foreign minister.”

I said, “I have?” The long and the short of it was, you see, they put two and three together. Because it was a Pan Am plane, that made it an official plane; it must be a CIA plot. We were the tools of that regime in Accra, Ghana. So by God, they were going to sit on me and all the other Americans until the Ghanaians gave up the Guinean foreign minister. Well, this went back and forth and back and forth for a while.

Meanwhile, the OAU meeting in Addis couldn't take place, and a special mission with the foreign minister of Kenya, the foreign minister of Sierra Leone, the foreign minister of the Congo, (that's Leopoldville, now Zaire), whom I knew very well from my days there, came to try to negotiate our release. Then after about a week, we were finally released.

Q: Were you under any threat, really?

MCILVAINE: Yes. A mob had been organized. I was allowed to go to the chancery, along with Charlie Whitehouse and a couple of others, so we could send messages back and forth. The mob appeared there, brandishing signs about “A bas l'imperialism americain,”

so on and so forth. There were about 3,000 people all milling around the chancery, and then I heard on the radio from my wife that a similar group was doing the same thing at the residence. Well, that one got out of hand, broke all the windows, and it was pretty scary for my wife and two kids, who were then three and two. They were all holed up in the second floor, and these characters came through the windows on the second floor. The long and the short of it was that in the end, nothing much was done except breaking all the windows.

I should add here that Africans aren't like some other nationalities. I've always felt that if I'd had the experiences I've had in Africa in an Arab milieu, I wouldn't be here now talking to you. The Africans are not all that vicious. I'll never forget, after the mob went away and, my wife came down. I hadn't gotten home yet, but she went down and she started with a broom to sweep up all the broken glass, and a little guy appeared out of the bushes and said, “Oh, no, madame, we did it. Let me sweep it up.” [Laughter] And he took the broom from her and swept it up.

Another family who had been under house arrest for about a week said to their guard, “You know, we're running out of food. I wonder if you could get permission for us to go to the marche.”

“Oh,” he said, “no, I have strict orders you're not to go anywhere.” And he said, “Ah! I will go to the marche for you.” So he handed them his gun, he took their shopping basket and the list, and he went on foot about two and a half miles to the market, bought everything, carefully noted how much each thing cost, and brought it back and handed it to them. Pretty sweet, both those instances. Otherwise, rather frightening experiences, because you're never sure when mobs get out of control.

Q: How was this problem resolved?

MCILVAINE: The Ghanaians finally released the Guinean delegation. But first of all, I got to see Sekou Toure at 0300 in the morning after we discovered we were hostages.

This bizarre early morning appointment was made on the extra-ordinarily able Guinean ambassador to the U.S., Karim Baugoura, who flew out from Washington. We “palavered” for two hours with Pres. Toure and, I believe, convinced him that we had nothing to do with the kidnapping of his foreign minister. However, the Americans were Toure's only leverage on Ghana. So he did not release us until his foreign minister was returned about 10 days later.

Subsequently, I was called back “for consultation” in Washington to assess the situation—should we break diplomatic relations, cancel the AID program or what? Meanwhile, Sekou Toure took all that in his own hands and threw out the Peace Corps, canceled the AID program, and expelled a lot of the embassy staff. This had its positive side as now we had a small embassy of about 10 people, including clerical and everything else. Our relations with Guinea improved enormously. We got the bauxite and we got all our aims, and I was there for three years, which was something of a record for that place.

Q: Why was it such a blessing to get rid of the Peace Corps and AID?

MCILVAINE: Not the Peace Corps and AID per se. But, we were trying to do too much. They weren't ready for any of the kind of projects we were trying to do. I have a feeling we have too many people in all our missions abroad to this day.

Q: Had the French been pretty well expelled?

MCILVAINE: Yes. There were no official French there at all. The British had been expelled. I was also representing the British. The only Western diplomats in Guinea were the Italians, the Swiss, and the Germans. The rest were all Third World, and all of the Eastern bloc, including Outer Mongolia. He was a marvelous character who chain-smoked and couldn't speak any language that anybody knew. I don't think he even spoke Russian. [Laughter] Poor guy.

Q: How did the Eastern bloc operate within Guinea?

MCILVAINE: It was very interesting. When this happened to us, they were all very concerned, because they knew quite well that once you get a mob excited, the Guineans couldn't tell the difference between Americans, Romanians or Bulgarians or Russians. So I remember when I got released, I went to a diplomatic event, and they all came up to me and were very concerned and solicitous.

Then another interesting angle was when we finally signed the bauxite agreement, the Soviet ambassador came up to me and said, “I don't understand this! I don't understand this!” He said, “Here we have given this country $350 million. I say dollars, not rubles! Dollars! And what happens?”

I say, “What happens?”

He said, “You get the bauxite. And what do we get?”

And I said, “What do you get?”

“Bananas, bananas, bananas.” [Laughter] That was a great day in my life.

Q: Then from a practical point of view, the Soviet influence there was not major.

MCILVAINE: Yes. This is something that we as a country haven't learned. Sekou Toure was a Marxist, but he was also a Guinean and a nationalist. The Russians, in their usual heavy-handed way, started trying to run him around. Well, hell, he threw one ambassador out. He wasn't going to be run around. Basically, he was more sympathetic to their point of view than he was to ours, but in the end, you know, what he wanted was dollars for his bauxite and not rubles. In other words, self-interest overcomes ideology every time, I think, or most times.

Q: Let me stop here for a minute.

Mr. Ambassador, could you describe your impressions of Sekou Toure, please?

MCILVAINE: Yes. He was a fascinating man in many ways. He had a lot of charm. He had a lot of hang-ups. He was not terribly well educated; he had not been to a university, in any case. His upbringing in the colonial period had been as a labor leader, which inevitably, I think, put him into Marxist circles, because I think much of labor in France was, at the time. He was certainly involved in the French labor movement, which was fairly Communist, in any case. He had an extraordinary self-confidence. As I said, a lot of charm, was a fantastic speaker. He could orate and wind up the crowd in an amazing fashion. Indeed, that was one of the secrets of his longevity. He outlasted all of the African presidents, except for Houphouet-Boigny who is still alive and still in place.

Of course, he had no idea how anything really worked, had no concept of economics or anything. As a result, he totally ruined the economy of Guinea, which the French, prior to the independence, considered the pearl of their West African holdings. Everything was ideologic, everything was done by slogans, and, of course, he had a total police state, which would manifest itself in pogroms and arrests and fabricated coup attempts, just to keep any possible opposition off balance.

Most of the people we ever knew there were either killed, imprisoned, or in exile, within ten years after we left there.

Q: This was an example of the weeding out of opposition.

MCILVAINE: Exactly. They say that over 1,500,000 Guineans lived in exile in neighboring Senegal, Ivory Coast, or Liberia. I don't know how you'd ever prove it, but I believe that that's probably right, due to this man.

A good example is the case of Alpha Addoulage Diallo who was Chef de Cabinet in Foreign Ministry, a charming man, a licensee en droit from the Sorbonne in Paris, spoke impeccable French, a very, very civilized gentleman. Needless to say, I felt when I left that

he was not long for this world, because he obviously didn't approve of what was going on. But what could he do? He couldn't get out. Sure enough, he finally was arrested. He's one of the few who survived. He had ten years in a windowless cell, was beaten daily. He got out eventually, and he came to this country last year and visited us, a very remarkable human being. He also wrote a book, which I read, and it's indescribable what these people were put through, African against African, not colonialists treating their subject people. It was Africans against Africans—just incredible.

Eventually, Sekou Toure became ill a couple of years ago and died. His successor lasted in office only a few weeks, and then there was a coup d'etat, and they got rid of the whole bunch of them.

Q: Did we have any other interests other than bauxite then?

MCILVAINE: None, other than the one I cited in Dahomey, that as the world's largest country, we felt we had to maintain a diplomatic presence everywhere. You try to be helpful within certain limits and do what's feasible. You got big arguments about what those were, but I don't think there were any other interests.

Q: Did Toure ever turn to you for advice informally or in any way?

MCILVAINE: Conversation with him was very difficult. He generally turned it into a speech in no time at all. Of course, in three years, I managed to hear all his speeches several times. You know, after the first incident, where we all got blamed for the kidnaping of his foreign minister, the foreign minister was Louis Lansana Beavogui. We called him “Lucky Louis.” Sure enough, about six months after this happened, he got kidnapped again, this time off a KLM plane somewhere else and put in by the Ivory Coast.

Q: Why were they doing this to the foreign minister?

MCILVAINE: I don't know. So that time, the poor KLM man got put inside for months. But the point of my anecdote is that I heard about this from our embassy in the Ivory Coast, and I called Sekou Toure up and said, “I've got to see you quick. Urgent.” So I went around, and I said, “I've just heard this. I can't make sure if it's true or not, but I want you to know we are not hiding anything, and we did not do it!” Well, he laughed, you know. Every time anything came up, I would go to him first. I'd say, “Now I hear this, that, and the other thing, but we are not involved.” Their internal security was run by the East Germans. They're great at feeding all kinds of false information particularly about Americans, to try to get us in trouble. You can not believe all of this, you know. I finally convinced him by the time I left that he shouldn't believe these guys.

The East Germans were past masters at disinformation. In effect, they ran the Guinean security service so it was easy for them to flood rumors, false information, etc. While we were there they sold the Guineans on a totally fabricated document that purported to be written by Charles Whitehouse, the DCM. To Tom Mboya in Kenya suggesting that he overthrow Jomo Kenyatta. Charlie did not even know Tom Mboya and of course this “fake” was designed to get us in trouble both in Guinea and in Kenya. The language of the letter was totally “un-American” and the stationery did not fit anything in the U.S. Government . It was a patent fake.

Q: Again, I ask this with all our interviewees and stressing that it's unclassified, it doesn't sound like a very productive place for the CIA to try to do anything.

MCILVAINE: Oh, Lord, no. Absolutely not.

Q: Did you have to go through the routine requests to see the head of state, to get them to vote right on the UN and all this sort of thing?

MCILVAINE: Oh, yes, sure. But I didn't see the chief of state; I saw the foreign minister.

Q: How did this exercise go in a place like Guinea?

MCILVAINE: Oh, they'd listen to you. It was a ritual. You knew perfectly well they weren't going to vote with us. They never voted with us. They may have once or twice, but it was probably just a coincidence..

Q: But we had no power of persuasion?

MCILVAINE: They were basically in the Communist bloc as far as voting at the UN was concerned.

Q: Was the People's Republic of China there?

MCILVAINE: Yes.

Q: Did they have much of a role?

MCILVAINE: Yes, they had a big role in getting our residence stoned and windows broken. Somebody told me later that some Chinese came along and started throwing rocks, which encouraged the Guineans to do the same. Q: You had no contact with them?

MCILVAINE: No, they weren't allowed to talk to us, and we weren't allowed to talk to them. Actually, it's interesting about the Chinese Communists there and in other places. They are very unobtrusive. They had a big group there, because they were doing major projects. They were building a big cultural center, had built a tobacco plant, and hydroelectric project up-country. They had a compound right near our residence, but you never saw them. The compound had great high walls around it. They were trucked to work in big stake trucks with canvas over the top and sides. You didn't know what was inside. One time I was driving along, and the wind blew the flap open, and I saw there were about 80 Chinamen in there, all hanging like this, being trucked from their job back to their compound. You never saw them on the streets. They were no problem. And Sekou Toure

talked about that. He said, “These Chinese are very discreet. They don't come around and rape our women and get drunk on the streets and so on.” Very discreet. And it's true. You hardly ever saw these Chinese. You had to marvel at them from that point of view.

Q: Did you have much contact with embassies of other countries, particularly African countries there? Were they people you cultivated?

MCILVAINE: Yes, it was a pretty small diplomatic corps, we were fairly close. It was really dangerous for Guineans to get to know us so, you couldn't do too much with them, except for the officials.

Q: Did you travel much?

MCILVAINE: All foreigners were supposedly restricted to a 20 mile limit around the capital. But I managed to get all over the country. It was one of my fetishes. After the incident of our house arrest, when I came back from consultation in D.C., the Guineans were supposed to make an official apology and pay for the broken glass at the Residence. Well, getting Sekou Toure to apologize for anything was pretty tricky, you know, and I wasn't sure how he was going to handle that. He called me up one day, and he said, “What are you doing tomorrow?”

This was a Sunday. I said, “Well, not much. What do you have in mind?”

He said, “Well, I'm going to Kankan,” which is a major city in the north, in fact, where he comes from. They were having a meeting of all the regional governors there, and he said, “Would you like to come up with me?”

I said, “Sure.” So I played checkers with him all the way up in his Antonov 24, a Russian plane, with steam pouring out of the vents the whole way. They're not very well attuned to pressure.

Anyhow, we got to Kankan, and went to the meeting. I was the only pale face in the whole room of a hundred or so governors and other civil servants. He opens up the meeting and says, “I want to introduce, before we get into the business, my friend the American ambassador.” Now, this is just after we'd had the house arrest. He said, “You all know what happened to him a couple of weeks ago. It shouldn't have happened to a dog.” They all stood up and pounded their feet and clapped like crazy. And then I was dismissed. That was the apology.

Q: Did you report back that apology duly accepted and all that?

MCILVAINE: Yes. Then what was interesting, speaking of how I had to finagle to get to see the country, I really fooled him. I had heard that there was a drought or a flood—I forget which—in that area. At this point our AID mission had been thrown out, but I found we had a whole warehouse full of tools and things like shovels and a two-ton stake truck, so I loaded that full of shovels and sent it up to Kankan with the driver for the drought or flood workers. Then I drove it back. I wandered all over the country doing this, which he, Sekou Toure, was not counting on, and saw a lot of it. In Africa, there are always people on the road. We'd stop and pick people up all day long. Sometimes I'd have 20 or so people in the back of the truck with their gear, and they'd get out at this place and that place. I had a marvelous trip.

When Sekou Toure heard about that, he started to have a fit! He said, “I don't like people traveling around.” But I was currently the hero of the country, and I was going to make the most of it.

Q: Did you have trouble keeping up morale of the embassy? You were rather isolated and couldn't get out and travel.

MCILVAINE: At that embassy, we had the best morale of any embassy I've ever been in. I think this is often true of places where it's tense and difficult, because everybody gets

together and looks out for each other. We got along fine. I remember just before I left, things had calmed down and become more or less normal and wasn't quite as exciting, and we began to have a little trouble with the embassy.

Q: How did your officers do their work if it was difficult to meet people?

MCILVAINE: I'm not sure how they did it. Certainly you couldn't go and—well, there were certain things that were made available, and that's about it. It couldn't have been very in-depth reporting on economics, as there wasn't any economics. The politics was all Sekou Toure.

Q: You were there during an election in which he got 99.7 percent of the vote.

MCILVAINE: You see, it was so important, I'd forgotten that!

Q: It was the election of 1968.

MCILVAINE: I was certainly there. I've forgotten his election.

Q: At one point, Stokely Carmichael visited Guinea. Were you there, and did you go out and have anything to do with him?

MCILVAINE: Yes, I met him and shook hands, but he didn't want to talk to me. By this time, he was married to Miriam Makeba, the famous South African singer. Sekou Toure gave them a plot up in Labie, which is in the highlands, and they built a very interesting house there and lived there for some time. I think Stokely Carmichael is still there. She, I think, has left him. At least I saw that in the papers recently.

Q: There was an article in the paper on her today, in the Washington Post. She's making concert tours here. But Stokely Carmichael, I might say for the record, was a radical black American activist on the Students' Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, SNCC, I think.

MCILVAINE: That's right.

Q: He, I think, had left the United States. Was he accused of something, or he just left?

MCILVAINE: I don't remember.

Q: I don't recall.

MCILVAINE: I'd hate to say, because I'd probably have it wrong. But anyhow, he certainly left America and, I believe, has been away ever since.

Q: But when he settled there, he was not much of a presence, then?

MCILVAINE: No. I think he kind of hoped he would be, but Sekou didn't trust him.

Q: He didn't want any other luminaries in his universe.

MCILVAINE: No.

Q: You went from Guinea to Kenya.

MCILVAINE: That's right, yes.

Q: This was under the Nixon Administration. Did changes of administration mean much in Africa?

MCILVAINE: Not really, no. I went to the Congo under Eisenhower, to Dahomey under Kennedy, to Guinea under Johnson, and to Kenya under Nixon.

Q: The only difference being that if you were a Harvard man, you had a little more difficulty. You couldn't go to Senegal. [Laughter]

MCILVAINE: [Laughter] I guess that particular day, I couldn't have gone anywhere with LBJ. It didn't matter.

Q: How did your assignment to Kenya come about?

MCILVAINE: Joe Palmer, a good friend of ours, was then Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, and he wrote me a letter and said he wanted me to go to Nigeria. At this point, we'd had six years in the “armpit” of Africa. So I wrote to Joe, I said, “Look, Alice really, cannot take much more of this subtropical stuff from a health point of view, and I sure as hell don't want to, but I'll go where I have to go. Could we possibly get some place like Morocco, you know, a dry area?”

Well, he came back and said, “Sorry, we hear that a politico's been promised Morocco, but would you mind going to Kenya?”

Mind? I said, “Mind? When?” That's how it happened.

Q: Again, what were our interests in Kenya? We're talking about 1969. You were there from 1969 to 1973. What were our interests in Kenya when you were going out? How did you prepare yourself?

MCILVAINE: Kenya was considered, as a much bigger embassy, more important to the U.S. than either Dahomey or Guinea, which were always considered basically French provinces. Of course, a lot of tourists went there to look at the wildlife. So there was much more interest in Kenya. Indeed, we'd already had two non-career ambassadors there. In fact, I was the first career ambassador there. There was some concern about Jomo Kenyatta, who was of a certain age and Tom Mboya, the obvious successor to Kenyatta, had been assassinated.

Q: This was in July of 1969.

MCILVAINE: That's right. So there was some concern about it. I think, frankly, another non-career would have gone there had this not happened. Maybe they decided there might be a coup d'etat, and you'd better have old anti-insurgency McIlvaine there. [Laughter]

Q: You'd already been through this sort of thing.

MCILVAINE: A few times. I'm sure that's how I got the job. But anyhow, it was nice. We loved it there, and liked it so much that after it was over, I retired from the Foreign Service and stayed on there and ran a wildlife conservation program.

Q: You said that our interests in Dahomey and Guinea, Guinea was bauxite, Dahomey was the presence. How about Kenya?

MCILVAINE: I think that our interests there were more substantial from a geographic point of view. Nairobi is very definitely a meeting place in Africa, a fantastic number of airlines coming in, cris-crossing, the continent and coming in from India, from Arabia, to the U.S., to Europe, and I guess Nairobi is the most sophisticated city in black Africa.

Then you had in Jomo Kenyatta a very remarkable man, who, despite having been imprisoned by the Brits, when he finally got to power, was the guy who saved all their hides. It was very interesting to me to find how many of the Brits stayed on, particularly on the farms. When they had problems, they would go to Kenyatta. That guy who had been called a demon and a leader of the Mau-Mau, and everything you can think of just a few years ago, was the one who saved their bacon. He understood what his country could do and what it couldn't do. He was very much like Houphouet-Boigny of the Ivory Coast, and as a result, I would say that those two countries have done the best in Africa, as far as economic development is concerned, because they did not jump in over their heads with things that they couldn't handle. They kept enough people around to manage things until their people could be trained. Today, almost everything is run by Kenyans, but they

couldn't have done it in 1963 when they became independent. I am not as familiar with the Ivory Coast, but I would say it's somewhat similar there.

So we had an interest in the stability of Kenya and in Kenyatta, and in what happened after his death. Everybody who ever came there would always ask me, “Has Kenyatta named a successor?” I would explain that people don't do that. I mean, it's either a total dictatorship and a guy gets knocked off, and whoever knocks him off is the successor, or you have a constitutional government. According to the constitution of Kenya, the vice president becomes president. Well, indeed, when President Kenyatta died, that's exactly what happened. Mr. Moi, vice president for about eight years, became president, and he's still president. So that's one of the interesting things about Kenya, that they were able to get over this transition from the founding father to a not-so-well-qualified successor, without bloodshed.

Q: Did you have much dealings with Kenyatta?

MCILVAINE: Not a great deal, because one of my predecessors—and I've said this to his face, so I don't mind saying it—Bill Attwood—by the way, Bill Attwood had been ambassador to Guinea and to Kenya. In other words, I followed him twice. But he was basically a journalist. He had been editor of LOOK magazine, and he was a political appointee by Kennedy, so the minute he decides he's going back to journalism, he has to knock off a book about his experiences. It was called “The Reds and the Blacks.” Well, he put in that book what various senior officers told him about other senior officers in Kenya. I mean, any damn fool would know better than to do that, but, of course, it made much better reading that way. So Mr. Attwood was declared a prohibited immigrant, and by the way, he'd bought some land there and hoped to go back, and he was never able to go back and hasn't to this day.

As a result of that, the old man—that's Kenyatta—was very annoyed, as was the attorney general, because he was the one that was quoted as saying nasty things about other

people still around. The word went out that nobody in the government was to have anything to do with Embassies, except the foreign minister. And you could never find the foreign minister. I had to take up golf in order to see the foreign minister.

So we didn't have much contact with Kenyatta. My main contact was with Moi, who was the vice president. I found that I could get to see him relatively easily. He was very serious, no great intellect, but he was a hard worker. He was a very loyal vice president to Kenyatta and probably couldn't have had the job if he hadn't done it that way. Because he was from a minor tribe, he was not considered a threat to the Kikuyu establishment. In Kenya, you've got tribalism, same as you have elsewhere in Africa.

Q: Was the main tribe the Luo?

MCILVAINE: No. The Kikuji are the largest...Kenyatta's tribe...the “Eastern establishment.” The Luo, which was Tom Mboya's tribe, are smaller and from the west of Kenya.

Q: I see. What sort of things would you be going to see the vice president about?

MCILVAINE: Oh, mostly nitty-gritty. I remember I was going to go to the northeast. That's the area on the Ethiopian and Somali border, and they'd had a lot of troubles there with the Somalis and other tribes. Indeed, it was kind of a prohibited area. I wanted to go up there and look around, so I did. I came back and since it wasn't easy to go and chat with the president, I chatted with the vice president. I said, “They all feel totally left out there. They're not a part of Kenya. Nobody ever goes there. There hasn't been a minister there in five years. You've never been there, the president's never been there. In your political interest, you ought to start doing something about it.”

Well, he was very interested in that idea. I had a long talk about it, and I got him to go. He became very keen on this. When I saw him again, he said, “Where else haven't I been? That was kind of interesting, and I see a lot of their problems.” So I got him to go to other places. We sort of became friends as a result of that.

In Kenya, most of the politicians were in business, and it was awfully hard to find any of them in their office, and it really wasn't worthwhile to find them in their office, because they really didn't know much about what their office was doing, they were so busy with their gas stations and their factories and their farms. You talk about capitalism, Kenya's got it! It makes some of our robber barons of the 1880's look like pikers—but it works. It really works.

Q: Were we having a lot of American tourists there getting into trouble? Did you have trouble trying to get them out?

MCILVAINE: Not too much. I was there six years, four as ambassador, two with wildlife. But I don't remember any really serious problems with American citizens, except with a man named Peter Beard or with students who were on drugs.

Q: How was the staff of the embassy?

MCILVAINE: Most of the time it was very good. Some were better than others. It was much bigger than I was used to in Guinea.

Q: There's a tendency, I've noticed, that the nicer the place, the larger the staff.

MCILVAINE: That's right. You can count on it.

Q: Which does not have to do with the relative importance of a country.

MCILVAINE: I recall one time a gentleman arrived, and he turned out to be a representative of the Federal Aviation Agency. He wanted to talk to me about having a Federal Aviation attach#. I absolutely horrified him. I said, “What for?”

“Oh, oh, oh.” Nobody had ever asked him that before.

He said, “We have a requirement.” I hate that word. A lot of people use that for self-serving purposes.

I said, “Who requires you?”

“Well, the President and Congress.”

And I said, “Well, tell me about this requirement.”

He said, “That is, we're responsible for U.S. airlines and how they operate, and we have to have a guy out here to check on Pan Am and TWA.”

I said, “Well, you know, I date way back when Pan Am was the first airline we had, and it's slogan is the world's most experienced airline.” I said, “My guess would be that if Pan Am can't get from New York to Nairobi without your help, it ought to be abolished.” And I said, “In any case, if it does require your help, why can't you put your guy on New York and he can do a round-trip and see how they fly both ways?” Well, he was furious about that. [Laughter]

And we had a Library of Congress attach#, and what did he do? He went around and bought books everywhere and magazines. We had a huge Peace Corps, a huge AID mission, and I guess there must have been 500 or 600 Americans getting a government check one way or another.

Q: Again, looking at it at that time, how effective was our Peace Corps and our AID mission?

MCILVAINE: I think the Peace Corps was very good, very good. We had to change its emphasis during my period. After independence, there was a big push to get education, naturally, because prior to independence there had been no schools, except missionary schools, a few, very few. So to get real public education going required a lot of help and a

lot of teachers, so the Peace Corps was the answer to that. They were in schools all over the bush. It soon got to be too difficult; I thought it was unfair for a Peace Corps kid to be in a bush situation where he's the only foreigner around, set up and running the school, while the head of the school board is probably absconding with half of the funds, and this poor kid knows it, and what does he do about it? If it's a girl, she's being chased all the time by the mayor or the head of the School Board. I just felt that was an area, rural schools, we ought to get out of, so we changed.

By this time, anyhow, they had trained their own teachers. If you keep doing the job for them, they'll never put them in; they'll go to something else. So we got out of teaching in rural primary school and limited it to the bigger high schools on hard subjects like physics and math and so on and so forth. Then we shifted the emphasis to practical things such as kinds of fish, soil conservation, and other projects of a basic nature, which I think was the correct thing to do.

The AID programs, I don't know as all of them were very effective. One example would be our efforts in range management: the concept of digging more wells when the cattle did not have enough water. That's the worst possible thing you can do. You dig a well, and then the cattle will come for 100 miles around to that well and trample everything. So the Sahara moves south. Too many cows is the real reason for the Sahel and all those problems. Too many people, too many cows, both.

Q: What about the British? Did you defer to them on many of the AID things, or were we in competition with them?

MCILVAINE: No. That was the big difference between the francophone and the Anglophone colonies. The French were very jealous of their prerogatives in French-speaking countries, and I for one didn't feel that I wanted to contest it, anyhow. I mean, we've got enough on our plate without taking over something that they're willing to do. Now, the Brits didn't have this attitude at all. They didn't mind our helping in Kenya. Sure,

we coordinated as best we could also with the United Nations effort and World Bank. They all had their offices there, and we used to have regular monthly meetings with the government on AID and what needed doing and so on and so forth, which was not ideal, but I think it saved a lot of duplication and other problems.

Trade was another matter. The British naturally wanted to sell Brit and we, U.S. We had a big battle over three aircrafts for East African Airlines. In the end we won and then bought 3 DC-3's.

Q: You were there during a major crisis or problem, that is, the expulsion of many of the so-called Asian, basically they were Indian, weren't they, of India and Pakistan?

MCILVAINE: Yes.

Q: From Uganda. And there was pressure put on those in Kenya. Did we have any role in this?

MCILVAINE: No, no, we didn't.

Q: Did we try to help or issue visas or protest to the government to alleviate the problems?

MCILVAINE: Well, the real problem was in Uganda, and I had nothing to do with that.

Q: Idi Amin.

MCILVAINE: He threw them all out overnight, just like that. That did create a tremendous dislocation problem. In Kenya, they never did anything like that, but there was often subtle pressure. After all, the classic thing that happened was that after independence in Kenya, an African who's been dealing always with an Asian, because all shops were run by Asians, particularly in the bush, and even a lot of them in Nairobi. So he'd been dealing with this guy all his life, owing money, and now you have independence! There is pressure to get the Africans in business so the Asians would sell out to them. The African thought all

you did was sit behind the counter and dish out the food and take in the shillings, which, of course, is what you do do up to a point, and then you run out of goods. The Africans didn't know where to go to replenish the stock. So they would go to Nairobi, and, of course, the only place they could get goods was to buy at retail prices from that same Asian who had a brother in Bombay and a cousin elsewhere to get things for him wholesale. These poor Africans were having a rough time getting into business. But they aren't dumb.

Today, 15 years later, I was just out there last year, and by God, there are a lot of African shops now running, and a lot of Africans in small businesses that used to be entirely Asians, and I don't know, I guess a lot of Asians have emigrated to Canada, and some to Australia.

I remember one time my wife, was talking to her Asian butcher, and he was complaining about conditions in Kenya. She said, “You know, why don't you go back to India?”

“Oh, Madame, we couldn't go do that. They're just as smart as we are there.” So obviously they were there in Kenya exploiting (a) us whites, and (b) those blacks. [Laughter] They wouldn't think of going back to India, where the competition would be too stiff.

Q: There was no pressure on us to try to do anything. This was a local problem.

MCILVAINE: Yes.

Q: Were there any geopolitical problems there? Were we concerned about—I think of Tanzania, Somalia, Ethiopia, Uganda, Sudan.

MCILVAINE: I think the main thing of that nature was the East African community, which we thought was a good thing. It was set up by the British before independence, with the idea that it would be so much easier for these fledgling countries to have a common railroad, airline, post and telegraph, and income tax system, actually, which would be run as the East African community, and you wouldn't have to have separate airlines, separate

railroads, separate this, that, and the other thing. Indeed, it worked very well, except that pretty soon the disparity between the economies of the three countries became a telling factor. Tanzania, with Julius Nyerere, was sort of following the Sekou Toure line of African socialism. Nothing was working. And pretty soon they couldn't pay their share of the airline and this, that, and the other. Then you've got Idi Amin in Uganda and all that dislocation.

But what happened was that Kenya soon found itself financing the two neighbors in all their trade, and they got tired of it. At one point when all the East African Airline airplanes happened to be in Nairobi, they grabbed them all. This, of course, made Julius Nyerere furious, because it happened to be at a time when he was having an international meeting and had counted on using one of the three DC-9s that belonged to the airline to transport people around, and he couldn't do it.

So the Kenyans just grabbed all the aircraft and, some of the boats on Lake Victoria. Anyhow, there was a big brouhaha. Then Nyerere closed the border between Tanzania and Kenya, and grabbed off all the airplanes there from the Kenya safari types. They sat around for five years. I used to see them every year, grass growing up around their wings. Finally, it got all settled.

Q: We played no particular role in that? We sort of sat back. We didn't act the role of the conciliator or anything?

MCILVAINE: No. The only role we played was, whenever we could, to encourage the concept of the East African community. Then when it was clear what was happening, we laid off that and said, “Well, too bad.”

Q: How about bases? Were we at all interested in bases?

MCILVAINE: We weren't in my time. I believe that we have some kind of a training mission in Kenya now, Air Force. What it is, I don't know. We never even had military attach#s.

Q: How about American business there?

MCILVAINE: There was a lot of it. Several plants. Union Carbide had a plant, Colgate-Palmolive-Peat. There were several banks. Firestone and General Motors each had manufacturing plants.

Q: Did they take care of themselves, or did you have to intervene to help?

MCILVAINE: Very occasionally. Pretty much they took care of themselves.

Q: How about oil exploration? Was that going on?

MCILVAINE: They never found any of that. People would come and go from various consortiums, trying to find it. As far as I know, oil has never been found.

Q: Businessmen could pretty well come in and do their business.

MCILVAINE: Yes, it was relatively easy, because English was spoken, and enough sophisticated people around to help out and so on and so forth.

Q: Did you retire in 1973? Was this of your own volition?

MCILVAINE: I had been there four years. We had just had an election, and I knew we were going to have another ambassador—well, somebody had been trying to get my chair the whole time I was there! I think the only reason I had it for four years was the candidates sort of canceled each other out.

Q: You had sort of felt the hot breath of political appointees on this post?

MCILVAINE: Oh, yes. Well, the guy who succeeded me, he's a nice guy and I'm very fond of him, but basically he bought and paid for it several times.

Q: Would he come by and take a look and see how it was doing? Would you find people coming by and sort of looking you over?

MCILVAINE: Oh, sure, yes.

Q: Let me just flip this over.Just to wind up this interview, Mr. Ambassador, what do you consider your major accomplishments in the Foreign Service?

MCILVAINE: Glory be, I've never thought about it!

Q: Well, I'm asking. [Laughter]

MCILVAINE: What is an accomplishment? I guess I would say my role in getting the United Nations involved in the Congo. I feel that was a very important thing. I felt so then, and, of course, we've lived through Vietnam since, and I've often thought back, had we not done this, we could have had a Vietnam in Africa, which we never had.

I'm also rather proud of the way we handled the Guinea problem. There was some pressure at home to “do something,” to show those “savages” they can't be arresting diplomats and particularly Americans. Of course, sticking up for principles is important. But you should never lose sight of your objectives either. I knew from my two hour talk with Sekou Toure in the wee hours of the morning, that he knew he had made a mistake. The trick was to find a way for him to extricate himself without losing too much face. At the same time we must insist on basic principles. I worked out the formula and sold it to Dean Rusk who whisked it by LBJ while he was looking at something else. Then, with the help of Guinean Ambassador Baugoura, I sold the concept to Sekou Toure. It worked. U.S.-Guinean relations reached a new high. We had no AID program, no Peace Corps and we got the bauxite!

One other thing: I am proud of some of the junior officers who served with me at different posts and on whom I may have had some influence. None did as well as Frank Carlucci but six of them have become very successful ambassadors. I am very proud of them.

Q: That's a very substantial role. With somebody at right time, at the right place . . .

MCILVAINE: I don't say that other people didn't think of it too, but I know I planted the idea and kept pushing it, and I gathered later, the Secretary and President said, “Why not?” So it just hit right.

Q: How about the reverse side of the coin? Any great frustration you had or something you wish you could have done that you were unable to do or tried and didn't work?

MCILVAINE: I suppose so, but I've forgotten now. I guess my greatest frustration was the need to battle constantly to keep the U.S. mission lean and effective. Parkinson Law is always at work.

Q: I'd like your estimate of the Foreign Service as a career. What do you think about it, looking back on it, and how it is today?

MCILVAINE: I think there's always a temptation for older people to think and to say, “Well, it ain't like it used to be,” and it certainly isn't and probably shouldn't be. I have a couple of impressions, and they're only impressions. I think there's an awful lot of stress, among people now serving, on accouterments and benefits and that sort of thing. I get the impression that a lot of them are time-servers. Mind you, I'm not around them all the time, and I may be wrong, but I don't feel there's the sort of gung-ho, serve-your-country sort of thing no matter what that I can recall from earlier years. That's one side of it.

Another side of it is, I think, the current administration, the Reagan Administration, has done a very poor job about support of the career Foreign Service. I don't think they even understand what it is. Clearly, they feel that the diplomatic posts are to be rewards to the

party faithful. Now, there's always been a certain amount of that, but I thought that we had grown a little more sophisticated in the course of the last 50 or so years than would be indicated by what the Reagan Administration had done. They've gone down into places like Lesotho with non-career ambassadors, so there's not much left for the guy who is an able, coming career guy anymore to look forward to, and I think that's a damn shame, because after all, if you're worth your salt, you should be ambitious, and in the Foreign Service, that's the thing you aspire to be, is to be chief of mission, have your own ship.

Q: It does appear that Africa is no longer, at least, one of the few places—Africa and the Arab world were the two places where the professional could look towards a reasonable career.

MCILVAINE: Yes.

Q: Up to and including yourself, being an ambassador several times. Now one has the feeling that much of it is almost a tombstone promotion. You're going to be ambassador to Gabon for a year and a half, and then you should move on and retire.

MCILVAINE: That seems to be it, yes. I have a good friend who was my DCM one time in Nairobi. He's almost the world's champion DCM. I think he was DCM in eight different African posts, so he knows Africa better than anybody. He finally got to be ambassador to Brazzaville and served there three years, and now he's retired.

Q: You were there sort of at the beginning of Africa emerging. Can you give any estimate of how you feel about our African expertise as it grew during this period, both in Washington and abroad? Did you feel you were getting better backing or not? How do you rate this?

MCILVAINE: Well, it varied with administrations. I think we developed some very knowledgeable people, who had a lot of experience in Africa. I think there's a tendency among some career, and almost always with the non-career, get their roles mixed up, and

they end up being that country's ambassador to the U.S. I don't think that should be a U.S. ambassador's job. I think he's hired to be objective, to be discriminating and not go along with everything the host country wants and be their apologist on everything that comes up. There's a tendency to do that among non-career as well as career. In their desire to be popular, to be liked, they lose their objectivity. Well, we have to look out for U.S. interests, be objective. U.S. interests are not of course the same as the host country, and I think everybody knows that. It is an obvious statement of fact, but a lot of people forget it.

Q: Did you find a difference in the heads of the African bureaus, in the atmosphere that emanated from them? Just yesterday, I heard some people who served in Africa talking, in very disparaging terms, about Governor Williams, about his idea that anything that black Africans were doing was considered to be fine, and he wouldn't hear of anything wrong about this, and this had an effect on our policy.

MCILVAINE: Yes, that was partially true. Soapy had a big heart, and he was a politician, and he was kind of running for governor of Africa in every single country. Which isn't right. But I don't think it did any harm. At that particular stage in the whole operation, I think it was probably a net plus to have a guy who was so obviously pro-African, you know. He didn't give away the house. He may have tried, but he didn't get away with it. [Laughter]

Q: How about later on? Did you find a difference?

MCILVAINE: Yes, the others were much more practical and objective. All the rest of them were career. Joe Palmer and David Newsom were both all top career guys with a lot of experience in Africa, and it isn't that they disliked Africans, but they were not as emotional and were more objective and more aware of U.S. interests.

Q: Also during this period, you were there during our increased involvement in Vietnam, which certainly distracted us from other places. Did you have this feeling, too?

MCILVAINE: Very definitely, yes. I had a lot of trouble in Kenya with the Peace Corps. They were all ready to go and march in front of the embassy, anti-Vietnam. I sat up and talked with eight or ten of their leaders for I think it was something like 18 hours to try and talk them out of this. And I did.

Q: How did you talk them out of this? They were ready to demonstrate against our embassy?

MCILVAINE: They were indeed. It was a tortuous process over many hours. I recall telling them that I didn't agree with our Vietnam policy either. Before I could elaborate they asked me to join the protest march! I then explained that I would never join in a public protest against my government in a foreign country. If one was a government employee and wanted to protest, one must first resign, go home, then do whatever one felt was necessary to advance one's ideas. I added that in my case, at least, I had rationalized my experiences in Africa as being of some value to my country and to resign in protest about Vietnam about which I knew very little, would not accomplish very much. I suggest they were in a comparable position but that if they really had to do it, okay, resign first, then do it—and at home. They finally bought the concept.

Q: Did you find that there was diminished interest on the part of the State Department in Africa, that the less you reported in or "bothered" them, the better, because their plates were full of Vietnam?

MCILVAINE: Well, you always had the African bureau that would answer your mail, and they would try to do their best. But yes, certainly I think that Africa was on the front burner for a long time, for most of this period that you and I have been talking about, and I think people gradually got tired of it, and there were competing things such as Vietnam and other things, definitely.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, you've talked at great length here. I certainly appreciate this. Thank you very much.

End of interview