

Interview with Frank G. Wisner

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

AMBASSADOR FRANK G. WISNER

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Q: Frank, you have had an exemplary career. You received from Secretary Albright very recently the highest award. Before we turn to your career, and its highlights, are there some themes that you would like to touch on? The emphasis that you have put on language, and area knowledge, the emphasis on enjoying what you do over a career, the dichotomy in anyone's career and particularly in yours in being a field officer and being a Washington bureaucrat?

WISNER: Well, trying to look back over a 36-year career really, in effect, demands that I look back over something much longer than my career. My thoughts about American diplomacy, America's foreign affairs, began really as a child. I grew up in World War II and have vivid memories of a father going to war. I have very, very strong memories of the end of the war, the emergence of the post-War period, the onset of the Cold War itself, sharp reflections born of the time, like yourself, with a father who was in government. My father was for a number of years the head of the clandestine services of CIA. I remember the outbreak of the Korean War, its passage, the crisis in Washington during the McCarthy years, the emergence of NATO and the Suez War. I was in England at school and felt almost as if I were on the battlefield, and when I arrived in Washington at the beginning of the Kennedy Administration to join the Foreign Service, I had in a very real sense already

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lived a life of foreign affairs. As a child I had met General Marshall, Allen Dulles, and had known many Secretaries of State and Defense in passing as a little boy. The older I got, the more I was acquainted with our great progenitors of our foreign service — Llewellyn Thompson, Chip Bohlen, Freddy Reinhardt, Secretaries Dulles and Herter were people that I met. Dean Rusk was the first Secretary I worked for, so in a sense my span of memory goes back in more of a continuum that if it had just started in 1962 when, having passed the previous year the foreign service exam, I joined the service.

Q: But still Frank, this was something you knew you wanted to do. I can remember at Princeton University you were learning Arabic and taking advanced courses on the Middle East. At what point did this crystallize for you and why the Middle East at that stage?

WISNER: My decision to become a Foreign Service Officer, in my mind I remember it very clearly; I was about 12. Asked by a friend of my father's what I wanted to do when I grew up, I said this, and I never thought anything else as I went through high school and college. When I was at university, I felt very, very strongly about where I would go with a career in the foreign service, and I realized I needed to have another language — I was not a particularly good language student — and had done poorly in French at secondary school and couldn't face the prospect of doing it again. I hadn't done brilliantly with German in a brief interlude in a school in England in 1956-57, and so I thought I would try a more remote language in one of the areas of the world where we were being tested. For reasons peculiar to Princeton of the day, the Russian language department was disruptive, Chinese seemed intimidating, and really almost more by accident than anything else I fell into Arabic. My father was unwell at that point, and I remember my mother felt this was rather off the beaten track and attempted briefly to discourage me — I'm glad I persisted. It gave a real dimension to my life, and I loved that language and worked in it or around it, though I never became in a classic sense an Arabist or able to do the detailed courses. I did have a six month course as a student of North African Arabic when we briefly had an Arabic language school in Tangier in the early 1960s.

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Q: But was it the influence of Phil Hitti or any of the great professors that steered you that way?

WISNER: No. I met them afterwards in the Department of Oriental Studies at Princeton, but that was ex-post-facto, not the cause for my becoming part of it. But, once in it, I was intrigued by the flow of modern Middle Eastern history from the Ottoman Empire to the present.

Q: So, then you came in the service and you were perhaps in that legendary first class at the Tangier School with Bob Pelletreau, Lannon Walker, Ed Peck and others. That was an experience.

WISNER: That certainly was. We were delayed coming into the Foreign Service because of one of our perennial budget problems. I was assigned to a brand new office as a temporary measure while Mr. Crockett's budget was resubmitted and funds for travel abroad were set aside. I went to the then-new office of RPE (European Political and Economic Affairs) which George Ball and the Deputy Secretary of State had instructed be set up under the leadership of a very smart Foreign Service Officer named Stan Cleveland, a man of strong personality, a high profile, a determination to make our European economic policies not only a standard-bearer of the Department's role in Washington and Europe, but of his own career. I was sent to the office, there was some famous future Foreign Service Officers there — Mel Blake, Paul London, Dick Devine — all of whom were sitting in this office. On the day I arrived, I remember I came in and there really wasn't a job for me to do as I was more than overcomplement, and I stood around for a while — there wasn't even a desk or a chair — and I noticed that workers who were opening a door between two offices were taking a coffee break, so I took off my jacket and rolled up my sleeves and took the sledge hammer and finished opening the door that they had left undone while they were off having their coffee break. So I guess that was my very first job in the Foreign Service, having completed A-100. Somehow my diligence caught Mr. Cleveland's attention and he gave me a desk and gave me my second job which was

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to find him a chair like George Ball had. He wanted it at least to be as big and this was one of those judge's chairs with the very high backs, leather covered. I didn't know anything about requisitions and executive bureaus, so I asked where the furniture storehouse was and I was directed into a nether region of the Department that probably today is part of the area that is set aside for garage space. I went down there and walked in and made my way through all of the Department's goods and equipment and spotted one of these chairs, so I took it, brought it up and gave it to Mr. Cleveland to his immense satisfaction. I was rewarded with real work which was an analysis of Thailand's tapioca trade, my first substantive job in the foreign service. But after these whimsical beginnings, I was sent to North Africa to Tangier. Tangier, which had been an international city until only several years before, was entering its long period of doldrums as part of independent Morocco. The businesses that had thrived there in the inter-war and post-war period had largely disappeared, the city was over-built, there was an economic recession. We had moved our...

Q: This was after the Tangier era of Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg and Paul Bowles?

WISNER: Well there were still some extras left over — Paul Bowles lived there at this time. Tennessee Williams was a frequent summer visitor. There were other passing presences, my own classmate and sometime author — class ahead of me at Princeton — Johnny Hopkins arrived with Joe McPhillips. Joe really never left and served since as headmaster of the American School in Tangier. But it was relatively remote, backward. We had two American official installations, three if you will. We had a brand new shiny office complex with an attached VOA facility as a modern Consulate General. It was designed before Tangier became part of Morocco and it was to provide a modern office space. Then we had the old Consulate General which was the oldest diplomatic establishment in the United States Government's possession, given to us at the later part of the 18th century by the ruler of Morocco and which had remained in American control ever since and is today a museum society. This building had been abandoned for several years when we, the

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language students and our language coordinator, a man named Harley Smith, arrived in Tangier. It was a flexible day, unlike the present. We went out, we rented our own houses, we found our own furniture. Bob Pelletreau, future Assistant Secretary of State, and I rented a small house near the bull fighting ring in Tangier and we all set to, as there was virtually no budget to clean up the old Consulate building which hadn't been occupied in a number of years, to make it presentable, identify some classes, use what little money we had to find chairs, tables, and get around to recruiting teachers and starting the teaching and learning of North African colloquial Arabic. I was there only six months, but I had a real taste of life. We were independent of, but part of, the then-Consulate General. The Consul General was a crusty figure, Mr. Meyer, who had reached the august position of Deputy Chief of Mission in Accra, Ghana before he filled the opening as Consul General to Tangier. He felt that the arrival of the language school should become an extension of his own Consulate General. He wanted to bring us firmly under his aegis and as we, the language students, got out and around Morocco he became more and more convinced that political discipline had to be exercised. In my case, it brought about a crisis between the Ambassador and the Consul General. The Ambassador stood by me, and the Consul General was worsted. I don't think he was ever entirely happy. He did get us to stand duty, so we had some sense of the operations of an American government installation abroad, but not very deep or very consequential.

Q: Frank, at the conclusion of that, then you were assigned to Algiers, is that correct?

WISNER: I was. The Algerian war for independence, the liberation struggle for Algeria, was winding down. The French and the Algerians had reached an accord at Evian. There was a transitional regime in Algiers as I began my studies in Tangier, and there broke out at that moment a fierce, fierce struggle between the provisional government of the Algerian Revolution which was based in Tunis and the military which had allied itself with the previous group of Algerian political leaders the French had arrested some years earlier. Algeria was for a number of months swept with internecine, bloody warfare

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until the provisional government was dislodged and the Ben Bella regime, backed by Boumedienne, was in charge. That was the Algiers that I arrived in. I was assigned there.

Q: You arrived in '62?

WISNER: In 1962. I arrived there having had some association with Algeria. As a student at Princeton, I did a senior thesis on the subject of the French army and the Algerian independence struggle. I had taken a look at French army counterinsurgency doctrine and then had looked at the Algerian revolutionary doctrines for the pursuit of an independence war and compared the two. This had taken me, in the summer of my senior year at Princeton, to the French Ecole Militaire, where I knew a number of the officers who had been part of a doctrinal revolution in the French Army's Counterinsurgency School and who eventually became dissidents, a number of them against de Gaulle. And then, I'd gone to the Middle East and ended up in Cairo where I met for the first time the Algerians. Freddy Reinhardt, our Ambassador in Cairo, made this possible. I stayed in the Embassy in Cairo then. It turned out that my mentor in Cairo, Ibrahim Ghafa, the head of the Algerian Liberation Movement's Radio in Tangier when I got there and a lifelong friend ever since, was in the Ministry of Education during the first days of independence. So that was the setting.

The setting was further that the French had left, thousands of French residents had left the country, and the economy was absolutely flat. A new, quite radical regime was taking over, but right down to basic services in the marketplace, the plumbers, the technicians, most of them were French and they had all picked up and gone. It was very hard to get things done in Algiers. You had a modern city that didn't have the technical capacity and on top of this was layered a decision to not only declare Algerian independence, but the new leaders wanted to socialize it. There was a huge ideological struggle underway from straight Algerian nationalists to pure Algerian communists with Trotskyites and other European leftists who had come down to be part of it. The Russians and their Eastern European allies, the Cubans, the Chinese, Che Guevara arrived during all of this period

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with everybody wrestling for the soul of the Algerian Revolution, what was to be its course and direction.

The United States was in an anomalous position. We were regarded in a number of ways, none of them particularly friendly, of course constantly recalling that the United States, notably President Kennedy, had stood by Algeria in the later days of the revolution. Kennedy had been the first Senator to speak out for Algerian independence, but for the great majority of the Algerian War our concerns about European stability had led us to at least try to accommodate the French who were determined to maintain their role in Algeria. So we carried a bit of the memory of our association with France. Since the new Algerians of one stripe or another had decided either for national security purposes or for ideological reasons to align themselves with the then-East Bloc, the existence of the Cold War and the position of the Americans in it created a further tension. Third, there was a sort of inherent diffidence about the United States, born of the high degree of French culture that had been part of Algerian life. A diffidence about American culture, and you could hear many of the same arguments you heard in France in the late '40s or '50s about American culture and its failures coming out the mouths of Algerians. It added a patina of discomfort to the American-Algerian relationship. Fourth, Algeria was trying to make its way inside the Arab world. It had never been there really and, while I was there, Nasser came to try to put his banner of Arab nationalism on top of the Algerian puzzle. I had a chance to meet him and talk to him. Ben Bella, in fact, introduced me to him. But our tensions with Egypt, the outcome of the Suez War, our increasing estrangement from Egypt and the Arab national cause, as it was defined then, and the confrontation with Israel also played to our disadvantage; so we were battling with three strikes against us on the Algerian field of the day. We had a terrific ambassador, one of the finest Foreign Service Officers of my career's experience, William J. Porter, an Arabist, a man who'd headed the North African desk when Kennedy spoke on Algerian independence, our first Ambassador to Algeria, later Deputy Ambassador in Saigon where I also worked with him.

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Q: He also served in Morocco.

WISNER: Correct, and went on to be Under Secretary of State, Ambassador to Canada and had a very distinguished, remarkable career. A man of fine judgment, excellent ambassador. A fine DCM, John Root, who I worked for years later as head of the North African desk as well. Excellent colleagues in the embassy. Old friend Walter Cutler, others.

Q: As Junior Officer you did a little bit of everything?

WISNER: Junior Officers in those days did do a little bit of everything. We had no General Service Officer when I first came, and what I knew about repairing homes and electricity with fleeing French technicians, but I did that and have wonderful, humorous memories of events during that period. I ended up working as the Vice Consul in a day in which you actually interviewed in your office in a very relaxed manner visa applicants to the United States. I was in the political section toward the end of my stay and the junior officer and the leg man in the section in some absolutely fascinating times. Porter was very friendly to me and used me a lot. I delivered the President's message to Ben Bella at the time of the assassination attempt against the first Algerian Foreign Minister and was received by Ben Bella and first had a chance to meet and talk to him. I was used as the leg man around town because a lot of the Algerians who were coming back were quite young and here was an American who spoke a little Arabic and spoke some French and had some association with their struggle and I had friends throughout the Algerian establishment. The embassy found that very useful.

Q: Were you unique in speaking Arabic, were there others on the staff?

WISNER: No, the head of the political section was a more classical Middle Eastern hand, Peter Chase by name. But he didn't feel so comfortable with his Arabic and his rather more chaste Mashreqi Arabic just didn't sound quite right in the ears of these North Africans, not that my Arabic was all that good—it was pretty poor, but it was Algerian

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Arabic of the day, very heavily mixed with French and you could get away with showing the sympathetic side in trying to speak it. It was a tough time for the United States, though. We were under constant criticism with hostile intelligence operations all around us, not only sanctioned by the local regime. We were the country's major aid provider, particularly food assistance. The French were the major financial assistance provider. But we were constantly hammered in the press, criticized for sending poisoned food to Algeria.

Q: You went from there to Vietnam and stayed for most of the rest of that decade. That was a time when many Foreign Service Officers were trying to go to Vietnam where the action was and many were trying to avoid it. Did you steer yourself there? Or how did that process work?

WISNER: I certainly didn't steer myself there. I thought at the time — in Algiers the Moroccan-Algerian War was over (I was covering that) — I was having the time of my life when all of a sudden a telegram arrived from Washington, signed as one called it in those days by “highest levels”. “Highest Levels”, that is the President, directed that I be called back to Washington. We were looking for French-speaking bachelors to strengthen our presence in Vietnam, and I was called back to Washington to be one of those French-speaking bachelors. I was first taken aback when later reminded by the personnel officer for the assignment, Alan Wendt, (later ambassador to Slovenia) that when I wrote my original A-100 request for an assignment my second choice, after Algiers, was Saigon, so I was getting it. Just exactly what I asked for. Bill Porter, who also saw me as a future Arabist, asked that the assignment be waived and that I be allowed to stay in Algiers and go on with a career as an Arabist, and his appeal was overruled. So I came back to Washington in the summer of 1964 and was assigned. There were two groups who were called back, those who were sent immediately to Vietnam and those who were brought back and put into Vietnamese language training, area and cultural studies to be prepared. I was in the latter group. We were all told that we really had a choice, either to take this assignment or leave the service. Later on we discovered there was a second choice and that is either you were to do well in our studies of the Vietnamese language — a tonal

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language is very difficult for the western ear — either that or we were to be sent to what was in those days called a fever post, fever spot, and suffer in our careers. In fact one of our officers was taken out of the course for seeming insufficiently diligent in the learning of the Vietnamese language and not reassigned quickly, and we protested that and our protest was upheld and he was reinstated with honor. Fred Spots went on to have some interesting assignments. He was a European specialist, a German expert. As for the rest of us, many went on to great things: Steve Ledogar was our disarmament ambassador, Dave Lambertson ended up as our ambassador in Thailand, Desaix Anderson is our charg# in Vietnam, Paul London didn't stay with the service, but has had a terrific career, he was with me at that time, Dicky Burnham went on to a career in the IFC. We were a very good lot and we had a lot of fun together.

Q: Were there also others like Dick Holbrooke?

WISNER: Well, we were already in Vietnam or about, in Dick Holbrooke's case, to leave Vietnam and come back to the United States. They had been recruited and sent directly without benefit of Vietnamese language training. Peter Tarnoff was working for Cabot Lodge in the front office. Lodge's second tour as the ambassador. Though our group was all foreign service officers — like Dick Teare, people who were going to learn Vietnamese with the majority to be assigned to the provincial reporting end of the political section of the American embassy — I was however to be assigned on a secondment to AID, to the pacification program. After going through language training and area studies and a brief stint at Fort Bragg with the United States Special Forces, acquainting myself with some of the weaponry that we were giving the Vietnamese in those days, mainly ex-World War II, Korean-vintage weapons, I was sent out and assigned — this was really the very end of Maxwell Taylor's period as ambassador to a province in the delta. The province was a sensitive one, it was the Dinh Tuong. It was the headquarters of the 7th ARVN (Army of Vietnam) Division. That division had played a very important role in coup-making. We were at this point trying to stabilize, find a political formula of some stability. The 7th division area was very important. Dinh Tuong was well known as well because,

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just outside the provincial capital, the battle of Ap Bac had been fought where John Vann and others earned their names. Neil Sheehan cut his teeth as a journalist. The Vietnamese army was really defeated by the Viet Cong insurgents, and this was one of the real wake-up calls when General Harkins realized that our way of doing war side-by-side with the South Vietnamese was not working. It was selected as one of three provinces by the ambassador of the day, Maxwell Taylor, to begin to organize a consolidated pacification program.

Heretofore, American agencies had been represented separately in the field — AID had its people, USIA had its people, the CIA had its people, the military had their people and each of these American agencies competed for the ear of the province chief and his bureaucracy and of his provincial and village defense forces. Maxwell Taylor decided that we needed an integrated American presence with a team chief. Dinh Tuong was selected as the military command, and a Lieutenant Colonel Mc Fall was given charge of the several agencies. I was assigned to the AID office, provincial operations caring for refugees, building up agriculture, village self-help, village improvement, education support, these sorts of things, with a budget that flowed down through the Vietnamese side with some resource availabilities directly under our control, notably food and some amount of money. The man who I worked for, Mr. Letts by name, was a professor of agronomy from Texas, and he was a flinty old character. He came down, and he felt his instructions were very clearly not to cooperate with the Lieutenant Colonel who Maxwell Taylor had put in charge of the provincial effort, and he and the Lieutenant Colonel could barely speak to one another. It was very disruptive. I found it much easier to work with the military than did my boss, to his considerable unhappiness. Eventually Mr. Letts was able to go back and be an agricultural advisor where his skills were better served. I ended my time in about six months in the delta.

Q: It was a risky place to be?

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WISNER: Oh, it was a bit risky. I was not awfully cautious and I traveled the length and breadth of the province to all the reasonably pacified areas. Took a lot of American visitors around. Joe Alsop used to come.

Q: You took some motorcycle trips?

WISNER: No, that was later. That came later. I did actually acquire my first motorcycle then, and I was on a road to Saigon one day when I saw a jeep blown up with a remote control mine a little bit in front of me, but my motorcycle days were in the future. But I was called to Saigon to be the staff aide of the new, then-deputy ambassador. First and, I think, last time in the world we ever named a deputy ambassador. Bill Porter had been brought out to give Cabot Lodge some strength, so that Cabot could focus on Washington, the politics, the diplomacy with the top rungs of the new Vietnamese government of Nguyen Cao Ky and leave the management of the mission in Bill Porter's hands. The idea was, through the title, to give Bill Porter the strength that, in fact, he didn't need because his personality and judgment was really sufficient. I was brought up as Bill Porter's staff assistant. It was also the time I lost my father, and I went home at that moment to attend the funeral, see to my mother and the family and then return to Vietnam. I then started to work in the second phase of my life in Vietnam which was increasingly with the pacification program.

Q: So that meant you traveled a good deal outside Saigon?

WISNER: Well Porter, as I noted, was responsible for the management of the mission. But increasingly, as Washington became more and more anxious about the conduct of the war and our ability to achieve our goals of peace there, Porter was given the job of working together with the great civilian agencies — USIA, USAID, CIA, the police program of USAID which was a very important adjunct of our pacification effort — and to create a sort of coordinating mechanism for the pacification program. As his staff assistant, not only this interested me, but it was where he needed someone to pull the effort together,

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and I really became the working secretary of a mission liaison group that brought these agencies together, set the priorities, assigned the tasks. As the matter progressed through 1966, late '65-'66, Washington became increasingly assertive in the desire to see a more coordinated effort and this evolved into the creation of a formal organization called the Office of Civil Operations. I really wrote the charter for that, picked a lot of the people for it, helped write its rules, and then Bill Porter put me at the disposal of the new organization, which was run by the then-Deputy Director of USAID, USOM it was called. Wade Lathram, who had been our DCM in Turkey, was an AID officer, and economist. I went over as Wade's special assistant to help him make this organization run, make it function. The next step didn't have very long. McNamara came out, urged an intensification of our abilities in the pacification field and a closer integration of the military and civilians sides and, without too much more ado, Lyndon Johnson forged a unified pacification effort putting the civilian operation in charge of pacification but under Westmoreland, in comusmacv's direct command. So you had Westmoreland at the top, the Chief of Staff; obviously General Cheysson; then you had a deputy for pacification — in this case Porter had left and Bob Komer came in when Bunker arrived. Komer was a fiery, determined, and ambitious fellow and had been back-stopping the effort from the White House. “Blowtorch Bob” as he was known. I liked him a lot, but many didn't. A vigorous, demanding individual with a lot of imagination, tremendous drive. He had a military subordinate, General Knowlton who went on to become Commandant of West Point. And I worked for Komer and for General Knowlton and Wade Lathram at the end of his tour of duty in headquarters at MACV near the airport at Tan Son Nhut. Again, bringing the military and civilian teams together, writing the mission orders, picking who would be top in one province and top in another, military or civilian, recruiting new foreign service officers for the job, analyzing the pacification programs, working out ways of working better with the Vietnamese, trying to build links with them, I was at the center of our pacification thinking and planning right up to early 1968 when I was given my own province and put in charge of a highland Province.

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Q: Frank, before that, pressure was growing on President Johnson and a lot of that pressure focused on the success of the pacification program and you were front and center in that. You came back here probably a few times, you were struck by the growing resistance movement within the States. What were you thinking? Were you a true believer, did you have doubts? What was in your mind?

WISNER: Well, in retrospect of course, this was clearly the first great political crisis of my career. The decision surrounding pacification in a narrow sense, but in a much broader sense the United States' role in Vietnam. I went to Vietnam believing very deeply that we had undertaken a national commitment to preserve the independence of South Vietnam and that we could win if we were skillful and determined. We had to; it wasn't whether we could, we had to. We could not suffer a defeat; it was virtually unthinkable and our cause had to triumph. Now I was not unmindful of the odds: the determination of the North Vietnamese, the consistency of their backing from Beijing — Peking in those days — and Moscow. And I was not unmindful of the strength of Vietnamese nationalism and how complicated it was to take even arguable Vietnamese nationalists, of which there were many in the south, and mix them with an outside power like the United States and actually make them a strong and politically credible alternative in this sort of environment. I felt that we had little choice but to do that, and I maintained that view with consistency and determination, focusing rather my efforts on how to improve the practice of the American war effort: how to make pacification more effective, more sensitive to local demands, to decrease the amount of bureaucratization, resist the encroachment of conventional military operations. Pacification was a political, social, and economic issue, not just purely a military one to be conducted by military officers. So my mind was there. Yes, of course I could hear the drumbeat at home of protests against the war rising. They added to a sense of urgency that we had to be able to make a difference in Vietnam, in my mind. The day I came home in 1967, I found even my own family split; my little brother and sister alienated from my next older brother. My younger brother, Ellis, had come out to join me in Vietnam, he was as much part of this. It was almost that the family had split down the pre-WWII,

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post war fault line. My brother and I had a sense of America going to war we couldn't lose, and I did not question deeply enough the very logic of our engagement. It took me some time to understand that it really was a cause that we could not possibly triumph in. The domestic base wasn't there, but I don't blame it on the failure of the domestic base. We had picked an impossible objective, and that was to pacify Vietnam. To force a political conclusion, the weight of the argument would rest with the most evident nationalist and best organized party, and that was the government of Hanoi.

Q: As you managed the pacification program, was this a debate among you and the other officers there? Was there a division or did you all see it more or less as you then did?

WISNER: If you were in Vietnam in those days, the debate began early in the morning and ended late at night and it was every day, there were no Saturdays, there were no Sundays. The debate was over how to conduct the war not, whether there should be a war. The debate was over whether there were more skillful, politically savvy ways to associate ourselves with the Vietnamese to energize them and to help them overcome the inconsistencies in their own political, military and administrative behavior, as well as to face the problems of their war-wrecked economy. Those were the issues we debated. We debated amongst ourselves. What we saw was the very heavy, stultifying bureaucratic hand of the American military. There were terrific military officers of course but the whole machine was a very heavy operation. We, as young civilians in particular, found that hard to associate with. We were trying to introduce flexibility. In fact the Komer reforms introduced a lot, and Westmoreland, once he was fully in charge, and Abrams after the pacification effort allowed a lot more flexibility of the pacification response inside the military organization than had been the habit heretofore.

Q: One remembers Cabot Lodge and his white linen suits in Saigon, what was your picture of him and his effect?

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WISNER: That was really more the first Cabot Lodge when he was associated with the government of Ngo Dinh Diem, before the war reached the fever pitch that it acquired in 1965. In 1965, we were talking about the country being cut in half. 1965 is the introduction of American troops. America takes full responsibility for the conduct of this war. It becomes a really make-or-break national decision for ourselves. Cabot Lodge comes back, obviously picked by Lyndon Johnson with very strong political reasons behind it, and he settles down. Cabot Lodge is an intriguing figure and is, first of all, utterly likable. Our families had an association. He was always very nice to me personally. He wasn't a man for details of bureaucratic management. He left that to the people who worked under him. He loved younger officers.

With the exception of Leverett Saltonstall, he was one of the last of the Boston Brahmin politicians. Cabot Lodge was the choice of two presidents for this assignment, both of them with political motives in mind, maintaining some balance with the Republicans and keeping them more or less on our side as we prosecuted the war in Vietnam, Cabot having been the vice presidential candidate in Nixon's first run for the presidency. I would go on to add that Cabot Lodge was not a deep man, but he had the right political instinct in Vietnam. He was deeply committed to public service and to nation over party. We had to get over this protracted period that began with the death of Ngo Dinh Diem and find stable government. As Cabot returned for his second tour as ambassador, his objective was to take this cockamamy combination of Thieu and Ky as president and as prime minister and turn them into an effective government. Putting American backing behind them, sorting out the natural differences between the two and building a relationship between them and the United States, both in the public eye and private eye, and trying to help them get themselves organized to have a public persona in Vietnam itself and be credible partners in the conduct of the war — and that really was the right priority, given the assignment that Cabot had.

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Q: Which was quite a patriotic assignment for him to take, given his age and family considerations.

WISNER: Oh, absolutely, one had to accept the admirable nature of his sense of service. He was not a man who liked controversy, and he really didn't like all the hair-pulling inside the American mission. He found distasteful the shoulders and elbows that get pushed around in bureaucratic warfare either in Saigon or between Saigon and Washington. People like Ed Lansdale had a very romantic appeal to Cabot, but he couldn't fathom why it produced nothing but bureaucratic confusion. Disorganization rather than forward motion resulted inside the effort in Vietnam from the loose cannon nature of Ed Lansdale and his almost mystical views of how one related to the Vietnamese and prosecuted a war. The Ambassador turned to Bill Porter to run these things for him, to take these demons away from him. When controversy broke out in the country team between Westmoreland and the civilians, virtually he would hold his head in his hands — this was not Cabot's either forte or pleasure — he wanted more to focus on the political aspects, both American and Vietnamese. And there I think he did his very, very best against quite overwhelming odds. He no longer had the same proconsular status that he had in the first time as ambassador, for now you had this huge, approaching-half-million American men in the field. Westmoreland was certainly of commanding stature in the American presence in Vietnam. The nature of the operation had changed. Politics and the war, the roles of the two had switched, in our eyes, though really not in fact which was a basic flaw in our way of going about the presence in Vietnam. And so I think this second tour as ambassador — he was separated from Emily Lodge, no wives were allowed to go to Vietnam — was a hard period for him.

Q: He and Westmoreland had a reasonable dialogue?

WISNER: They certainly did. Westmoreland was respectful. Cabot Lodge went to pains not to interfere in Westmoreland's military life, nor question Westmoreland's judgments. He made it pretty clear to Bill Porter that he wouldn't countenance a lot of second

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guessing of Westmoreland's manner and priorities and decisions. And Westmoreland was a fine honorable soldier, but he was a written-by-the-book soldier, and adapting to the complexities of a war like Vietnam with the counterinsurgency and its main force aspects was complex for Westmoreland. His responses were heavy — more men, more equipment, more bombs. I don't think he was ever fully at ease. He traveled a lot, saw a lot, but I don't think he was ever fully at ease with the more political aspects of the counterinsurgency struggle.

Q: Well, inevitably the mission was also fighting the battle at home, as doubts grew. There certainly have been all kinds of charges of inflated success stories about pacification and what was going on. The McNamara missions were an exercise in spin, as they are reconstructed in history. How did that seem from the perspective of being there? This is perhaps truer of military than of Embassy reporting.

WISNER: No, it's unfortunate. I think it all goes of a piece. The urgency of getting on with things, of showing that we were making success forced us to look for signs of what we could demonstrate was working. We were not only our own program former — we not only designed our own programs — we were the judges of their success. Now, while I would tell you right up front that there were no harsher critics of the battlefield statistics than people on the civilian embassy pacification side. And our constant efforts to show that progress was being made — we were sharp critics of that, sharp critics, much more inclined to try to call — to see things our own way. But we too were missing a critically important point. And that is that this effort was fundamentally flawed. I operated with the hope that we could make it a success, if we did the right things we could make it a success, if we could get the right Vietnamese in place, the right province chiefs, the right military commanders, the right psychological warfare programs, the right pacification strategy, the right nighttime warfare, the right intelligence coordination. If you could get things right you could make this work, and we were focused on the wrongness of our operations. But we accepted the fundamental logic of the operations themselves. And so we were, too, part of the distorted perspective in which the war was seen. When journalists

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came out from the United States, from the Rolly Evans and the Stew Alsops and Charles Collingwood and the many times Joe Kraft came out to look at this war, they would see us, and they would find these voices of dissent. Not dissent with the war, but dissent with the conduct of it. We had a bit of the hubris borne of having seen “the truth”. I think in reality as well we overlooked some very important internal dynamics. We overlooked the increasing weight of conventional warfare capability of the North Vietnamese. In believing that Westmoreland and his senior officers overdid the military side — the great sweeps, the heavy use of artillery and air power, the major operations — in being critical of that, in believing that insufficient resources were being expended to provide local security, we overlooked the fact that what would finally kill the Vietnamese regime would be a military victory, and in the end that is what killed it. It was an overwhelming conventional defeat of the Vietnamese army, overextended. It wasn't that the Vietnamese army was under equipped or badly officered by most normal circumstances. Its political logic was deeply insufficient, but what broke it in the end was not the political insufficiency, it was main force warfare starting in Pleiku and then rolling up the entire front.

Q: It was about this time you went to a province. When did you go? Where did you go? Where did you stay?

WISNER: It was an interesting period. I was asked by Bob Komer to be one of the new integrated military-civilian province senior advisors.

Q: An immensely responsible job for somebody of your then age.

WISNER: I was 29 years old. I was a Foreign Service officer, class 6 in those days, became a five a bit later. I was sent up to take command of about 160 American military and civilians including AID, USIA and CIA employees. Millions of dollars in a provincial program. The province I was sent to was the province of Tuyen Duc in the Vietnamese highlands and the autonomous city of Dalat, the old vacation city, the educational center. There were a couple of universities and the Vietnamese military academy in that city. I was

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sent up at the beginning of 1968. I had as a deputy a Lieutenant Colonel, United States Army, who really took badly to the thought that a 29-year-old civilian was coming up to set up as head. He had been military attaché, of all places in Malawi. He, I think, saw the final blow to his military career and while I was home on a very brief period of leave — I went home with Paul Hare, we traveled home via Morocco, had a terrific trip all through Morocco, and Paul was going to the neighboring province of Ninh Tuan as senior advisor — while I was away, the provincial intelligence picked up the movement of Viet Cong and this was a province that had had considerable peace throughout most of the conflict, probably why Westmoreland and Komer felt they could assign me there. The dangers weren't too great. Very unwisely, without assessing what kind of threat was occurring in the province, the Lt. Col. Lloyd Michel was able to obtain a couple of helicopters and, taking the provincial province chief's reconnaissance force and a couple of his officers, went and landed in the middle of a North Vietnamese battalion. Now in retrospect, this was one of the battalions moving into position for the Tet offensive, and he brought those helicopters down right into the midst of this battalion in a remote area of the province and he paid for his decision with his life. By the time I got to Dalat in January of 1968, a new officer had been assigned, a lovely man, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Deverill, who had taught a lot in the military system, was a nuclear affairs officer, eventually was to go back to West Point to teach mathematics there, a man of a very gentle and thoughtful nature and disposition, a man utterly determined to support me, a fine, fine man, a man of the greatest integrity. I was in Dalat for a couple of weeks when the Tet Offensive started and we went through hell.

The town was almost overrun in the first days. We had no effective forces there. I ended up fighting for my own house at one point, staying up nights, patrolling the perimeter of my house and then trying to work during the day, answering calls from Saigon, from Westmoreland personally on one occasion about the fate of Dalat's nuclear reactor — we had a nuclear reactor among other things — looking for forces, finding them assigned to the province then pulled off for higher priority missions. The actual military threat to the city

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I was in, intense military threat, did not abate for five months. It was a very complicated period. I was visited by many people. Nick Platt (our future ambassador to Zambia, the Philippines, and Pakistan, and now President of the Asia Society) came out and visited me, and I was sending him home when he was pinned down at the airport with machine-gun fire. It was a very tough, tough period, and yet I had my first experience with command of a complex, interagency operation in intensely stressful circumstances — intelligence, political assessment, economic action, military training, logistical support, political and economic and military advice to the local commanders, the top military officers in the city and the top province officials in the province. These were mature, senior Vietnamese officers, with the town's political leaders, with the Catholic Archbishop, the religious hierarchies on the Buddhist side, the Montagnard tribal chieftains. It was a diplomatic assignment in a wartime setting with vast resources at my disposal, with few embassies in the United States overseas presence that were as large in even numbers of employees and certainly not in budgets as I had at age 29 in Dala. I turned 30 there.

Q: So you were there for a total of?

WISNER: A year. The basic mission of course was to pacify Dalat and Tuyen Duc, to go out to the population centers, build their self-defenses, improve their economic circumstances, help build political support for the government, and strengthen the administration. It was innovative, lots of good ideas, moving and caring for refugees where that was necessary, expanding employment and prosperity where that was also possible.

Q: Well your stay in Vietnam was certainly longer than average. At each stage they wanted you to go on to further things and you agreed?

WISNER: Absolutely, it was part of my sense of commitment. I remember when President Johnson announced he wouldn't run, I remember that vividly. I was in the province chief's office and he felt very strongly. I had to assure them that this did not mean the United States was backing away. I noticed the skepticism that creased the Vietnamese brows at

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that point. But it was a sense of real foreboding. I came home to — at this point in 1968 — a radically transformed United States. One that I quickly found myself personally out of sympathy with. I had a sense of loyalty to the mission I had carried out in Vietnam, that was only part of it. I was hostile to the breakdown of what I thought was public discourse. I was hostile to the breakdown of public institutions, the anarchy in our university system. I noticed it in the life of my youngest brother, and I consider 1968 in its many aspects, even in racial harmony, one of the worst years in American history. It was hardly, as it was called in those days, the greening of America from what I saw, I saw it as a very, very unpleasant passage. Yet I felt a sense of mission and obligation to what I had done in Vietnam, and that wasn't the end of my Vietnamese experience for later as my career advanced — I went on to work on things North African again, first in the Department and then in our Embassy in Tunis — I was called back to Saigon as a Foreign Service inspector in the early 1970s to evaluate the widespread presence of Foreign Service Officers, not only in the embassy but in the field throughout, in my case, the southern part of Vietnam. I was then called back, pulled out of the embassy in Tunis at the time of the cease-fire, made Deputy Consul General in My Tho under Tom Barnes in Can Tho, with responsibilities reaching throughout the southern part of the country, the Delta. For the first six months of the post-Paris peace conference period I then, when Saigon fell, became one of the organizers of the evacuation effort and ended up as Deputy Director of the President's task force for Indochina refugees. I then went on in my regular government career and was called back again by Mr. Vance in 1979 to join then-former Senator Dick Clark in plucking boat people out of the South China Sea and reorganizing the refugee effort for Vietnam. So my career in Vietnam frankly began in 1964 and it wasn't over until 1979.

Q: Thinking about that, going back to organize the evacuation, was this the most intense experience probably of your foreign service career? The most marking?

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WISNER: I can't say it was the most. It was certainly very intense. It came about in the following way. Very few people know this story. Would you like me to tell it to you?

Q: Be delighted.

WISNER: Well, as the last year of our presence in Vietnam moved along and the certainty that the United States was going to not return to the fray and that the final round was building up, the disagreements between our embassy and our Ambassador, Graham Martin, in Saigon and Washington grew more and more sharp. Graham Martin was in constant disagreement with Henry Kissinger and with Assistant Secretary Phil Habib, probably the greatest Foreign Service Officer of my time. But I was assigned at that point to the office of the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, Carol Laise, wife of Ellsworth Bunker. Her own sense of anguish over the course of events in Vietnam was very, very deep. She was a superb, decent, committed woman, and public servant. Ellsworth Bunker stayed in a more detached way intimately concerned, but no less anguished himself. So Carol had no quarrel with my sense of obligation to what we could see as the approaching end game. But there was a view that Graham Martin advanced from Saigon that any attempt to organize the United States Government for an evacuation from Saigon would have the political effect of signaling our lack of confidence in Thieu's ability to keep the place together. And we would in effect be kicking the struts out and bring the whole house down on our heads. So here we were faced with the implacable opposition of the ambassador and the agreement of the Secretary and the Administration to back him on this point and the ever increasingly obvious fact that an offensive was beginning and the end was approaching. The final days of the military war were approaching us. Cambodia was falling also on the other side at a rate much more rapid than any of us could have anticipated. Like many others, I felt a profound debt of obligation to those Vietnamese who had placed their faith in us, worked in a mission, or served side by side with Americans.

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Q: Were we at a life-or-death decision?

WISNER: So what happened was absolutely fascinating. Lionel Rosenblatt, bless his soul, now in charge of Refugees International, who was working for the Deputy Secretary of State, Mr. Irwin, called a group of us who had known each other in Vietnam to the Deputy Secretary's conference room and there, in approaching disregard for legal authority, we met to plot the evacuation effort. And we met every day to think through what needed to be done and how to go about it. As the end game really began to approach and the Vietnamese army began to collapse under the hammer blows of the North Vietnamese offensive, Henry Kissinger — largely at Phil Habib's prodding — gave instructions that a special task force be created. We had a team and a plan. Now that task force was headed initially by Dean Brown. Early on, it was obvious that people were starting to flee Vietnam. How were we going to organize this? What were we going to do with them once they got out? Who were going to come to the United States? Who would take care of them when they came? What were you going to do with your embassy? How were you going to get it out of the country? How were you going to coordinate the full weight of the United States Government and coordinate this internationally, because boats would be leaving, planes would be flying, they'd be landing anywhere from Bangkok to Singapore to Manila to Guam? And what were you going to do with what was shortly to be 200,000 Vietnamese refugees pouring out of the country? Not to mention tens of thousands of others stranded around the world as their country's existence came to an end. It was awesome. We began to organize ourselves inside the United States Government. Officers like Paul Hare, who came back and put his job down; Clay McManaway in AID; Ray Dubois out of the Pentagon; Julia Taft out of HEW in those days, HHS today; the strong and wonderful presence of General Chapman at the Immigration and Naturalization Service; Sol Green, his deputy. We formed a real interagency effort and a very strong connection to the American voluntary service community — the Lutherans, the Catholics, the Church World Services, HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), the International Rescue Committee,

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Jules Kline — these people all came together to help receive and care for these thousands of Vietnamese.

In the first stage, the issue was getting out of Vietnam, and then we were managed and run by Dean Brown, former ambassador to Jordan, former Under Secretary. I worked with Dean, did a lot of the leg work; we were working 16, 18 hours a day. It was hell on me personally. I had lost my wife at that point to cancer and was trying to cope with a family, a baby daughter without a mother and it was emotionally very complicated for me personally. But I was working — maybe it was, say 16, 17, 18 hours a day — trying to make this whole system function.

After the fall of Saigon, the weight of the operation shifted to how do you bring these people into the United States? Where do you get, what camps do you put them? Where do you resettle them? How do you get budgets from the Congress? We had already done that. In fact we'd gotten 500 million dollars for the cost of the effort. Organizing Congressional testimony, liaison with the Congress, another major responsibility. I became the deputy director of the task force working for Julia Taft, a terrific lady who is now our Assistant Secretary for Refugee Affairs. And that really was opening these camps that we had at Pendleton, at Fort Chaffee in Arkansas, at Eglin Air Force Base in northern Florida, Indian Town Gap in Pennsylvania, the last one we opened, and then getting the people settled from there and on into American communities all over the country. We succeeded. Within virtually a year from the fall of Saigon, nearly a quarter of a million Vietnamese had been brought into this country and found homes and most of them who could work had something approaching a job. It was an enormous accomplishment and brought the whole government together in a manner that was unprecedented. The model of course served us very well when Dick Clark came on to deal with the boat people. And over the years we've brought nearly a million Americans of Indochinese origin to this country, but largely as a result of the bit of work that was done at the time. An intriguing story of the foreign and domestic aspects of American public life coming together.

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Q: Still, in terms of the time, the image of the helicopters lifting off from the roof of the embassy.

WISNER: Absolutely, it was with some emotion a couple of weeks ago I went back to Saigon for the first time, Ho Chi Minh City now, and stood outside that old embassy, and here it is with its streaked cement. The embassy is back in our hands now, but I mean I could practically hear the chopper blades. I remembered walking through the door and going up to the ambassador's office, sitting in there with Ellsworth Bunker.

Q: Do you feel that the friendships that you forged in all those years on Vietnam and the crew that worked on it formed, in a way, a core of the service and facilitated then your subsequent...

WISNER: Well, I'm not sure I could say there...

Q: The Tony Lakes and Dick Holbrookes and you yourself and many others.

WISNER: Well that's thoughtful of you to put it that way. I'm not sure it was the core of the service. In most cases, all of those you mention, they left. Others a result of disagreements over policy or, in Peter Tarnoff's case, the change of Administration between Carter - Vance and Reagan - Haig. So that in a physical sense these people moved out of the Foreign Service to come back later on in very significant positions. Some were never in the foreign service. Les Aspin, Congressman Aspin, who I worked with in Saigon in those days — we were in the same office together — became close and dear friends. Some stayed in the service; Paul Hare and I did. We were the exception in this group rather than the rule. Johnny Negroponte stayed in. Dick Teare stayed in. David Lambertson stayed in. But I think of others who were in this same circle of friends, people like Les Gelb. Some ceased to be friends — Dan Ellsberg, with whom I considered I had a bemused friendship during my time in Saigon, but when the Pentagon Papers story broke —. But other friendship circles remain very strong. I remain deeply fond of Neil Sheehan all these years, so the

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friendships extended into the press. It was really a set of fibers linking a generation, this Vietnam experience. People who were deeply interested in public policy. People like Tony Lake, Dick Holbrooke, Peter Tarnoff with uncommon intelligence, a capacity to take risks for public purpose, a sense of spirit of public engagement that is in some ways lacking today. The sense of drive, the sense of something really being at stake. This was a terrific lot of guys to have known and been associated with, most of them much brighter than me, but a wonderful, wonderful gang.

Q: Well Frank, after Vietnam, the Tunisia desk — and I was in that office at that time — must have seemed pretty tame and kind of a decompression. I remember, I think we had Jim Blake and Harry O'Dell, and I must say, your preoccupation with Vietnam didn't seem to detract from your focus on Tunisia. You were busy and all over the Department in those years.

WISNER: Well, it perhaps is a bit of my nature that, when I get into something, I love it so much it becomes the most important thing in all of American foreign policy. That said, I was asked to come back and take on the Tunisian desk by John Root, Jim Blake's predecessor, former DCM in Algiers who remembered me from that time. He was recruiting and, gosh, we had a wonderful office. Wingate Lloyd was doing Morocco, and was followed by Paul Hare at my request, Rocky Suddarth was doing Libya, Art Lowery was there, Charlie Bray was deputy at one point. We had some really, really good officers in that office and David Newsom was Assistant Secretary of State for Africa — you remember in those days AFN was part of the Africa Bureau. But that said, it was an interesting and not unimportant time. Tunisia is a small country, but it was a stalwart friend of the United States. It had shown much more flexibility in the Arab-Israeli confrontation. Bourguiba, the president, stood by us on a couple of occasions during a lot of radicalism in Algeria next door and, while I was in Tunisia, the Libyan Revolution took place and King Idriss departed. David Newsom was the ambassador at that moment. Tunisia was a real island of moderation and a place of friendship for the United States, so preserving this foothold on the North African coast and in the Arab world was not an inconsequential

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priority. The Tunisians were very worried. Would we stand by them? Would we stand by them politically, economically? Would we stand by them if they were pressed militarily?

And it came at an important time for me—1969. You were quite right, it was a decompression from Vietnam. The test was whether I could find a bridge back into the conventional foreign service, into the life and workings of the Department. I'd never worked in the Department of State. I'd joined and had gone abroad. Could I take all that energy and enthusiasm that you build up, that sleeplessness, that pressure of a war and convert it into a more organized, bureaucratic routine? I was also newly married. I'd married a beautiful French girl and we were setting up home in Washington for the first time, so all of these matters were before me. It turned out to be sufficiently exciting as a government experience to contain the Vietnam in me, if you will, and it was still here where I could get my life back together and start a new marriage, so it was overall a perfectly wonderful experience. Now in this there were some policy complexities. The ambassador in Tunis, Francis Russell, had been Dean Acheson's press spokesman. Frances Russell was an old fashioned foreign service officer, and he certainly brooked no second guessing from some puppy of a desk officer in Washington. He had a bit of an imperious nature, but what was important to Frances Russell was where Tunisia stood with regard to the United States. What Tunisia did internally was Tunisia's business. Now this was a reasonable, reasonably nice way to look at things. It was a kind of old Cold War approach to matters, in a correct and traditional diplomatic approach to a relationship.

But the fact is that Tunisia was going through a perfectly hellish internal experience. Following some of the trends in the region, it had gone towards nationalization of the key commanding heights of the economy and then under a brilliant, but maniacal, virtual maniac of an economics minister. By the time Ben Salah had become Minister of National Economy, Education and Finance, about every movable asset in the country was taken over. He used to say, when he came here to the United States, "I don't know why one man could run GM, we've got about the same gross domestic product, GM and Tunisia, and I can run Tunisia the same way, like a big corporation." But he went for maximum

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socialization, began seizing land and tearing down property divisions and creating a really deep social disturbance in the country with a view to creating the new Tunisian man. Bourguiba sat back and looked at all of this, watched it, as the traditional leadership including his wife began to have second thoughts as to whether Ben Salah was out to take full charge. The ambassador was determined not to question the internal evolution of Tunisia. And yet I figured that we had to be attentive to these matters and even have a voice, because, if Tunisia didn't stand on its own two feet, how could we stand with it. We'd just been through an experience in Vietnam, and it had taught me at least that.

The crisis came about with a terrible flood that ravaged Tunisia and, in the wake of that flood, Bourguiba grabbed control of the country and sacked Ben Salah. We were able to begin to reorient some of our aid programs, intensify our dialogue with the Tunisian government, begin to argue that new economic priorities needed to take over. That would give Tunisia some growth, some employment, try to move it, nudge it towards a free market and use the influence inherent in the American position, using aid as a lever. These were experiences I'd had in Vietnam, not as a club but as a point of influence and so I found I had a very interesting time. As Tunisia came under these various hammer blows, it was time as well to see if our allies would think in terms of a Mediterranean policy, and I tried very hard with some success to create a dialogue inside the Western Alliance over Tunisia. The purpose was to create a consensus among western allies to accelerate aid to press for domestic reform—opening Tunisia to market forces. It ran up against the stone wall of French skepticism about further American inroads into the neighborhood, but some Italian and Spanish interest. But it was a way of beginning to look, in my mind, at the Mediterranean as a whole, where we had important national security principles at stake. The American Sixth Fleet was a major bulwark in our NATO and Cold War defenses.

Q: Tunisia and North Africa were at that time the jewel in the African Bureau crown. David Newsom had been ambassador in Libya. The director, Jim Blake, had been his DCM.

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It moved in '73, under Henry Kissinger, to the Near Eastern Bureau. You were happy enough then to be in the Africa Bureau?

WISNER: Well, I was and wasn't. The point of gravity in the Africa Bureau was south of the Sahara. And we felt we had more in common with the Arab East than with the South and Sahara. The North African account is a very complicated one, for it doesn't fit neatly anywhere. When the Black September crisis in Jordan broke out, we all stood watch with our Middle Eastern colleagues. In the crisis period surrounding those events, but when the staff meetings went on with what was going on in Zaire or something else, it really didn't touch us very deeply. We operated pretty much as a self-contained cell within the Africa Bureau. David Newsom, as you quite correctly pointed out had lots of interest in us. But I think, while it isn't entirely easy, the fit between the North African bureau and the Middle Eastern bureau — particularly when it still had India and Pakistan and the Assistant Secretary was just going mad trying to handle the peace process and everything from Morocco to Burma — none-the-less has more logic than having it in the Africa Bureau.

Q: So you then followed a logical progression from Desk Officer to economic officer in Tunis.

WISNER: Well, there was a personal reason as well. The ambassador of the day, Arch Calhoun, had been the political counselor in Saigon when I was there. He also happened to be a family friend, so he asked me if I would come out and serve as his economic officer, and I was very, very pleased to do that. I was ready to go abroad. My wife had seen Tunisia which sort of had a French environment to it. We moved out, had a beautiful home on the edge of the Mediterranean in Gamarth. We had a couple of lovely years in Tunisia, visited much of the country. I found the job fascinating. First of all, it was my first real economic assignment. I had been able to do the six-month economic course before I went out, and I argue that it was one of the most challenging and effective training programs the Foreign Service has ever put before me, and one of the few I ever had the opportunity to take also.

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Q: So you took integral and differential calculus?

WISNER: I did those things and hated them, but I learned enough calculus to feel that I wasn't entirely at sea but...

Q: Has it stayed with you?

WISNER: The calculus hasn't, but the economics have and the way of thinking about economic subjects has. In fact, when I got to Tunis, I was able to plunge in, be able to understand the language of national income accounts, the World Bank and the Fund, which were heavily involved with Tunisia, and be able to offer judgments to our AID mission and work towards a coordinated AID - embassy approach to Tunisia at the annual meetings of the World Bank Consultative group in Paris where AID policies were coordinated among the many donors. I was able to represent the embassy's economic side, the economic policy side, and work in that way for a greater integration for economic and AID policies. I found Tunisia interesting furthermore as the first opportunity that I had to work closely with American business and to try to help that business get a foothold in Tunisia, solve business problems from disputes over repatriation of profits by the motion picture industry to getting the Bordens company to open a new investment in textiles for the European market in Tunisia. These were first attempts at what became a dominant feature in American government policy. So let me point to, in summary, two points: as an economic officer in Tunisia, trying to work for economical restructuring and greater emphasis on the free market became part of my life in the '70s and working with American business to open doors for greater economic interaction between our business community and the country in which I was assigned. I started that fully ten years before it became a leitmotif for operations in the Foreign Service more broadly. In the beginning, I have to argue that my ambassadors were very skeptical about arm wrestling with the AID mission director and trying to use economic policy influence and they were shy about getting involved about commercial matters. I remember going to Ambassador Calhoun and asking him to approach the Prime Minister and the government over oil concessions. We wanted

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to win and not let the Italians and French win them. I wanted Amoco to get them. And he was very shy about doing that. He felt this wasn't the role of an American ambassador. I felt it was and have believed it ever since.

Q: This was an uphill battle, our business presence must have been modest in what was then regarded as a French chasse gardée. You were opening up for business in competition with the French?

WISNER: In many cases, though by no means in all. Tunisians were looking to diversify their own economic interests. They were looking for connections with the United States, so it wasn't just a one-way street.

Q: Bourguiba at that time was in his heyday. He was at the top of his game. Do you have some observations about him?

WISNER: Well, when you remember that Bourguiba began to rise to political prominence in Tunisia while Franklin Roosevelt was president of the United States, he had a long innings as the British put it. His batting was once again reasonably strong. His relationship with the United States had been reestablished, he was in command of matters at home, he was seen as something of a national savior, having reversed his own economic policies to the pleasure of his fellow citizens. But he was clearly an older man. His son, Bibi, had suffered a stroke and was to suffer yet another one. His wife was in ascendancy, she and her Ben Amar clan were major players in the country and its policies and orientation at that time. It was the beginning of his last great stand, if you will. His last great moment on the Tunisian stage and after that his medical problems, which were sort of hardening of the blood arteries, the arteries flowing blood to his brain, began to become more and more of a fact. He began a long downward slope, but he had broken the country out of the control of Ben Salah, opened it to a more disputatious political process, and Tunisia survived due to its own internal dynamics, its inherent stability, its cultural unity, but also due to this long period of stable rule that Bourguiba had brought to bear.

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Q: Tunisia was then, as it is now, sandwiched between bigger neighbors. There was a lot of idealism still about a United Arab Maghreb? What did you think about that then?

WISNER: There wasn't much of a view that there could be either a united Arab world or a United Arab Maghreb. I was reasonably close to the then-somewhat dissident former defense minister Ahmed Mestiri. He used to speak of Arab unity, wehdeh, as a piece of chewing gum an Arab picks up every once in a while, puts in his mouth to refresh the taste, but it didn't have any real effect on his behavior, and even less so North Africa. The Tunisians looked with great skepticism at the Algerians who were radicalizing their own revolution at that point, seizing more and more land, socializing the land holdings in the country. And then, on the other side, with the Libyans who were beginning their erratic behavior under Qadhafi's rule. It was towards the later part of my stay, a brief period where Tunisia came under the powerful influence of Masmoudi who was a corrupt sort of figure. He tried to link Tunisia more closely with Libya and had to eventually be reined back in by the president. Masmoudi had arguable Arab and Maghrebian credentials, but a lot of it was for his own personal enrichment.

Q: Next door, Qadhafi had come in on Labor Day '69, and Wheelus Air Base was being phased out, Peace Corps was being thrown out. You were probably looking across the border with a feeling of some consternation.

WISNER: Real consternation, if not threat. Not that I thought that the Libyans could do anything of immediate danger to Tunisia, but the pressures were on. They were more political than economic. The Tunisians were feeling the need to increase their armaments. Our capacity to provide additional military assistance was limited, so our ability and willingness to provide a security guarantee for Tunisia was limited. Therefore we were having to use diplomacy to mask in a political sense that which we were not able to do with tangible hardware or formal alliance arrangements. The Libyan situation did bring a lot of pressure. It was to bring even more pressure later on as Qadhafi increased his own obstreperousness and began pressing occasional dissident movements outside

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his borders, including in Tunisia and in the Mediterranean which began to be very, very disruptive. The Tunisians were immediately in harm's way and have, throughout all these years, stood by a strong friendship with the United States with virtually an unbroken record in a volatile part of the world, and we have been pretty good to the Tunisians, too.

Q: Well, all good things come to an end. The three years there passed. You were...

WISNER: Called back to Vietnam twice.

Q: Called back? In that period?

WISNER: In that period. That's right. Once, as I noted earlier, as an inspector to review the performance of Foreign Service Officers in the embassy and in the pacification missions, notably in the southern part of Vietnam. And then my assignment was really effectively curtailed by the Paris Peace Agreement and the need — as the last American military and pacification officers wound down — to replace them and allow Washington to monitor the course of the Paris Agreement by building up strong Consulates General in Da Nang and in Nha Trang and in Bien Hoa and in Can Tho. I went out as Deputy Consul General in Can Tho in the fourth region with foreign service officers in the key provinces of the Delta following how the first months of the new post-peace, Paris Peace Agreement, were playing out in Vietnam, and that in effect was an assignment that lasted six months. But it ended my life in Tunisia, and it forced me into a new assignment — which, as it turned out, I volunteered to look at in a part of the world I'd never seen that I figured by its very weight and substance would make it a player in world affairs and I wanted to understand more about — took me to South Asia and to the head of the political section in Bangladesh in the time immediately following the independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan and the end of the Indian-Pak War over Bangladesh.

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Q: Before we get there, there is a book just out by Terry McNamara on his closure of a consulate in Vietnam in that period and a dramatic escape. Did you have any close calls in getting out at that time?

WISNER: No. You see I left well before Terry's period. Terry came at the fall of Vietnam, Terry was our last Consul General in Can Tho and he led a riverine patrol with his staff down the Mekong and out to the sea. I monitored that from my position on the task force in Washington. But I had long since left Vietnam and was on my way to Bangladesh, where I was to serve just under a year and back to Washington and then the collapse of Vietnam which surrounds the events that set the stage for Terry McNamara's story.

Q: Your career to date that we've been talking about seems to have been marked by a series of shortened assignments, probably a sign of rapid advancement. But tell us a little bit about the year in Bangladesh.

WISNER: Well, as I took off for Bangladesh, you were looking at a brand new country. Q: It had gained its independence very shortly before?

WISNER: Correct. The events that led up to Bangladesh's independence were increasing disagreements between the Bengalis on the one hand and the Pakistanis on the other. The Pakistanis simply couldn't see their way to allowing Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to be the prime minister of united Pakistan. Denying the Bengalis a real place at the top of Pak politics, whether this would have worked in the end or not, was a fundamental illogic between the Muslims of east Bengal and the Pakistanis of Pakistan. The Punjabi dominated Pakistan. The Pakistanis resorted to the very heavy-handed tactics of oppression. You had the two personalities, Mujibur Rahman on the one hand and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on the other, hardly two characters who could stand at the center of the same stage at the same time. And then you had Indira Gandhi in Delhi and her determination to give the Paks a proper pasting. The Paks played into it. The repression led to a liberation attempt by the Bangladesh side. Mujibur Rahman ended up in India, tens and tens of

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thousands of Bengali refugees crossed the border, and the Indians began stoking up an insurrection, the seeds of which insurrection were very richly fertilized already inside Bangladesh. This then went straight down the tubes towards a war in which the Indians invaded and beat the Pakistanis, captured their approximately 80,000-man army and severed, broke Pakistan into two pieces. The United States at this period stood, under Henry Kissinger's diplomacy, by Pakistan. We had done that not out of enmity toward India, but we did it more as part of our own rapprochement with China, which had its own important dimensions flowing from the Vietnam War and repositioning at that stage in the Cold War. It was more a reflection of our Cold War desires than our views about the subcontinent. The Indians, of course, found that hard to stomach or understand and for many years took badly to it, reading our actions as hostile to India. In fact we were trying to open to China and needed Pakistan's help.

With the independence of Bangladesh, we opened a new embassy, changed the staff that had been there in the old Consulate General in Dacca days and set the stage for a new American ambassador, the first American ambassador. We had a large AID presence. If you recall, in those days, Bangladesh was considered the basket case of the world. A large AID presence aimed at dealing with important matters like population and food. On the political side, we were trying to get ourselves on a stable footing with the new government. For the Awami league of Mujibur Rahman, it was hardly certain that the United States was a friendly element, but increasingly, as their historic tensions between east Bengali Muslims and Indians broke out, they gradually moved towards accommodation with us, and we developed and enjoyed a good relationship with Bangladesh ever since its independence. While I was there, in the beginning it was not a particularly well-run country. Mujibur Rahman was a great opposition politician. He was not much of a ruler, and he paid for his incapacities, as well as Bengali fractiousness, with his life later on. I left the country just before he lost hold on power. The time I was there I would consider — in addition to the basic work of trying to put together a relationship with this new government — I felt that it was right and proper that we have a strong relationship

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between the AID mission and the embassy and that we decide what our economic priorities needed to be, very closely related with our political priority. I regarded the single most important fact in Bengali life, the priorities that East Bengal had to face, as the population priority. Together with the brilliant AID mission director, Tony Schwarzwald, I developed an elaborate strategy, putting population right at the top of the agenda of our relationship with this country and putting it at the center of our diplomacy, of our advocacy for the kinds of policy changes needed and using our AID program as leverage and influence to try to give greater impetus to policy, to population policy. My more classical colleague, Dan Newberry, the charg# d'affaires, found this a strange way for a foreign service political officer to be arguing things and took the argument back to Washington to the country director, Peter Constable, who was much taken with it, and I think we had some influence. We didn't have anybody agree that this ought to be the sole or the top priority of the United States but, frankly when one looks back now at that time, the Bengalis grasped the nettle in a very effective manner and produced one of world's more successful family planning programs and have managed to get the rates of population growth down and their rates of agricultural production up. The country, despite a certain amount of political chaos, has done reasonably well economically and now has a real chance, with the emergence of large holdings of natural gas, to make some big steps forward.

Q: Did you in your time go through the one of the classic floods?

WISNER: No. I didn't actually have to experience one of those. I was there before one and another broke out after I left. I'm afraid that's part of the nature of geography and a fact of life that can never really effectively be changed. But, no, I didn't actually experience one.

Q: And so you were pulled out to come back as....was it Deputy Executive Secretary?

WISNER: No, no. I had to leave early, but it was for a medical reason.

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Q: *I see.*

WISNER: My wife, who had not accompanied me, was in a state of advanced pregnancy with our daughter, Sabrina. Sabrina was born with a birth defect. A mild birth defect called dyslexic hips; her hips were not properly in place. Rather than bring Genevieve and Sabrina to Dacca and have us fly every three or four months at government expense to Bangkok for medical attention, since that was an oxymoron in Bangladesh — there was no medical attention at all — the Department decided to save a medical dollar and expend a bureau dollar and brought me back to Washington where I joined Carol Laise in the Bureau of Public Affairs as head of a new office — in her mind an office of plans and management — taking the old executive and planning offices and moving resources and planning together under one roof. Her deputy was Charlie Bray, an officer of tremendous imagination. And in those months that I worked with Carol we really had an extraordinary team. We shaped — and I have to give credit to Carol and particularly Charlie Bray — a new way of thinking about the Department of State and its relationship to the American people.

And if I could hold you for a few seconds: on that aspect — because I think it remains as relevant today as it was of course in my time in the 1970s: the issue at hand — remembering we were coming out of the Vietnam War, Ford was President, Kissinger was Secretary of State, Democratic-controlled Congress, disputes over the intelligence community, the American military was beginning its restructuring, grave criticism of American foreign policy and its purposes, the beginning of the breakdown between Congress and the Executive branch with Congress asserting increasing leadership — was how to relate to this national debate over foreign policy. The leadership of the bureau — and I was proud to be included in it — began thinking very hard. We faced a traditional stricture that the Executive Branch is not supposed to lobby the American people. If the Executive Branch is to communicate with the American people, it is supposed to do so through the Congress. And yet the Congress was increasingly in opposition to the

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President and his policies; so we had to think of a way to carry the foreign policy views and message of the Administration to the people, with a limited budget that would be closely scrutinized by the Congress, and at the same time overcome some of the natural inhibitions of the Department of State which does foreign affairs. Why we should be doing domestic affairs and giving a real national sales purpose to the Department became a key mission of the Bureau of Public Affairs and designing a strategy for dealing with the American public was also very important.

Well, in a way we were helped greatly by the fact that the Secretary of State separated the Spokesman's function from the Public Affairs Bureau function. That gave us a chance to focus on the American audience at large without the daily preoccupation of the Assistant Secretary being focused solely on what is the press line in answer to the day's questions. And what we did was accept the challenge, do a careful assessment of who our cooperators were — the Councils on Foreign Relations, the World Affairs Councils around the country — and recognize that they themselves had limited reach and sometimes their leaderships were old. We sat down and divided the country into about ten major centers: the Boston - New York - Washington corridor; the Detroit media area; Chicago; San Francisco; L.A.; Denver; the Houston area; the Atlanta area. We divided the country up into these, if you will clusters, and we did a careful assessment of each cluster. Which are the major newspapers, editorial boards; which are the major TV stations and shows; which are the major universities; which are the major world affairs or citizens affairs councils — designing a strategy for each one. And then taking the Department's scarce resources, its articulate spokesmen, sending them out to these centers. In a given day, instead of just going out and speaking at the World Affairs Council in Los Angeles, you would also have virtually a set piece where you would go to the editorial boards — Board of the L.A. Times — and you would go down the street to UCLA, to the political science department. In 24 hours, the Department officer really hit the themes of the day, taking the traditional products of the Department of State — its GISTs and its packages of speeches and its guidance to speakers — and arming your people so they could get out there. Well

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I think we certainly had a lot of fun putting this strategy together. I'm not sure we carried all of our colleagues then, or have carried them since, but I know it was the right way to conceive of the mission and, as the Secretary today and the previous Secretary both consider themselves America's Desk Officers, so I came to believe at that time that at least 10% of the life of any Foreign Service Officer had to be focused on management of Congressional relations and management of public relations — our ability to explain ourselves to the nation and to carry our point of view out and to defend it. In those months, that was my principal preoccupation, and I think we made a bit of progress.

Q: In putting that forward were you reacting to the greater success of the Pentagon in developing a constituency?

WISNER: No. The Pentagon — we borrowed some useful ideas from the Pentagon — has such a very different relationship to the United States. The armed forces represent every element of the United States; Americans rightly hold their soldiers in special consideration. The Pentagon's size of budget permits it to relate in a very different manner. The institutional infrastructure supporting the Pentagon out in the hustings is very different. No, we did our own thing in our own way and we didn't study, we didn't frankly mimic, the Pentagon. And I think that's right, a little bit different profile.

Q: In motivating people to leave their in-boxes and staff meetings did you build in a system of rewards or recognition to make that catch on?

WISNER: I think not particularly, except the challenge of doing it, the fun of being out there, of relating to audiences, making certain that people were not out-of-pocket when they did it, that they would be repaid. It was a simple process; somebody would set up a proper trip. The prestige, the recognition of speaking before American audiences, the value of adding to one's professional kit bag the ability to stand up in public and articulate a view and defend that view — those were the ultimate rewards, plus the conviction that

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it was important. The best officers in the Department of State understood that and would look for the opportunities to go out and speak for the Department.

Q: This was a transitional period then to the Secretary's Office? Those six months.

WISNER: Well, I was there for about six months and then, as I described earlier, Vietnam began to crumble, and Carol Laise released me to go up and be part of the evacuation effort, so I was really pulled free. By the time I finished that, I was remarried and or getting — I was courting Christine — not remarried but had been approached by Joe Sisco to join his office as his senior foreign service staff officer as part of the seventh floor effort. That's how I first appeared on the seventh floor, invited to join Joe Sisco's office, leave the task force, turn it over, and then start to work with Joe.

Q: He was by no means the easiest kind of a person to work with.

WISNER: Well, sure, I think that's true, but it's not the most important fact. He was a fascinating fellow. Joe made his way up the ladder of the Department of State in a most unusual manner. He came from a poor background in Chicago. He fought hard to make his way in life. He joined the Foreign Service, and he really focused his entire career inside the United States. His path to fame and policy significance was through the UN. He began working — I think way back in Harlan Cleveland's time, the early Kennedy Administration — that UN beat. He was associated with people like Bill Rogers, and he used his huge intelligence, his brilliant tactical wit that was honed in those experiences, in shaping resolutions in the Security Council and managing the UN process to develop a commanding hold, staff command of the whole series of policies towards the UN and our many cycles of debate with the UN. And, given the fact that the Middle East was such a perennial part of our United Nations debate, Joe became a considerable Middle Eastern hand, developing strong ties with our great, classic figures in the Middle Eastern Bureau. The Hal Saunders, the Roy Athertons and the Art Days, the others all worked with him, and Joe ended up as Assistant Secretary of State for the Middle East [Near

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East and South Asian Affairs] and, from there, the step upstairs to Under Secretary of State. A hard-driving, politically savvy, congressionally smart officer with a real sense of public management and a capacity to speak at ease, with strong connections to the American Jewish community, as well as political leaders many of whom had served on UN delegations, Joe had a very important appointment at a time when the Administration was somewhat beleaguered politically. Nixon had gone, Ford was holding on, getting ready for an election, Kissinger had come over from the White House. Now these were Joe's great strengths, and I think, if one looks back on the history of the Department, Joe Sisco's abilities should stand out very, very high. Joe was troubled at this point: what was going to be the next port of call in Joe's life. After he saw the shaky Republican circumstance, and he made a decision to leave government and go on — his first post-government assignment was President of American University. So I came in late in Joe Sisco's career, not when he was aiming at building a future record of service in the United States Government, but was thinking how he was going to end his service to the government of the United States, an instinct that Henry Kissinger quickly picked up and their relationship was not — was never obviously troubled — going to deepen because I think Henry understood that Joe had set other goals in his life and had set other ports to navigate to. So I worked at this very complicated period for Joe. The Middle East peace process was, as it always is, a lively matter, and Joe was trying to balance those coins. He put me in charge of two major undertakings. The first was the implementation of the post Egyptian-Israeli disengagement. That meant the withdrawals in the Sinai and the creation of a buffer system in the Sinai in which the Israelis had pulled back to the Mitla and Gidi Passes and the Egyptians had advanced. It was the first stage in withdrawing, and the Americans had a monitoring presence. Organizing that through the State Department became really my responsibility, as well as creating a mechanism for putting that in place. I asked my old friend Clay McManaway to come on and we represented, in effect, Larry Eagleburger. There was some rivalry, as Larry was very close to Kissinger and Joe Sisco. But we managed to put together technically a very sound effort, using the services of an American corporation called E-Systems, now just taken over by Raytheon, and a Sinai

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field mission that was the precursor of the group that has been part of the peace function in the Sinai ever since, the political side of the multi-national force that is in the Sinai. So I was able really to put that on its feet. It was a fascinating undertaking.

The more complex aspect of my time with Joe, more enduring, which set the stage for my future, was my association with the Angolan Civil War. It came about because Joe was the Department's representative on the Forty Committee, the government's body for receiving clandestine programs. Angola is an important event in American post-war history, our relationships with Africa, and how we became involved in Angola. To understand the United States and Angola you have to recall that, at the time, the circumstances were quite acute. We had been forced out of Vietnam. Events like the Mayaguez, there was a real concern on the part of the Administration that the United States would now be tested. Our leadership, our defenses would be tested. This was a time for the erstwhile Soviet Union to expand. As détente took place between Russia and America, on the one hand, on the other the competition in third areas would intensify, and I remain to be dissuaded the assessment was not an accurate one, culminating later in the Russian mistakes in Afghanistan.

But Angola came about in a curious way. For many, many years, southern Africa was frozen in place. The South Africans were intensifying apartheid, behind the screen of Portuguese colonial rule and behind the UDI screen in Rhodesia. South Africans with their interventions were able pretty much to contain nationalist abilities in both Rhodesia and Namibia, and the Portuguese struggled on with rebellions in Mozambique and Angola. In Angola, the jewel in the Portuguese crown, they were able in that huge country, to keep themselves ahead of the game mainly because of splits in the nationalist camp, the MPLA, FLNA and increasingly in the latter years, UNITA. Now, it was the death of Salazar and the fall of his successor Caetano in Portugal that brought a radical change. The new Portuguese proto-military government that took over — a lot of officers who had been in Africa, a lot of left-wing elements, strong influence in the Portuguese Communist party, Alvaro Cunhal's people — forced the Portuguese system into a real crisis, and they

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decided to move towards rapid, rapid decolonization. they moved in effect towards freeing all of their colonies — Macau being a bit different — very quickly and with catastrophic outcomes. The crisis in East Timor we still live with today, the Angolan Civil War is a legacy of this period.

The Angolan situation was complicated furthermore by the fact that, through the Portuguese community party, the MPLA (the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola), had connections to Cuba and through Cuba back to Moscow. And while the Russians did not immediately see the strategic opportunity of Angola, they were quickly enticed and brought in in a supporting role by the Cubans. They were also brought into Mozambique where Samora Machel and FRELIMO took control and where the South Africans were shortly to start to stoke up a rebellion, that had its roots in some of the tribal realities in Mozambique, by supporting RENAMO. Well, the United States had been involved in Angola way, way, back in the early '60s in the Kennedy time, and we had supported Holden Roberto of the FLNA, an Angolan national liberation front, but over the years he hadn't gone anywhere. He was a reasonably incompetent fellow and our support through Zaire to him had trickled down to virtually nothing until this crisis developed when the Portuguese took the decision to leave. The Portuguese made that decision even worse by sending an admiral, a communist admiral called the Red Admiral, Rosa Coutinho, to be the last Governor General, and they negotiated a flimsy agreement between the three Angolan parties — UNITA, FLNA, and the MPLA — at Alvar. But Coutinho was determined to turnover the country as best he could to the mixed, mulatto, left-wing, Luanda-based, tribal, northern tribal party of the MPLA. And so a lot of Portuguese military equipment was turned over to the MPLA, and the FLNA and UNITA found themselves on the short end of the stick. The coalition arrangements blew up. FLNA and UNITA, one went north, the other went south. Roberto ended up with Mobutu and FLNA began operations there. Another man named Daniel Chipenda, who ceased to be very important, was the connection to the South Africans for UNITA in the beginning until it later became a real South African-UNITA connection.

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Well, we were faced with a challenge: were we going to see a new seemingly communist-led offensive move in, take over oil rich Angola and begin to carry the Cold War into southern Africa, or were we going to try to stop it. As Henry Kissinger's response took shape, it was to try and block this MPLA communist-backed takeover in Angola, then to intervene diplomatically in Rhodesia and Namibia and to leave Mozambique for later. Now, to blunt the communist takeover we had to make certain that the non-communist elements weren't thrown off the chess board, and that meant getting support — first to Mobutu and through him to the FLNA — and keeping an eye on this phenomenon we never knew very much about — UNITA. Now it is wrong to say that we began cooperating with the South Africans. We never...we did not. They were pursuing their own objectives which were to push back the support, keep a division between the new communist and left-wing dominated Angola and SWAPO, which was giving them the dickens, and to have a better, stronger presence in the South.

Q: Now the part of covert assistance...

WISNER: Comes later.

Q: in '75.

WISNER: Comes later in this story. Now how were we going to get assistance into the Angolan non-communist side? Well, we weren't going to be able to walk down to Congress, in the aftermath of Vietnam, and say “look let's send American military trainers and equipment over there to Mobutu”, so Kissinger and the President made the decision to go to the Agency. And CIA was given the task of putting together the kinds of packages that would make it possible for the non-MPLA parties to defend themselves and maintain a balance of power inside Angola. Maybe even right the situation. Joe, whose eyes I said were on getting out of government, didn't want to get too close to this rather seedy affair and was only too happy to let me be his representative, and for a lot of the coordinating meetings that took place within the Department and at CIA. The major

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burden fell on the African Affairs Bureau which was a further complicating factor because the Assistant Secretary, Nat Davis, having just been targeted for his role in the Chilean Revolution, didn't want any part of the Agency's operation, he refused — sat down in his job and wouldn't act on the Angolan case, tried to act against Kissinger's policies — until he was given another diplomatic assignment. Kissinger sent him to Switzerland. He behaved in what, in my judgment, was a very, very bad manner, and poor Ed Mulcahy, the Deputy Assistant Secretary, carried the burden of development of a very complex and sophisticated, covert action, diplomatic strategy designed to try to check the advance of the Cubans and the Russians, without much help from Joe and without any help from his own Assistant Secretary. He was brilliantly and ably supported by a very able Central African Desk Officer, shortly to become Ambassador to Zaire, Walt Cutler. But with INR on our side, the three of us went out to these meetings in the Agency, and the Agency's heart was not deeply in this scrap either. They'd just been pasted in various Congressional committees and the object of press attacks by Dan Schorr and people, and to go into a new covert undertaking for which they would end up holding the bag would be increasingly expensive. The effort was, in retrospect, flawed, furthermore, by the fact that what we could do in a covert manner was not up to what the Cubans, plus the Russians, plus the MPLA were going to do. It was going to be too small, we had to move very quickly, and we did — cobbled together a bit of a military response Holden Roberto's people turned tail and ran. Then we were faced with an escalating presence of Cuban troops, Russian arms, and increasing Congressional concern leading up to the end of the year with the emergence of the Clark Amendment cutting off all covert assistance.

Q: End of '75 this was?

WISNER: Yes. It cut off all covert assistance to the Angolan Civil War, at which point Joe Sisco dumped this matter on Bill Schauffele, the new Assistant Secretary's, desk. The CIA was cut off, and we were driven back. The stage was now MPLA in Luanda and Roberto having been unmasked as feckless, but — although badly beaten and driven back to the corner — Savimbi in the south down in Jamba, having forged the beginnings

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of an alliance with the South Africans who had intervened tried to get us in deeper with them — we'd never done it — despite constant assertions later on. Very, very marginal tactical cooperative moves, and here we were. The stage was now set for what was to be a much more complicated problem, for now you had a large Cuban military presence in Angola, not only training the MPLA but fighting alongside it against UNITA in the south and increasingly with South African assistance. It was this fact, and the extension of the Cold War into Africa, and the further extension of the Cuban presence into Ethiopia very shortly thereafter, that drove Henry Kissinger to accelerate his diplomacy in Southern Africa and provided the core of the logic for the policies followed during the Reagan period by Chet Crocker.

With the Clark Amendment, we were out of business in Angola. We had not succeeded in isolating the MPLA diplomatically in Africa, we had not gotten the American oil companies to cut off payments to the MPLA government, we even came close to getting serious retaliation from the Nigerians. We hadn't stopped the Cubans from arriving. It had been a pretty dramatic setback for American diplomacy to be matched in a separate track with success that Kissinger began to engineer further to the east in Rhodesia. But to stick with the Angolan story, there was a period from about 1976 until early in the 1980s where the MPLA regime consolidated itself in Luanda, FLNA ceased to be a real fact of life and the Cubans remained in Angola. UNITA began to go from strength to strength and intensify its association with South Africa, receiving South African support to oppose the MPLA, on the one hand, and, on the other doing South African's bidding by keeping a bit of a clamp on SWAPO. This interregnum or this period lasted until, as I say, the early 1980's when in 1980 Ronald Reagan was elected President of the United States and came to office bringing Al Haig to the Department of State, Deputy Secretary Clark with him and Chet Crocker, after a brief and unwanted debate over Crocker's qualifications, as Assistant Secretary. Now Chet, in my experience, is one of the more remarkable foreign policy minds that I've known and been associated with in my career. Chet sat down and began a fundamental reconceptualization of American foreign policy in Africa. He was a

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deeply committed Africanist. His wife is of Zimbabwean origins, born in Bulawayo. Chet had devoted his life to teaching, thinking and writing about Africa, and Chet believed that the United States had an enormously important role to play, not only for geostrategic purposes of making certain that we were not outflanked by the Soviet Union with the Cubans at their sides in the Third World, but had a mission in Africa to carry out. That mission included dealing with Africa's conflicts, bringing justice to Southern Africa, and stimulating economic growth. The cutting edge of what decisions would have to be made was in Southern Africa, for apartheid was coming under increasing pressure inside South Africa. America's effective involvement— committed diplomacy with high level support— began during the Kissinger period — the events in Soweto, the pressures domestically in the United States to bring our influence and weight to bear on the South African equation. Rhodesia had moved into independence and was now Zimbabwe. And the Russians and Cubans were strongly present in Angola, on the one hand, the Russians more so than the Cubans in Mozambique, on the other. Crocker's concept, in the briefest word, was to try to negotiate, between South Africa and the peripheral states of the region, a set of understandings that would calm the region down, create a greater degree of security. Security would serve American interests, but would also create an atmosphere for South Africa within which change away from Apartheid and toward a pluralistic, multi-racial society and democracy could take place. That was the core of Crocker's view. Now, when it came down to the practical reach of it — and we're on to Angola looking at the Angolan dimension — Crocker could see no way in which, by simply beating on South Africa's door as had occurred ever since the end of the Kissinger period, throughout the Carter period under Secretary Vance and in Andy Young's time and his successor's time in New York, simply banging on the South African door and passing more UN resolutions and having contact groups come together and urge and create more elaborate structures of transition, that it was going to convince South Africa of the political logic in giving up Namibia and allowing the transition that the UN foresaw to take place. These habits of the past just weren't going to do it, and so Chet came up with the singularly important notion that everybody's interest would be served, on the one hand, by convincing the Cubans to

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withdraw from Angola and the South Africans to withdraw from Namibia, turning Namibia over to the UN and allowing Angola to settle down to the equally tough job of internal reconciliation between the UNITA southern-central, Angola-based tribal elements and the MPLA's more northern reach. This was a bold idea. It really caught the South Africans off guard, hoisted them on their own petard. It hoisted them on their own petard because they claimed in part that they were facing foreign aggression, foreign intervention, that they were carrying the banner of the West. This gave them a way out. The Cubans would leave and South Africa would have to retread. It also gave the Africans something to work for, though they didn't like it and protested vigorously, American diplomacy now linked South Africa's withdrawal to an internal decision taken by one African government — the MPLA — to invite the Cubans to leave. Yet in private, African governments found it difficult to deny the inherent logic of the matter, but wouldn't admit to it. They protested. But for the first time in years, we had a formula for unblocking the diplomacy that the United States, Germany, France, Britain were involved in. For a while, the French went along with it and then, seeing no particular movement and not liking to find themselves side-by-side with the United States in Africa as a general matter and involved in a proposition that wasn't moving and over which they would have very little say and for which we would call the shots —the French eventually dropped us. The Germans were never were comfortable; the Canadians, who regarded their UN commitments as of a higher priority than their sense of geostrategic purpose, also were not very comfortable, and the Contact Group as a result became less and less effective as an institution, less and less coherent as an institution. The British gave us, throughout, strong understanding and effective support. The Angolan matter was, therefore, an issue of putting before the Angolan government a set of proposals that would ease the Cubans out and before the South Africans a set of proposals that would force them out and bring the UN in to Namibia.

And the hardest part was, of course, getting the Angolans to buy this package for they didn't like the linkage. They were under terrific pressure from the Cubans, they had support from the Russians, and they certainly didn't like having to bob and weave and dance to our

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tune. They were fundamentally distrustful, at the end of the day, that they would be caught without their Cuban shield while South Africans would still have an ability to intervene on their front and that we wouldn't be able to keep — wouldn't intend to or be able to keep — our word on both ends. The Cubans saw our success at the end of their revolutionary messianic movement in Africa. So the history of our diplomacy over the next several years took place in a series of stages and has been brilliantly written about. Chet Crocker's own book, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, is an adequate chronicle of the events that followed, but let me just touch a couple of headlines. In the first instance, we presented our ideas to the Angolan leadership, the President and then-Angolan Foreign Minister and his deputy, Venancio da Moura — Paulo Jorge and Venancio da Moura. But after reflection, the Angolans retreated, went inside their shells, and it took a couple of years to get out. The Mozambicans, Cape Verdeans helped us talk the Angolans back to the negotiating table. In this interim period and more precisely, of '84, we were probing the Angolans from about every direction. We worked with the Portuguese, I visited Lisbon frequently, we worked closely with the Cape Verdeans, we were able to get the Angolans to come and meet us in Cape Verde and exchange positions there in the Cape Verde Islands. We were able, as well, to engage the Mozambicans, who wanted some American sympathy and support, as their own internal rebellion was rising very fast and the regime was under cruel pressure in Maputo from RENAMO, backed by the South Africans. The Mozambicans wanted help from the United States, so they, too, undertook to put us together with the Angolans and explain our logic to the Angolans. The Angolans regarded them as something of the poor cousin and weren't entirely sensitive to their point of view and, certainly, to being pushed by the Mozambicans. Our relations with Mozambique led down a different road which was towards Nkomati, and trying to stabilize another Southern African front and reduce the tensions in the region.

With Machel, Chessano, Veloso, Honwana, and other Mozambican leaders, we were able to build confidence and broker an understanding with South Africa. The South African Foreign Minister played a key role; his colleagues in Military Intelligence did a great deal

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to upset Nkomati, believing that RENAMO could win and convinced that Crocker and our Secretary of State did not have White House backing for our diplomacy.

Coming back to Angola, we faced yet another growing crisis inside the American administration. Unable to move the Angolans quickly to this linkage theory, the Republican conservatives, many of who were in touch with South Africa, including Bill Casey at CIA, set out to restructure and reorder American's African policy and have us firmly, unequivocally on the side of non or anti-communist movements. Pushing Savimbi's case to the fore and breaking our diplomacy with the MPLA became a concerted objective, not only of a number of Republican conservatives including some in the White House like Pat Buchanan, but also drew sympathy from Clark from time to time who ended up as National Security Advisor. With the heavy pressure from Bill Casey, there was extreme tension between ourselves and CIA and between some of the President's advisors and George Shultz, who stood by our effort in diplomacy and this balanced view of what served our interests in a stalwart manner. Once convinced of a case, George Shultz's crowning character trait is to stand stubbornly by it and defend its logic. George Shultz has never been properly recognized for his contribution. Without his unstinting support, I suspect Chet Crocker would have been destroyed politically.

Q: He describes you in his book as a foreign service officer who was able to convey friendliness and ferocity all at once in talking about just this period.

WISNER: Well, he does me a big favor. I would argue that the point we had to make clear to the Angolans was that if they did not decide to seek a diplomatic outcome — the negotiated withdrawal of Cubans and South Africans — then time was going to run out in Washington and we were going to be under pressure increasingly to take Savimbi's side. Well, in the summer of 1985, the most unusual of events took place. The Congress, at one and the same time, voted in a totally contradictory manner. Congress repealed the Clark Amendment, thereby enabling the recommencement of covert assistance to Savimbi, and, on the other hand, voted a pile of new sanctions on South Africa, complicating our ability to

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deliver the South Africans to the outcomes that we thought made sense. The left won the constructive engagement fight and the right won the fight to take a clear “anti-communist” stand, so each got something, however contradictory. To make matters worse, the United States was consumed by the anti-apartheid debate, made more complex by the stubborn behavior of P.W. Botha, the President of South Africa. It took a new man in the form of De Klerk later on to liberate South Africa from some of the strangleholds of strict Afrikaner orthodoxy that P.W. Botha had imposed in his time.

But returning to the Angolan story, diplomacy resumed really through much of '85 and in '86 it was interrupted when we were forced to provide military support for Savimbi. In time the MPLA moderates were able to regain their voice. The pressure of our coming back in on the Savimbi side strengthened the hands of those in Luanda who said “look it's time to go on and make this deal. The Cubans can't end the war on our side, we need to get the South Africans out and then face UNITA one-on-one.” The present ambassador here, Ndal, then chief of staff of the army, was an advocate of that position.

The story then went on to the next stages and eventually to the success of Crocker's work. I had left at this point and went as ambassador to Egypt in 1986. But Angola played out. In fact, I didn't escape entirely. Briefly in Cairo I played host to the South Africans, Angolans, and Cubans, who needed a place to meet. Boutros Boutros Ghali understood the need to provide parties, including Crocker, with a venue and he carried the day in Cairo.

There was finally an agreement. There was a structured withdrawal of the Cubans, a structured withdrawal and turnover to the UN in Namibia, and Namibia went on to independence, the Cubans went home, opening the way to the last chapter of the Angolan story, which is the struggle for supremacy inside Angola and again the UN's reinvolvement in sorting out between the MPLA and UNITA. As it now stands, UNITA is contesting once again — wrestling once again with the force of fate and their ability to withstand the pressure of the MPLA government, which has the support of Africa, as well as the understanding of the UN, the United States, all of us who believe that Angola's 30 years

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— nearly 40 years now — of civil war, liberation war, it's time to bring it to an end. My role during these fascinating years with Chet, as senior deputy in the Bureau of African Affairs from 1982 to 1986, was principally as his arm in negotiations in Southern Africa with the Angolan government, to carry out a lot of our liaison with the government in Zaire and to be able to open up channels of communications with the Mozambicans and to deal with them and the South Africans over Nkomati (a different story and one that I'll let you come back to).

Q: Frank, as you've taken the Angola story forward, you were working on that from different vantage points. We left you, I think, with Under Secretary Sisco, you then worked for Dr. Kissinger and were one of the Deputy Executive Secretaries under Secretary Vance and, of course, Ambassador in Zambia. Could you sketch in some of those stages and also some of the other issues that you worked on at that time?

WISNER: I am happy to. Joe Sisco resigned from the Department of State and assumed the Presidency of the American University in 1974. Phil Habib became the Under Secretary of State, and Phil had his own top guy, Dan O'Donohue, who he wanted to bring upstairs. So I was out of a job. And I was planning to get married that summer — I had been a widower for nearly two years at this point. I was planning to marry Christine de Ganay that summer, and Sabrina was still very small, and I thought for a moment about taking a leave of absence from the Department of State, of going to the Carnegie Endowment at Tom Hughes' invitation and doing some work on a subject that I believed and still believe is very important — that is the relationship between the foreign affairs community and Congress. One day I was called into Larry Eagleburger's office, and Larry threw that challenge that you can't say no to in the Foreign Service. “Frank”, he said, “do you want to go and goof off for a year or do you want to do real work? If you want to do real work...and, by the way, none of us as Republicans are particularly keen on seeing an officer of this Department go off to a Democratic think tank like the Carnegie Endowment.” In a jocular manner, Larry raised the partisan point. Then he put before me the prospect of joining the Bureau of African Affairs as the country director for Southern

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Africa. Now, Southern Africa was of enormous importance to the Secretary for, having received a setback at the hands of the Congress and on the battlefield that he received in Angola, Secretary Kissinger, as I earlier said, had shifted his focus to doing something about Rhodesia and Namibia and beginning to engage in Southern Africa in a much more important manner, and he needed an effective backup office in the Department of State. The backup office had to be the African Bureau and its Office of Southern African Affairs and, at that time, Kissinger felt the office was not on the same wavelength with the Secretary. He wanted a change in leadership in the office, and I had to admit that I knew where Luanda was from my time with Joe Sisco, but I could hardly place on a map Salisbury and Louren#o Marques, Maputo, Port Elizabeth, Blantyre and Lilongwe which were in Southern Africa. I'd never been in Southern Africa. I'd been in Vietnam, I'd been in South Asia, I'd been in North Africa, but never been in Southern Africa. Larry dismissed my reservations, and I found myself in the summer of 1976 as the new country director for Southern Africa. I must add the Bureau and the Department gave me a terrific team. Dennis Keogh, who lost his life in Namibia, was an outstanding officer and served as my deputy, carrying the office for months while I was abroad. George Moose and Jeff Davidow went on to become Ambassadors and Assistant Secretaries. I went off and got married, came back, and not too long after I came back, Kissinger took off on his shuttle, his second meeting with the South Africans and his first shuttle in Africa. We went off with a very fascinating set of objectives.

These were Rhodesian-related, and the point was to see if we could move the diplomacy of Southern Africa forward so that Ian Smith and his government would agree to negotiate a path to independence with the nationalist parties of Rhodesia and bring about the creation of a new Zimbabwe. We would do this as executive agents, if you will, of the British who still held colonial authority in Rhodesia, though UDI had occurred and the territory was in the hands of the white minority regime. Kissinger's plan was to create a set of propositions around which a transition to elections and a transition to majority rule would take place, over a period of time: a set of propositions that he would sell first to the

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Africans, then having already started working on John Vorster, finish the job with the South Africans and then get them to help him sell it to the Rhodesians, then get the two parties together — the white minority regime and the cantankerous and divided nationalist side together in a final conference and put it back under British authority and then have Britain hold the brass ring. Kissinger's conception was brilliant, and his execution was admirable. That he failed to reach 100% — is not to gainsay the fact that he got us well along that path and opened the door for what ended up later, an independent Zimbabwe and the basis of what eventually became the Reagan approach to calming the rest of the region down. Limiting Soviet influence and squeezing them and the Cubans out of the Southern African picture.

Kissinger went, and I was with him, to see the South Africans in Switzerland in August. We couldn't see them anywhere else, couldn't see them in the States, couldn't see them in a country like Britain, where the mobs would have surged around the South African prime minister, so the Swiss were very helpful, and I admire the Swiss. They have been very important at moments like this to American diplomacy for many, many years. The government has been a good friend of ours. It is also true Swiss interests were being served. They had strong ties in Southern Africa and, most notably, in South Africa, but still it was one of those very helpful moments. We were able to see the South Africans, and that gave Kissinger confidence his diplomacy could succeed. South Africa's government would use its authority to convince the Rhodesians to accept a set of negotiating principles which would end UDI and open the way to independence in Rhodesia under majority rule. These principles by the way, were prepared in the closest consultations with the British government. Kissinger then took off with his team—Win Lord, the Policy Planning Director; Bill Rogers, the Under Secretary for Economics; my excellent boss, Africa Assistant Secretary, William Schaufele, and Peter Rodman.

When we arrived in Tanzania, for two days of meetings with Julius Nyerere, Kissinger met his match. Nyerere — brilliant, deeply suspicious, wanting to see the African side win decisively, especially Africans beholden to Nyerere's radical persuasiveness, not

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terribly trustful of the role the United States would play — gave if you wanted to call his halfhearted support, that would be overstating what Julius Nyerere did. In fact, Nyerere told Kissinger to go forth and deliver the Rhodesians; he undercut Kissinger's diplomacy at the same time, decrying its objectives and its author. When Kissinger left the second meeting, Nyerere publicly criticized the American proposals. Happily, when we arrived in Lusaka, the play was reversed, and Kaunda embraced Kissinger and his proposals. We needed this signal of support; it gave Kissinger a strong basis on which we could all fly to South Africa and meet the Rhodesians.

And there, in Pretoria, in the Union Building, I joined Kissinger for his historic meeting with Ian Smith and those members of the Rhodesian minority government who had come down theoretically to watch a rugby game, in fact to meet with John Vorster and Kissinger. In a truly brilliant tour-de-force, Kissinger painted for Ian Smith the world situation, bringing it right down to the Rhodesian predicament, building the logic that Rhodesia could never work its way out of the problems it was in, never get support from the outside world if it didn't commit itself to a peace process and a track that would end up leading to independence under majority rule. Smith accepted the five-point proposal that Kissinger put on the table as a basis to go back and talk to his Cabinet colleagues. John Vorster was present to assure good faith. Smith wouldn't have come to it, had it not been for John Vorster. Maligned as he is, John Vorster is one of the true fathers of Zimbabwe's independence.

Kissinger went back to London, but he stopped in a visit to thank Mobutu. He respected Mobutu, his sense of power, and the role Zaire, because of its size, could play in Africa. Kenyatta, too. We went up and met him. Kissinger explained to Kenyatta how important it was to see this new peace approach through and to limit outside and Communist influence. Kenyatta was on board to try to build African support for a moderate outcome, not leave everything in the hands of the likes of Julius Nyerere.

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And then he flew to London, and I joined the Secretary in a very late night Cabinet meeting in Number 10 Downing Street, where Kissinger explained his five points. At that moment it began to dawn on us that the British — a Labor government, Jim Callaghan's Labor Government — for all their protestations of wishing to solve the Rhodesian problem, didn't want to have to face the awful fact of actually carrying through and particularly taking what would seem to be American ideas — though coordinated with them, they didn't believe they would ever have to take our ideas, but then to have to be faced with them and negotiate them with Ian Smith, who was a veritable anathema to the Rhodesian Government. Furthermore, I suspect Callaghan never fully explained to his government what he had set Kissinger loose to do. The Labor left, notably Michael Foote, did not want to be seen in cahoots with Smith and Vorster. Well, the British began hemming and hawing, a prelude to the failure of the Geneva Conference. On our way back to Washington, we heard Smith's acceptance of the five points and, with the UN General Assembly about to meet, the fat was really in the fire. Kissinger spent much of the latter part of September, 1976 selling his concept of a Rhodesian settlement, as well his concept of a Namibian settlement, to the players in the General Assembly and finally, when Tony Crosland came to New York to work out how the British were to proceed in managing the Rhodesian story. I was with Kissinger throughout that time in New York, attending all his African meetings, talking with him, watching him at work and I was, needless to say, fascinated and admiring. I remember the night with particular poignancy when I was called into the meeting with Tony Crosland, the Foreign Secretary. Kissinger, Phil Habib was there, the British UN Ambassador Ivor Richards was there, I was the notetaker. I think Bill Schaufele was there, the Assistant Secretary for Africa from the Department. And Crosland, at that point, said the British Government in effect didn't have the heart to send a foreign secretary to deal with the Rhodesian parties, white and black, and they were going to name their UN ambassador and who would Kissinger have there, and Kissinger said he had this man named Wisner in mind, and I took the notes and I looked at it and realized I

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was being referred to. I was astonished which was prelude to the fact that, though I was just married, I was also about to leave and not return until December.

From the end of September until December, 1976, I represented Henry Kissinger in Geneva during the course of the negotiations. The negotiations were a fascinating experience for me, but deeply frustrating, because I saw a chance to achieve peace slip away from us. The British were more inclined to argue with Smith than to try to find ways to bridge gaps between the Zimbabwean parties and the Rhodesian white minority regime; Smith was up there. And so the negotiations bogged down into debates about the Kissinger package and the authorities of various elements of it, something called the Council of State, a matter of important detail for a scholar of the subject. The British did not come to bring the process to a conclusion and, by about a quarter of the way through, our election was held so there was now no longer a President Jerry Ford. The signals out of the Democrats were that they would take an entirely new look at African policy, and this attempt to try to work with the Zimbabweans and white Rhodesians and with the South Africans was held in suspicion. The black parties began to get the view that they might get a better deal out of Washington than the one Ford and Kissinger had on offer. British diplomacy was a disappointment . We really thought we had given London a hand, but Labor and senior civil servants like the cautious diplomat Tony Duff, added to the drag on British thinking. Geneva broke up in December. Henry Kissinger had a final round in London where he saw that the British weren't going to go back to the table on the basis of what he'd achieved, and that really brought an end to our attempts in that cycle to produce it.

But remember what we had accomplished: Rhodesians had, in effect, said they were willing to negotiate their way out of UDI, towards black majority rule on the basis of a transitional set of arrangements. South Africa had played her cards, had come in and moved the Rhodesians forward which opened, then, the possibility of the next cycle — Cy Vance's attempts, with Andy Young, to find another basis were not in the beginning successful, but set the stage for Maggie Thatcher to come on board and to kick-start

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Lancaster House, get an agreement and bring Rhodesia to independence — a fact that had to await, literally, the end of the decade and the beginning of the '80s to become a full and solid fact. But it would not have happened in the way it happened —so Africa wouldn't have been the same — without Henry's intervention on this key point. I was pleased to have been with it.

When I returned to Washington in December, at the end of the Administration, my last weeks with Kissinger, I remember Andy Young coming to my office and saying I needed to get ready for the fact there was going to be a big shift and either I was part of that shift and I started working well with the incoming crowd or, if I stuck to working closely with Mr. Kissinger who was still my boss, I would not be part of the new team. So be it I said to myself. When the Democrats came and Carter was sworn in, Vance became Secretary, my days in Southern Africa were numbered. But in a very interesting manner, very generous manner, Secretary Vance asked me to come up and join his new Executive Secretary Peter Tarnoff, my old friend from Vietnam days, as Peter's deputy executive secretary and to keep an eye on these African issues.

Q: So you were there, present during a considerable transition.

WISNER: Absolutely.

Q: Carter Administration, new approach on Africa.

WISNER: That's right.

Q: Camp David.

WISNER: Camp David, Egyptian-Israeli Peace Agreement.

Q: So you moved up to the seventh floor.

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WISNER: Normalization with China, establishment of ambassadorial level relations. The fall of the Shah and the Panama Canal Treaty. Exciting period. Salt negotiations and much more.

Q: And in that office with Peter Tarnoff and, I think, Jack Perry?

WISNER: Jack Perry, with Jerry Bremer, with David Anderson.

Q: You were, in addition to a brief for Africa, following the procedures of the Department as a whole.

WISNER: That's true. Africa and the Middle East were my two main pieces, but I traveled with the Secretary. The European and Soviet questions fell more to my other colleagues, Jack or David Anderson and, of course, to Peter Tarnoff who was so very close to the Secretary. A brilliant mind and a superb organizer, one of the most effective staff officers I ever watched work in the Department of State in my entire career. Superb political judgment as well and a very close relationship with Cy Vance. Cy Vance, a man of modesty, of precision, a man of the deepest honesty, a man of high principle, high liberal principle, a man whose very commitment domestically to racial equality belied the fact that his ward in West Virginia, John Daves, had argued the other side of Brown vs the Board of Education. A man who was a deeply committed Democrat. He had an instinctive mistrust of the use of force in world affairs. This left him very vulnerable to "Zbig" Brzezinski who had a more brutal view of the world, more confrontational, more belief in the naked applications of pressure, and who Mr. Vance came increasingly to believe he could not rely on fully to get his word to the President, his, Vance's, word to the President or be able to work with him. Matters came to a head early in the administration. I recall a speech on Russian policy that Carter gave at Annapolis. Vance wrote one half of the speech, and Brzezinski wrote the other, and the President delivered the two halves even though they were more than contradictory. The relationship between Vance and Brzezinski collapsed finally over Iran. Vance resigned, but it was tense between the Department of State and

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the NSC virtually from the outset. Vance's Department was an interesting gathering. Coming out of the legal practice, like Mr. Vance, was Warren Christopher as Deputy Secretary. Vance assigned him the priority of human rights, with Assistant Secretary Pat Derian, who became really the Joan of Arc, avenging angel, or whatever you want, of human rights, pushing our policy into more and more blatant intrusions in domestic affairs, sometimes wisely, sometimes in an excessive manner. I think it took us years to recover in Latin America from some of the excesses. It cut across other policies that we were pursuing, as in the Philippines. She never had much time for refugees, and we had an ongoing refugee crisis with the Vietnamese boat people that was to break in '79, and Vance called me back to put that together. The Under Secretaries of State were also interesting people. We had a very able David Newsom, wonderfully decent man with deep experience in the world of foreign affairs, who held the portfolio of Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. Hodding Carter was an excellent spokesman. Les Gelb gave real intellectual strength to our arms control effort and Dick Holbrooke served as an incomparable Assistant Secretary for Asia. I was fond of Ben Reed, the Management Under Secretary. We did not always agree, but he had superb character. Tony Lake provided great intellectual energy from his position as head of policy planning.

Q: Somebody who was quite tested in the conflicts between Vance and Brzezinski in the course of the Iran Hostage Crisis.

WISNER: Absolutely, which broke out in my time there. The whole fall of the Shah, I followed very, very closely. Phil Habib, who had stayed on as Under Secretary after Kissinger left until his heart wouldn't permit him to carry the play forward any more, a wonderful man, finest foreign service officer of my career. Vance was well served. He had some who were not so effective, in T. Lucy Benson, I think, never found her footing in the upper reaches of the Department. We had a number of able Assistant Secretaries, particularly in the regional bureaus. Richard Holbrooke's great stand in Asian affairs was notable in that regard.

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Q: Dick Moose was carrying African policy forward at that time?

WISNER: Dick started out as Under Secretary, and I was sent down to talk him into taking the African portfolio over when Bill Schaufele clearly couldn't carry on any further, given the opposition that had risen against him inside the new Administration. He accepted the task. I think another very successful regional affairs manager was Roy Atherton for the Middle East. He did a hell of a job and, followed by Hal Saunders, made Camp David and the Egyptian-Israeli Agreement possible, with Bill Quandt anchoring the team, one of our most effective teams ever — Bill Quandt working over at the NSC. So Asia and the Middle East were strong and well served. George Vest was an able figure, as Art Hartman had been before him, on the European front.

Q: How did you feel about the process? Did you feel the Department, as it was then structured, was working? Did you feel that the power was well distributed among the bureaus? Did you feel there were built-in conflicts between the regional bureaus and the functional bureaus?

WISNER: Well, of course all of the above is true. It is always true. It just depends on the weights and balances of any given time. I would say that it's generally truer of a Democratic administration than it is of a Republican administration at the time, but it certainly was true of the Carter administration after Kissinger who had the sense of a commanding Secretary of State whose word was law, and who brought along foreign service officers — the Kissinger model. It was a much more politicized — a lot of outsiders being brought in — looser, more argumentative, policy process. Arguments came up, were lost, decided, made, unmade, and redecided again — a much less orderly environment.

Q: Was this taking a cue from the top? Did it reflect Carter's own proclivities, work habits or..?

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WISNER: Well, Carter also was a very hands-on-in-foreign-affairs President. Every night, we would prepare night-notes for the President and come back in the morning to find scribbles on the sides with ideas, guidance, direction, very, very detailed and busy.

Q: You asked me once for a night-note when you had none and I did one on distribution of milk to Somali refugees, and it came back the next morning from Carter wanting to know more.

WISNER: That's right! This is exactly right, your memory is dead-on right. The fact is that the President loved those details. He felt he was marching to the highest principles. He didn't appreciate the effect of American power, but he used it with effect, otherwise we wouldn't have had the peace in the Middle East, we wouldn't have had the Panama Canal Treaty, we wouldn't have had some of the other major accomplishments of the Carter period that really has to be seen as a period of overall achievement. I think we didn't get very far in Africa because to work in Africa we needed to also have some balance between the South Africans and black africans. If the South Africans were the ones being asked to make the concessions, they weren't going to make them if you just beat their brains out. There had to be some sense of their needs and their requirements for security. But the balance played much better in the Middle East and, of course, you had Sadat there helping out enormously. Panama was a close run thing.

Q: What were your greatest frustrations being in that office? Did they have to do with dealing with the NSC staff in the period of Brzezinski?

WISNER: During the early years, the NSC staff was difficult to deal with. Brzezinski brought a lot of people from the outside, some of them truly didn't know anything about government and felt they had an arguable right to make decisive national policies, and what the Department of State and the Secretary of State viewed as important wasn't all that important to them. With notable exceptions—Bill Quandt for example—much time was lost in maneuvers for advantage.

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Q: That excludes our present Secretary who was also in the Carter NSC?

WISNER: She came really very much at the end, in the very last days. No, most of the ones I have in mind have disappeared long since from the foreign policy scene. Well, Henry Richardson in the Africa Bureau, African area.

Q: Roger Morris was...

WISNER: No, Roger wasn't part of that. Bob Pastor, on the Latin American front, acquired a reputation as another avenging angel.

Q: Well, you did that for a couple of years, Frank, and then went to Zambia?

WISNER: That is correct.

Q: Before we go on to Zambia, do you want to comment on anything else?

WISNER: I was asked by the Secretary to represent the United States in Zambia. It was to be my first embassy. Hal Saunders came up and said, "how would you like to be DCM in Riyadh?", and I said, "I've already plighted my troth." I didn't regret it; I loved Zambia. But I missed Peter and the Seventh Floor. There is no experience like service there. Without it you do not see the Department as a whole; nor government in its entirety; nor the connection between policy and politics.

Q: What was it like to be the ambassador in those years?

WISNER: Fascinating. I arrived in Lusaka with my wife and three children, with a fourth child to be born while we were in Zambia. Lancaster House was underway, and it was, in fact, going to bring an end to the Rhodesian crisis. The day I arrived in, very shortly after I arrived in Zambia, the Rhodesian Canberra bombers came over and bombed Lusaka. This was '79, summer of '79. Zambia was a front line state. It was truly on the front line, with Rhodesia being just over the border. We were home to Joshua N'Komo's Zambian

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African People's Union (ZAPU); ZANU, Mugabe's group which was more strongly based in Mozambique and had the support of the Tanzanians. The Zambians had their own reality. In Kaunda you had one of the independence African presidents who'd been around for a long time. He had managed to make his way, in a country with very few human resources. There were only about a dozen university graduates when Zambia became independent. Thanks to the high price of copper, a lot of money flooded in. Roads were built, schools, factories, all sorts of things. But it was a shell, more than a reality: huge socialization of the economy, nationalization of productive enterprise, government factories and, by the time I got there, I could tell by looking at it, this was all coming to an end. The price of copper had come way down. The Zambian bureaucracy had offices filled with people and empty of work; with copper prices way down and production falling, the roads were beginning to fall apart, the infrastructure beginning to deteriorate, there was no new foreign investment, no new domestic savings generation. At this point, I learned the realities of deep structural reform; how you put together the Bank and the Fund and the donors and how to design policies which provide growth. And I argued for substantial changes in our policy approach to provide for a stronger private sector role in the economic management of the country. We were putting 25-30 million dollars of aid every year. It was a terrific experience, not only that experience, but also the experience of seeing Rhodesian peace carried through, my association with Namibia. The Namibia Institute was in Lusaka. The present prime minister of Namibia was the head of that institute, Hage Geingob. Terrific individual. So it was a real crossroads of policies and politics, not that any of them were going anywhere because we didn't have a line of approach. It took the arrival of Crocker in the Reagan years to give some new direction to our diplomacy and, not terribly long after that happened, Chet Crocker called me out and I went back to Washington. I had a fine embassy in Lusaka. Wes Egan who went on to become an Ambassador several times over, most recently in Jordan, served as my DCM. Suzanne McGannan Ben Aida, a wonderful secretary, who worked with me earlier in Washington, carried a huge burden at this embassy. Jon Blaney, John Finney, Mike O'Brien of USIS.

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Q: But the Zambians themselves were easy to relate to? I remember there were problems with drunkenness in the mines and I've heard that about Zambia.

WISNER: Well, the Zambians are a tribal society, nomadic, tribal society until the early part of this century when the British came. So it's all raw and recent and, no, I wouldn't say the most disciplined, but people of great charm and fun. And, on a personal basis — though there was a lot of criticism of so-called American sympathy for the South Africans, things of that sort — I got on very well with a lot of the leading people of the country and remain close to them to this day. The Ambassador here, Dunstan Kamana, is one among many. And as we struggled to keep our diplomacy pointed in clear directions, I had many engagements, including with Zambian businessmen. My greatest single crisis, my most difficult moment, came as the result of a spy scandal with a CIA officer, charged with recruiting people in Zambia, while he was there. One of the Zambians turned himself into his government and this caused a huge amount of trouble, ending in the expulsion of a number of Americans and my having to go head-to-head with Kenneth Kaunda. Kaunda's sense of caution, his need to maintain a relationship with the United States, meant that he didn't bring an end to my stay in Zambia and allowed rather that I was able to go back and get support in Washington and bring the wonderfully nice and able and effective — particularly in this kind of environment — General Vernon Walters, Dick Walters, forward to smooth things over and put them back together. But there were hairy moments.

Q: You must have gotten to know Joshua N'Komo fairly well.

WISNER: I had more to do with him in the Kissinger day's, in my Geneva incarnation. I also spent a lot of time there with Sithole, Muzorewa, and with Robert Mugabe, as well as Ian Smith who I dealt with personally, and at some length, Ken Flowers, his intelligence chief. I knew General Walls, the armed forces commander.

Q: So you were the logical one for Chet Crocker to call back when he took over the Africa Bureau and needed a principal deputy.

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WISNER: Well, I don't know that I was the logical one. In retrospect, I'm very glad that he decided I was the right one. There were other very able people, and we had a terrific team in the front office: Princeton Lyman on the economic side, now our assistant secretary for IO, Jim Bishop, future ambassador to Liberia, Somalia, had been in Chad and was a wonderfully able and smart man.

Q: So, taking over as Chet Crocker's deputy, you both ran the bureau and helped him take forward these..

WISNER: Well, I wouldn't say I ran the bureau, I think the day-to-day management of the work of the offices fell more to Jim Bishop — the substantive office for Africa, West Africa. But not Southern Africa; that one was my responsibility for Chet, though Chet spent most of his time doing that as well. I would say I was responsible for — I was Chet's right-hand man for — the Southern African diplomacy. I did the Mozambican and the Rwandan government. He did Savimbi and the South Africans. I did South Africa, as regards Mozambique and had developed with the Mozambicans a very strong relationship, with Samora Machel personally, with Jusinto Veloso, his security and then development cooperation minister, with Fernando Honwana, who with Samora Machel was killed in that tragic plane crash, with Chissano, then the foreign minister and today the president, a man who I remain enormously fond of and admiring. We began to try to negotiate with Pik Botha, trying to get the South Africans to take control of their military intelligence group, General Vander Westhuzin's people, and to get them to slow down the support for RENAMO on condition that the Mozambicans live in peace and not send the ANC flying over the border and blow things up in South Africa. N'Komati was a partial success; the South Africans never fully kept their word. But it certainly brought the level of tension down and gave Mozambicans some breathing space and led them to the next stage which is: they needed internal reconciliation with RENAMO — which eventually came. I had the distinct pleasure of being able to see the Soviet Union's strong relationship with Mozambique decline, and disappear.

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Q: Still dealing with differences within the USG. It was the Samora Machel visit in the mid-80s that CIA Director Casey so much opposed. Was it touch and go getting him together with Reagan?

WISNER: Part of trying to get Machel to N'Komati was to build some confidence in us. Machel wanted to be sure we had his interests at heart and he needed to hear a word of assurance from the top. It was important therefore, to get Machel to meet the President. Shultz backed that notion and the President agreed to it. Casey, I think, wanted us to get in on RENAMO's side. He used the Agency for nakedly political-policy-shaping purposes. He opposed Machel's visit right down to the moment that Samora Machel was standing outside of Reagan's office. He and Shultz were in a heated argument when Reagan settled the matter and saw Machel. The President did the right thing, received Machel, found him engaging and gave us the support with which to pursue our diplomacy. Casey lost interest in the Mozambican side and really turned his attention to the more profitable Angolan account. Casey set out to destroy our diplomacy and he almost succeeded. I abandoned Chet to go to Egypt, leaving as Chet's deputy and my old friend, the brilliant Chas Freeman, in my place.

Q: Frank, as we turn towards Egypt and your stewardship there, do you want to step back and provide any insights on Camp David? Because that sets the scene then for your time in Egypt.

WISNER: Yes, well, what can I tell you? Camp David, I hold today as one of the triumphs of American post-war diplomacy. It wouldn't have happened without Sadat, without Begin having a vision of the future, and without the two coming along at the time American diplomacy was properly disposed. Egypt having regained her self-confidence after the '73 war as a result of having acted strongly in the '73 war, the effect of American diplomacy separating the armies in 1973, all made it possible to get the parties to Camp David. There the negotiating brilliance of Cy Vance with his wonderful legal capability and, the President's determination, God-driven determination to make it happen, made

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the difference. I remember many aspects of it, but I was principally backing up in the Department of State making certain the Secretary had the papers he needed, being focused on his brief, single-minded interest. But it became obvious afterwards that you could not spread Camp David. You could not carry it over to Syria the Egyptian - Syrian rivalry was such that Hafez Assad needed a better settlement than Sadat was able to get. Then it became inevitable that we seek an Egyptian-Israeli agreement. And I went with Mr. Vance, out once with him alone as we put the pieces together and then subsequently with him and the President to Egypt, to Israel and back to Egypt again where I was present when the Secretary, the President, Sadat on the phone in the Cairo airport, and Begin on the phone in Jerusalem came to the final deal which produced the Egyptian - Israeli treaty. The heroes of those days were our ambassador in Cairo, Roy Atherton; Hal Saunders brilliantly managing the Middle East account in the Department of State, Bill Quandt — really first rate, first rate people — Sam Lewis in Tel Aviv. We had a team on the ground that's never been rivaled, in my judgement, in our history in that part of the world.

Q: And then came the assassination of Sadat.

WISNER: Then tragically came the assassination of Sadat and an unsettled period and then Mubarak. And Mubarak started out quietly, very cautiously in a dangerous environment. Our relations with Mubarak went into a tailspin during George Shultz's negotiations in Lebanon. He felt Mubarak was going to support the deal Shultz brokered, but in the end Mubarak did not. Shultz took that very badly. But while our relationship wasn't great, Shultz was determined to repair it. And when I was asked to go to Cairo, to take Nick Veliotos' place, it was with a specific charge from Secretary Shultz to go out and repair the Egyptian - American relationship.

Q: How did you approach that?

WISNER: Well, with vigor. I had a lot of time to think about it. My nomination was opposed by Jesse Helms on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Behind that lay persistent

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Republican conservative opposition to my taking on another diplomatic assignment at a senior level, given doubts about what they saw as our policy toward and the role I played in Angola. I was criticized heavily at that end of the Republican party for my work in Angola, and it stayed with me for some years. It didn't block another diplomatic assignment abroad, but it precluded my being able to serve either as assistant secretary for the Middle East [NEA] or Africa when Jim Baker became Secretary. The opposition to my views, seen to be pro-MPLA views, was garbage, never proven. I was pro-American interests and policies, of course. Thanks to the vigorous support of the Vice President, George Bush, who I admired and admire intensely; John Warner, Senator Warner, senator of Virginia, just a terrific man; they were able together to work out a way and Warner was at the cutting edge of bringing Helms around, and I was confirmed to go to Cairo.

I arrived in Cairo in the summer of 1986. Egypt was still reeling from the rebellion in one of its security forces. Many people wondered about Egypt's economy, Mubarak's longevity in power, and the relationship was overhung with a bitter dispute over our military debt. The Egyptians didn't think they should have to pay for military aid provided during Sadat's time; we had no ability to forgive it. And what I set about doing was an intense interaction with the leadership of Egypt, from the president on down, contacting the government, calling on everyone, trying to make myself relevant, the United States relevant to as much of life and key decisions of the Egyptian government as possible.

Secondly to relate to Egyptians, I traveled all throughout the country and met people from every level of society. I tried to relearn and practice my Arabic. I fell in love with Egypt. It's a fabulous place. But keeping an eye on the central fact of building this relationship, it was clear to me that we had to focus attention on the performance of the Egyptian economy. Finding a way to advocate a move away from the state-controlled sectors of the Egyptian economy with its huge subsidies. Moving to a broader basis for the American relationship, not just an aid-dependent relationship, but while we had this huge aid program to make it relevant to Egyptian needs. To reduce the friction, to resolve the problems surrounding the many aspects of this billion dollar program. To keep a very careful eye on the Egyptian

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military and our huge billion-plus dollar annual assistance program to them of building up the Egyptian air force. I went out with the Egyptian army to their maneuvers and learned to know their generals, trying to engage, to create a strategic dialogue between the two countries. I was following very closely the diplomacy as we moved, during the late Shultz period, to see if we could get the Taba matter settled. I was heavily involved in that with Judge Sofaer and from that to trying to get a peace process up and running with the Egyptians, moving to bring along Arafat, on the one side, and us trying to nudge the Israelis forward, on the other, with the Egyptians playing an extraordinary strategic balancing role.

And last, certainly not least, was the tragedy that befell all of us in the summer of 1990 when Saddam lost his grip on reality, overplayed his hand, and occupied Kuwait. The job then was to build the Egyptian-American relationship which was one of the single, most important planks in the structure of the Gulf War. The Egyptians ended up providing us with overflight and airport rights, flow-through capacity in the canal and right down to Egyptian divisions serving on the front-line together with American forces. It was a triumph, the high point in Egyptian-American cooperation, brought about by Mubarak's sense of strategic vision and purpose. A terrific experience, just terrific. I loved those years in Cairo. My family did as well. My heart will always be there. I had able officers and staff at my side—Jock Covey, Wes Egan as DCM, as well as Mark Johnson. No one can match Ryan Crocker and Stan Escudero in political work, nor Kenton Keith and Marcelle Wahba in press and cultural affairs. The military under General Fitzgerald and the USAID missions were ably staffed. Rozella Berger was a grand secretary and executive assistant.

Q: Now, in those years, you had the leverage of the Camp David aid levels, an aid program of two billion dollars a year.

WISNER: Two plus billion dollars.

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Q: Combined economic and military aid that was beginning to have an impact on the country. Your mission was expanding and bursting at the seams to become the largest U.S. embassy in the world. How did you keep track of that vast process and what are your conclusions about the aid and Egypt's ability to absorb it?

WISNER: I have very little doubt we were able to keep track of and absorb the military aid. So much of it goes to hardware of American origin. It went into specific programs within a strategic definition. Now whether we made all the right choices is another question. Egypt needed to overhaul her armor but whether the right way was to build a M-1-A-1 tank factory....you'd have to say the other choice, of course, was to buy M-1-A-1 tanks. What were the savings going to be if you just bought a bunch of tanks. We didn't, at that point, know the Cold War was going to end and we'd have access to phenomenal numbers of M-60 tanks. But you needed to end the Soviet military equipment phase of the Egyptian Army if you were going to have them anchored in with us as a strategic partner. The decision to build the M-1-A-1 preceded me. It happened during Nick Veliotos' time. I never was particularly excited about the project because I could see one round of tanks, and I couldn't see what was going to happen next, and my question is still being asked. But the fundamental decision was not wrong, to replace the tank force with an American tank force in this part of the world in which the tank battle arguably is still the most important land battle to be fought. On the air force side, I think we made exactly the right choices. The Egyptian air force needed new equipment. Whether you should have been spending more, on the margin, on communications, command and control training, things like that, perhaps, but I think basically, with relatively minor exceptions, we made the right choices.

On the economic side, I had graver doubts about American economic assistance. I think it disguised the need for more forceful economic policy measures on the part of the Egyptian government. I think it slowed the decisions to take the state out of the Egyptian economy. I think it did some things that had to be done: water and sewers, irrigation drainage, canals and micro credit, but things that, unfortunately, were never going to leave much of

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a mark on the minds of Egyptians. Who sees a sewer, who cares? Until you don't have any. These were not new universities and housing projects, not that I think the American government ought to have been building all of these. We were pushed into spending these colossal sums of money, and the leverage that it gave us to influence Egyptian economic policy was in no way commensurate to the volume of resources that were flowing. It took very, very tough collaboration to get the Egyptians to listen to me, because they had, virtually every year, an assured pot of lolly coming along.

The food aid side was highly arguable. It sustained subsidies and led to misuse of food. It meant Egypt didn't put the right volume of resources into foreign exchange earning capabilities and didn't exploit its domestic market to get its costs down to be more competitive internationally. You could always keep cheap bread on the table, bread so cheap that it was cheaper to feed cows and goats with American wheat than it was to, you know, produce a proper animal food stock industry. We did a lot of good, no doubt, but at the same time, it really had two edges, this sword.

Q: It was then and still is a race of economic liberalization and export orientation and privatization of the economy versus population growth and creation of sufficient jobs to keep pace. How do you view that? Prospects for that race, long term, for Egypt?

WISNER: Well, I think that, finally, the corner has been turned in terms of the private sector having a stronger say in the economy. I wish Mubarak had felt bolder after the Gulf War, both in democratic liberalization and allowing a broadening of the political base and in economic liberalization. He has been very, very cautious, very careful. It's going to be harder, though, to assure an orderly institutional process of power shifting after the Mubarak period because of the long time it has taken to get this far. On the economic side, things are turning in the proper direction. Egypt can support her present population. I have never had any doubt about that. She needed, however, to get prosperity up and then, at the same time, take a very hard crack at population control, but let prosperity also provide a dividend for smaller families; give an incentive for smaller families. I haven't

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been close enough to the Egyptian economy in the last years. I've seen liberalization but I have a sense that Egyptian society is moving toward smaller population rates of growth and that the Egyptians do have a ways to go. An export economy, true — they needed to lower their tariffs, open themselves up, force themselves to be competitive — but equally I believe Egypt is a large enough country that they needed to focus on income, building up effective Egyptian demand for goods, to get their prices down so they would attract exporters because they'd have a strong domestic base.

Q: Post Camp David, could you see in your time changes in ingrained attitudes towards Israel? Doing business with Israel?

WISNER: The Egyptians are going to be ambivalent about Israel. They wanted peace; they did not want to go back to war, but they also didn't want a very close relationship with Israel; close in the sense that the Israelis wanted to be close; a warm, embracing relationship. And certainly not a relationship that was going to have common political goals being pursued. Egypt still wanted to be the first among Arab equals, and to use the weight of the Arab world to keep the balance with Israel.

Q: Did you feel with the aid dollars that people were also being forced on you. Were the accretions in your staff desirable, useful? How did you manage?

WISNER: Well, I managed not only to put a cap on, those numbers, but to progressively reduce them. I remember the first time I was hit with about 25, 30 demands for new officials on the American embassy staff, and I think I ended up the first round with a very artful system that Jock Covey helped me with and a painful review of all the mission operations. We reduced positions and did a second round my second year and a third one the third year. We were able to bring the numbers down a bit. But I'm not sure that numbers were quite the goal in itself, but I was trying to change the way we used our leverage and thought about things and where we wanted to use our influence. I would have rather had us more into the venture capital market and development banks, being

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able to take equity and debt positions in privatized Egyptian enterprises, funding the mortgage market, doing more things like that. That was my dream, instead of the big infrastructure and the large American contractors. But you had to admit, unless we'd done it, Cairo would be choking in her own sewage.

Q: And Imbaba.

WISNER: Yes, I mean it was awful. And sewers were built in the 1910s for a city of a million.

Q: and today a city of 12 to 15 million. Cairo was a crossroads. You had every manner of high level visitor, including the President.

WISNER: Yes, indeed, and the Secretary

Q: ... very many times.

WISNER: Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense.

Q: Any highlights of those visits?

WISNER: Oh, many. Many, many. George Bush came on Thanksgiving Day, right in the Gulf War. The American community came out that day. I'll never forget it. I was very proud of our community. This was the American community that stuck it out during the Gulf War. It did not run. Throughout the Arab world, American communities packed up and left. But not the one in Cairo. Maybe not in Morocco, but I mean.

Q: In Morocco, we were ordered to. We had a mandatory evacuation. Curious.

WISNER: The embassy?

Q: "Non-essential" personnel and Embassy dependents.

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WISNER: What about the American citizen community?

Q: Some left, most didn't.

WISNER: We stuck. We stuck. Both embassy and other people left on their own, or their companies pulled them out because they were frightened of liabilities. But we stuck. Did it in interesting ways, not only holding Washington steady, but having regular town meetings with the American community, keeping the school open. The German school closed, but we kept the American school open, so that the families had a reason to stay.

Q: You were having a dialogue on that with Ivan Selin?

WISNER: Mainly with John Kelly.

Q: You were the American Ambassador on the eve of the Gulf War, the first time the U.S. had been engaged in warfare in the Arab world in recent history, anyway.

WISNER: Since Samuel Eaton and the Dey of Tripoli.

Q: What did you think, sitting in Cairo, was going to happen? Were you concerned? Were you confident? This was an unknown. What were your feelings?

WISNER: I had been in Egypt for a while. I had a sense of confidence in the Egyptian Government's ability to maintain control in the streets. I had confidence in the direction of our diplomacy and in the Egyptian association with us. I was very confident. Maybe foolishly so, but I never thought so, and it worked out — I was right. No, I'm comfortable. We read the Egyptians right. They read us right. We and they were on the same wave length. Just as we're not today, which bothers me very deeply.

Q: As it turned out, their position was the correct one and was also the best one for Egypt...debt forgiveness, follow-on benefits.

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WISNER: We've rewarded them handsomely with the debt forgiveness. A flood of foreign assistance came to them at this period. In a way, I hoped that the war would force them and free them to do something about the liberalization of the economy, and Mubarak promised me before I left that he would. He was very cautious; he has always been cautious, probably wisely so.

Q: Before we leave Egypt are there any other issues there you'd like to touch on? You want to say something about American University of Cairo? or transit of nuclear ships through the Suez Canal? or any other issues?

WISNER: We found ways of dealing with all of those problems. Egyptian ways. Our ships would come. We would write endless diplomatic notes and their stays would be approved, but we were never going to get blanket approval, never going to have something that would make the US Navy happy. We would transit the Suez Canal, and we wouldn't pay the extra surcharges involved, and our bills would run up, and the Egyptians wouldn't collect them, and our bills would run up, and the Egyptians, wouldn't collect, and we'll never pay them and they'll never collect them. It took me a while to figure out the best Egyptian "No" is don't say anything at all. "Yes" was also ambiguous. All answers in Egypt are ambiguous.

American University was a fine institution of American higher learning and probably unspoiled today. I think it does an important job in Egypt. I think we've been right to support it, build up its endowment. It will be a beacon for years to come. I was very touched when the American business community, Egyptian and American business community, at the end of my stay there raised 50 thousand dollars and created a special prize for modern Egyptian history in my name, which I always consider one of the nicest things ever done for me in my career.

Q: You had a consulate in Alexandria, now closed. Was that a valuable resource?

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WISNER: That was a valuable resource, and it was a terrible decision to close it. I disagreed completely with the Under Secretary of State for Management. I disagreed with Mr. Eagleburger who sustained the decision. And I think Mr. Djerejian was wrong to put it forward. And all of them know my views. Second largest city in the continent of Africa. On the Mediterranean. We never should have closed that consulate. We didn't need to. We shouldn't have.

Q: You were getting a different window on Egypt.

WISNER: The fact that we created a false trade-off between Casablanca and Alexandria was only to mean that one of these two important consulates would end up being closed and that was the false choice.

Q: When you left Egypt, you were called to Manila?

WISNER: That's right, I was asked to stay a fifth year in Egypt which, as you recall, is unusual these days. I think the Gulf War explains that. Also, the President wanted to find a good next posting for Nick Platt and Pakistan was coming up, and I asked to go to Manila; the fascination of American history, chance to get back to Asia, a large complicated mission. And my wishes, desires, dreams were all rewarded.

Q: But this was again, as you've said before, maybe a Helms problem that would have come back to haunt you.

WISNER: Well, Jim Baker told me later that he feared that I was going to have trouble, and I'd actually been told by Mitch McConnell and others that there was some gunning in the conservative side of the Republican party for me. But I was confirmed for Manila and then subsequently for Under Secretary, so whatever the problem was it eventually went away, but it gave Jim Baker some reason for second thoughts on the Middle Eastern and African Assistant Secretaryships. In any case, I'm delighted with what I did with my life and would have been less happy otherwise. I arrived in Manila in the summer of '91, confirmed by the

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Senate, and was faced with the immediate challenge of taking the base agreement, which Armitage had negotiated on behalf of the United States Government and Nick Platt had seen through in the Philippines, and trying to nudge it over the finish line in the Philippine Senate, where it needed to be ratified in order to take effect. By the time I arrived in Manila, there was a bare four weeks until the Philippine Senate vote was scheduled to be taken. Very quickly, I realized the odds were horrific. For the Philippine Senate, like the United States Senate demands, a two-thirds vote for a treaty. The structure of the Philippine Senate was such that the radicalization of the post-Marcos period produced a number of Senators who had strong positions in opposition to the continuation of the American base presence. Others, for tactical, or less exemplary reasons, had switched sides over the years. The former defense secretary, Juan Ponce Enrile being one of those, and Cory Aquino had been, at best, halfhearted in her desire to see the treaty extended. It was further complicated by the fact that Mount Pinatubo, the great volcanic mountain in central Luzon had blown its lid and effectively destroyed Clark Air Force Base, removing Clark from any consideration, as there was no way we were going to put up the money required to redo Clark, given the overall worldwide defense downsizing. The Navy, on balance, wanted to keep Subic. Well, I have to say that — though I did about everything I knew how to do, I appeared on television programs, testified, spoke, traveled all over the islands, inaugurated schools, bussed babies, marched in parades — it wasn't to be, and the base treaty was defeated by the Philippine Senate.

I, then, set my mind on two facts: one, to see if we could work out a three-year-arrangement by which we could get out of Subic and turn it over in an orderly manner and have, in effect, a base compensation agreement play out over those years and, secondly, to begin to plan for the post-base American-Filipino relationship. I ran into the complexities of negotiating a fresh agreement with the Filipinos, an interim agreement — all the complexities that you would imagine in a wealth of domestic local political environment — people thought, well, we'd defeated this, but here a dragon lives on. I came to realize that in Washington I faced an even greater negative lobby in the Pentagon — those who

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wanted to swat the Filipinos and those whose calculations ran even deeper, that is that Subic wasn't worth it anymore, and that the real benefits that Subic brought United States forces in global reach and the political presence that Subic gave us, by showing friends in Southeast Asia that we would be near at hand, were outweighed by growing concerns over the budget and just exactly how much we needed. I learned further that the Navy loved Subic because of all those admiral's billets and the gorgeous facilities and quarters the base offered. And so, I found myself in a very stressed atmosphere in Washington — the assistant secretary having a lot of trouble getting Jim Baker's attention, the Pentagon increasingly reserved about all of this. And the Filipinos being nowhere enthusiastic, with some important exceptions — notably the Filipino military which wasn't at all sure how it was going to continue to have access to American arms and favorable packages of assistance in the absence of any arrangement whatsoever. I came back to Washington toward the end of the year, and I was asked to go over and call on the President and I did and went into the Oval Office, and George Bush really made it very clear to me, “Frank, don't try too hard.” Dick Cheney had sent me an equivalent signal, when I called on him in the Pentagon, “don't try too hard.” I also saw Deputy Secretary Eagleburger, Larry Eagleburger, and Larry said “Frank, Mr. Baker is going to make some changes, he wants Reggie Bartholomew to go to NATO, and he wants you to come back and be the Under Secretary of State for security affairs, international security affairs.” Well, I will do anything the Secretary asks. I hadn't been a full year in the Philippines, I was working very hard on the post-base arrangements, and Larry made it very clear that the Secretary wanted me in Washington. The post-base arrangements would be the job of my successor in Manila, and that would be Dick Solomon, the present assistant secretary himself, who would be replaced. So, I realized that an order was an order, and Christine and I said farewell to the Philippines and left in the late spring to be confirmed for the Under Secretary's position in State by the early part of the summer.

I did, however, very much believe that the Philippine economy was going to come back and that Cory Aquino, who would be leaving the presidency, was not the last word in

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Philippine economic management; her administration was not effective. In effect, the Philippines had tremendous latent capabilities, and we needed to have access to this strong Filipino market and a platform in which to continue to be competitive in Southeast Asia. Second, I believed that we would, in time, work out some security arrangements with the Filipinos that would give us access to the Philippines and not bases, but places, access — places that we could stop in, pause in, in the event of another difficulty — if we could let things settle down. So I was very very keen on moving around the islands, dealing with the political leadership to try to focus on the day after Subic closed. What was the Philippine - American relationship going to be about? We'd been together almost a hundred years, there would be the thin and there would be the thick, and there was no doubt that our two societies and mixings of populations was such that we couldn't escape each other's embrace and that we ought to be working hard to try to come up with ways to make that happen. I argued that case at a general level and tried in a number of ways to promote American business, to get the Philippine economy in a position where we would have a stronger business presence as opposed to a base presence, in the days that followed.

These jobs were to be completed by my successors, Dick Solomon, John Negroponte, and now by Tom Hubbard, and we have today a much stronger relationship with the Filipinos. They, too, have been able to prove that democracy is a good antidote at a time of economic crisis — the very crisis that Southeast Asia, in the summer 1997, into 1998, has experienced. My return to Washington was not immediately visible at the time, in the face of the declining fortunes of George Bush as a candidate for reelection and in the diminishing days remaining to Jim Baker as Secretary of State, also a fact I didn't know. The last six months or so of the Administration, including the defeat at the polls, were dominated on my side by a set of issues that play into the upcoming Clinton administration.

Let me touch on these. First and foremost, I was given responsibility for wrapping up and completing with the Russians negotiations over the START II. START II, with its radical

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reductions, its important reductions in missiles, reductions in war heads, was the last of the great arms control treaties. It remains to be seen if we will be able to wrap up any time in the near future towards START III. The negotiations were detailed, they were highly complex, full of START II protocol. A minute had been reached. I was responsible for leading teams to Moscow and then bringing the final bits and pieces together in Geneva, with strong support from Larry Eagleburger, and finally, signature of a completed negotiating instrument by George Bush after the turn of the year. I was brilliantly assisted by a good interagency team: Steve Hadley (DOD/OSD), and Barry McCaffrey from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. My own able staff and team included Jim Timbie, particularly, one of the great arms control experts in the history of the United States Government, Vic Alessi from the Arms Control Disarmament Agency, Doug MacEachin from CIA, and from the NSC, General John Gordon. These are the people who propped me up, for I was hardly a strategic arms expert, and to be put in the midst of a very complex negotiation late in the day was hardly an easy task. We got the job done, also thanks to the fine work of Russian negotiator Berdinnikov and George Mamedov on their side and Kozarev's interventions which were very important, together with Larry Eagleburger's. I also had a chance to work with one of the State Department's true heroes, the brilliant arms control negotiator, Jim Timbie, who served on my staff in T.

Q: The Soviet Union by then had collapsed.

WISNER: Oh, a longtime collapsed, this was now Russia.

Q: You were also worried about Ukraine?

WISNER: I went to Ukraine to try to begin to build the basis of an understanding, for we were going to be reducing nuclear arms that were held in Ukraine, as well as building a strong Ukraine which could survive in independence. Even though the weapons were held by the Russians, we needed strong Ukrainian participation, as well as the various Nunn-Lugar programs to reduce the whole nuclear shadow over the former Soviet Union.

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That was the first of my major undertakings in the six months plus that I was in the job. The second was Bosnia. Though I was not a principal on Bosnia and Arnie Kantor, my ever brilliant and able colleague as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, was in the lead, nonetheless, it kept falling to me as the duties were shared on the Seventh Floor. We were still determined to stay out of Bosnia and not commit American troops to Bosnia. That was President Bush's view; however, he was beginning to relent and argue that we should be in a posture of helping to support our allies, if they had to remove their forces, to maintain a strong humanitarian presence, to begin to deliver humanitarian relief with military means, but to allow the Europeans, together with the United Nations, to play the principal role. This policy was beginning to run threadbare. No number of conferences that we could help host or warnings seemed really to be slowing the pace of Serb depredations, and the job was left largely undone and left over for the Clinton Administration. Without a new political mandate, George Bush clearly felt he had no standing to make a new policy start and intensify American intervention and pressure in the Bosnian context.

Q: Did the Egyptians and other Arab friends of yours come to you with the paradox of apparent US passivity in the face of atrocities against Muslims?

WISNER: They talked about it. And you would find it in the Egyptian press, and there were arguments in favor of greater activism, but I never felt that the Arabs were deeply affected. I felt the pressure more sharply in this regard from the Turks, who have a Bosnian population in their midst. The second issue was Haiti where, rather than bite the bullet and face the fact that the Cedras regime was not going to reform itself, we chose to try to slow the flow of refugees to the United States by building a naval cordon sanitaire around Haiti. We aimed at trying to keep Cedras on a straight and narrow path, without coming to terms with the fact that the regime had to go. We had been in a lot of stressful circumstances at the end of an administration. I didn't find a lot of desire to roll our sleeves up any more in Haiti and plunge in, and we were unwilling to do so in Bosnia.

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Somalia was the exception where the famine conditions, brought about by protracted drought, were really wreaking the most horrible havoc. After for a long time resisting serious intervention, at the very end of the Bush Administration, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Pentagon relented and decided on an American military intervention in Somalia aimed at feeding Somalis in the most affected areas, with a certain amount of military screen. An international coalition had been built, and I had been given heavy responsibility in this regard. Now the job that was left to the Clinton administration was to extract this feeding mission from Somalia and to take the next step politically. The mobilization for Somalia, the mobilization of the international coalition, the delivery of troops and forces to the dangerous Mogadishu and into the countryside, occupied much of my time as the Administration drew to a close. These issues, plus the ordinary issues of who would be the next ambassadors as the D Committees met and things like that, filled up what turned out to be a very busy six months at the end of my time with the Bush Administration. The Bush Administration ended, and the Clinton team came in. Briefly, on Inauguration Day, I was Acting Secretary of State. I had already been approached both by the incoming team to be told that I would not be asked to stay on as Under Secretary, that I would be replaced by Lynn Davis and to be asked by Les Aspin, my old friend from Vietnam, Congressman, Secretary of Defense-Designate, to join him as Under Secretary for Policy in the Pentagon. I agreed to go to the Pentagon and to join Les. I crossed over the Potomac shortly after the inauguration and joined the Pentagon's ranks and took over while waiting for confirmation. My confirmation was delayed by nearly five months, while the State Department investigators gave the clearance to the FBI and to the White House, and I could finally be cleared out of State. When that was finally done, I became Under Secretary and served for the balance of Les Aspin's tenure as Secretary of Defense.

Q: Was that hold-up, Frank, because of different Pentagon security procedures? Or just the incoming Clinton Administration's procedures?

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WISNER: No, I had been accused of importing from the Philippines weapons that I had in fact declared were antiques, number one, malfunctioning, number two, and, three, I had declared them to customs. But, by the time the State Department investigators got their teeth into the matter, it took them a hell of a long time to get it out. It was cleared up in the end and it went into the history books. I remember Rocky Suddarth, deputy in the Inspector General's office, who was, after he left, telling me that they were looking for a "trophy head."hose days.

The beginning of any administration is a complex period. The President was finding his style. The Pentagon was under a lot of pressure. The President had already made it a high profile issue, right at the outset, when the gays-in-the-military issue set upon us. In addition, on the international scene the Bosnian problem overshadowed virtually everything else, Haiti and Somalia. These three issues dominated my time in the Pentagon. They dominated them in the following ways: In Bosnia, we did everything we could to bring our influence to bear without having to involve the United States in direct action. As the months wore on and the killing and slaughtered intensified, our options began to run out. There was no desire on the part of Colin Powell, as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to see American forces committed. He believed we would be on a slippery slope — he certainly convinced me of that — toward a troop-type war in the Balkans, that I thought would be a pretty horrible outcome. There wasn't much desire, therefore, to heavy-up our presence, though we did go into Macedonia to try to stabilize it along the margins, start flying air caps, shooting down air marauders on the Serbian side. But, when trying to threaten action, when the Serbs — almost certainly the Serbs — mortared the marketplace in Sarajevo, killing a lot of innocent people...it took the horror of Srebrenica, even later, to finally bring us to make the decisions we took. This was after my time and bomb, and that led to Dayton and where we are today. The new Administration wished that Bush had solved the problem, but there was no solving it. There was very little domestic support for intervention, and the Europeans were just unwilling and fundamentally unable, for at the same time what we were watching was

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a decline of European capabilities to conduct defense. Europeans, faced with budget problems brought on by their protracted economic downturn, were cutting back their military. It was very hard for them to imagine how to undertake an operation in the Balkans with a diminished military capability and then NATO had long depended on the U.S. for strategic lift, for command and control, for C#I, the communications capabilities. We eventually began to turn this, in my time in the Pentagon, into some creative policy outcomes — combined joint task forces where we would plan for future contingencies under which if the United States decided it wouldn't be involved politically, we would provide strategic lift, C#I, and allow the Europeans to provide troops, so that you could have the command even in European hands with the ultimate commander of course being the NATO commander. It was a period of some creativity as well, as NATO was tested so strongly in this Balkans operation — the first time they had ever been committed to flying air caps and acting out of area in a concerted fashion, which happened on Clinton's watch. To rethink NATO's own broad future and purposes, we came up with ways to accommodate the security map of Europe. The Pentagon gave birth to this, and Chas Freeman was very effective in this regard, helped see it through — the concept of the Partnership for Peace. NATO expansion was not exactly our priority. In the Pentagon, we were aiming at trying to build a new relationship with the Russian military forces. The President made the political decision and, at the 1994 NATO meetings in Brussels, he in effect pushed the alliance, and then, by going to Eastern Europe, set the stage for the commitment to expand to include Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic. Less clear to us were our goals in Haiti, where the Pentagon, in my time, was deeply skeptical about Aristide's pretensions, his capability of bringing stability. It took a strong, strong set of decisions from the White House and State to push us, after one failed attempt to land peace keeping elements, to really move to get rid of the Cedras regime, which was where you had to go, if you were going to take the country back in hand and get the U.N. in there. We finally crossed those rubicons. I had my doubts at the time that it was the best use of American prestige. I never believed we would be able to stabilize Haiti. We still haven't; by the way, I now believe I was wrong and that we did exactly the right thing in nudging Mr.

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Cedras out of the door and Aristide, his successor, in. Cedras and his gang could not be reformed. More importantly, the United States bears a heavy responsibility for the stability of the Caribbean area. We have had to intervene in the past and will do so again. The job comes with being the US. Yes, I admit it, Strobe Talbott was right about Haiti and I was wrong.

Q: The Navy ship coming into the dock, being unable to land, humiliating, wasn't it?

WISNER: It was terrible! It was terrible! Terrible! Terrible! I, unfortunately, was not even present. I was on a trip in Eastern Europe when that damn thing blew up and much to my colleague, Les Aspin's, sadness. Les' health proved to be less certain than anybody realized. His heart condition was severe, and he just never could quite get himself around the job and build the confidence with the military or set a record of decisions for a successful stand as Secretary of Defense. After the Somali crack-up, his fate was sealed and the President released him. While there was an interim step in the search for Admiral Inman, the job eventually went to former deputy secretary Bill Perry, who, I believe, was one of the truly great defense secretaries of our age. We were well served by having Bill Perry there as Secretary of Defense. Les was a tragedy; he had a first rate mind and the deepest commitment to our nation's defense, a cause he pursued since he and I first met in Vietnam. I wish I had served him better—seen the choices more clearly and been more persuasive.

Q: Les Aspin was criticized, at least in the press, for being overly conceptual and for bringing an academic style to the Pentagon. How was it for you coming from State, how was it to be plonk in the military culture?

WISNER: I know that criticism of Les. His style was informal, loose; he was not a crisp decision maker. He liked to explore issues, explore them and reexplore them in seminar style. That ability to come to terms with a decision very, very quickly wasn't his. His management style was not precise. He asked me to try to set a policy shop with really

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many, many, too many people in it and overlapping jurisdictions, and he had people in mind for all of the jobs, and they didn't all fit together terribly well, so it was a tough, tough job. Moreover, in the critical beginning months I wasn't even confirmed. I think it was not a great success. And I say that with sadness because I was a friend of Les' and didn't do more, was unable to think of ways to do more, to help Les through these sets of dilemmas, to help Les grasp this nettle in a more effective manner. I considered it not one of my great moments in public service. I found the time in the Pentagon, on the other hand, absolutely fascinating. I have long admired our military, have been associated with it in Vietnam and in many other assignments around the world and will hold my experience of service with the military very close, very dear to me. Moreover, I was proud to be associated with hard debates and real choices over defense resources, Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti, European security, Asian security, normalization with Vietnam.

Q: I was struck, Frank, in your retirement ceremony, you said how much you had admired the Pentagon's treatment of its people in training, assignments and promotions. Implicit in that, or at least in my mind, was an inference that perhaps they do better than we do at State.

WISNER: I think they do. I really believe that. I think every military officer, every captain looks at every lieutenant, every major looks at every captain, and says how can I find who is going to be my successor, who is going to carry the troops, lead the troops up the hill. Every colonel for every major, every general for every colonel. You are bringing people along. It is leadership instilled in developing your successors. I don't see that as clearly in our service. I don't think we have the same sense of obligation to those who follow us to bring them along with the same single-mindedness. I believe that is so crucial to our purposes. It's true of our Secretary and political appointees, as well, that developing the next generation of leadership in the Foreign Service, when you're only going to be around for a couple years, is not your highest priority. And yet, if you're going to leave a legacy for yourself and capabilities for the nation, you've got to be very careful about these things. So that's why I mentioned it. No, this was a tough time and was no, no, no fun to watch

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the Secretary of Defense's mandate slip through his fingers. But no harsher test was there than Somalia. I started out, I think, quite wrong headed. I started out believing that the facility with which we brought our forces in and conducted the feeding mission and had come to terms with the different political factions would define the next phase, and that we could pass on the job to the U.N., and then that there would be an orderly process out there. But I believe, from the beginning, that the ultimate issue in Somalia was a political one. The Somalis had to be brought to compose themselves, so that we could finish the mission and get out. We the U.S. or we the U.N. or we U.N. with a huge U.S. role. It's perfectly fatuous to say the U.N. did this, the U.N. did that; we were the dominant force in the U.N. coalition in Somalia. We had the majority of the forces. We provided, even in the U.N. phase, the logistics. We provided Somali political leadership. We provided much of the military leadership under General Bir, the Turkish general. All of these facets were heavily dominated by the United States, and if there were mistakes, and we have to acknowledge them, we share a big burden of the criticism. Essentially we did not get our goals right and set forth clearly. We needed a political settlement among Somalia's factions, not confrontation and a new political order.

Q: Yet the mission changed from the original Bush one of feeding to one of peace-making. How did you see the shift?

WISNER: I was about to go back. Well, the notion was that you needed to finish the feeding. It wasn't fully done. You needed to get something in place in Somalia, so you didn't have another feeding crisis right away, again. There was no government that could provide food to the people that they could eat. You needed some structure of government. I can see the logic of that. But where we began to go wrong was, first, in the handoff to the U.N. to get the American flag down and out. We acted with great haste, and the U.N. and was unable to phase-in in an orderly manner. Second, the political objectives of the next U.N. phase were not clearly set. Boutros, who believed that Aideed and his followers were responsible for much of the problem and needed to be dealt with, began to influence the political shape of the mission, and John Howe I'm not sure ever really saw clearly the

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road down which the whole U.N. presence would be headed. There came to be a view in the U.N. and in State, that you needed to create a new system of governance, you needed to bring up new leadership in Somalia, you needed to replace all these rotten, corrupt and murderous warlords with a new generation of Somalis. Well, to this day and until somebody shows me I'm wrong, I believe that was the beginning of serious error because we were unable or unwilling to back that disposition up with the force, the persistence, the commitment that it would take to rebuild the political order of another nation we understood very badly. It didn't take very long for Mr. Aideed to figure out that the outcome of all of this was that he would be history, and he didn't want to be history. He began to react to the U.N. by shooting Pakistanis. We retaliated to that shooting. That retaliation led to other retaliations against other people, and the system started sliding down and we then, trying to put pressure on Aideed, brought in Special Forces elements. I supported that undertaking, but I failed to insist enough on the definition of political objectives which military pressure could support.

Q: Was it not Howe that personalized it to such a degree, by publicizing a reward on the head of Aideed?

WISNER: Well, that was Howe's idea, but it came back, and it was supported inside Washington that we should really get after Aideed, instead of going down the road that I felt was important; that was to have clear political goals towards the accommodation of Aideed inside a Somali system and set that as your priority. We started down quite a different road, and that was support for coming up with another system and replacing Aideed. That's in fact where he saw it headed. The capture of his people and the attack on his headquarters also fed that kind of view. At the same time, I also feel that when the people on the ground called for American forces to be brought in in large numbers and to pacify, if you will, Mogadishu, and some of our officers on the ground did call for that, I thought that was the wrong objective. You had to get back to this political objective. These are the cases I argued. Les Aspin was given the job of trying to defend an American presence. He pushed me very hard and even pushed conceptually further down the road

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to set goals, specific goals. I admired Les' speech on Somalia. I don't think I pushed my mind hard enough at that point, but afterwards kept beating on this drum of political, political, political was more important than the force outcome. I didn't think it was right to send American tanks in, because I felt that would only intensify our involvement in the war. You can argue that they were needed for troop protection but then it wasn't the absence of tanks that was the problem. There were tanks there, but military coordination was insufficient, given the complicated structure of the U.N. command.

Q: As the tank issue was later presented in the press, it was the absence of tanks or armor that led to the casualties we took. That may have been political. Isn't that correct?

WISNER: No, I think the way it was set up it came to the conclusion how could we have had our soldiers there and no tanks. The answer was the soldiers were not there to go and engage in main force combat. They were there as special forces to engage in some very surgical attacks, trying to pick up some of Aideed's people to bring pressure to bear on Aideed. If they could have gotten Aideed, that would have been great, too, but not to end up in a main force war for which we had to bring armor in. If you have armor, then people are going to call on your armor every time there's an ambush, and you're going to be out there in a big and very nasty war. And we didn't need to kill more Somalis, we needed to find a way to engage them politically and then get ourselves down and out, and that was the reason that I supported the JCS view, overriding CENTCOM's view that tanks be sent. I thought this was the wrong political signal. It was continuing to push us, more and more, towards a militarization of the Somali problem. When the disaster occurred, the Administration looked at the numbers and went up on the Hill in a catastrophic session between a number of members of Congress, the National Security Adviser, Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense. They just didn't feel at all comfortable with their Somali brief and were shattered by the hostility they felt in the Congress. The president saw a loser and just said " we're going to get out ". Was there an option? Certainly not at the time, not given the emotions and the sadness and the fact that we hadn't done our homework properly. A number of Americans soldiers died, and

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there wasn't in retrospect another option. If you had been able to pretend that the situation at the time didn't exist, there was an option and that was to go back in and do a couple of things to hammer Aideed, just to remind him that you were there and then immediately move for a reconciliation effort and create some loose council and then pull your forces out as the political steps were taken. We tried to involve the Ethiopians at one point in calling a gathering of Somalis leaders to turn it over to them. That's where they've ended up today. Setting that objective of getting the warlords to hold the country together and represent the clans, which was the nature of Somali society in those days and to this day, is in my view what our objective should have been. I didn't argue my case strongly or effectively enough, and I hope I'm not speaking today with the benefit of hindsight. I felt that at the time. I talked it through with officers who I know and like and trust, like Bob Oakley, and felt that was the right approach. But history will not treat the United States kindly and, in some ways, we deserve not to be treated kindly, and I consider it one of the great personal setbacks in my career that I didn't see the enormity of this problem and be able to stand out there and turn the traffic flow around and make it go in a different direction.

Q: As we went in there originally on the relief, mercy mission in response to television journalism and, essentially, an outcry around the United States that we had to do something, and, as the mission shifted, there wasn't, it seems to me, a real U.S. interest in that country, but was there a feeling among US. policymakers that we bore some special responsibility in Somalia for having pumped in arms, along with the Soviet Union, in the Cold War period?

WISNER: Certainly not. No. No, not at all. The American weapons in the Somali inventory played absolutely no role whatsoever. Somalis were killing each other with fair abandon with AK 47's and 12.5 millimeter machine guns mounted on the back of jeeps. There were no American machine guns there. Our stuff had been at the higher military tech end, and the Somali street fighters weren't using that stuff. They wanted stuff that they could fire—B-40 rockets—and they were all out of the Soviet arsenal, not out of the American one. That argument didn't come up. The critical mistake of the estimate was not to see this

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political situation heading towards a sharp deterioration, to have misestimated the strike determination and capability of Aideed. That we didn't see.

Q: I'm struck that these are two major instances — Vietnam and Somalia — that you have lived through where the U.S. estimate on the ground was basically faulty and we pulled out under very tragic situations. Are there reflections looking at those two situations that you have or want to comment on?

WISNER: We did it in Lebanon too. You make the best intelligence calls you can. You do the best estimate you can of the situation, given the facts available to you. Of course, in Somalia we had no facts because we closed our embassy out several years earlier. There was no intelligence network. There was no way of knowing the dynamics of the Somali situation. Had we sat back and done a careful analysis of Somalia and its history and its people and their attitudes and everything, we would have never done the humanitarian mission. Could we have done the humanitarian mission in another way? If the truth be known, my recommendation was that we never go in with U.S. forces, that we let others do the force side and we provide the logistics. This was way, back in the Bush period. I never saw the wisdom of putting our people on the ground and felt that every time you put Americans on the ground with a rifles in their hands they were lightning rods. Because we were WE, we're the biggest player in the world picture and coming after us is an interesting target. The fundamentalists and other people would get stirred up. In this case, we pursued the wrong political strategy. We never gave the impetus to creating a Somali political outcome that I think we should have.

Q: There were other tumultuous issues. How long were you at the Pentagon, and did you then stay on with Secretary Perry for a time?

WISNER: I did. The Secretary asked me to stay on, see how it would work out. It was, however, several months later, that I represented him and accompanied Secretary Christopher to the ANZUS meetings—the Australia-New Zealand-U.S. meeting. I was

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accompanying the Secretary on to China. I was in Canberra with Christopher when he called me into his hotel room and said that the Indian Prime Minister was coming to Washington. There was no ambassador in New Delhi, and the President and he had talked, and would I be willing to go to Delhi? I had gone to the Pentagon basically at the request of Secretary Aspin. Secretary Perry was very kind to me in asking me to see how things would work out if I stayed on with him. But when the Secretary of State asked me to come home, I felt an obligation. Christine was delighted; she wanted to go abroad. I had an able deputy in the Pentagon, Walt Slocum, and so it made sense for me to go back to the Foreign Service to what I did best — representing the United States abroad as a senior diplomat.

Q: So the India years were '94 to '97.

WISNER: '94 to the summer of '97.

Q: And in some ways that was the culmination of your focus on American business, opening up markets on a very big stage — India.

WISNER: Big stage, a lot of latitude. India has not been at the center of American foreign policy, although we've wanted to treat it well and not find ourselves in an antagonistic position. But India was at a real turning point in her society. Her economics had not worked out. Her balance of payments situation had deteriorated terribly at the beginning of the 1990s. She had begun liberalization. It looked like she was going to surge ahead with that liberalization. Unfortunately, the then-government in Delhi lost control of a lot of state governments in 1994, and the political situation India became much more chaotic. They just had an election in the last couple of weeks in India, right now, and still there are coalitions in India's future and for some time to come. All of this, however, is to say that India has begun to achieve much higher levels of growth throughout this decade. American investment has been expanding, but not at the rate it could have expanded. The reform in India has continued, but not at the depth it should have proceeded. I found

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myself in a very high-profile embassy, arguing a new, post-war relationship with India, arguing that the future of the globe depended on the interactions of the great powers: Russia, China, India, the United States, Europe, and Japan to maintain a core of stability through our interactions and then our ability to influence the broader international scene. I argued, as well, for concentration on the new agendas: refugees, drugs but also the environment. India's environment was cruelly degraded. We were trying to see ways to engage the United States economically with India in a wholly new way, one that would provide us with a major platform for economic expansion in a globalized economy through a deep relationship with this huge, nine-hundred-million-strong Indian market and, from India, via her human resource potential, out beyond India's shores. A big, big canvas to write on.

During my years in India, I was served with a very able embassy. I never had a better DCM than Matt Daley or a more able executive assistant than Penny O'Brien. We worked hard. We took the message of the United States and a new vision of the future all over the country. Our three consulates general were active points of diplomacy, as well as the normal conduct of consular relations. We issued thousands of visas. I think, in this time, we began to set a certain style of the United States, demarcated our previous approaches, and began to come to terms with some of the harder edges of the nuclear issue, moving away from pretending that we could roll back India's nuclear capability to learning to live with it, if the Indians could keep that capability recessed, if Indians would recess their missile capabilities. We were trying to create a sense of a greater partnership between India and the United States, which was hard to do. Things don't turn around quickly, anywhere. Big democracies are distracted, and that was India's case, heavily domestic in their orientation and inward looking — a great nation between three seas and the mountains. But I think we began to write on some of the slates of the Indian political leadership and to make India a reality, certainly in the American business community, and beyond the normal debates over just non-proliferation as the only aspect of the policy. We stimulated both Pakistanis and Indians to intensify their discussions with each other,

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recognizing the chances of them going to war were not the highest in the world. I suspect we must continue to nudge them, discreetly, toward negotiated solutions. They had, for 25 years, kept tabs themselves on each other's habits. We helped to make some important statements for the United States. It was the 50th Anniversary of Indian Independence. I was able, with my embassy, to raise about a million dollars and put one of the best dance troops in America in ten Indian cities and a lot of other activities showing respect and recognition for Indian society and culture and to encourage and see a couple of Indian prime ministers come to the United States. We encouraged a dialogue taking place at many different levels, intensifying strategic exchanges between the Pentagon, the State Department, policy planners and Under Secretaries.

WISNER: I took my leave of India in the summer of 1997 with great sadness. It was a fascinating country which is really a continent at a time of great transition, great change in its national life and style.

Q: There was clearly growth, in the years you were there, of Hindu nationalism, reflected in the recent elections.

WISNER: No, I think I wouldn't quite see it that way. I would say that it was more the decline of the great Congress Party and growth of regional political expression. The Nationalist Party — the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) — has not, of itself, grown very much. It's got about ten more seats in this Parliament than it had in the last Parliament, but it's proved itself more skillful in building its coalition base.

Q: The future India is governable?

WISNER: India will stick together. India will retain sovereignty, keep her borders secure. But the degree to which India will enter the world stage as a major actor — mix it up, commit herself to taking risks internationally, be a player, a negotiator and leader — that is still to be seen.

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Q: India as a major market and trade partner of the future for the U.S.?

WISNER: Very, very possible. I think that, without stretching the point too much but to give a conceptual focus, India could be the fourth or fifth largest economy in the world in 20 years.

Q: You had a number of high profile economic visits. I think that Treasury Secretary Rubin, others were there?

WISNER: Sure, Mrs. Clinton was there. Secretary Perry visited. The Secretary of Commerce, two Secretaries of Commerce came. The Secretary of Energy came twice. The Secretary of Agriculture visited. Quite a piece of the American Cabinet came out to India.

Q: What were your greatest frustrations in a country that vast?

WISNER: I think in our policy. It was hardest to get us to turn our attention to shifting our policy on the nuclear issue. I just don't think we have been very flexible or very smart. We've hoped that we could talk the Indians out of being a nuclear power. We can't do it. They won't accept it. They consider it essential to their national security and even more essential to their national pride.

Q: Well, Frank, as you were getting towards the end of your tour, there was the daily lottery in the Washington papers about whether you were going to Paris or whether Felix Rohatyn was going there. What was that all about, can you say?

WISNER: Well, I was encouraged to put my hat in the ring for Paris, to be ready to serve in Paris, by Secretary Christopher just after the election. And I agreed to do it. Pamela Harriman made it very clear she hoped I would be her successor. A number of other people wished I would do the same thing. The Administration did not move immediately to name new ambassadors, but I was eventually offered Paris, just about the same time I

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was offered a new life outside government, a second career with American International Group. But before I went to India, I had made a decision that, after 36 years at the end of my time in India, I would go on and follow a new path. It would be my last chance to really have a crack at a second career. I was interested in trying my hand at a second career, and I enjoyed the prospect of doing one in business. All of this weighed heavily in my decision to go to New York and to give up Paris. My wife had had a bout of ill health too, and I think some of the financial concerns about Paris weighed in my decision. None of these were decisive. My main course was I had decided that the time was right, and I had a terrific offer, and I decided to pick that offer up and go with it.

Q: Still thinking about Embassy Paris and your commitment over the years to service, that must have been a decision, for a time, that kept you up nights?

WISNER: It did. It kept me up. But I also reflected, I had seen some of the best. I had seen Egypt. I had seen India, Philippines. Loved my time in Zambia. I had four embassies. Had sat at the top of the United States Government, and here I was being offered a new challenge. So, in terms of personal growth, it was very attractive. As I was preparing to leave, the Deputy Secretary asked me if I would lend a hand with Russia, Iran and the missile problem. A certain amount of technology had been leaking through Russian hands and into Iran. Over the past six months, I turned my attention to trying to make some sense of that problem, to bring the Russians to take the issue seriously, to organize for it, to convince the United States Government to give them time, to convince the Israelis that we were making progress, to keep allies informed and involved in encouraging the Russians to go along, and to convince the Congress that the right way to approach this issue was not a package of new sanctions against Russia, but rather taking a strong view on the matter, letting the Russians put in place controls, which they in their own declared national self interests had said they would do. I am pleased to say that — after six months and five missions with the Russians, two meetings with the Vice President and Chernomyrdin and countless gatherings and sessions along the margins, trips to Israel, the Middle East — I am proud to say that, as I was leaving the Department, we had gotten

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out of the Russians just about every single thing we've asked for: New laws, authorities, export control priorities and fresh investigations, and designation of Iranian enterprise systems as suspect in terms of export controls. Now it remains to be seen if all these measures are fully effective in terms of stopping Russian exports, but also in slowing down Iran's rather dangerous development of weapons of mass destruction. It was nice to take my leave of the diplomatic service feeling it accomplished something that was important.

Let me conclude with a couple of general observations. Number one: family. I'm not going to be the first or the last Foreign Service officer to conclude that careers of the sort that I have been privileged to enjoy are not possible without a hell of a strong family. Not only wife, but children. I was lucky to be married to two terrific ladies and have had four wonderful children who have enjoyed and profited from the Foreign Service, though none of them have shown an inclination, except maybe young David, to follow in it. Dave plunged wholeheartedly into it and we put a lot of stress on him, but the balance of profit over debit from the Foreign Service life in our children is very real. To have an old fashioned family, in the sense of a wife prepared to dedicate a big piece of her life to the success of her husband's career, these are joint enterprises. This isn't Wisner in Zambia, this is Wisner and Christine in Zambia. We couldn't have done these things without each other. They are dual functions, and I do not know how we can run the Foreign Service any other way. I really believe that. It sounds very old fashioned, but I truly believe that.

The second principle I would argue is looking now at the fundamental guiding points of American foreign policy. I believe, as I said in my last day, that we cannot allow ourselves to be seen to be dictating to the world. We must be in search of partnership, of balance. Not of assertion, but of compromise. The compromises must start notably with great powers. I believe in the balance of power, I believe in it today, I have always believed in it. It doesn't mean there are not other forces shaping human kind, but if we and the other great nation States can't even, in an age of globalization, make things happen, then no one else is going to be responsible for the effective ordering of the international system.

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Third, I welcome the fact that the Foreign Service has, over my lifetime, broadened its base of recruitment. It's more than just you and me who graduated from Princeton, or Ellis who graduated from Yale. It's a much broader base in the Foreign Service today. I welcome that, I think that's very healthy, provided that we do not confuse the need to have a broad base and a capacity to join the service and advance unencumbered, unhindered to any member of the service, do not confuse that with the need to have effectiveness. We must be able to make certain that the best people do the jobs all way along. I am unalterably opposed, to staffing our Foreign Service based on social, ethnic, religious or any other sets of considerations. I believe that who can do the job most effectively must be the guiding principle. That may sound racist in our day and age or neglectful of the need to advance women and minorities. I just don't think when you deal with a nation's foreign affairs — anymore than when you deal with her military — that you can afford to give people responsibility for such sensitive matters because of social progress considerations. Allowing access is different from providing for governance, and governance requires excellence. I believe that. I believe a lot of other things too, but as you know I believe in the excitement, the commitment that we all bring to the service that makes it work.

Q: We've talked today about Wisner the field officer, and Wisner the Washington bureaucrat. Were those different roles, different skills? Which did you do best? Which did you prefer?

WISNER: They were different. I did them both with good heart and enjoyed them both in their own time. I think you cannot be an effective member of the American Foreign Service and only do one. You've got to do both. You have to enjoy both of them. The more you enjoy both of them, the better you'll be as an overall officer. They require very different skills, and we often forget, however, there are some common skills. For example, we believe it's important to figure out how a foreign government works, so we can explain its behavior to Washington. We don't often use the same analytical capabilities for finding out how the Pentagon works or the Congress works or the Treasury Department works, and

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we need to be better at figuring out our own system. Getting things done in Washington is central, if we have the intellectual drive. We have the capability of producing good choices for the President and must be able to manage those choices correctly inside of Washington City. This, in some ways, has changed a lot in my lifetime, because the decisions have become more political, more contested. There is a sharper and uglier edge to the public debate in Washington today than when I joined the service. But we're still faced with the workings of the democracy, and we have to be able to be effective in it.

Q: Frank, the kind of responsibilities you described as province advisor at age 29 in Dalat are responsibilities few junior or middle grade officers ever get today. At a time when consulates around the world are being closed, most officers before they become DCM barely manage to have a secretary. Have you any thoughts on leadership as the service moves towards the 21st century? Advice to A-100 people?

WISNER: Well, I'm damned if I believe that leadership is solely comprised of managing large numbers of people. Leadership is also about knowing what needs to be done. Having a clear sense of mission, being able to define goals, presenting choices, getting others to join you in thinking through, receiving demanding assignments from those above you. It's all a training experience. Strong, diplomatic leaders are produced around the world in other national services without having huge staffs to manage. We're not an industrial organization producing widgets everyday. We have plenty of chance to manage employees, we often have to do it in the most complex settings — Foreign National employees in embassies abroad. So I think the classic diplomatic skills of analysis, diplomatic skills of representation and advocacy, doing the best you can in deployment of these skills are the ones that are going to pick the leaders, but then those leaders have to be encouraged and move forward. And that creates leadership. But if people, at the end of the day, when they have more than half the secretary to manage, don't get along well with their folks, well they're probably not going to be very good in any case. And there are plenty of good schools and courses to give you that extra rounding and sensitivity, but, I agree, I had an unusual career, unusual in many ways. I doubt that I could have gotten

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into Princeton, were I applying today, and I doubt I'd have gotten into the Foreign Service, were I applying today. But I had a hell of a run through all of it.

Q: Regarding human resources and training, the money available at the Foreign Service Institute for area studies training and, to a lesser extent language, is less today than it used to be. The emphasis is not so great as it used to be on those kinds of skills which, at bottom, are what the Foreign Service brings to the table. How do you feel about that?

WISNER: I regret it. I believe language training, particularly, is just critical. It creates a sensitivity and an empathy for another culture that is in itself its area of study. A little time to read some books and to think with people who have devoted their lives to it, is, of course, a good bet. How do you ask people to go abroad and represent their country effectively in lands around the world, if you don't train them for it? It's a contradiction in terms.

Q: I think this has been a full interview, Mr. Ambassador, are there any final thoughts you have on your official oral history record.

WISNER: Mr. Jackson, I am enormously appreciative of your patience and in letting me put, in the last hours, 36 years of my life onto tape. But as you or others at FSI or indeed other scholars come on a particular aspect of my account that they would like to dig deeper into, I would be very pleased to do so.

Q: That's great.

End of interview